My Heart of Joy

by Chash

Summary

Collection of holiday fic fills from Tumblr! Mostly Bellarke AUs, other pairings to be tagged as they become relevant.

Notes

Welcome back to holiday fills! As always, if you want these ASAP, they're posting first to my holiday Tumblr, so follow that. Otherwise they'll go up when I have time to post them here.

These are Bellarke by default (because they are), but if you're looking for a non-Bellarke tagged pairing, check the chapter title, I will put it in there.

FINAL NOTE: I'm doing over one hundred of these, which is tons of fun! But also means that these are not long fics. So please do me a favor and refrain from leaving comments telling me any of these fills should be longer, or you really want more, or I should do a sequel. These are, by necessity, two-thousand-or-so word fics, and hearing that they should be longer is always kind of a bummer for me. I appreciate the sentiment! Just please don't share it with me <3

Happy holidays!
Fill for under-the-lakes! Prompt: Bellarke college AU where they share a class and they keep fighting each other until they decide to let off steam through hate sex... Which somehow turns into fwb and feelings

“Okay, we need to do something about this,” says Clarke.

Bellamy wants to disagree, but Professor Pike took them aside after class and issued a formal warning to them both about being disruptive, which means if Clarke reforms and he doesn’t, he’ll be the troublemaker.

If he’s going down, he’s taking her with him, but the wiser choice would be for neither of them to go down. If Clarke can be mature, he can be too. After all, she started it. And she’s apparently stopping it.

So he nods. “Yeah, you’re probably right. Did you have something in mind, or are you just asking questions and planning to shoot down every answer I offer like you always do?”

She rolls her eyes. “I’m trying to make peace here, can you not be an asshole for like thirty consecutive seconds?”

“Maybe twenty on the outside.” He sighs. “Seriously, what were you thinking? I’m open to suggestions. We could set up a weekly lunch where we–”

“I think we should have sex,” she blurts out, and he stops short.

“Sorry?”

“Me too,” she says, with an overly dramatic sigh. “But it seems like the easiest solution.”

“Based on what? How did you even come up with that one?”

Clarke shrugs. “Bang out the resentment. It’s an option, right?”

“Is this how you solve all your problems?”

“Of course not. Just the ones I think it might work on.”

It’s not actually something he’s opposed to, but he wouldn’t have expected Clarke to make the suggestion. She doesn’t seem like the fuck the problem away type.

Then again, all he really knows about her is that the two of them have a lot of disagreements about the role and structure of governments, and she refuses to back down even when he’s right. On a personal level, she’s honestly a mystery. Maybe she’s nothing like he assumes.

“So, you think this is going to make you like me?” he asks.

“Nope. But I’m hoping you fucking me good and hard will put me in a better mood.”
He has an instant and somewhat unwelcome vision of doing just that, and his dick is definitely completely on board with this plan. Clarke’s gorgeous, and if she wants to let him get his hands on her, he’s rapidly losing any even slight interest in arguing with her.

“Worth a try,” he says, and she smirks like she knows exactly what he’s thinking. Which, to be fair, she probably does. It’s not hard to figure it out.

“Do you have another class now?”

“Uh, no, I’m done for the day.”

“Cool, you want to come back to my room and fuck me?”

“Now?”

“The professor had to talk to us about our issues. I don’t want to get kicked out of class because we can’t get along. If this doesn’t work, we need an alternate solution. So we should try this as soon as possible.”

“Wow, you really know how to sweet talk a guy.”

She smirks over her shoulder. “I’m pretty sure I do, yeah. You coming?”

“Worth a try,” he says again, trying to maintain something like cool, and follows her as she goes.

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It’s not like Bellamy doesn’t get laid, but he usually has to do at least a little work for it, and this semester has been kicking his ass hard enough that he’s had trouble finding the time. He goes to parties sometimes to blow off steam, but actually finding a hookup at those requires effort, and he tends to leave early so he can put his time into his homework and part-time jobs.

Which is probably why the fucking Clarke thing actually works. Not only is it zero effort, but the sex is good. Amazing, even. Clarke in bed is a lot like Clarke in class—confident, opinionated, and bossy—but while he finds it kind of annoying when she’s telling him he’s wrong about their reading, it’s really hot when she tells him exactly how she wants to be fucked, or pushes him down and climbs on top of him because she knows what she wants and how to get it. And she likes when he tells her what he wants too, likes when he pushes her wrists over her head and holds her down, likes when he sucks marks into her skin. It’s honestly the best sex of his life, and it’s surprisingly easy to shift from arguing in class to arguing on their way to his room or hers. He doesn’t actually need the whole class to know she’s wrong, apparently, just her.

Still, the first time they fail to have sex because they’re too busy having an interesting conversation about their reading is pretty alarming. Not that she doesn’t have interesting opinions or that he doesn’t like discussing the material with her, but for one thing, a few weeks ago, he would not have admitted either of those things, and for another, if he likes her and thinks she has interesting opinions and enjoys her company, they’re basically friends. And Bellamy’s not entirely prepared for that.

Clarke seems about as perturbed. “Were we seriously so busy talking we forgot to have sex?”

“We do have a paper due,” he points out. “So it was a good use of our time.”

“Yeah, but I still wanted to get laid.”
“Me too. But your roommate’s going to be back in like ten minutes, right?”

“Yeah. And I have an evening class today.” She sighs. “Speaking of which, I need to get dinner. You want to come? We can figure out another time to have sex.”

He has to smile. “You want to schedule sex?”

“After class usually works, but we don’t have class again until next Tuesday. I assume you’re free sometime this weekend.”

“I need to work on the paper too.” He hesitates for a second. “I have a single and I was going to try to knock the paper out on Saturday. You want to come over? We can hook up and proofread for each other.”

“I do, but now what are we going to talk about over dinner?”

He holds the door open for her, feeling kind of queasy and excited for reasons he doesn’t want to examine on either side. Both are concerning in their own special ways.

“I bet we can think of something,” he says, and to his surprise, he really means it.

To his even greater surprise, it’s not even hard. And it’s even easier when she comes over on Saturday, kisses him, climbs into his lap, rides him at his desk, and, once they’re done, says, “Can you read my intro for me? I think it’s too vague.”

He finds himself grinning. “This is what we’re doing now?”

“Sorry, does this not work for you?”

Some part of his brain is aware that he’s playing with fire, that this is going to blow up in his face, probably sooner rather than later.

But in the moment, all he can do is grin. “No. This is good.”

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By the time the semester ends, he thinks they probably qualify as real friends, albeit friends who have amazing sex at least twice a week. They still don’t really hang out, but they do homework together, and get meals together sometimes, and if they’re at the same party they usually find each other, play beer pong, and go home together after. She even spends the night sometimes, and they’ll go to the dining hall for breakfast and bicker about TV shows.

It’s actually kind of perfect, and then the semester ends, and he’s at home for Christmas break, missing her kind of desperately and wondering if he’s even going to see her spring semester. They don’t have any classes together, and they live on opposite ends of campus. They won’t really have any reason to spend time together, unless she wants to come specifically to see him.

Which he wants. He really wants. He wants her around all the time, sitting on his bed doing her homework, complaining about her classes, curled up close to him every night.

Shit.

Me: Think I fell for that girl I’m fucking

Miller: Wow
Never saw that coming
Total shock
No one thought that would happen
You didn’t look like a heart-eye emoji every time you talked about her at all

Me: I don’t know why I thought texting you was a good idea

Miller: Neither do I
But yeah, you’re definitely in love with the girl you’re fucking
Congrats
Happy New Year

Me: Yeah
You too

*

He spends the first three hours he’s back on campus wanting to text Clarke, then not wanting to
text her, alternately thinking about going to her room to try to talk to her and telling himself he
should try to never interact with her again, just for his own sanity. Cold turkey and full-on love
confession seem like his only options, and neither is even a little bit appealing. The fact that he’s
not sure which is less appealing is probably a sign that he’s already way too far gone. He doesn’t
even know how it happened.

Well, okay, it was probably some combination of Clarke’s intelligence, dedication, and overall
perfection, with an assist from the amazing sex.

Realizing that is actually what gets him over to her dorm room. He’d be an idiot to not at
least try to make this work. Beautiful, amazing girls who want to argue about political theory and
ride his dick afterward don’t exactly grow on trees.

Clarke posted Back on campus with no roommate yet and already bored, anyone who’s around let
me know on Facebook, so he knows she’s here and looking for company. She’ll probably even be
happy to see him, specifically. He’s pretty sure she likes him. They definitely texted a little over the
break, and she even initiated some of it.

Laying it out like that in his head, it feels a little pathetic, but whatever. She does like him. And it’s
not weird for him to go say hi.

Her door’s open, but she’s sitting on her bed engrossed in a book, paying no attention to anyone
passing by, so he knocks on the door frame to get her attention.

When she lights up at the sight of him, something uncoils in his chest.

“Hey! I didn’t know you were back.”

“Yeah, just got in a few hours ago. I saw you around so I thought I’d come say hi.” He shifts a
little. “Can I come in?”

“No, definitely lurk awkwardly in the hall, that’s my favorite thing. Yes, come in. Close the door.”

He feels a surge of hope at the instruction, and to his profound relief, as soon as he does it, she puts
her book aside and stretches out on the bed. “Why are you all the way over there?”

“Sorry I can’t teleport yet.” He settles on top of her for a long kiss, feeling the tension draining out
of him as she kisses back, hands mapping his back, sliding under his shirt, pulling him closer.

“I missed you,” he murmurs without thinking, but she only smiles against his mouth.

“I missed you too. You’re wearing a lot of clothes.”

“I just got here.” He pulls back, swallows. “I, uh–you want to?”

“Want to what?”

That is kind of the question, and he falters, trying to figure out the right response, the one that gets him what he wants without exposing his entire heart.

From the way her face softens, he might have already exposed it. But not in a bad way.

“I want to have sex with my boyfriend for the first time in weeks,” she says, tugging on the hem of his shirt.

He helps her get it off. “Your boyfriend?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s what you call the guy you’re sleeping with and want to date.” Her tone is sarcastic, but there’s a slight flush on her cheeks, a defiance in her eyes like she’s bracing for a fight and has arguments lined up.

He’s never seen anything better.

“Unless you have a better word for it.”

If he were slightly more of an asshole and slightly less in love with her, he might turn her down, just because he’s curious how she’d fight him on it.

But instead, he leans down, gives her another kiss, like he’s been wanting to for weeks. “No,” he murmurs. “That sounds perfect. Boyfriend it is.”
If someone had asked Clarke to come up with a profile of Bellamy Blake, florist, she would have put them in their late fifties or early sixties, an older woman who wasn’t quite a grandmother but hoped to be soon, someone whose hair had gone white early, but in a fashionable way. She would have assumed Bellamy Blake made lovely floral arrangements and had candy on the counter for children who came into her store with their parents.

Of those assumptions, only one would be true: Bellamy Blake makes lovely floral arrangements. But he’s also in his mid twenties, with curly black hair and freckles, and she’s pretty sure that if he wasn’t pissed at her for arresting his sister, they’d get along.

Not that she knows about the floral arrangements the first time she meets him. The first time she meets him, she mostly just knows he’s fucking pissed.

“What the fuck?” he demands, and Clarke actually assumes that he’s talking to Octavia. “Why are you holding her?”

“She peed on a police car,” says Clarke. “Also she’s seventeen and intoxicated.”

“And you’re going to charge her for that? It’s dumb high-school shit.”

Privately, Clarke agrees, and she has no intention of charging her. But she thinks taking her in and making her hang out at the station is a pretty good solution, all things considered. She was hoping calling Octavia’s older brother, who’s apparently her legal guardian, would also put the fear of god in her, but Bellamy Blake seems much more interested in attacking Clarke.

“It’s illegal dumb high-school shit. Can we talk in private?”

His jaw works, but then he nods. Clarke doesn’t have an office, but there’s an empty interrogation room by her desk, so she takes him in there.

“I’m letting her off with a warning, but I would suggest you make it clear to her how serious this is. Public urination can land you on the sex offenders registry if you do it close enough to a school. We all do dumb shit in high school, but it’s better if it stays in high school.”

He considers her, arms crossed, irritation still radiating off of him. “Is there a bad cop who’s showing up, or will you just switch at some point?”

“No trick. Just a warning. It would help if you acted like this was a big deal.”

“I don’t need lessons from you on how to take care of my sister,” he says.

“Fine, then don’t take them,” she snaps. “I’m issuing the warning and you can take her home or back to the party or wherever. I don’t give a shit.”
“Pleasure doing business with you, officer,” he says, and once the paperwork is done, they’re gone.

The encounter sticks with Clarke in the way some encounters do. It’s nothing terribly special, really; she deals with plenty of drunk kids and annoyed guardians. But the file had stuck out because Bellamy was young to be taking care of a teenager, and she couldn’t help but be annoyed by his lax standards. None of it is a big deal, but it’s just enough to be memorable.

It’s enough that when she needs a flower arrangement for a coworker who was injured in the line of duty and he’s at the counter at the flower shop she goes to, she recognizes him, but she doesn’t place him until he says, “Officer,” in the same curt, disdainful tone he used a little over a year ago.

She came in after work, and she’s still wearing her uniform. She’s not exactly being subtle.

“Is there a problem?” he asks, and she thinks he knows her too, but she’s not actually sure. He could just dislike cops. He wouldn’t be the first one.

“No. A coworker is in the hospital, I wanted to get some flowers for him.”

“Of course.” His voice is still cool, but he straightens a little. “Did you have anything particular in mind?”

“Just a standard get-well-soon arrangement? On the smaller and cheaper side.” She considers, but his expression and manner still bother her, so she adds, “He’s kind of insecure about his masculinity, so if you can lean into that I’d appreciate it.”

He frowns, looking at least confused instead of actively aggressive. “Lean into what, exactly?”

“I don’t know, like a teddy bear, maybe? Something to make him feel kind of uncomfortable because it’s not manly enough, but he can’t get rid of it because it’s a nice gesture.”

He finally cracks a smile. “Yeah, that’s a more common request than you’d think. I can handle that. Thirty bucks okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Great. I’ll have that done in a minute.”

Clarke watches him work, feeling more relaxed as nothing bad happens. He probably did forget her and just doesn’t like cops. It’s not a position she’ll ever fault anyone for, and with his dark complexion, she’s guessing he gets more “random” harassment than someone like her would.

But she’s glad that he smiles when he rings her up. The arrangement is perfect; she’d like to come back.

She comes up with an excuse just over months later, because mother’s day is coming up and she never gets her mother anything, so now is clearly the time to start. She goes in out of uniform and Bellamy shows no sign of recognizing her at all. He has some pre-made arrangements for the holiday that can be customized, and he and Clarke talk through what she’d like. She pays extra for a delivery service, and it’s all very professional and civil.

She wears her uniform next time, just to see if he remembers her, and he seems to, but not as anything other than a cop he doesn’t hate. Which is what she wants, mostly. He seems like a cool guy, from what she’s seen, and she’d like him to think she’s honest and fair.

That’s definitely why she keeps going.
She’s been going in every few months for about two years when she stops by at the beginning of June and sees he’s put up big display of rainbow flowers outside, arranged around a cursive sign reading simply, Be proud. It’s cool, but she can’t help being a little, well—curious. If he’s expressing pride as a general concept or because he’s part of the LGBT community, and if he is, what part.

Even if she hadn’t already been planning to go in, she definitely would be now.

As usual, he’s at the register, but for the first time ever, his sister is with him, chatting at him from across the counter. They both look up at the sound of the bell, and Octavia narrows her eyes at Clarke.

“Why do I know you?”

“Because she arrested you for peeing on her car in high school,” says Bellamy.

Clarke doesn’t flush, but—she really didn’t think he remembered. It’s been more than three years since the arrest happened, and he never seemed surly at her. He certainly never mentioned it, not even that first time.

Octavia snaps her fingers. “Right, that was it.”

“I hope you don’t get arrested so often you can’t keep the cops straight,” Clarke offers, and to her relief, both of them smile. They have the same way of curling one side of their mouth in reluctant amusement, and it’s cute, seeing the family resemblance.

“I was pretty wasted.”

“Maybe don’t brag about your underage drinking to, again, the cop who actually arrested you for it.”

“She already let me off with a warning. It’s not like she’s going to retroactively charge me. She knew I was drunk the first time.”

Bellamy rubs the bridge of his nose. “You must have something else to do. Literally anything.”

“You don’t need help?”

“She wants flowers for her mom’s birthday, I think I can handle it. Go check on the greenhouse.”

“Yeah, yeah. Nice to see you again, officer. Thanks for letting me off with a warning, sorry I peed on your car.”

“In your defense, you were wasted.”

She grins. “I’m saying.”

Once they’re alone, Clarke doesn’t think she’s the only one who feels awkward. Bellamy rubs the back of his neck, discomfort written all over his posture, and it makes something warm curl in her stomach. At least she’s not the only one.

“I didn’t think you recognized me.”

“It took me a second, but your name’s on the credit card, and I had my note with your name and badge number, so I could check. I, uh—I am sorry,” he adds. “I got taken down to the police station for some bullshit stuff when I was in high school, but O deserved it.”
She leans on the counter. “Like what?”

“I was looking into my friend’s window to see if he was home and a policeman passing by put me in cuffs and took me to the station.”

“Did you get charged?”

“They were on high alert because my friend’s dad was the police chief. The officer thought he was going to get a commendation for finding some dumb kid trying to break into the chief’s house, and Captain Miller was just like, hi Bellamy.”

“So at least it was satisfying.”

“Once I stopped being terrified, yeah. I knew if I made it to the station I’d be fine, but I was always worried I wouldn’t.”

“I get it when people don’t like cops. But I was kind of hoping you were going to yell at your sister instead of me.”

“If it helps, I yelled at her when we got home.”

“It does.” She smiles. “So, the pride bouquet.”

His expression gives nothing away. “What about it?”

“It’s awesome. I was hoping I could get a custom one for my desk. It could hang out with my rainbow flag and alienate my asshole coworkers.”

He seems to be thinking over his phrasing, finally settles on, “What pride are you showing?”

“Bisexual.”

“Cool, that’s mine too,” he says, casual, and Clarke feels a strange surge of hope. She’s always a little wary about dating straight guys, but–bisexual could work. If he can get over the cop thing. And he’s interested.

Fuck, she hasn’t actually been nursing a crush for three years, has she? That would be so fucking stupid. But–he’s cute. And, perversely, guys who don’t like cops are kind of her type. Familiarity breeds contempt.

“So, you want blue, purple, and pink? I haven’t done that before, but I think I can come up with something cool.”

“Yeah, that would be great. And something for my mom for her birthday? She expects flowers now, apparently.”

“That’s a new development?” he asks, with a kind of casual curiosity that makes her flush. “Flowers seem like your go-to present.”

“I’ve never been great with gifts, so when I find something she likes, I just kind of go with it.”

“So now you’re on flowers?”

“They’re good conversation pieces. She’s a doctor, so she puts them in her office and her patients ask about them, and then she gets to talk about her police-officer daughter who sends flowers.”
“Glad I’m helping. So, one mom bouquet and one bi bouquet?”

“Yup.” She worries her lip, but it feels safe to add, “Thanks, Bellamy.”

His smile is soft. “Sure. Let me know how many fights you get in.”

“Yeah, I’ll keep you posted.”

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She keeps the bouquet until it wilts, and goes to get another one when it does. It’s pretty and a good litmus test for coworkers, so she just keeps on getting them for a few months, until she gets shot in early September, the day before she’s planning to go to Bellamy’s.

It sounds a lot worse than it is, just a grazing hit to her shoulder. It’s not fun, by any stretch of the imagination, but as bullet wounds go, it’s basically the best-case scenario.

Her mother still wants her to stay in the hospital for a few days.

“We need to make sure there weren’t any complications. Bullet wounds can—”

“I’m going to listen to my actual doctor,” Clarke says, making her voice gentle. “The one who has access to all my charts.”

Abby smiles a little too. “I suppose I can’t argue with that.”

“I’m off work no matter what. I’ll take it easy.”

“I’m going to hold you to that.”

There’s a knock on the door and they both startle, and Clarke startles again when it’s Bellamy, holding a bouquet of yellow and blue flowers, with a sheepish smile on his face.

“Sorry,” he says. “They told me visitors were fine, I didn’t think the doctor would—”

“This is my mother,” she says. “Mom, this is—my friend Bellamy.” It feels more accurate and less awkward than my florist. “Hi, Bellamy.”

“Hi. I can come back,” he adds, and she rolls her eyes.

“Mom probably has actual patients to see.”

“I do,” says Abby. “Let me know if you need anything. Nice to meet you, Bellamy.”

“You too.” He still lingers by the door, looking unsure, until Abby has to go by him, and only then does he finally come over to the cot. “Jesus. You really did get shot.”

She laughs a little. “Sorry, did you think it was a hoax? How did you even know?”

“I follow the police department on Twitter, they talk about incidents. I googled it to make sure it wasn’t you, and then it was.” His eyes dart over her, like he’s trying to remind himself she’s there. “Are you—okay? Relative to getting shot.”

“Yeah, I’m fine. They had to operate to get a fragment out, but they’re not worried. I’m staying for observation, should be out tomorrow or the next day.”
“Good.”

“Can I see the flowers?”

He frowns. “What?”

“You brought flowers. Which ones?”

“Oh, uh–you like yellow and blue,” he says. “Or maybe your mom does, but–when you’re not getting pride bouquets, you usually like yellow and blue, smaller blooms, lots of leaves. So I thought–”

“It’s perfect. Thanks.”

He ducks his head, pleased. “Cool, I’m glad.” And then, like an idiot, he stands up. “So, uh, feel better. Get–”

She grabs his wrist with her good hand. “Bellamy.”

“Yeah?”

“You came all the way down here. You don’t have to leave. Company would be nice. If you don’t have anywhere else to be.”

He sits again. “I told Octavia not to burn down the store, so I’ve got an hour or two before she gets bored and turns to arson.” He pauses. “I should probably stop making jokes about her committing crimes, huh?”

“I promise I will never arrest your sister unless she’s actively committing a crime in front of me. Again.”

“That seems fair.” He hesitates, and then takes her hand, smiles when she squeezes his fingers. “I’m hoping you’re going to see more of her. And me. I’m probably going to ask you out when you’re not, uh. In a hospital.”

“You can ask me out now,” she says. “We just can’t go anywhere until I’m discharged. And maybe a week after that.”

“Cool. So, you want to go on a date with me maybe a week after you’re discharged?”

“Yeah, I’d love to.”

He brings flowers for their first date too, and the second, and the third, and somehow they’re her favorites, every single time.
“So, is that one of your desert island books?”

Bellamy looks up from Percy Jackson, blinking at Clarke. The sun is behind her, framing her hair with something like a halo, and the wind is trying to lift the hat off her head.

“My what?”

Clarke sits down next to him on the sand, gathering up her skirts. He knows now that she’s a brilliant, capable scientist, but she still looks like a tourist on a beach vacation most of the time. Not that he blames her; if you’re coming to an island assuming you’ll be the only one there, you might as well dress comfortably.

“Come on, you must have played that game. What books and movies would you bring if you were stuck on a deserted island. Is that on your list?”

“I brought it with me to a deserted island,” he points out. “Ergo it’s a deserted island book. Kind of by default.”

“You brought more than five books.”

“True. I’m also not really stuck here, so I don’t know if it counts.” He huffs. “I always thought that was such a stupid game.”

“Why?”

“Because it doesn’t make sense. You don’t get to pack to get stuck on a deserted island. Also, when I was growing up we didn’t have portable technology yet so I was like, do I have a VCR? Where are we getting electricity on this deserted island?”

“And now here you are, an adult, stuck on a deserted island with a generator. And you are stuck,” she adds, before he can object. “The ship isn’t coming back to pick us up for another few weeks. It counts.”

“So you want me to say that this is one of my desert island books?” he asks, closing the book and looking at the cover. “Because, again, it undeniably is. I looked at the amount of space I had, thought about my priorities, and brought The Sea of Monsters.”

“My actual question is if you brought all the Percy Jackson books, and those five books are your desert island collection, or if that one’s your favorite, or what?”

“Honestly, I bought it in the airport a few years ago,” he says. “I read the first one in the series and figured I could read this on the plane. Then I slept the whole time and didn’t actually read it, so every time I go on a plane, I bring it and figure I’ll read it eventually.”
“And now that you’re on a deserted island, you finally are.”

“How are you here, so it’s not actually deserted?” He taps the cover. “I’ve read it like five times now.”

He’s expecting her to laugh, but instead she rests her head on her arms, smiling. “I get that.”

“Yeah?”

“When I was in high school, after my dad died, my mom sent me to stay with my aunt in Russia for the summer. She thought I’d feel better if I got away.”

“And?”

“And I didn’t know anyone or speak the language, so I just stayed in my room. The only books I brought were my summer reading for school, so I read *East of Eden* so many times I practically memorized it.”

“Yeah, I’m not sure five books is really enough for a deserted island.”

“Well, it’s not deserted,” she points out. “I’m here. And I have books to share.”

He snorts. “So you desperately want to read *The Sea of Monsters* and you’re hoping I’ll trade it.”

“And you will, right?”

He stands and stretches. “Depends on what you’ve got. If it’s all biology texts— “The vast majority of his books are academic, and while he likes them, they aren’t exactly fun.”

“Give me some credit, Bellamy. I know what you like.”

“Yeah?”

The smile playing on her lips is more than a little distracting. “Yeah, I think I do.”

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Bellamy was planning to be stuck on a deserted island, but he wasn’t planning to be stuck with Clarke, and he was kind of annoyed when the guy he’d hired to take him to the site asked if he was joining his friend. Bellamy’s interest in the island was archaeological: based on his research, he was fairly sure there had been a settlement there, but it was wiped out by natural disaster, and he wanted to see if he could find any evidence of it. As summer projects went, it felt fairly doable. It’s not a full expedition, but his goal is to find enough evidence that he can bring it back to the university and get an full study funded.

Plus, he thought he’d be spending the summer alone on a tropical beach. It sounded kind of awesome.

Clarke had been waiting for the boat when it arrived, wearing a loose dress and a floppy sun hat. He’d assumed she was some tourist looking for privacy, but it was a free island. She had no authority to kick him off.

“Is there a problem?” she asked the boatman, eyes sharp behind her sunglasses.

“Just dropping him off,” said the man. “Do you still want to leave on the 23rd? If you both leave the same day, it will be easier for me.”
“When are you leaving?” Clarke asked him.

“The 25th.”

“I can leave with him,” she said. “Thank you. We’ll see you in a few weeks.”

She waited until the boat was gone to turn on him, which seemed odd. If he’d been a woman alone on an island, he would have wanted to get the strange guy’s story before the witnesses left.

“Business or pleasure?” she’d asked, not particularly friendly.

“Academia,” he said, and she broke out in a grin.

“Really? Me too.”

*

Clarke’s a biologist, documenting plant types. It seemed like an odd use of her summer, but she’d actually read some of the same texts he had and found the island in the same way, but while he saw a lost settlement, she saw unknown medicinal plants, referenced in texts and illustrated, but unidentified. Her camp is a chaotic jumble of notes and samples, but so is his.

With two weeks down and five to go, he can admit he would have been miserable without her.

“For one thing,” Clarke is telling him, “I have a kindle.”

“Have I mentioned how much of a fucking racket being rich is?” he asks. “You can power a kindle.”

“I’m using solar panels.”

“You can afford solar panels. My research funds didn’t cover those and I’m not independently wealthy.”

“Sucks to be you.” She pulls a paperback with a pale cover out of her bag and presents it to him. There’s a half-completed scientific sketch of a dragon on the cover, and the title A Natural History of Dragons. He has to admit, Clarke does have his taste pegged.

He flips through it, getting the general idea. “Don’t tell me, this was what inspired you to be a scientist.”

“Yeah, I read it the day it came out and did my entire PhD and got hired on tenure track in the last four years. I’m a savant.”

“Okay, so it didn’t inspire you. But it’s one of your deserted island books.”

“Like you said, they all are.” She shrugs. “It did inspire me. But the kind of way where—I don’t know. When I was little and I started seeing women who liked women on TV, that helped me figure out who I was? And these books aren’t like that; I was already a scientists. But I did bring it because I was coming on this kind of stupid, reckless trip, and she’s a role model for that.”

He laughs. “So this is a book that validates your bad choices?”

“Hey, guys get validation for that all the time. Women need some help.”

“I didn’t get a ton of general validation,” he says, and she inclines her head in acknowledgment.
“Okay, yeah. But yes, I’m going to give you my actual deserted island books. It’s going to be fun.”

“I can’t believe you brought deserted island books,” he teases.

“I can’t believe you didn’t. How many opportunities do you actually get to plan to be stuck alone somewhere for an extended period of time? And you just wasted it.”

“I do really like that Percy Jackson book, though,” he says, and she laughs.

“Cool, so I’ll read this, you’ll read that, and we can have a book club. Meet up in a couple days.”

“Our camps are next to each other. We’re going to see each other before then.”

“We don’t have to.”

“Are you going to try to cook your own food again? Because that was bad last time.”

“Okay, fine,” she says, with a roll of her eyes that can’t cover her smile. “We’ll still talk. But I do want to have a book club.”

“You’re a giant nerd, Griffin,” he says.

“So are you. This is a giant nerd island.”

“The entire population is giant nerds.” He smiles. “Thanks for the book. I’m really looking forward to it. And all your deserted island books.”

“I want yours too,” she says. “I don’t care if you have them. But I want the list.”

He smiles. “Trying to get to know me?”

She looks around at the empty island surrounding them, pointed. “I don’t have a lot of other options, right?”

“That’s my brand, yeah. Bellamy Blake: better than nothing.”

Her smile is much softer than he would have expected. “So much better, yeah.”

*  

After A Natural History of Dragons, Clarke gives him The Golden Compass, which he’s read before but always likes, Persuasion, which he’s been meaning to read, A Room of One’s Own, which he figures out based on googling that he’d always conflated with A Room With a View despite having read neither, and finally The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, which he read for one of his classes but hadn’t revisited since.

What’s most surprising, once he’s done, is how much he does feel like he has an idea of Clarke, how he can fit the novels into the woman he’s still getting to know, how it brings her together.

“It’s like you were planning to unexpectedly meet someone here and wanted them to get to know you,” he teases, and she shrugs.

“I wanted to remind myself of who I was, I guess. These are the books where I really—” Her fingers trace the cover of The Golden Compass. “They felt like revelations, the first time I read them. Like I found something. So I wanted to make sure I could find it again, if I needed to. When I didn’t have anyone else.”
He nods. “I get that. So—I’ve been working on mine.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I’m not totally sure on these, so don’t get too judgmental.”

“Me? I’d never judge,” she says, completely straight-faced, and he snorts.

“Of course not.” He clears his throat. “I told you about my sister, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So, the first one is To Kill a Mockingbird. My sister loved the book because she felt like it was about a girl like her, and when I read it, I felt like I did too. Jem and Scout always reminded me of us, and reading it was the first time I really felt like I understood my sister.”

Clarke smiles. “See, I don’t have siblings, but Atticus reminded me of my dad.”

“So between us, we have the full To Kill a Mockingbird family.”

“Go us. What’s next?”

“Double feature, The Iliad and The Odyssey. I liked The Iliad more when I was a kid, but if I’m stuck on a desert island, The Odyssey seems appropriate. Getting home, or whatever.”

“I can see that, yeah. And you’re definitely an archaeologist because you loved mythology, right?”

“Definitely. I had to pick between history, classics, and archaeology, and I went with archaeology because I wanted to find things, not just read about them.” He wets his lips. “Which brings me to the next one, which you’re not going to know.”

“No?”

“I guess you might. But it was this—not quite a picture book, I guess, but kind of mid-range, more like Dinotopia. Illustrated story. My teacher in fourth grade had it in her classroom. The Voyage of the Basset. It’s about this professor of—myths and mythology, I guess? And his colleagues don’t respect him, because there’s no proof anything he does is real. And then a magical ship shows up, and he and his daughter go on this—magical voyage, and see—” He flashes her a grin. “All my favorite mythological creatures, basically. Dragons, mermaids, sphinx, even Medusa. And it was kind of what like you said, I read that and I felt like I got something about myself. It felt like—I don’t know. The kind of person I wanted to be.”

“See, this is why you bring the books to the island,” she teases, and he laughs.

“Honestly, I haven’t read it since I was a kid. I didn’t even remember it until you started talking about this stuff.”

“See? It’s a useful exercise.”

“Yeah, you’re delving into my psyche.”

“And it’s awesome.” She nudges his shoulder. “One more.”

“I still reserve the right to change this, but I think I want my last one to be Murakami. But I’m not sure which one.”
“I read *Norwegian Wood* in undergrad, I think? But I don’t remember it very well.”

“I don’t have a great profound reason for it. I think it’s filling the same role on my list *Persuasion* did on yours. I just like his stuff. If I had to have one now, I’d say *Wind-Up Bird Chronicles*, but I like a lot of his short stuff too.”

“Okay, cool. So that’s the desert-island guide to Bellamy Blake.”

“You’re actually getting the real desert-island guide to Bellamy Blake,” he teases. “This is the ultimate crash course.”

“Yeah, but still.” She bumps his shoulder. “Thanks for humoring me on that one.”

“It was fun. Sorry I don’t have the books for you.”

“Next time,” she says, and he laughs.

“Sure. Next time we’re stuck on an island together, I’ll bring more books.”

“You better,” she says, and even though she’s smiling, it doesn’t quite feel like a joke.

He doesn’t really want it to be one, either.

*

They leave the island together on the 25th, say goodbye when she has to fly back to the States. He takes her to the airport, and it’s not entirely a surprise when she leans up and kisses him goodbye, just this quick, soft brush of her mouth, but it is a relief.

And then she’s gone, and it aches, until she texts him that she’s landed, and then that she’s off the plane, and the next day, best of all, a picture her hand holding a new translation of *The Odyssey* he’s been wanting to check out, and the caption, *Reading up for next time I see you.*

Alone in the airport, waiting for his own flight, he grins.

*Hope it doesn’t disappoint,* he replies, and her reply is immediate.

*It won’t. I get to learn more about my desert-island person, right?*

*Right,* he agrees, and the next time he sees her, he’s the one to kiss her first, as soon as she’s close enough for it. He’s not even nervous about it.

After all, he knows her pretty well.
Chapter Summary

**Bellamy:** I know you have some class stuff to do but what if you blew it off and came and took pictures of me and Carter for Christmas cards

Clarke blinks at her phone, trying to make sense of the words on the screen. She’s been trying to edit her photo project for long enough that her brain feels like it’s starting to melt, but once she figures out what he’s asking, she has to smile. Octavia and Lincoln are out doing Christmas shopping, so Bellamy is watching his nephew. Clarke was sad to be missing out, but this needed to get done.

And now it mostly is, so she can definitely go home, take pictures of Bellamy and Carter, and relax for the rest of the day. It’s not the most academically sensible decision she’s ever made, but it does sound like a huge improvement over what she’s actually doing.

And Bellamy clearly needs backup.

**Me:** If I’m home in like half an hour is that soon enough, or do you need me to leave now?

**Bellamy:** Half an hour should be fine
I just want this documented

It’s a somewhat confusing statement, but Clarke doesn’t dwell on it as she finishes up and locks the lab behind her. She assumes that once she gets home and sees him, everything will become clear.

And it does, but not quite instantly, because she opens the door and there he is in the kitchen, wearing a lot of soft brown material with a red dot on his nose, and that’s just kind of a lot to take in. It’s hard to process what she’s seeing, let alone make sense of it.

When she spots the antler headband, though, it clicks.

He gives her a crooked smile. “Hi.”

“Hi. Did you have this outfit already, or did you guys go shopping? I’m just trying to figure out the timeline here.”

“It’s, uh—”

“Aunt Clarke!” says Carter, spying her from his spot on the living room floor and running over. “Hi! Don’t we look handsome?”

Clarke has to smile. At almost five, Carter is talkative and messy-haired, a bright bundle of energy and missing teeth. Clarke hasn’t seen him in a few weeks because she’s been busy with grad school, and she did miss him.
“You look very handsome. Did you come over in that costume?”

He twirls for her, showing off a bright red suit and bushy beard made of what looks like an old t-shirt and yarn. “Uncle Bell made it.”

“He did, huh?” Clarke asks, smiling at Bellamy over Carter’s head.

“They’re doing a holiday pageant at the preschool,” he explains. “Carter is playing Santa and O figured I could handle the costume.”

“I’m amazed a preschool can have Santa in a pageant,” she admits. “Aren’t they non-denominational?”

“It’s informational about all the holiday traditions. The kids are coming together in song. It’s going to be—” He glances at Carter and coughs delicately. “Great. It’s going to be great.”

“And are you going to be in it?” she teases, giving one of his antlers a tug. They’re felt and kind of adorable.

“I figured if he was dressed as Santa anyway we might as well make a day of it, right?”

His smile is a little sheepish, and the whole effect is just—

Honestly? It’s adorable. Bellamy is about the cutest thing she’s ever seen, even without Carter. Put in the kid and yeah. It’s absurd.

“So did Uncle Bell make his own costume?” Clarke asks Carter. “Or did he already have that?”

“He had it!”

“Traitor,” Bellamy mutters. “It’s from a costume party.”

“You went to a party in a reindeer onesie?”

“Like you didn’t do weirder things in college.”

“Why did you keep the reindeer onesie?”

“For moments like this, obviously. Are you going to take pictures for us or not?”

“I can’t believe you’re asking me to document it. I’m not even getting secret blackmail material. It’s your idea.”

“You can’t blackmail me if I’m not embarrassed. We look handsome,” he adds, smirking, and it’s not actually accurate in his case, but—he is cute. Incredibly cute.

It gets cuter when he scoops Carter up onto his shoulders, making him whoop with laughter. He tugs on the antlers on Bellamy’s head like they’re a steering device, and Bellamy goes with it, letting Carter navigate him into the living room.

The living room is actually worse, because it’s full of the ruins of the costume-making, scraps of loose fabric they seem to have arranged into decorations. Clarke wouldn’t say she’s into guys who are good with kids, as a general thing, but if she hadn’t been in love with Bellamy before she saw how he doted on Carter, that probably would have done it. He’s just so sweet.

So, yeah. This was a bad idea. She shouldn’t have agreed to take pictures of the cutest babysitting
session ever. But she did, so there’s nothing to do but ask, “So, what did you have in mind?”

“Mom wants pictures of me,” says Carter. “Without Uncle Bell.”

“She specifically said that,” Bellamy adds. “Bellamy, you can’t be in all the pictures, I need some of just him for Lincoln’s parents.”

“Poor Lincoln’s parents, missing out on your reindeer onesie. Okay, kiddo, what do you want to do for your grandparents?”

“We need a background,” he says, patient. “I told Uncle Bell, but he said we should wait for you.”

“You’re the artist. I figured you might have ideas. I’ve got some construction paper and markers, so—”

“So, we’ve got Santa and a reindeer, right?” she says, clapping her hands together. Projects are good. Projects aren’t thinking about how cute Bellamy looks. “I think we should get a sleigh and some presents. You two can handle presents, I’ve got the sleigh.”

As plans go, it’s good for their project and still bad for her sanity, because Bellamy is still wearing his stupid costume, and Carter is sitting in his lap, telling him what colors of construction paper to use for the presents he’s cutting out. He’s patient as he adds polka dots and stripes, does everything, and Clarke keeps getting distracted from her own project watching the two of them.

Bellamy catches her the third time or so, flashes her a grin. “Don’t judge. We can’t all be professionals.”

She shakes her head, her own smile warm. “No, you guys are doing great. Just trying to get the size on the sleigh right. Proportions.”

“Uh huh.”

“I take my duties seriously.”

His expressions softens. “I know you do. Thanks.”

Even with her occasional distractions, Clarke finishes her sleigh and a Christmas tree before Carter feels that Bellamy’s made a sufficient number of presents. Which says less about Clarke’s own skills and a lot more about what Carter considers a sufficient number of presents, honestly.

They cut out a few ornaments for the tree and then tape the whole display up on the wall, which is enough work that they have to go have a snack before they’re ready for the actual pictures, so there’s no way Clarke’s getting anything else done before dinner. Even if Carter leaves, they’ll have the living room to clean, and Bellamy will definitely feel obliged to buy her a pizza for all her help.

So it’s the ideal day, basically. Even with the morning spent in the computer lab and the slight stress of childcare.

The pictures of Carter are easy, because he’s half Blake, which makes him a natural ham. He lives his whole life like it’s a photoshoot already, and Clarke’s camera, whenever she turns it on him, just confirms what he already suspected about his own coolness.

And then he says, “Come on, Uncle Bell! Your turn!”
“Any notes?” he asks Clarke.

“Have fun, be yourself. Try not to hog the spotlight. It’s the kid’s moment.”

“But this is my breakout role.” He leaves her side and goes to pick up Carter. “Okay, buddy, what do you want me to do?”

Carter, being Carter, has a lot of ideas about what he wants, and Bellamy, being Bellamy, goes along with him. He rides on his uncle’s back, in his lap, on his shoulders. He gets a bow and ties it on Bellamy’s head so he can pretend to unwrap him, makes Bellamy find sunglasses so they can both wear them and pose as cool guys.

And the whole time, Bellamy is just being Uncle Bell, the sweetest, kindest, gentlest version of himself. It’s not, honestly, how Clarke would want him to be all the time, because she likes the Bellamy who’s kind of prickly and sarcastic and irritable, the one who snaps at her when he loses his temper. Bellamy, when he’s with his nephew, is superhumanly patient and helpful, and while it’s beyond sweet, it’s not how Clarke wants him to be with her.

But it is very, very appealing. She blames biological imperatives.

“Oh, okay,” says Bellamy, flopping onto his back with histrionic exhaustion. “That’s it, right? We got enough? You’re done? You’re happy?”

“We didn’t get one with Aunt Clarke!”

Clarke blinks. “Did we need one with me? I’m not even wearing a costume.”

Bellamy takes his antlers off and puts them on her instead, smiling. “There, instant costume. We should get one with the three of us, right?”

It doesn’t seem like a necessity to Clarke, but it’s not like she minds, really. They can put it up on the fridge or something. She can post it on Instagram and her relatives who follow her will ask if she adopted a child with that nice boy they’re all convinced she’s dating.

So, par for the course.

“Let me just grab the stand,” she says.

It takes a few minutes for Carter to get them arranged, and then she sets the camera to auto-take pictures every few seconds. They do a couple serious ones, and then some silly ones, and Carter settles into Clarke’s lap to review all the shots she took. He picks his favorites for her to send to Octavia, and then Bellamy comes to see too, slotting in right next to Clarke, warm and close. He’s still wearing the onesie, which should be ridiculous, but she’s pretty sure he’s not going to change before Carter does, and Carter sounds like he’s planning to wear his Santa costume until it is forcibly cut from his body.

So the whole thing is, again, overwhelmingly cute. Clarke is not prepared.

“Which ones of these do you want?” she asks him, trying not to think about how close he is and how nice he smells and how his hair is a little messy from his headband that she’s still wearing.

“All of them, obviously. They’re all great. Thanks,” he adds, to her surprise.

“You don’t actually think this was a hardship, right? I got to take cute pictures instead of doing work. And I got to see you guys all dressed up.”
“You can see me again at the pageant,” says Carter. “You’re coming, right?”

“You can see me again at the pageant,” says Carter. “You’re coming, right?”

“Of course I’m coming,” she says. “I wouldn’t miss it.”

“Okay, buddy,” Bellamy says, once Clarke gets through all the photos. “We need to get you changed before your parents show up.”

“We do? Why can’t I wear it home?”

“Because the beard would be itchy,” he says. “And your mom said you guys were going out to dinner, so you need to wear your regular clothes. Otherwise all the other kids are going to ask you for presents.”

“I guess,” Carter says, heaving a heavy sigh. “Okay, I’ll get changed.”

Octavia shows up before they’re ready, so she and Clarke have their usual slightly awkward chat, which blessedly ends when Octavia says, “Oh my god, Bell, what are you wearing?”

“I’m Rudolph,” he says. “Hi, O, nice to see you too. No need to thank me for babysitting or making a costume or anything.”

“Thank you,” she says. “Carter, did you thank Uncle Bell and Aunt Clarke for letting you come over today?”

“Thanks Uncle Bell and Aunt Clarke!” he says, obedient. They both get one more hug, and then the kid is gone, and Clarke and Bellamy are alone in their antlers and onesie, respectively.

“Okay, seriously,” says Clarke. “What party was that appropriate for?”

“What party is it not appropriate for?”

“Look, I know you’re hot, but there’s no way this look was working for you back then.”

As soon as the words are out of her mouth, she knows they’re the wrong words, and Bellamy clearly does too. He cocks his head at her, curious, and Clarke feels the heat rush up her neck.

“Back then,” he repeats, slow. “So, you’re saying I look better in a onesie now than I did in college?”

“You had a kid helping you out. I assume you didn’t bring small children to college parties to help you get laid, so—”

He grins. “So this is doing it for you. Doting uncle in a reindeer onesie is your type? You’re actually into this?”

The smartest option would be to tease him back, but—he doesn’t look upset at the prospect. And he is her best friend. They can survive an awkward moment if they have to.

“Honestly? I really am.”

She’d worry it wasn’t enough, but Bellamy soaks instantly, eyes darting up and down, like he’s checking her for strings. “This? Really?”

“The hotness helps a lot. And—” She shrugs. “I’m into you, Bellamy, so—”

His hand is on her jaw, tilting her chin up, and his mouth is on hers, warm and insistent, and when
he pulls back, she tugs him back in, kissing him like she’s wanted to for years, making the most of it.

“Fuck, I would have told you I had a reindeer onesie years ago if I knew this was your kink,” he teases.

“It was really the whole experience. Honestly, do you have any idea how cute you are with your nephew? I’m amazed I lasted this long.”

“I had no idea and I wish you hadn’t,” he teases. He kisses her again. “Seriously, though, if this is a kink for you, you should tell me now, before–”

She gives him a gentle shove. “You’re a kink for me, asshole.”

“Cool, because I kind of wanted to take this thing off. If you wanted to help me with that too.”

It’s a line that wouldn’t work if he wasn’t Bellamy, but none of this would have worked if he wasn’t Bellamy. She adores him, and apparently the feeling is mutual.

Clarke’s bike breaks down spectacularly about sixty miles from anything in the middle of Mexico, which is around when Bellamy was expecting their first major crisis.

They’ve dealt with malfunctions before; it’s part of why they have Raven on the team. They’ve made it, so far, from Alaska to Mexico without any serious problems. All of the regular annoyances of long-range motorcycle travel are within Raven’s abilities to handle, and she’s gotten them through punctures, fuel malfunctions, and unexplained phenomena without much incident. A few times, the issue has required welding, but in the past they’ve gotten it patched up enough to make it to a town where they can get the work done.

This time, Raven just scowls. “What the fuck did you do, Griffin?”

“What percentage of your dialogue is going to be bleeped when this airs?” Monty asks. “Like, ballpark estimate. What do you think?”

“It would be a lot less if you assholes didn’t keep breaking your fucking bikes.”

“Hey,” Clarke protests, without her usual spark. She looks and sounds exhausted, worn out like he’s never seen her. The trip is wearing on all of them, but Bellamy’s not surprised it’s hitting her worse right now. She’s never happy when she feels like she screwed up, and breaking her bike beyond Raven’s ability to fix it is a lot of screwing up. “This is the first real break we’ve had.”

“Yeah,” Bellamy agrees. “You just like swearing. Don’t put this on us. Are you okay?” he adds, to Clarke. The crash wasn’t nearly as bad as it could have been, but there’s not really such a thing as a good motorcycle crash. It’s still a lot to deal with.

Her smile is tight. “Yeah. Just a little rattled.”

The admission is a lot, coming from her. He’d sort of assumed that if she lost a limb, she’d still respond to questions about her well-being with I’m fine.

“Monty and Raven can go ahead to the next town,” he offers. “Find a truck, bring it back for us.”

Clarke rubs her face. “We can just strap the bike to the top of the car, right? We don’t have to split up.”

“Where are you in this hypothetical?” he asks. “They don’t have enough room for another person in there.”

“I could squeeze in.”

“It doesn’t count if you’re not on a motorcycle,” Monty says, and Bellamy and Clarke both glare at him. “I’m not saying not to do it, just—you know what the goal is.”
The goal is kind of ridiculous, honestly. They’re traveling from Alaska to Argentina on motorcycles. It’s a combination of publicity stunt and charitable act, raising money for the ACLU and filming the whole thing to get up interest in some new movie of Clarke’s. If anyone had asked Bellamy if that was a good idea, he would have said no, but they didn’t ask him that. They asked if he’d babysit a celebrity on a cross-country motorcycle trip, and since it was Miller who was asking and assembling most of the crew, Bellamy had agreed. He hadn’t known much about Clarke, but they’d done a Skype interview that convinced him she was dedicated and stubbornly committed to the whole stupid plan, and that was enough for him.

He wouldn’t say he regrets it, just that he wasn’t really prepared. He didn’t think it would be like this.

“You could ride with me.” Everyone’s eyes snap to him; he refuses to let himself feel self-conscious. “It’s just sixty miles. We’ll be there in a couple hours. It’s not going to be comfortable, but we can double up for a little while. And then we’re both still on bikes.”

Clarke’s jaw works, but he’s not actually worried she’s going to disagree. It’s a logical step, and it’s not like it should be a big deal.

In fact, the only reason it feels like one is probably that they made out three days ago, and they still haven’t talked about it. Which isn’t really surprising; the bigger miracle is that they actually found enough time and privacy to make out in the first place. He’d like to do it again, have a conversation about it, and ideally do a lot more, but it’s probably going to have to wait until they’re done with the trip. At which point Clarke will go back to being a movie star and Bellamy will go back to being a stunt man, so they’re probably just never going to talk about it.

Which is fine. It’s not a big deal. Just a little making out between friends. Acquaintances. Whatever.

“Can we get the bike in the truck?” Clarke finally asks.

“Yeah, Miller and I can do it, no problem,” says Monty. “You guys can go ahead and we’ll meet you in town.”

“Splitting up, always a good idea,” Raven mutters.

“I assume Clarke needs a drink,” Monty says, and Clarke grins.

“I can wait until we’re loaded up. If something goes wrong with Bellamy’s bike, we want all hands on deck.”

“If something goes wrong with my bike, we’re probably going to die,” he says, flashing a grin at the camera Miller’s holding.

“As always, you’re a ray of fucking sunshine,” says Miller. “Help me with the bike.”

It doesn’t take them long to get the bike in the back of the van. The agreement is that Miller and Monty ride in there with the equipment, and Clarke, Bellamy, and Raven are on bikes. When Raven’s leg bothers her, she’ll sometimes switch places with one of the guys in the van, but the idea is that Clarke and Bellamy ride the whole way, so here they are.

“You sure you’re okay?” he asks her, low, as she settles on the seat in front of him. “We can figure out something else.”

She leans back into him, just a little. “I’m fine. But I’ll be better when I get a drink in me, so let’s
“Deal,” he says. “Let me know if I need to be doing anything differently.”

“I assume you’re a decent driver.”

He snorts. “I assume so, yeah. Hold on.”

It’s always a little awkward riding with someone else, and he’ll admit that it’s especially awkward now. It should be hard to be attracted to someone when they’re both lacking sleep and kind of dirty and living out of backpacks, but somehow he fell for her anyway. She went from being pretty cool for a celebrity to pretty cool in general to being one of his favorite people. And he knows how this works, relationships like this don’t stay. They’re doing a project together, and just because it’s an intense project, that doesn’t mean their relationship is going to have any more staying power than any other on-set relationship.

Just because they made out once, it doesn’t mean they have a relationship. It was just a kiss. A great, very intense kiss, but just a kiss.

They make it to town without any real incident. Bellamy gets a little turned on, but Clarke is polite enough and familiar enough with male anatomy not to mention it, or possibly just doesn’t want his erection on the record, considering the cameras are rolling and they’re wearing mics.

Regardless, they get there, and Clarke sags against him a little once they stop, so she can’t be that uncomfortable with him.

“Still good?” he asks.

“Still need a drink.” She lets out a long breath and then straightens and slides off the bike, stretching. “How about you?”

He takes a second to make sure his dick is under control and then stands himself, shaking out his shoulders. “A drink sounds good. I’ll even pay.”

“So generous. What about you guys?”

“I want to get your bike fixed first,” says Raven. “Miller, you want to take me to find a mechanic or film Clarke and Bellamy getting wasted?”

“Tough call, but I’m going with mechanic. Monty can film the bar.”

“Do we have to film the bar?” Bellamy asks, less because he thinks there’s any chance in hell anyone will say no and more because grumbling is basically his brand at this point, and even if he’s not an actual actor, he understands his role in this production. He’s the grumpy professional to Clarke’s fresh-faced celebrity.

“You don’t want the world to know what you’re like when you’re drunk?” Monty asks.

“I’m thinking he gets cuddly,” Clarke muses. “He seems like a cuddly drunk.”

“Ha ha.”

“Make up your minds about who’s coming,” she tells the rest of the crew. “Because we’re definitely drinking. Like, now.” She loops her arm in his. “Right, Bellamy?”

“I had no idea riding with me was that traumatic. But yeah, let’s go get wasted. Monty?”
“You know I desperately want to watch you get drunk.”

“Text us where you end up. Get rooms first,” Raven asks. “I know you’re an alcoholic, but I want a shower before I get booze.”

“Got it,” says Bellamy. “I’ll get rooms while Clarke orders.”

“Teamwork!” says Monty.

“Sure, let’s go with that,” says Bellamy. He rolls his eyes at the camera. “This isn’t going to be as exciting as you think it is.”

And it doesn’t even turn out to be a lie. He and Clarke sit at the bar, have a few drinks, talk about the trip and Clarke’s crash. When Miller and Raven show up, the conversation shifts to Clarke’s bike’s status and when they’ll be able to leave, which is not great and probably not until the day after tomorrow.

“Aren’t you supposed to be wild and crazy?” Raven asks, squinting at Clarke. “How many have you had?”

“Three. I can just hold my liquor.”

“Your fans are going to be so disappointed.”

She grins at the camera. “Sorry, guys. If it helps, I feel a lot better.”

“And that’s what’s really important,” Bellamy agrees.

“Even if you didn’t get cuddly.” Monty stretches. “Is that it? We’re signing off for the night and going to sleep?”

“Did you want to paint the town red?” Clarke teases.

“Just making sure I’m good to take your mics off.”

“Please.”

It’s always a little complicated, getting everyone unwired and set for bed, but they’re pretty efficient about it, at this point. It’s a small hotel, but also not a busy one, so Monty and Miller are sharing, and everyone else got their own rooms.

Bellamy wouldn’t say he’s expecting Clarke to want to talk to him, but it’s also not totally surprising. They’d been sharing rooms or camping since the kiss, so this is her first opportunity, and when she lingers at her door, he deliberately slows too, hoping she wants—

Well, hoping he’s why she was waiting.

She gives him half a smile. “Are you coming in?”

“Do you want me to?”

“We should talk, right?”

“Sure.”

He follows her into her room and she pulls him down as soon as the door is closed. He hasn’t
kissed her enough yet that he can say it’s familiar, but it is nice. Her mouth is warm and her hands tangle in his hair, apparently unconcerned with the slight greasiness or the fact that he hasn’t showered for a day or two. Not that he minds either of those in her, but it’s still good to know.

“This isn’t talking,” he points out, tugging her to the bed.

“Talking can be involved.”

“Yeah?”

She huffs. “I was going to wait until we were done, but that seems kind of stupid.”

“Wait until we were done for what?”

“This.” She pauses before he can push her down. “We could shower first. I don’t want to get the bed any dirtier than we have to.”

He feels a lump rise in his throat. “Clarke.”

“What?”

“We really do need to talk.”

“I like you,” she says. It’s so simple and direct, so not Hollywood. But very Clarke. “I’m hoping you like me too. But I wasn’t going to say anything until we were done. I didn’t want to make it weird.”

“This is pretty weird.” He wets his lips. “What happens when we’re done?”

“We both live in LA. It’s not like I’m never going to see you again.” Her thumb strokes against his hip, and if he didn’t want to hear what she was going to say so much, he’d kiss her again. “That was really what I wanted to tell you, when we were done. I don’t want this to be the last time I see you. That’s all I–”

He catches her mouth, kisses her warm and slow, and she melts against him. It doesn’t feel real, but here they are. He’s making out with Clarke Griffin in a tiny hotel in Mexico. Because she likes him.


She smiles. “Yeah, that works for me.”

*

The camera catches them three days before the end of the trip. They’re in Argentina and taking advantage of the rest of the group having gone to get water. It’s nothing scandalous or anything, just Clarke dozing on his shoulder with his lips in her hair, but he hears Raven say, “And here are the two most obvious assholes in the entire world. We were wondering when they were going to slip up. Anything to say to the audience at home, guys?”

“Fuck you, Raven,” says Clarke, making no move to get off his shoulder.

“Anything I don’t have to bleep?” Monty asks.

“Fuck you too.”

“Come on, the viewers are going to be invested in this,” says Raven. “The sexual tension has got to
be dripping off every scene. This is the culmination of everything they’ve been waiting for. At least make it good.”

“He’s hot and I like him a lot,” says Clarke. “Happy?”

“I don’t know. Bellamy, you don’t think she can do better?”

She probably could, but he knows exactly how she feels about him, and it’s no one’s business but theirs. “Nope. That’s the best she can do.”

“See?” says Clarke. “It’s fine. The viewers are going to figure it out. They’re smart. They don’t need us to spell it out for them. I like him, and we’re running late.”

“You guys suck at romance,” says Raven.

Bellamy stands and pulls Clarke up after him, shakes his shoulders out and cracks his neck. At least this way they can probably get just one hotel room, now that the cat is out of the bag. “It’s working for us,” he says. “Come on. Let’s ride.”
Given Clarke signed up to be naked and stranded, it feels unfair to be upset about that, but she signed up to be naked and stranded with a stranger, and instead here she is in the middle of nowhere with Bellamy Blake, who is—

Okay, he’s not actually the last person she’d want to be stranded with. Clarke does know worse people than Bellamy, both globally and in a crisis. But the deal was that she’d be with a stranger. The network gave her a list of names to confirm that she didn’t know any of her potential companions, and now here she is, face-to-face with a naked Bellamy Blake.

“Did you know?” she demands.

Bellamy crosses his arms over his chest. The crew just looks baffled, and Clarke realizes with shock that none of them knew. This is, somehow, an accident.

“How the fuck would I know?”

“Language,” says the camera operator. “Is there a problem?”

“We know each other.”

“She wasn’t on the list I got,” Bellamy adds. He’s sort of trying not to look at her body too much, but it’s difficult.

“Huh. Let me check that with the producers,” says the camera operator, and she pulls out a cell phone.

Clarke and Bellamy watch each other, Clarke doing her best to cover her breasts and Bellamy keeping his eyes fixed somewhere slightly above her forehead.

“I should have known you’d end up on a show like this,” he finally says.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

He smirks. “I’m guessing you were talking about survival shows with someone you don’t like, and they said you wouldn’t make it a week, and you signed up just to prove to them you could.”

“And I’m guessing you found out you could show off your abs and your survival skills at the same time and jumped on the chance. Honestly, I’m amazed it took you this long to get on here.”

“Well, I was in grad school for a while,” he says, grinning, and Clarke finds herself grinning back.

By the end of college, she really didn’t hate Bellamy. He wasn’t exactly her favorite person in a social context, but she knew he was smart and capable and even kind of fun. More pertinent to this
particular situation, she also knows they work well together and he’s a good person in a crisis.

“You think they’ll let us do this together?” she asks him. “Even though we know each other?”

“We are already naked.” He wets his lips, looks over at the camera operator, still on the phone. “I don’t know. I hope so.”

“Yeah,” she admits. “Me too.”

* *

The producers let it go. The mix-up was seasonal; Clarke was on the last episode of season seven and her partner dropped out, and the producers pulled Bellamy off the next season list when he said he was available. When they explained they went to college together and haven’t seen each other since Bellamy graduated, everyone agreed it was an error and they could just run with it.

And now she’s trapped in the wilderness with Bellamy.

“Okay, you need to get something on your boobs,” he says, as soon as they’re officially rolling.

Clarke snorts. “What about food and shelter?”

“I’m going to do better with those when your boobs aren’t right there.”

“You used to make clothes for the theater department, right? You can find stuff for clothing and a shelter and I’ll look for a good place to set up. I’d like high and close to water.”

“High might be hard, but if you can find somewhere, yeah. Or natural cover. We shouldn’t get too far apart, though. The last thing we want to do is lose each other.”

“So you don’t want to split up.”

“Have you ever seen a horror movie?”

“I didn’t want my boobs to distract you while you’re—“

He rolls his eyes. “Shut up, Clarke.”

But it’s really not so bad. Well, it is. Surviving in the middle of nowhere with almost nothing is awful. They’re hungry and sunburned and dehydrated. But it’s not bad being all those things with Bellamy. It’s better than doing it with a stranger. They figure out minimal clothing and a decent shelter, and at night when they can’t do anything else, they catch up. She finds out they live relatively close together, both in the Boston area, and that he’s going into academia, which she’ll admit seems like a good fit for him.

It’s hard to feel like it’s really going well, but it seems likely that they’re going to make it through their twenty-one days.

Which is when the storm hits.

Clarke is asleep when it happens, but Bellamy shakes her awake, the panic clear in his eyes. It doesn’t take more than a second for her to figure out why. She hasn’t been in a lot of bad storms, but she knows the signs. Rain is already spattering a little, and the wind is picking up.

“We need to get out of here,” he says. “Get somewhere higher up.”
They don’t have much stuff to gather, but she gets what she has. “You’re worried about flooding from the river?”

“Yeah.” He scrubs his face. “Fuck.”

“Have you heard thunder?”

“Not yet, but it could be coming. So we should get away from the water.”

“Yeah.” She clucks her tongue. “If there’s no thunder yet, I think we should head for the rocks. We could maybe find shelter there. We haven’t explored everything. We might find a cave.”

He nods. “Yeah, that’s probably best. I think our mics went out.”

“Really?”

He taps his, and there’s no feedback. Clarke winces. “Shit. So they might not be able to find us.”

“Yeah, but we’ll be alive, so—”

“So let’s go,” she agrees. “Cave.”

It takes them longer than she’d like to find decent shelter in the rocks. Bellamy’s got his axe, the single item he brought with him into the wilderness, so he goes first, ready to fight anything else that might be trying to escape from the rain in here. But, to her relief, they’re alone, and the cave is even relatively dry still. They go as far back as they can, and Clarke gets a fire started. Their clothes are still minimal, and not only is it colder outside in the storm, but they’re wet and the cave is freezing.

She’s the one who has to say, “We need to share body heat.”

Bellamy jumps. He’s sitting on the other side of the fire, glancing over shoulder every few seconds, paranoid that something will come for them.

“What?” he asks.

“I’m freezing, so are you. All our stuff is soaked, and our mics are down. If we want to make it through tonight, we need to make sure we don’t freeze to death, so—come over here.”

He lets out a breath that Clarke can see, like he’s psyching himself up, but he must know she’s right. He stands and comes over, sitting right up next to her. Despite everything, he does feel warm, and she immediately moves in close, wrapping herself up in him.

He laughs, soft. “You know this was basically all I wanted senior year of college, right?”

She blinks, looks up at him. “Which part?”

His throat bobs on a swallow, and he hesitantly raises one hand to smooth her hair back. They’re both disgusting, but she’s mostly used to that at this point. And he’s still, well, Bellamy.

The longer they’re out here, the less she can imagine ever doing this with anyone else.

“I had such a huge crush on you,” he admits, his smile soft.

Clarke manages not to laugh, mostly because that’s never a good response to someone sharing their feelings. But it’s so hard to believe. “Really?”
“Yeah.”

She repositions herself, snuggling closer, resting her head on his shoulder. He props his chin on her hair. “Were you waiting for the mics to go out to mention that?”

“Not exactly. Waiting to see if I still did. Have a huge crush on you.”

“And?”

“Definitely.”

She smiles against his neck. “Good. Let’s survive, brush our teeth, shower, and go on a date like a week after that. Assuming the crush survives whatever happens in the next ten days or so.”

“Deal. I’m going to kiss you then too. But, yeah. We should survive first.”

Clarke’s eyes drift shut. It is warm, pressed up against him. And she feels shockingly safe, all things considered. “Yeah, that’s the plan.”

*

When they leave the cave the next morning, it’s not exactly good news. The river flooded, like they thought, and their old campground is under water. Most of the places they’ve spent time are under water, in fact, all their usual stomping grounds.

“Fuck,” says Bellamy.

“I’d say we could stay in the cave, but we’d starve.”

“Yeah.” He looks around. “No sign of the cameras, either. I assume they’d airlift us out, or at least check in, but–”

“They might not be able to get back here. It’s not like we were getting help before, really,” she says.

“Yeah, but if one of us had gotten badly hurt–” His jaw works. “We aren’t working with a safety net right now. Not until they find us. So we need to be extra careful.”

“You don’t have to tell me that.”

He cracks a smile. “Yeah, I know. But still. You’re the one with the first aid background, so if you get hurt, I’m not going to be as much help.”

“You be careful too. I’m not that good at first aid.”

“Yeah, I know. Okay,” he says, letting out a long breath. “Food and water. We’ve got shelter. Maybe something to try to mark the cave? If they come looking for us, we’ll probably hear them, but–”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.’ His mouth twists up. “We did want a realistic survival experience.”

“Be careful what you wish for.” After a second of hesitation, she reaches down and takes his hand. “It’s going to be slippery,” she explains. “Careful, right?”

He squeezes her fingers. “Yeah, careful.”
It takes five days for the helicopter to show up, and they’re not good days. There was never a ton of food, but there’s even less now. They boil all their water before they drink it, the small pot Clarke brought as her personal item working overtime, but she still feels thirsty all the time. Bellamy’s running a low fever after the third day, which is terrifying, and she presses her hand against his forehead every few minutes, making sure it’s not getting worse.

At least he doesn’t mind.

The flooding changed the terrain too, many of the places where they knew underwater now. The fact that their cave is clean and dry makes it desirable housing for animals, and every time they leave, they’re worried something else will move in.

But they make it, and the sound of the copters early in the morning on the fifth day is the best thing she’s ever heard.

“Bellamy,” she murmurs, stirring awake on his chest. “Bellamy.”

He doesn’t wake, and it occurs to her that he’s warmer than he should be. The fever’s finally spiked, and she has to swallow back on the panic. The rescue is here; he’s going to be fine.

She gives him a hard shake. “Bellamy. Wake up.”

He makes a face, but his eyes blink open. “Clarke,” he says, like it’s a surprise to see her.

“I hear a chopper. We need to get out so they’ll pick us up. Can you stand?”

“I’m fine,” he says, struggling to sit. Once he’s upright, he visibly reels, and Clarke slides her shoulder under his arm for support. “Fuck.”

“If we get out, you can see an actual doctor.”

“But it hasn’t been twenty-one days.”

She has to smile. “I think the last five days count double. We were actually alone. No one can say we’re not survivors. Ready to stand up?”

He exhales. “Ready.”

They make it to the mouth of the cave to find the helicopter already approaching. They’d marked the entrance, hoping to be identified, and Clarke can’t help feeling smug that it worked. They aren’t half bad at this survival thing. They made it.

Raven, the main camera operator, is the one to pull them into the helicopter.

“Fuck! We thought you died.”

“Based on what?” Clarke asks. “We’re survivalists.”

“Our camp got flooded,” Raven admits. “It wasn’t great for us, and we had a lot more to work with.” She looks over Bellamy, critical. “Is he okay?”

“Fever,” says Clarke. “It got worse this morning, so good timing. Bellamy?”

He slumps onto her shoulder. “If we leave with you, do we lose?”
“I don’t care, we’re leaving with them. You’re not dying.”

“I’m definitely dying, Clarke. Death is inevitable.”

She smooths his hair off his forehead. “Please don’t be an idiot. Do you have aspirin or something?”

Raven is watching the interaction with interest, but she shakes herself out of it. “Yeah, and protein drinks. We’ll take you guys right to a hospital. Don’t worry, we’ll count this as a success. It’s going to be a pretty weird episode. Once you guys are feeling better, I think we’re probably going to just film some interviews about the storm and the aftermath and use that for the rest of the episode. But we’ll get you to a doctor first.”

“Thanks, that would be great. But aspirin now.”

They’re in better shape than Clarke expected. Bellamy’s fever responds to antibiotics, and Clarke’s mostly just dehydrated. She’s cleared in a few days, and spends her time hanging out by Bellamy’s bed, waiting for him to recover.

It’s not really a surprise that the producers want to talk to them together, after all that.

“Tell us about the storm,” says Roan. He’s not Clarke’s favorite person, but she’ll admit he’s a good interviewer. “What time did it hit there?”

“How would we know?” Bellamy grumbles. “It woke me up, and then I woke Clarke up. We picked a camp close to the river so we’d have access to water, but we didn’t want to be there if it flooded.”

“Which it did,” says Clarke.

“Which it did.” He sighs. “There wasn’t any lightning, but we were worried there would be. We decided a cave would be safest, if we could find one. And luckily we did. It took longer than we would have liked, but we did find one, and we set up camp there instead.”

They cover the flood’s effect on the terrain, the challenges in adapting to the environmental changes. Bellamy talks about his fever, and Clarke takes his hand, rubbing her thumb against his, so grateful. She could have dealt with the fever if she had to, but she’s much happier he could get proper care with real doctors.

Roan sees, of course, and once Bellamy’s done, he asks, “How was it being out there together? You’re our first couple to have known each other before you hit the ground.”

“It was nice,” she says. “We haven’t seen each other in a few years, but I remembered him. We knew how to work together, and we didn’t have to spend any time figuring each other out.”

“Do you think you’ll be seeing more of each other?”

She hasn’t even kissed him yet, which is honestly a crime. But all she can do right now is smile. “Yeah. I think we might.”
Before Clarke told him she’d never had sex, Bellamy was going to try to ask her out.

Or, well, that was the plan. But he’ll admit that he didn’t really know how he was going to do that. The lab partners thing wasn’t even a first step, it was a test, to see if his suspicion that he really did like Clarke was accurate. And the more time he spends with her, the more he likes her, and it’s so fucking stupid. The whole thing is just such a mess.

Which is why it seems like such a good idea to ask her if she wants to make out.

She blinks a few times, clearly taken by surprise, but she doesn’t look offended. It’s a great first step to not getting his ass kicked, and ideally getting to hook up with Clarke. And then maybe dating.

“What?” she asks at last.

“We’re done with our lab,” he says, with deliberate casualness. “You’re good on the Latin homework. I’m always good on the Latin homework. I’m pretty sure your paper will keep.” He shrugs, as if all of this leads to a logical conclusion. “So, yeah. Do you want to make out?”

She narrows her eyes. “Why?”

“Because it’s fun?”

“Finn’s the only person I’ve ever made out with,” she admits, and he can’t help making a face. He disliked Finn Collins enough before he knew he was hugely exaggerating his relationship with Clarke. Lying is kind of implied in cheating, but going out of his way to lie about one or probably both of the girls he was cheating on is another level.

But he has better things to think about than that right now.

“Jesus,” he says. “No wonder you don’t think it’s fun.”

“I never said that,” she says. It sounds less like a defense of Finn and more like a defense of making out. Which he’s all for. “I’m just not sure why you’re offering.”

“We’re not doing anything else and I like making out. No big deal either way.”

If she can tell he’s lying through his teeth, she gives no sign of it. Instead she worries her lip, visibly making up her mind, and Bellamy waits, not wanting to pressure her. It really isn’t a big deal if she says no. But he will be pretty excited if she says yes.

“I might not be any good at it,” she finally says, and he feels his face break into a stupid grin.

He crosses the room, sits down next to her on the bed, careful not to spook her, but she doesn’t look
upset. “You’ll be fine,” he assures her, and when she smiles, he moves a little closer. “Tell me if you want to stop,” he murmurs, and then he’s kissing her.

Clarke is a little hesitant, her movements unsure, so he goes slowly, getting her used to it. It’s not as if it’s a chore, after all. He gets to take his time, learn what she likes.

And by all appearances, she likes kissing him. When he slides his tongue against her lips, she opens for him, and when he pushes her back, she tugs him on top of her. Her hands slide up his back, under his shirt, and when he tries to shift his rapidly hardening dick away from her, she not only wraps her leg around his to keep him close, she actually tries to pull his shirt off.

He laughs, delight filling his chest and bubbling out of him, inevitable. “Yeah?” he asks.

She frowns, looking kind of adorably put out, and he has to restrain himself from kissing her again. “I’m not sure what I’m agreeing to if I say yes. But I assume there’s a step two to making out.”

He nuzzles he jaw, kisses her neck. If she’s trying to get him shirtless, he assumes he can try some other stuff too. “If you want. Up to you. I know you haven’t done this before.”

“Not for lack of interest.”

“Clearly.” He takes the shirt off, and she definitely checks him out.

It’s a lot to process, so he leans in for another kiss. “Tell me if–actually, just keep checking in. Good or bad.”

She slides her hand into his hair, gives it a light tug, figuring it out. “Good so far.”

“Yeah,” he says, and he’s planning out his next move, sliding his hands up under her shirt, moving closer, testing what she likes, where he should touch her, when her phone rings.

Of course.

He glances at the display, sees mom and a picture lighting up the iPhone. He didn’t think he’d get laid today, but he thought he’d at least have a little longer to enjoy this.

“Fuck,” says Clarke, with feeling.

Her mother apparently needs her, but when he kisses her goodbye, she doesn’t mind, and when he asks if she’ll be back, she says yes.

All in all, it’s a very successful experiment. He can’t wait to see what happens next.

*

Somehow, he didn’t expect to actually end up having regular sex with Clarke. At best, he thought he’d get to make out with her a little more, maybe get laid, if she was interested in seeing how that was. It didn’t seem impossible, hoping for those things. But he wasn’t really very optimistic.

But Clarke seems to like him. Or at least she likes hooking up with him, and he thinks she likes him beyond that. They chat and joke around, and she smiles at him and teases him and even hangs out with him sometimes at school, outside of class, like they’re friends.

He wants them to be friends. He wants them to be so much more than that.

“Have you considered telling her that?” Miller asks. He’s finally ready to try dating again after he
and Bryan broke up over the summer, so he’s dragging Bellamy to some party that he is really not looking forward to.

“I was going to ask her to come tonight, but her mom’s dragging her to a thing,” he says. “Does that count?”

“Not really. You can say you were going to ask her, but that doesn’t mean you would have followed through. I’m thinking if she didn’t have plans, you would have come up with another reason to not invite her.”

“I probably would have just tried to play it off like I was asking her as a friend,” he grants. “But we definitely would have made out, so—that’s progress, right?”

“Clearly,” says Miller. “I guess it is pretty impressive that you actually managed to get her to fuck you.”

“It wasn’t even that hard. Clarke Griffin’s into casual sex, who knew?”

There’s a long pause, and when Bellamy finally looks over, Miller exhales. “Honestly, dude? I can’t believe she is. That really doesn’t seem like her. So if she’s fucking you, it’s probably serious. You should talk to her.”

He swallows hard. “Wait, is this heartfelt advice from a friend? Are you sick?”

“I’m just saying, I’ve never seen you this happy. Think about how great it would be if you actually knew what was happening.”

“That does sound cool,” he admits.

“I’m saying.”

“As teenage boys, isn’t sex supposed to be our top priority?” he teases.

“Hey, fuck you, it’s still mine. You’re the one who grew feelings.”

Bellamy sighs. “Yeah. That’s me.”

*

The party kind of sucks.

It’s not really a surprise; Bellamy’s never been great at parties, because he’s just a little too responsible. He’s too busy worrying about how everyone else is doing to really have that much fun himself, and when he’s looking for a hookup he has to find someone else who’s doing the same thing.

Clarke would definitely be great for that; he has it so bad.

Miller finds some science club guy he’s been pretending he’s not flirting with fairly early on in the evening, which means Bellamy is relieved of his duties as wingman and moral support provider. It’s both convenient and a little annoying, since he doesn’t actually have anything else to do, but if he leaves, he’ll never hear the end of it from the rest of the track team.

So he’s not going to say he’s happy Niylah gets completely shitfaced, because that sucks for her, but at least he has a good reason to leave and someone to look after.
Harper is the one who finds him. “Are you sober? Miller said you were his DD.” She pauses. “Then he, like, made fake boobs on his chest and started cracking up so I’m not convinced he knows what’s going on.”

Bellamy frowns. “He’s that wasted? Is he okay? Where is he?”

She rolls her eyes. “Okay, yeah, you’re sober. I’m going to be good to drive home but I can’t yet, and Niylah needs to leave. Can you take her home?”

“You’ll get Miller?”

“Yes, Mom, I’ll get Miller. I’m not drinking anymore.”

“Oh, cool. Thanks.”

She just smiles. “How does no one realize you’re like this?”

“I work very hard on my image. Where is she?”

Between him and Harper, they get Niylah in the car, and he says goodbye to a semi-coherent but cheerful Miller.

Pretty standard, as parties go.

“What happened?” he asks Niylah, once they’re on the road. The two of them aren’t particularly close, but they’ve had a few classes together over the years. He’s positively inclined to her.

“I got drunk.”

“Clearly. Any particular reason?”

She huffs. “I got dumped.”

“Shit. That sucks.”

“It happens.”

“Did she say why?”

“Not clicking, whatever.” She makes a face. “Do you have a girlfriend? Boyfriend? You’re friends with Miller, but you guys aren’t together, right?”

“No.” He clears his throat, shifts a little, thinking of Clarke. Like he’s not basically always thinking of Clarke. “No boyfriend. Not really a girlfriend.”

“Not really?”

“Not how I want.”

She’s quiet for a second. “Clarke, right?”

He groans. “That obvious?”

“You guys are hanging out more. And she’s hot.” She sighs. “Straight?”

“Into guys,” he says. “Not sure about anything else.”
“No offense, but I hope she’s bi.”

“None taken. I hope she’s bi too.”

“And I hope it works out for you.”

“Yeah. That too.”

By Tuesday, it’s not looking good. He’s not sure what happened, but Clarke is clearly mad, possibly at him. Even though they don’t spend a ton of time together at school, it tends to be friendlier than this. She’s short with him, offering monosyllabic responses to his questions, focusing only on schoolwork. It’s disconcerting not only because she’s so curt but because he hadn’t quite realized until then how far they’d come, how much he had to lose. But they’re not even back at square one; they’re at some earlier place, without the barbed teasing they had before, without anything.

It sucks.

He tries to pull her aside on Wednesday and talk to her, but she says she’s got something to do and brushes him off.

“I don’t know what the fuck I even could have done,” he tells Miller, with his face down on the lunch table. “We were cool on Saturday. Now I can’t even get her to talk to me. Fuck.”

Miller pets him. “Maybe she’s just in a shitty mood and it has nothing to do with you.”

“Yeah. That doesn’t help. I want her to talk to me when stuff sucks. I want to be there for her.”

“Yeah, I know. But you guys might not be there yet. Especially if she thinks you’re just fucking.”

“Yeah.” He sighs. “I guess I’ll find out on Saturday, if nothing else. If she shows up.”

“Try not to be too much of an asshole. Benefit of the doubt.”

It’s good advice, but by the time Saturday rolls around, he’s basically a grumpy asshole about everything. Even leaving aside the Clarke stuff, it’s been a long, stressful week, and he’s in no mood to deal with anything.

He’s not even sure Clarke’s going to show up. That sucks a lot too.

When she does, he’ll admit to not being in the best mood with her. He couldn’t bring himself to text her and ask if she was coming, so instead he was just sitting on his couch, feeling sorry for himself and knowing he had no one else to blame. Not even her.

Still, she could have fucking called.

“I didn’t think you were going to come,” he tells her, by way of greeting.

Her jaw is tight, like she’s waiting for him to throw a punch. “We have a lab to do.”

“Yeah, but that might involve you saying more than ten words to me.”

It’s unfair, and he knows it; he still doesn’t even know if she’s pissed at him. So he can’t even feel triumphant when she flinches.
At least she recovers quickly. “Yeah, but not more than twenty. You’re getting a lot better at bio,” she teases, but he’s not in the mood. “I had a shitty week,” she finally says, deflating. “I’m sorry I took it out on you.”

His determination flags. “You could have talked to me.”

“Could I?” The question is harsher than he’d expect, and it clicks all at once. She doesn’t think they’re friends either.

“Jesus,” he says. “Yes, of course. I don’t ask how you’re doing to be polite. You know I’m not polite. What’s wrong?”

She shrugs. “Just stressed.”

“You want to make out? I know we usually do homework first, but–”

He really was just trying to help her, but the stab of disappointment when she says, “No,” is still sharp and hot. “I think we maybe shouldn’t–” She clears her throat. “We shouldn’t do that any more.”

That’s even worse. “No?”

“It’s a bad idea.”

His first impulse is to argue, to tell her—he doesn’t even know what. That it’s fine, that it’s good, that he thinks he’s falling for her. None of them are helpful, and none of them are reasons this isn’t a bad idea. Most of them are reasons it was a bad idea to ever start. “If you’re sure.” He nods, mostly to himself. “Yeah. We could do something else? To de-stress. Watch a movie, or–”

Her smile is a little weak, but it looks real. “It’s fine, Bellamy. Just homework is good.”

“Okay. If there’s anything I can do–”

“I’ll tell you,” she assures him, and he lets it go. She’s got her own issues, her own life, and she doesn’t want him to be involved in that. Maybe someone found out about them, and she got cold feet. Maybe she realized this isn’t normal, or isn’t what she wants from him.

Maybe he’s a self-centered jackass and she doesn’t need a reason to not fuck him.

He drags his feet a little on the lab, but it still doesn’t take long. They’re a great team. Usually, it’s not a bad thing; it just means they have more time to make out. But now, he’s worried she’s just going to leave, and he’ll have an afternoon alone, wondering if he fucked this up and whether or not he could have done something differently.

He’s about to ask what she’s doing when she stands and makes a show of stretching. “I assume you’ve got a party tonight?”

He frowns, confused. He almost never goes to parties these days. “No. I don’t have any plans. Why would I be going to a party?”

“You like parties.”

“Yeah, no. I really don’t. I don’t hate them or anything, but—I’d rather just be at home, most days.”

“I heard you had fun last week,” she says, in a vaguely accusatory tone, and it’s about the most confusing possible outcome to this. Of all the things she could be angry about, his going to that
stupid party had never even occurred to him.

Honestly, he didn’t think she cared. He’s still not sure why she would. It’s not like he wasn’t planning to invite her, before he found out she was busy.

“Are you pissed I went to a party last weekend? Did you want to come? You said you had plans, Miller needed a wingman. That’s not–” He’s not even sure why he’s making excuses; he didn’t do anything wrong. But she clearly thinks he did.

“I’m not pissed,” she says. It is a complete and obvious lie. “I just misunderstood.”

“Misunderstood what?”

She looks away from him, biting her lip. She seems tiny and overwhelmed in that moment, and all he wants to do is pull her close.

“It’s nothing,” she says.

“Clarke. You’re pissed at me. You can at least tell me why. I wasn’t even trying,” he teases, but she doesn’t smile.

“I know. I heard Murphy and Mbege talking. About how you finally took a girl home again.” Her eyes dart away from him again, and her cheeks color. “Apparently you were going through a dry spot.”

The only possible explanation occurs to him, and he lets out a bark of involuntary laughter. She’s jealous. She heard he brought another girl home, and she’s been jealous about it all week. It would be a lot funnier if it hadn’t sucked for both of them, but–it’s kind of awesome, still. “You’re pissed that I took someone home?” he asks. “Or that I wasn’t telling Murphy and Mbege I was actually getting laid?”

Her scowl deepens. “I’m not pissed. Just–I thought you got sufficiently laid already. That’s all.”

“That’s all?”

He’s too excited to be properly somber, and he can see the hurt flash in her eyes. “Sorry you disapprove of my emotions. I can leave.”

“No! It’s not–” He huffs, gives her a rueful smile. “I gave Niyalah a ride home. That’s it. I didn’t get laid, I wasn’t trying to get laid, I’m not looking for–fuck, I’ve got you,” he says, trying to pour everything into that single word. She’s what he wants. She’s completely and totally all he needs. “Or I did,” he amends. “I was working on it.”

“Niyalah,” she says, flat.

“She and Caroline broke up, she got way too drunk, I took her home. It’s not really funny, just–I can’t believe that’s what got back to you. And that you’re upset about it.”

“That would be a lot of sex in a day,” she says, tone light.

He swallows hard, steps in closer but doesn’t let himself reach out yet. “Yeah. I’m not interested in anyone else. Not for a while. Just you.”

She still doesn’t look quiet convinced. “And you decided the best way to deal with that was to ask if I wanted to make out?”
“If you didn’t, I figured I didn’t have much of a shot. And then I could work up to, uh. Dates.” His courage falters. Maybe he was reading the whole situation wrong. “Or whatever. If you’re—”

She grabs the front of his shirt and pulls him down to her, his mouth landing off-center because he wasn’t quite expecting it. But the kiss is firm and sure, hard until he tempers it, tries to make this one different, to show her what he really wants.

And it seems to work, because she melts into it, smiling into it, and it still doesn’t feel totally real, after the week he’s had.

But he’ll probably have time to get used to it.

“Hey, do you want to not have sex with me?” he asks against her lips.

In his defense, it sounded more romantic in his head.

She looks distressed. “Not have sex?”

“Okay, not yet,” he laughs. “But, uh—nothing against sex, I just want to do more with you.”

She nuzzles his jaw, all warm affection. “Boyfriend stuff?”

“If you’re into that.”

“You’re not usually this nervous,” she says, clearly pleased.

“Not usually, no. We could watch a movie.”

“Yeah.” She leans in for another kiss. “And then homework. And sex.”

“Yeah,” he says. “I can live with that.”

They settle onto the couch, which is a new location for them, and Clarke snuggles up against his chest, settling in like she’s not planning to move until someone forces her to.

“Did you actually ask to be my lab partner as part of a long-term plan to seduce me?” she asks, as he navigates Netflix.

“Uh. No?”

She pokes him. “You totally did.”

“I didn’t. I, uh—the seducing you was a late addition.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I wanted to ask you out. Seducing you just seemed easier.”

“Oh my god. Seriously, Bellamy?”

“What?”

She’s grinning. “You decided it would be easier to ask me to make out than to ask me to go on a date?”

“Less risky,” he admits, and her smile softens.
“I wish you’d just asked me in the first place.”

He considers. “Would you had said yes?”

“Absolutely.” She settles back against him. “But—you got there.”

He kisses her hair. “Yeah. Somehow.”
The Man, the Myth, the Legend

Chapter Summary

Fill for smuzie1! Original fic here.

The whole thing starts with Roma getting engaged, and it somehow snowballs from there.

The timing is the biggest issue for Bellamy, and also a complete coincidence; he knows his college girlfriend did not ask her boyfriend—fiancé—to propose to her a week before his thirtieth birthday as part of any coordinated attack on him. It has absolutely nothing to do with him, and the only reason he even knows about it is that it shows up on his Facebook timeline. She’s captioned it *better late than never!!* and added a tongue-sticking-out emoji, presumably so her fiancé wouldn’t be offended.

It’s sweet, and he makes sure to hit the like button before he starts panicking.

In theory, he gets that guys aren’t supposed to freak out about being single like women are, but he’s never gotten why not. Obviously the societal hangups exist and he doesn’t face the same pressure about it, but—he wants to get married too. He’d like to have kids someday. And when he thought about it, he always thought about doing it fairly young. Maybe just because his mom had him young, but—he hoped he’d find someone.

Not that he can’t, of course. Not that he thinks he won’t.

But between Roma and turning thirty, he’s feeling a little, well—old.

Which is why he scowls when Clarke slides him a yogurt with a candle in it. She’s his best friend and he appreciates her, but he also wants to murder her. Just a little bit.

“What?” she asks.

“Nothing.”

“Oh huh.”

He pokes his yogurt. “I’m turning thirty. *Thirty.*”

“I know how old you are, yeah. That’s why I put a candle in your yogurt.”

He snorts. “Yeah, that really helped.”

Clarke regards him for a second, thoughtful, and he really wishes she wouldn’t. He knows he’s being ridiculous. She doesn’t need to tell him. “I really don’t get what the big deal is,” she finally says. “Do guys freak out about turning thirty? Is that a thing?”

“It’s the twenty-first century. Everyone can freak out about everything. Gender roles are dead or dying.”

She pokes him. “Seriously. Is this actually an issue for you?”
“I’m not thrilled about it.” He huffs. “Just–thirty.”

“You keep saying that like it’s somehow going to clear things up for me,” she says, giving him a somewhat exasperated smile.

“You know what I thought my life would look like at thirty?” he asks, and regrets it basically immediately.

“When? I’m pretty sure you had pretty realistic ideas about it, like–yesterday.”

He gives her a look. “Clarke.”

She smiles. “Bellamy.”

“I thought I’d be–” He stabs his yogurt. “Settled. Married, maybe a kid. I know that’s stupid. Thirty’s not that old, my life is good, I’m happy. It just still feels like something to reevaluate.”

He can actually see her starting to take him seriously, which he appreciates. A lot of the time, he does just want gentle mockery, but this is fucking him up a lot more than he expected. Apparently, it shows.

“Do you want to be married with a kid?” she finally asks, propping her chin on her hand.

“Not really. Married wouldn’t be bad. But I’m not miserably single or anything. Just–”

“Thirty’s a big deal.” She flashes him a teasing smile. “I get it, I’m too young to understand. I’m only twenty-seven, so–”

“God, you’re an asshole.”

“Seriously, thirty isn’t that old. And your life is amazing.”

She says it with a surprising amount of conviction; he doesn’t exactly disagree, but he rarely really thinks that. “Is it?”

“You’re a great teacher,” she says, counting off on her fingers. “You can actually afford to live alone, you have a sister who loves you, good friends, an awesome best friend–”

“Yeah, Miller’s the best.”

“He is,” she agrees. But she sobers again almost at once. “Honestly, Bellamy. I know thirty feels like a big deal, but–if you want to get married, you’ll get married. We could get you on a dating app. You could lie about being a huge nerd so people will like you.”

“Yeah, lying is a good start to every relationship.”

“I think of it as creative truth-telling.” She wets her lips. “Look, I know I’m not as old as you, but I did freak out a little about twenty-five. Just, you know. I thought I was supposed to know exactly what I was doing with my life, and I didn’t.”

“I was still making sure O wasn’t going to die at twenty-five,” he admits. “Maybe that’s why I missed that one.”

“Probably, yeah.”

“So, what did you do?”
“You know me. I made a bunch of lists of what I was happy about and what I wanted to change and reevaluated everything. I’m not sure I recommend it. But—you could just think about it. What you want to change, or whatever.”

It’s good, simple advice, very Clarke, and he’s going to thank her for it when it hits him, like a plank to the face. Clarke is licking her spoon clean, all her attention on that to give him something like privacy.

And he wants her.

It shouldn’t be such a big surprise. He knows he loves Clarke. He knows she’s his best friend. He knows she’s beautiful and smart and everything he values in relationships.

Mostly, though, he knows she doesn’t want him. She’s not interested in him like that. He’s always known, with some distant part of his brain.

“Fuck,” he breathes.

She cocks her head at him. “What?”

“Thirty,” he says, voice a little hollow, and she snorts.

“You’ll be fine. I bet thirty will be good for you.”

It doesn’t sound particularly likely. But he manages a smile. “Yeah, I bet.”

He’s going to send Roma something really shitty as an engagement present. She definitely ruined his life.

* 

The thing about very belated revelations of love is that it’s hard to believe they can go well. He and Clarke have been friends for years, and she’s never been interested in him. The fact that he somehow missed that he was interested in her isn’t really a comfort, either—he’s pretty sure Clarke is more in touch with her feelings than he is.

Not that much more in touch, admittedly. But at least a little bit.

He does have moments of thinking she might not be completely opposed. She definitely checks his arms out a little on his birthday, but he knows that doesn’t mean anything. He has really nice arms, and he knows it. He’d check out her chest sometimes, before he even knew he was in love with her. They’re both attractive people, and he’s too smart to read into that.

He does start wearing the shirt regularly, though, even starts thinking about how to dress when he sees Clarke, which is a fucking nightmare. He sees her all the time, and he doesn’t know how to worry about that. It’s like worrying about how to breathe; as soon as he starts thinking about it, he realizes exactly how easy it’s supposed to be. He can’t even ask her advice, because it’s about her.

Honestly, he might be a bit of a mess.

It gets worse when she says, “You should get Tinder.”

Okay, that’s not immediately worse, but that’s just because he’s uninformed. “Like, firewood? For what?”

She gives him a supremely unimpressed look, but there’s amusement lurking at the edges of her
smile. She likes when he’s clueless. “It’s an app.”

That does sound familiar, but he leans into his ignorance anyway. “For firewood?”

Her eyes narrow. “Do you seriously not know what Tinder is?”

After a quick mental review, he concludes that he was aware there was an app called Tinder, probably from TV. But that’s all the information he has. “No idea.”

“It’s a dating app.”

His heart sinks. “And I should get it.”

Clarke cracks her neck, fixes him with a pensive look. “You’re worried about being single, right? Thirty, not married?”

Of course Clarke’s spent the last few weeks thinking about this, trying to figure out how to help him. That’s how Clarke is; she’s never met a problem she can’t pro/con list her way out of.

How did he not realize he was in love with her? She’s perfect.

“I’m not really worried about that,” he protests, and it’s even true. “Crisis over. I’m good.” That part is a lie, but it’s at least a different crisis. And he’s mostly good. “Thirty doesn’t feel nearly as different as I thought it would. And I’m not in a rush to get married.”

“But you should date,” she says, with conviction.

His face screws up, but he manages to make it look like a smile, even manages a laugh. It does feel ridiculous; she’s never cared about his romantic prospects before. “Yeah? Why?”

She shrugs. “Why wouldn’t you?”

“You don’t date,” he says. It’s a completely normal statement, but it feels dangerous.

“I don’t not date.”

“Do you have Tinder?”

“No,” she admits.

“So why should I get it? I’m not looking to hook up with random strangers, Clarke.” The phrasing clearly snags her attention, and he can see her trying to figure out if there’s someone else he’s looking to hook up with. He plows forward. “Really. I’m good.”

“You haven’t dated anyone since Gina.”

“You haven’t dated anyone since Lexa. Is it a competition now?”

“I didn’t have a breakdown about my birthday.”

“It wasn’t a breakdown,” he protests. “Just a mild—it’s a milestone, and that makes you think about where you are and where you want to go.” It’s what she told him to do, so she really should get it. “But–where I want to be isn’t online dating, okay?”

“So where is it?” she asks.
He could give a lot of answers, but she’s smiling, framed in the low light of the restaurant, and it reminds him of that first revelation over their weekly breakfast. He could look at her forever and never get tired of it.

“Here,” he says, too honest. “I want to be here.”

She smiles a little. “That’s a lot of stressing out just to realize you’re already happy.”

He shrugs. “You know me. I can stress about anything.”

“I know.” She bites her lip. “I still think—you’re a great guy. You know that, right? Tinder would be lucky to have you.”

“My self-esteem is fine,” he assures her. “But thanks anyway.”

“Sure.”

There’s still something off in her expression, but he tries not to worry about it. Clarke worries, that’s how she is. And it’s nice, that she worries about him. She probably didn’t figure it out. He’s just being paranoid.

Me: Did you know I was in love with Clarke?

Miller: Yup
When did you figure it out?

Me: My birthday

Miller: Mazel tov
Are you dying of overthinking it?

Me: Basically

Miller: Hot take: if you tell her, you guys can make out
I guarantee it

Me: Did she say something?

Miller: No, but neither did you
It’s fucking obvious
Trust me

Me: Easier said than done tbh

Miller: Yeah
I’m just saying
It is the most obvious thing of all time
Nothing else in the world has ever been so obvious

Me: Cool
Thanks

*

On Wednesday, she cancels on board games, sending a message to the group chat saying it’s been
a rough week and she needs to stay home.

It’s not the first time it’s happened, but it’s hard not to feel a little worried. She missed their usual breakfast on Monday, and it doesn’t have to mean anything, but he can’t help fretting. It hasn’t even been a full week since he saw her last, but it feels weightier than usual. His week feels off, when it doesn’t start with breakfast with Clarke, and not seeing her on Wednesday either is even worse.

So on Thursday, he texts her.

**Me:** Bad week?

**Clarke:** Long, yeah

**Me:** Sorry
You want me to bring takeout tonight?  
We can catch up on Brooklyn 99  
I’m like five episodes behind again

**Clarke:** How are you so bad at watching TV?  
Get it together, Bellamy

**Me:** I’ve got you for that  
After work?  
Around six?  
What food do you want?

**Clarke:** I want to, but you shouldn’t  
I think I’m getting sick

**Me:** What’s wrong?

**Clarke:** Cold  
My throat is starting to get closed up

**Me:** I don’t mind

**Clarke:** I know you don’t  
But I don’t want to get you sick  
And I’d be bad company

He frowns at the phone. He wants to argue, but he doesn’t really have a leg to stand on, except that he doesn’t believe her, and that makes him feel even shittier. He should give her the benefit of the doubt, but—he doesn’t buy it.

Which is why he agrees, tells her to feel better, and shows up at her place on Saturday.

She opens the door promptly, gives him a once over that makes him feel a little guilty. He managed to not stress about his wardrobe this time, but he still ended up in the stupid t-shirt O got him for his birthday. He was going for casual, but it feels weirdly aggressive now. He could have just gone with a button-down.

“I brought breakfast. And some cough medicine. And a can of soup.” He pauses, but she’s smiling faintly. “In case you’re really sick.”
The smile kicks up a notch into something real and genuine. As long as he can make her smile like that, his life is good. “So, you think I’m not sick and brought supplies anyway?”

“Just in case.” But now that he’s looking at her, he is worried. She doesn’t look sick, exactly, but she looks worn out, run down. Something is obviously wrong, and it hurts a little that she didn’t tell him, but not nearly as much as it hurts that she’s having a rough time in the first place. “What’s wrong?”

“I had a stressful week.”

“You could have told me,” he says, as gentle as he can manage.

“Since when do I deal with stress well?”

He huffs a soft laugh. “You’re a dick. I was fucking worried.”

She sobers. “I know. Sorry.”

“It’s cool,” he says, because of course it is. He feels a little shitty for pressuring her, but he knows Clarke. She won’t ask for help, even if she needs it. She forgets to eat when she’s fretting enough.

So he gets her coffee and a breakfast sandwich, makes sure she’s gotten some of both in her before he asks, “So, what’s wrong?”

He’s expecting her to just tell him, but she bites her lip. “Can we not talk about it?” she asks. “Just—for an hour or two.”

That means it’s about him. But it also means she’s going to tell him, so–

“I’m setting an alarm,” he tells her. “Two hours and then you have to tell me.”

She looks so fond of him, he can’t actually worry. “Of course you are.”

He offers her a hug when they settle on the couch, and she accepts it and then some, snuggling against him, falling asleep in seconds. Whatever the issue is, he’s glad she’s not so upset with him that she doesn’t want him to make her feel better. At the same time, he’s going to want to do this every time they hang out now, and that will absolutely suck.

Once he’s got Parks and Rec on—he’ll wait for her to be awake to catch up on Brooklyn 99—and Clarke drooling on his shoulder, it’s surprisingly easy to lose track of time. He’s not actually planning to wake her up until lunch, but he forgot about his alarm, and it blares in his back pocket. Even if the noise didn’t wake her up, his trying to get to his phone would.

“Sorry,” he says, when she blinks at him. “I forgot—”

And then she kisses him.

He honestly assumes it’s a mistake. He’s not even convinced she realizes it’s him; she’s probably still half asleep, maybe stuck in a dream about a person she actually wants to kiss.

But when he pulls back, her face falls, instantly and completely, disappointment and maybe even heartbreak obvious, and he barks out a sharp, surprised laugh and kisses her again.

She was definitely kissing him. She’s still kissing him. Miller was right.

“Please don’t tell me you’re blowing off stress,” he tells her, just to be safe. He’s not really
worried. “If this is just–”

She laughs, soft. “No, this is what I was stressed about. Telling you that I–”

Her voice trails off, and it’s awesome. “That you what?”

“You look really good in that shirt.”

He laughs. “Just in the shirt? So if I took it off–”

He does, and she likes that even better.

*

They’ve been dating for three years when Clarke’s thirtieth birthday rolls around. A month before, she asks, out of the blue, “When should I expect my crisis?”

Her birthday is on his radar, but not in the way where he’s thinking about it all the time. He knows it’s coming and he has plans, but he’s not yet thinking about it regularly, so he doesn’t make the connection.

“Aren’t you in a constant state of crisis?” he asks, and she pokes him in the ribs.

“My birthday crisis. I’m turning thirty. From what I remember, it’s stressful.”

“Hopefully less so for you than for me,” he says. “Your life is awesome. If I do say so myself.”

“Yeah, but I’m in a constant state of crisis, so–”

He laughs, but the amusement doesn’t last long. “I hope you don’t have a breakdown, but–” He clears his throat. “You don’t have to worry about the marriage part, unless you want to. I was going to propose on your birthday.”

The fact that her response is a slight frown and, “Why then?” is one of the million reasons he loves her.

“I couldn’t think of another present.”

That gets her smile, and then a laugh, and then she kisses him. “I’m going to say yes,” she says. “So no one has to have a crisis.”

“Neither of us having a crisis? That would be new.”

“Something to aspire to. Someday. Maybe by sixty, we’ll have it set.”

It’s not hard to think of what he wants his life to look like at sixty–a couple kids, a house, a dog, Clarke–and it’s not even hard to think he’ll get it. And even if he doesn’t, he’s sure about the most important part of the equation, the Clarke part. She’s not going anywhere.

“Yeah.” He kisses her hair. “I think we’re going to be fine.”
Felicita is the one who picks their seat, because she sees Clarke and Onyx have already settled, and she wants to sit next to them.

“Really?” Bellamy asks his daemon in a low voice, once he realizes where they are. Felicita, being both small and quick, can usually beat him places, when she wants to. She’s lucky she doesn’t get stepped on.

“What?” Felicita asks, scrambling up his leg and chest so she can drape herself around his neck. “They’re good seats. We have a nice view.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s why we’re sitting here.”

“I didn’t recognize anyone else.”

Clarke and Onyx were facing the person on their left, but Bellamy can see Onyx’s ear twitch, and then he turns his attention to Bellamy and Felicita.

Felicita, the little traitor, runs down his arm to the floor and goes over to greet Onyx.

For reasons that have never been clear to Bellamy, his daemon and Clarke’s daemon get along like a house on fire. While Bellamy and Clarke can’t go more than about five minutes without getting into a stupid argument, their daemons are such good friends that people assume they’re dating. It’s both confusing and irritating, and, honestly, the only comfort Bellamy’s found is that it annoys Clarke just as much as it annoys him.

So he’s glad that she turns from her other conversation just as Onyx starts grooming Felicita; Bellamy doesn’t want to be the only one dealing with this.

“I thought it must be you,” Clarke says, mild, watching the daemons.

“What, you don’t have any actual friends?”

She rolls her eyes. “Good to see you too, Bellamy. Did you have a nice summer?”

“Worked the whole time. Where did you go?”

“Italy. I took some pictures for you.”

The statement jars him. “You did?”

Her cheeks color a little, and both their daemons turn to glare at him. Like it’s his fault Clarke went so far out of their comfort zone. “Your sister is named Octavia, right? I took pictures of anything I saw with her name on it. Also some penis graffiti.”

“Because I’m such a dick?”
“Yup. I would have snapchatted you, but we’re not friends.”

“I don’t actually have snapchat.”

“Of course you don’t. What’s it like being sixty?”

“My body always hurts and music is too loud.”

She laughs. “Sounds about right.”

He shifts a little. “Now I feel bad I didn’t take pictures of anything for you.”

“I wasn’t going out of my way or anything. Just when I noticed.”

“Yeah, well, I notice stuff too,” he says. It’s not even a lie. He and Clarke are less enemies than rivals, in that way where he acknowledges that they have no major ideological or personal conflicts. They just got off on the wrong foot, and they’re too stubborn to get on the right one, even though his daemon has abandoned him to go curl up under Clarke’s desk with Onyx.

“Yeah?” Clarke asks, sounding genuinely surprised. So he’s not the only one.

“The art museum in my hometown had a special exhibit on traditional women’s work as art, it was really cool. I thought you’d like it.”

“That does sound cool,” she agrees. “What kind of stuff?”

They’re so involved in the conversation that they miss the professor coming in. It’s not the first time it’s happened, but it’s probably the first time they’ve been having a completely friendly conversation.

Senior year is off to an interesting start.

“Blake, Griffin,” Kane says, barely even looking up at them. His coyote daemon, Boudicca, has her eyes fixed on Felicita and Onyx under Clarke’s desk. “You can socialize after class.”

Felicita disentangles herself and scampers back to settle on Bellamy’s shoulders, while Onyx just yaws, a typically feline display of uncaring, and curls back up on Clarke’s feet.

Okay, so maybe it’s not that confusing that people think they’re dating.

* 

Felicita has always had an uncanny ability to find Clarke and Onyx, but it seems to have turned up to eleven this year. They’re in the same dining halls at the same time, they’re at the library when he wants to study, they’re even at the museum when he’s working the security beat. It feels like they’re everywhere, and Felicita always finds them and wants to hang out.

“Which means you want to hang out,” says his sister. He’s not sure why he told her about this, except that interaction with Clarke is like a pebble caught in his shoe that he can’t dislodge, and all he wants to do is complain about it. “When Julian hates someone I like, he’s basically always right, but I don’t think he’s ever liked someone I didn’t.”

“Daemons can get things wrong too.”

“Uh huh. Is she cute?”
“Who?” he asks, even though he knows. It’s not a good tactic, but it buys him a little time to think about the real answer.

“So she is cute.”

“She’s—” He sighs. “She’s attractive, yeah.”

“Wow. Attractive.”

“She’s not my type.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Felicita asks. She sounds almost offended.

“Just that she’s not—the kind of girl I usually like,” he tells her. “Explaining types to Fel.”

“Fel thinks she’s your type.”

“Clarke’s great,” Fel adds, and Bellamy scratches her ears.

“Does Onyx tell Clarke this stuff?”

“Yes. We like to talk about how ridiculous you both are. Onyx likes you. He thinks you’re great too.”

“At least put her on speaker phone so me and Julian can make fun of you,” Octavia says, and Bellamy snorts.

“I think she’s trying to match make,” he says. “She’s not good at it.”

“Have you talked to—” His sister pauses, trying to remember the name, and he hears the low rumble of Julian’s voice, presumably reminding her. “Have you talked to Clarke about this? Like, do you guys chat about how your daemons are ridiculous or just ignore it?”

“Ignore it,” he admits.

Octavia cackles. “Looking forward to your wedding.”

He flops onto his back on the bed, and Felicita curls up on his chest, a warm, comforting weight. She is on his side, he knows that. She wouldn’t like Onyx—and, by extension, Clarke—so much if she didn’t think he’d like them too.

“Yeah, yeah,” he says, rubbing his fingers through Felicita’s soft fur. “Shut up.”

* 

“Does Onyx do this a lot?” Bellamy asks, right around finals. He and Clarke are studying together in the library because they gave up on not hanging out after a few weeks, and now they’re, well, friendly. Maybe even friends.

And she’s gorgeous and a part of his soul has decided a part of her soul is her favorite other entity in the world, so it seems like they should talk about it before the semester ends and they go off on break and come back to a spring where they have no classes together and might not just casually run into each other.

“Do what?” Clarke asks, absent.
“Make friends of his own.”

A pretty blush crawls up Clarke’s neck to her cheeks. “No. This is the first time. What about Felicita?”

“Yeah, this is new for her. She really likes Onyx. And you.”

“She’s cute.” He can see her thinking it over, worrying her lip. “Ermines are really soft, right? I know they were part of the fur trade.”

“Yeah.”

Bellamy’s only touched one other person’s daemon in his life, his best friend Miller. They were fourteen, and curious. Felicita hadn’t settled yet, but Miller’s daemon had, and it was like an electric shock, the taboo of touching his friend’s daemon, of having Miller touch his. It had been intimate in a way that made him squirm, that made him a little terrified, and he’d avoided it after that, not wanting to be so close to any of the people he’d slept with or dated. Some people do it as a matter of course, think of it as a standard relationship step, but Bellamy hasn’t ever wanted to.

Onyx is a mid-sized wild cat, jet black, with bright golden eyes. He looks soft too, and Bellamy’s watched him with Felicita for two years now, seen how gentle and affectionate he is with her. And he’s spent just as long watching Clarke, pretending he doesn’t see the good things about her, all the things he likes.

“Fel,” he says, and the daemon runs up his jeans, hopping onto his hand when he offers it. “Clarke wants to see how soft you are. Is that okay?”

“It’s fine with me,” she says, which is deserved. He and Clarke have been lagging here.

Clarke glances around, making sure they’re alone before she leans in. Bellamy gets a whiff of her shampoo, and then her fingers sink into the fur on Felicita’s back, and it’s like nothing Bellamy’s ever felt before. It’s not like it was with Miller, two kids getting away with something they knew they shouldn’t. It’s somehow the last step and the first, a culmination of everything he and Clarke have been heading for for two years and a whole new world opening up between them.

“Onyx,” he says, voice choked, because he can’t be the only one feeling this. The daemon butts his head against Bellamy’s knee, and Bellamy scratches behind his ear, watches as Clarke shivers, eyes going dark, and he thinks this might be it. He can’t even imagine wanting anything else.

“You might have been onto something,” Clarke tells her daemon, but she’s still looking at Bellamy. They really shouldn’t have done this in the library, especially not when they both have more work to do, but he’s honestly just happy they’re doing it at all. They can figure out the timing later.

“We tried to tell you,” says Felicita.

“Yeah,” Bellamy agrees. “You did.”

* 

The first day of spring semester, Felicita finds Clarke and Onyx in the dining hall. This time, it’s not a surprise to Bellamy that the two of them are here—he and Clarke were talking every day over the break, and video chatting when they could so the daemons could be more involved. He’s missed her like he didn’t know was possible, but he knew he’d be seeing her.
It still sends a warm thrill through him when Felicita nuzzles Onyx and then jumps up to curl into Clarke’s lap. Clarke strokes her gently, but her attention is on Bellamy. As always, it takes Bellamy a little longer to make his way through the room, being burdened not only with a larger body, but with his tray of food. But when he gets there, Clarke squeezes his hand, Onyx nuzzles his ankle, and Felicita abandons Clarke to settle in his lap instead.

“Hi,” says Clarke, and he leans over to give her a quick kiss. Somehow, it even feels different kissing her than it did kissing other people, as if the intimacy they have from their daemons bleeds into everything, as if all parts of their relationship are richer, deeper.

Or maybe that’s how love always is. He’s never been in love before, either.

“Hi. How was break?”

Her smile is warm. “You know how break was. We talked the whole time. What updates do you want?”

“How was your flight?”

“I texted you when I landed.”

He laughs and kisses her again. “Jesus, you’re an asshole. Sorry for trying to make conversation with my girlfriend. We can just sit here in silence now.”

Clarke scoots closer, leans her head on his shoulder. Onyx lies across their feet, content, and Felicita burrows closer. “I just like sitting with you,” she says. “We don’t have to do anything special.”

He leans back against her, basking in the warmth of his girlfriend and their daemons. He did miss this, and it is more than enough, right now. “Yeah,” he says. “I like sitting with you too.”
The Mermaids Singing

Chapter Summary

Fill for griffinpuff! Prompt: Dude why did that siren take on my image to try and seduce you, is there something you wanna tell me

“So,” says Bellamy. “That was weird.”

Clarke lets out a shaky breath. “Yeah.”

“When do you think they saw me?”

Clarke pauses, turns to look at him. He’s looking at the road, which he should be, but in the passing street lights, she can see the genuine consternation on his face, the genuine confusion.

“Saw you?” she asks, careful.

He drums his fingers on the steering wheel, jaw working. “It must have seen us together, right? And then it took on the form of someone you trusted to try to get you to go with it. But I wasn’t there, so–when did that happen?”

It’s kind of hilarious, honestly. In the most hysterical sense of the word. Clarke had figured out something was wrong with the “Bellamy” who was hitting on her right around when Miller had spotted him and texted the real deal because he was pretty sure Bellamy wasn’t at this party. So Bellamy had showed up to see what was going on around when the cops Miller called showed up, and she’d been pretty sure he knew exactly what was happening.

But apparently he put it together wrong, and now she has to decide if she’s going to tell him the truth or try to bluff it.

“I don’t think they saw you,” she admits.

He glances over at her, frowns. “They must have. Shapeshifters can’t just–”

“But a shapeshifter,” she says, and immediately wishes she hadn’t.

Fuck, it had been so nice, for the first few minutes. Bellamy weaving his way through the crowd to find her, chatting with her. He’d been a little off, she thought, but between his drink and hers, it hadn’t bothered her too much. They were both a little tipsy, and he was smiling at her, leaning in close, and it was–

It was so close to everything she wanted, but it didn’t feel like Bellamy. There was some part of her that believed he might, in some universe, want to flirt with her. But it didn’t feel like he’d do it like that. And he kept calling her pet names–baby, sweetheart–but never Clarke, and never princess.

He’s her best friend, and it wasn’t hard to start tugging at threads, to figure out it wasn’t him at all.

The real Bellamy clears his throat. “You can tell me it’s a shapeshifter if you want,” he says, careful. “And we’ll go with it.”
It’s actually kind of a relief. “You know.”

“There were two options, one made more sense. But–you can pick which one it was.”

It’s both comforting and not comforting at all, somehow. He knows, and he’s giving her an out. It’s not lying to him if they both know it’s a lie. It’s saving face. “Shapeshifter,” she says, and he nods.

“So, we should come up with a code word, right? Something I can say so you know it’s me. In case this ever happens again.”

“They got arrested,” she points out. “I think I was just unlucky. Besides, I didn’t need a word. I know you.”

He glances at her again. “Yeah?”

“They didn’t know you call me princess. It wasn’t hard to figure out. I could probably just ask your middle name.”

“That’s part of why we have middle names, yeah.”

“Really?”

“Not this exact situation. But spells are supposed to need full names to work. The idea was that you wouldn’t tell someone your full name unless you trusted them, so they wouldn’t be able to curse you or anything.”

“And?”

“And what?” he asks.

“Do you trust me?”

He laughs. “I better, yeah.” He stops at a light, working his jaw. “Do you want me to take you back to the dorm?”

“What’s my other option?”

“If you don’t want to be alone tonight, I get it. It’s scary. You can come over to our place. O’s around, she’d be happy to see you.”

“I’m fine, Bellamy.”

“I know. But I’d feel better if you came over.”

It’s a bad idea, but the kind of bad idea that she has trouble convincing herself is really bad. She’d probably feel better if she was there too; going back to her dorm room, alone, to dwell on nearly getting assaulted by a siren at a party because she has a crush on her best friend sounds awful. At least if she’s with Bellamy, she’ll be distracted, and she’ll know it’s really him.

“What’s my middle name?” she asks, and he smiles.

“Dorothy. After your grandmother.”

She puts her feet up on the dashboard. “Yeah, I’ll come over.”

*
Octavia greets them with, “A real shapeshifter?”

“Yup,” says Bellamy, easy. “Aren’t you supposed to be in bed?”

“I’m seventeen, Bell. I can stay up late. Are you okay, Clarke?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. It happens. Some shapeshifters are jerks who take advantage.”

“Just like some humans,” Bellamy agrees. “How much later are you planning on being awake?”

Octavia gives him a wary look. “Depends, what are you doing?”

“Watching TV and arguing over whether or not Clarke takes my bed.”

She makes a face. “Yeah, hard pass.” But she does hug Clarke. “I’m glad you’re okay. Sorry a shapeshifter stole my brother’s face to try to kill you.”

Clarke looks away. “Me too. Thanks.”

Bellamy goes into the kitchen and starts on hot chocolate, making it on the stove, because he thinks the microwave gives it the wrong kind of film. Clarke leans against the counter, watching him. He doesn’t look as polished, as himself. The siren had been wearing a blue button down and jeans, whereas the real Bellamy came in his flannel pajama pants and a sweatshirt, one he probably just threw on over his t-shirt when he had to leave the house. He’s wearing his glasses and his hair is a mess.

If the siren really wanted to seduce her, they would have looked more like this Bellamy.

“What do you want to watch?” he asks.

“I’m not picky. Something fun and mindless.”

“I can work with that. Marshmallows?”

“Obviously.”

He smiles. “Obviously.” He looks her up and down, all concern. “Do you need a hug? Or would that make it worse?”

“Hug would be good,” she admits, and when he opens his arms, she steps into them. He does love her, and he still loves her, even though he definitely knows that a siren used his body to try to seduce her.

It only hurts a little.

“I wish I’d been there,” he says.

“Just as well you weren’t. I recognized it wasn’t you and Miller knew it wasn’t either, so we could get the cops. Nothing bad happened, and no one got hurt. Best possible outcome.”

“Best possible outcome is no one being an asshole and using their abilities to try to—”

Clarke winces. “We should probably just call a spade a spade, right? It’s not a big deal.” She steps out of his arms, lets out a breath, and looks up to meet his eyes. “They were trying to seduce me.”

“You’re sure?”
“It wasn’t subtle, yeah. But it wasn’t how you’d be, so–”

“How would I be?”

She feels herself flush. “You’d be acting like yourself. I was kind of drunk, so it took me a little while to figure out, but–it was like talking to a stranger.”

“Yeah, that’s what I figured.”

“Figured how?”

He rubs the back of his neck. “They picked the wrong person. It’s a stupid impersonation to try.”

“Yeah, pretending to be someone’s best friend is hard.”

“Especially when you think you’re trying to be—something else. I’m glad they didn’t find–” He coughs, clearing his throat. “I’m glad they screwed up.”

Clarke feels goosebumps rise on her skin. “What was my middle name again?”


“Just checking.” She closes her eyes, lets out a breath. “The siren didn’t screw up. They just got unlucky. They must have assumed I didn’t know you very well. I probably would have fallen for it if you were just some guy I had a crush on.”

“But I’m not.”

“No. You’re my best friend I have a crush on.”

“Oh.” He laughs. “Fuck. I thought it must be—anything else.”

He looks so delighted, she can’t be worried. “So, you knew a siren was trying to seduce me and you figured it turned into you by mistake?”

“Miller said you didn’t look interested in what the siren was selling. I was trying to, uh—manage my expectations.”

“So you gave me an out.”

“Both of us an out.”

“You’re a dumbass,” she says, fond, and winds her arms around his neck, toying with an errant curl of his hair. “I’m in love with you. The real you.”

“The dumbass me,” he says, grinning.

“The siren was a dumbass too. As soon as they called me sweetheart, I knew it wasn’t you.”

“Good for me, picking a unique pet name.” He swallows. “I, uh—honestly, I really want to kiss you, but if that’s going to make you uncomfortable right now I can—“

Clarke tugs him down, catches his lips with her own. His mouth is warm and soft, and she can feel his smile for a second before he settles in to kiss her in earnest, and it’s just like she hoped it would be, if this ever happened.
The milk for the hot chocolate ends up burning, but Clarke can’t bring herself to care at all.

*

Miller takes one look at them, curled into a booth at their favorite diner the next morning, and snorts.

“I told you it was a siren.”

“You did?” Clarke asks, curious. Miller came to check on her once he’d called the police, but she didn’t think he’d talked to Bellamy after that.

“Pretty sure my exact words were, a siren is trying to seduce your girlfriend because you took too long.”

“I don’t think that’s why the siren did it.”

“No, that’s because they were an asshole, and I hope they end up in jail,” Bellamy grumbles. “But they could have been a shapeshifter. Or wrong. Just because they turned into me and were talking to Clarke doesn’t mean—“

“Sorry,” says Miller, without contrition. “I’m confused. Are you saying Clarke isn’t in love with you? Because you guys are looking pretty cozy, and you’re not freaking out at me for talking about how you’re in love with her.”

“You’re definitely not wrong,” Clarke confirms.

“No. I’m just saying you could have been. There were a lot of possibilities for why that might have happened. It didn’t have to be a siren pretending to be me.”

“Uh huh. But it was, and it didn’t work.”

“Hard to compare to the real thing,” Clarke says, and Bellamy smiles, big and a little goofy.

“You can’t fake this level of insecurity.”

“Nope. That’s all you.”

“Yeah,” he agrees. “All me.”
Fill for clarityandwit! Prompt: Voltron AU with Bellarke? :) More specifically, Clarke being a badass pilot of a robot lion and Bellamy totally admiring her for it.

“This isn’t working.”

Clarke has to smile. Bellamy is rubbing his temples, a surprisingly human expression of exasperation. She wonders if he’s seen them doing it, or it’s just an obvious way to relieve his own tension. “No?”

“No offense to your boyfriend, but he isn’t a leader.”

“He also isn’t my boyfriend,” she says, keeping her voice light. She and Finn had a thing for a while, but it didn’t work out. Somewhat spectacularly. “Offend away.”

“I’m not even convinced he should be in a combat situation.” He hesitates. “Same for Wells and Monty. They’re good guys, but I’m not sure they belong on the front lines.”

“So you’re saying three out of five of our pilots should look for other work.”

“Just if you want to win.”

His attention is still on the five lions, the pilots trying to get through basic exercises and not doing very well, so Clarke takes advantage of his distraction to study him instead.

When she and the rest of the crew of the Arcadia had found this planet, they had expected it to be uninhabited, and that all they’d find would be some useful natural resources. Finn hadn’t wanted to stop at all, but Clarke and Wells had talked him into it. And now here they are, allied with the last survivors of an alien race, trying to figure out how to use an ancient, incredibly powerful technology to finally end the endless war.

It’s not where Clarke thought this trip would take them.

“Here’s what I don’t get,” she says.

“Just one thing?” he asks, and she elbows him.

“I’m serious. Why didn’t you and Octavia become paladins? You two know how they work, you’re good fighters, I’ve never seen Octavia when she didn’t want to punch someone.”

Bellamy snorts. “Because there were only two of us. Why didn’t you become a soldier?”

“My mother is a medic. I saw a lot of injured soldiers, and I wanted to help.”

“You can help as a fighter too,” he says.

“Fighting for peace,” she says, with a small smile. “Oxymoron.”
If talking for peace doesn’t work, you’ve only got so many options.” He claps his hands. “Stop! That’s enough for today. Take a break, get your heads in it.”

“My head’s in it,” Raven calls back. She’s the first out of her machine, and Clarke can’t argue that she’s the best of their current pilots. Not that that’s saying very much.

Bellamy apparently can’t either. “Yeah, you’re good. You deserve a break, you don’t need one.”

“We all deserve a break,” says Wells.

“So take one,” he says.

“You deserve one too,” Clarke tells him, once the pilots have cleared out, and he gives her a wry smile.

“The Galrans don’t take a break.”

“They do. They sleep.”

“They have enough troops they can sleep in shifts and keep going. There are only eight of us against an army. The only advantage we have right now is that they don’t know about us, but that won’t–”

“All the more reason for us to be well rested,” she says. “Working yourself to death isn’t going to help anyone, Bellamy.”

“Don’t act like you haven’t been doing the same thing.” He considers. “Have you thought about piloting?”

“Me?”

“Why not you?”

“No piloting experience.”

“It’s a completely new system. None of them have experience, they’re just figuring it out. You could do the same.”

“So could you. And Octavia.” She grins at him. “I’ll try it if you try it.”

As she hoped he would, he grins back. “Who’s going to tell Finn?”

She makes a show of thinking it over. “Together?”

“Deal.”

* 

“Redundancy,” says Clarke, the next morning. “Galrans have it, we don’t.”

“Just because we have five machines doesn’t mean we should only have five pilots. Wells, Monty, Miller,” says Bellamy. “I want the three of you on monitors today. Figure out how they work, let us know if anyone’s coming. Clarke, Octavia, and I are taking the lions.”

“Clarke?” asks Finn.
“Why not Clarke?” Raven asks, and Clarke has to smile.

“She doesn’t have any experience as a pilot.”

“So now’s the perfect time for her to get some,” says Bellamy. “You didn’t either, a week ago. O, show them how the computers work first, you already know the controls on the lions.”

“Got it,” says Octavia. She’s been giddy with excitement all morning, eager to get in the lion, and Clarke was expecting her to be upset about the delay, but maybe she’s just happy to miss the argument.

“You don’t actually want to do this, do you, Clarke?” Finn asks, when she tries to skip the conversation entirely by heading for the green lion.

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“It’s dangerous.”

“It’s dangerous just being here,” she says. “This way I have a fighting chance to do something about it, right?”

“You don’t have to do this just because Bellamy said you should.”

“No, I don’t.” She flashes him a smile as she pulls herself up into the cockpit. “So maybe that’s not why.”

“Clarke–” he starts, but she doesn’t listen to him.

She’s got better things to do.

*

Given her relationship with Bellamy—cordial, even friendly, one of her strongest allies—she expected him to go a little easy on her once she started piloting.

Well, okay, maybe not easy on her. She wouldn’t expect that. But she thought he’d take a little longer before he started putting as much pressure on her as he put on everyone else. And, in his defense, he’s just as hard on himself, but he was a soldier before, the same as his sister. They never piloted the lions before, but they at least have a combat history.

Clarke likes it, she really does, but it’s unfortunate that after two weeks in the green lion, she almost wants to strangle someone she would have said was becoming one of her best friends before this happened.

Today, it was her, Octavia, Monty, Raven, and Miller in the lions, with Finn and Wells doing maintenance on the ship and Bellamy running drills. It was a long, difficult day, and everyone’s exhausted, but Clarke definitely felt unfairly targeted, Bellamy not letting a single thing go, pushing her on every minute screw-up while Monty flailed around without comment.

She’s not going to murder him; he’s too useful to murder. But she’s tempted.

“Oh, good job, team,” he says, when they’re out. Everyone is sweaty and exhausted, but Clarke feels like she’s more sweaty and exhausted. Not that it’s a competition, but—it’s fucked up. “I think we’re getting it.”

“I’m not,” says Monty.
“I think you’re great with the ship,” he says, and Monty snorts.

“Thanks. I appreciate your support.” He shakes his shoulders out. “Dinner?”

Clarke gives him a tight smile. “We’ll catch up. I have some ideas for Bellamy.”

Octavia and Raven seem to realize what’s going on; Bellamy does not. His smile is easy. “Cool. See you guys there.”

“You better hope so,” Octavia mutters.

Bellamy doesn’t seem to hear that either, and Clarke can’t tell if he’s being willfully obtuse or is just weirdly cheerful today. Either way, she’s planning to ruin his mood.

“What were you–” he starts, once they’re alone, and she doesn’t even give him a chance to finish.

“What the fuck is your problem, Bellamy?”

He blinks at her, taken aback. “My problem?”

“If you think I shouldn’t be piloting, just fucking say it. But I don’t know why you’re letting Finn and Monty go without a word, but every single thing I do, you’ve got–”

“Wait,” he says, frowning. “What?”

“I can’t do one fucking thing without you telling me–”

“Clarke. You’re the best pilot I’ve ever seen.”

She stops short. “What?”

“You’ve got at least as much raw talent as O, and you’re not as reckless as she is. I’m not wasting my time with Finn, he’s a lost cause. But you’re–fuck, you’re amazing, Clarke.”

“Amazing,” she repeats, and he flushes a little, clears his throat.

“Like I said, in terms of raw talent, yeah. You’re good at this. And you’ve got tactical skills too. I figured you knew.”

“I thought I was doing pretty well. Until you were yelling at me all the time.”

“Advising you. Loudly.” He gives her a wry smile. “I think the team should you, me, O, Raven, and Miller. I’m basically giving up on everyone else. You have the most potential, you get the most attention.”

“You could have said that.”

“I tell you you’re doing well all the time”.

“You tell me I’m doing better,” she says. “After I fuck up.”

“You’re good, Clarke. And you yell at me just as much.”

“Just when you screw up.”

“A little more than that.”
She smiles. “A little more than that, yeah. Let’s get dinner.”

*  

They are a good team. Bellamy knows how to lead on the ground, knows the strengths and weaknesses of each pilot, and they all trust him. When the battle is over, he and Clarke meet up, debrief, and figure out their next steps.

It’s not where Clarke thought she’d be in a war. But she’ll admit, it’s so much better.

And then, the first solo mission comes along.

“You said I’m our best pilot. You know it, I know it—“

His jaw works. “I should go.”

“Why?”

“I’m the leader.”

“That’s a reason for you to stay.”

“It’s dangerous.”

“We’re at war. Everything’s dangerous.” She crosses her arms over her chest. “Do you think I can’t do it?” When he doesn’t answer right away, she reminds him, “You said I’m amazing.”

“And you are. Fuck, Clarke. If you don’t get out of this—“

“I should go because I have the best chance of getting out,” she reminds him.

“You do.” He looks her up and down, anxiety over all his features. “I don’t like you going alone.”

“That’s how solo missions work.”

His mouth quirks. “That doesn’t mean I have to like it. I wish I could just send Finn because I don’t care if he comes back.”

“Yes you do,” she says, smiling herself. “You care about everyone.”

“I do. But not like I—“ He wets his lips, and Clarke’s heart starts racing when he takes a step forward. This has been building, or she’s hoped it was. She wanted it to be. “You have to come back, Clarke.”

“Otherwise your giant robot won’t have a left leg.”

“We’d find another leg. But I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

She leans up to press her lips against his, and he responds at once, tugging her in. He’s warm and solid and smiling, and she’d do her best no matter what, had every intention of returning.

But he’s a good incentive.

“I’m not going to make you find out,” she says, like it’s something she can promise.

He rests his forehead on hers, smile soft. “Yeah, please don’t.”
She barely makes it out before the Galran ship’s doors close, but she does it. She really is good at this. Something about being in the lions feels like coming home, like an extension of her own body.

Like Bellamy and Octavia really were asleep for thousands of years just to find her.

As soon as they’re out of their cockpits and back in their own ship, Bellamy sweeps her up for a kiss; she barely even hears the catcalls when he lets her go; all she can see is his face, full of relief and something like love.

It probably looks a lot like her own face.

“I knew you’d be good at this,” he teases, and she laughs.

“Amazing. Was what you said.”

He grins, kisses her again. “Amazing, yeah.”
Bellamy hadn’t really had any idea what to expect from the Clarke Griffin gig.

He’d heard of her, of course; the story was big news first when she was kidnapped and then when she escaped. He was twelve when the kidnapping happened, and it was the first time he really understood how much more the media cared about rich white people than poor brown people. Not that he hadn’t always known, on some level, but seeing missing child posters all the time, he didn’t understand why it was so much worse that Clarke had disappeared than all the kids from his neighborhood who didn’t dominate the news cycle for weeks on end. It’s not like what happened to Clarke wasn’t a tragedy, even before they found out what happened to her, but it wasn’t a unique tragedy.

She escaped ten years after that, and it was all over the news again. As far as Bellamy was concerned, the whole thing was pretty suspect, the “religious sect” that Clarke had been involved in claiming they were unaware of the kidnapping, that their member who kidnapped her worked alone and lied about his relationship with her. Even with all the Griffins’ money, they hadn’t been able to take down everyone, just the kidnapper himself.

Clarke’s been vocal about how fucked up the whole thing was, even published a book about it, and while Bellamy’s opinion is still that no one would care this much if she wasn’t a rich white girl, but it’s not like she can help that. So at least she’s getting the word out.

Her mother hires him after the book comes out, because even for Clarke, speaking up about these things is risky, but he’s not really expecting it to be too bad. The Griffins are still rich and influential, and her family supports her. It would be stupid of them to prey on her too much; they must have easier targets, even if Clarke is making a lot of noise.

As for Clarke herself, he’s really not sure what he’s expecting. She was eight when she was kidnapped, eighteen when she escaped, twenty-one when he meets her. He read her book in preparation for the job interview, and the portrait painted in there was of an intelligent, determined young woman who never lost her will to fight and escape, who bided her time and toed the line until she could do what she had to do. But he has trouble believing celebrity memoirs are really that accurate to life, even when the celebrity has a good reason to write them. And she probably didn’t write it, either way.

But mostly, he thinks that being kidnapped at age eight and forced into a cult would fuck anyone up, and he respects that she’s working to change things however she can. He figures he won’t be on the job for long, and that once she’s figured out how to readjust to normal life, she’ll move on.

For the first few weeks, he thinks he’s right. Clarke is quiet and wary of him, and he doesn’t blame her for that. If he’d lived her life, he’d probably be wary of strangers too. She’s still not great with crowds, but she does book signings sometimes, makes appearances, advocates for women and girls
in bad spots. He likes her, in a limited sense, but he doesn’t feel as if he knows her.

It’s after a signing when he feels like finally meets Clarke, when she turns to him once they’re alone and says, “How much do you listen to?”

He blinks. “Sorry?”

“When people talk to me, do you listen?”

“Yes?” It comes out as a question less because he’s not sure of the answer and more because he’s not sure why she’s asking. “I don’t eavesdrop, but I’m right there. It’s hard not to listen.”

“So you hear them telling me how much good I’m doing? How brave I am for speaking up?”

She sounds almost bitter, and it would be nice he had some idea what she wanted out of the conversation. He’s not interested in telling Clarke nothing but what she wants to hear, but he’d like to know what that looked like, if he wanted to.

“Yeah.”

“It’s bullshit, right?”

He considers this. “Which part? You’re going to need to give me more information here.”

She snorts a laugh, which tells him more about her than the last three weeks put together. “I’m not really doing anything.”

“Look, if you want to vent about your feelings, you can, but you need to just do it. You can’t prompt me to tell you something I don’t know.”

“Yeah, okay.” She sighs. “I feel like I should be doing more, and I hate that I’m not.”

“You do a lot. And you didn’t do anything wrong to begin with. You don’t have to atone for being kidnapped, Clarke. I get why it feels that way, but—it’s up to you what you do, and screw anyone who thinks you’re not doing enough. You got your life back, you deserve to use it how you want.”

The outburst is as much of a surprise to him as it is to her; he hadn’t thought much about whether or not he thought Clarke was doing good. He had a favorable impression of her, but he hadn’t been sure the book was even her idea, if it wasn’t a publicity stunt of some kind. He didn’t have much background.

But he likes her. And he thinks she’s good. He’d like to help her.

Clarke nods slowly, as if she’s considering it. “Yeah, you’re right. Thanks.”

He’s expecting more, but it doesn’t come, not exactly. He does feel more comfortable with Clarke; they chat more, become more comfortable around each other, even friendlier. He finds she has a dry, somewhat dark sense of humor, and she’s working on her GED, since the schooling she had in the cult was fairly weird.

He finds out in a casual way that she decided she had to escape because she was going to be married to a man forty years her senior who already had a number of wives, and it’s only her deliberate casualness with telling him about it that keeps his temper from flaring. She knows it’s shitty; she doesn’t need him to tell her.

But she must know how he feels, because the next day, she says, “Who do you work for?”
“Is this a trick question?” he asks.

She doesn’t smile. “No. You can work for my mother, or you can work for me. Which is it?”

“Your mother pays me. I assume she could fire me if she wasn’t happy with what I was doing. But I assume you could too. So—as always, if you just tell me what you want to know, my life is easier.”

“I want to get girls out of the cult,” she says. “Myself. I want to break them out.”

He pauses, thinking it over. “If your mom fires me for that, you’re just going to be less safe,” he points out, and she smiles, this slow, bright thing, an expression he’s never seen before.

“Yeah, that’s what I was hoping you’d say.”

*

He doesn’t expect it to become a career. He doesn’t even really expect to keep his job for more than a week after Abby Griffin discovers he’s aiding and abetting in Clarke’s plans, but whatever fight they have about it doesn’t involve him, and all Abby does is ask if he’s willing to participate in a riskier job that he initially signed up for.

Five years later, he doesn’t regret saying yes, despite how much weirder his life has become than he expected. They’re on TV now, Clarke’s genuine desire to help somewhat stretched and warped through the strange modern court of public opinion. His official position is Head of Security, and that’s certainly part of what he does, still acting as Clarke’s personal bodyguard and coordinating the rest of the security staff, but it’s not all. After five years, Clarke is his best friend, the most important person in his life, and he knows she feels the same way about him.

Well, mostly the same.

He also knows she has the same basic feelings about the actual celebrity that comes with the TV show and public nature of their work, too, the same queasy insecurity about whether or not this is really the best way for them to help. He talked her through writing her second book, and he’s getting her through the book tour. He thinks he knows her better than anyone else in the world, at this point.

But when an interviewer asks her, “And what about you, Clarke? How is your life?” he has no idea what she’ll say.

The first person they rescued from the cult, almost five years ago, was a girl named Harper, and Clarke was gushing about her success, how she’s got a job, a life, is starting a family. Not all of the women they’ve gotten out have been so lucky, even though Clarke has worked hard to make sure they all have the support they need. It’s harder for some than others.

“My life?”

The interviewer is a sharp, intelligent woman, and her eyes on Clarke are hard. “You talk about how much you want the women you rescue to be able to move on. But you haven’t. Your life is still focused on—”

“I chose my focus,” Clarke says, voice a little sharp. “I choose every day. I have the same thing every person I’ve freed has. Some of them have chosen to work with us, some haven’t. I have the life I want.”

“Some people have called you obsessed.”
“Is that supposed to be a bad thing?” she shoots back. Her voice has gone cool. “Are people who
work for charities obsessed?”

“People who work for charities don’t have TV shows.”

“Cults like the one that took me thrive in the dark. I didn’t make this decision alone. I wanted to. I
wanted to take my best friend and break into compounds in the middle of the night and smuggle
people out. But I’m not the criminal here. They’re the ones doing something wrong, and if people
won’t believe that, I’m going to show them.”

The interviewer nods, apparently satisfied. “So, you have no intention of moving on?”

“Define moving on.”

“A normal life. Husband—”

“I’m bisexual,” Clarke says. “Let’s not get heteronormative here.”

“A partner, then. Children. The things you would have been forced to have in the cult. Is it difficult
to want those, after what you’ve been through?”

“Dating is pretty awkward,” she says, dry. “So, I was in a cult is a weird ice breaker. It’s not
difficult to want that,” she adds, shifting a little, awkward. “It’s difficult to get it. But—I still think
I’m doing the right thing. I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

The interview isn’t about Bellamy, of course, but it makes him feel twitchy all the same. It’s not
quite like the woman was taking thoughts out of his head, but he has worried about all those things.
He thinks Clarke deserves her own life, her own happiness. She deserves someone who loves her.

If he could just stop wanting it to be him, he wouldn’t even feel guilty about that.

He waits until they’re in the car, being driven home, before he asks, “Did you know she was going
to ask that?”

“Yeah. Not exactly, but—I got some warning.”

“Are you okay?”

She flashes him a tight smile. “Don’t tell me you’re worried about my dedication.”

“I’m always worried about you.”

“No wonder you’re going prematurely gray,” she teases, ruffling his hair.

“Seriously,” he says. “It’s been five years. I’m not saying you should stop, but—it’s stressful. I
know it’s stressful.”

“I know.” She shifts a little, awkward. “I’ve been thinking about changing it up. Maybe I don’t
have to go in anymore. But I don’t want to ask anyone else to go back.”

“No one asked you. You wanted to. Harper wanted to get out and have her own life, but some of
the others might want to take over for you.” He wets his lips. “You can do something else, Clarke.
You can have a life.”

“Don’t tell me you’re worried about me dating.”
He thinks over his response carefully, finally settles on, “Should I not be?”

“Are you worried about your dating? You’re single and older than I am, so–”

“I know why I don’t date,” he says, and immediately regrets it.

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t want to. If you don’t want to, that’s cool, but–”

She huffs. “You know how much it sucks when everyone assumes you don’t date because you were in a cult? There are a ton of people my age who are single and everyone just accepts that there’s a valid reason, but if I’m not dating it means I haven’t healed or whatever.”

“You’re right, that is shitty.”

She glances at him. “You really don’t want to date? Like, are you actually opposed to it?”

“No, I don’t have moral issues with it or anything. But I’ve never been good at it, and I think I’m just getting worse.”

“Probably because you never do it.”

“Probably.” He worries his lip. “Look, you know I support you, whatever you want to do. I’m here for you for as long as you want me here. I don’t care if you date or don’t date, if you do the show or not. Whatever you want, I support you. But–” He has to make himself say it, because it’s completely true and total bullshit all at once. “I wouldn’t mind if you started dating.”

“Not even a little?” There’s something off in her voice, even before the words sink in. When he looks at her, she’s watching him, a slight flush on her cheeks, but determination in her eyes. “Everyone always assumes it’s the cult,” she goes on, determined. “Not, you know, I’m in love with my best friend and he–”

He catches her jaw and kisses her, mouth landing a little off center, and Clarke smiles and tugs him closer. It’s not really the best thing to do in the car, neither comfortable nor practical, and Miller will probably tell them to knock it off in a minute, but if they’re going to be doing confessions, he might as well get a kiss.

“Everyone always assumes it’s the cult,” she goes on, determined. “Not, you know, I’m in love with my best friend and he–”

“With you? Both.” She bites the corner of her mouth. “I do have some stuff to figure out. But–I want to figure it out with you. If you’re not doing anything else.”

He gives her one more quick kiss. “No, I’m free. Whatever you need.”

Clarke settles in against his side, talking through her options. Even though she’s done it a thousand times, it feels brand new with her curled into his side, her fingers tapping against his.

Somehow, after five years, he still doesn’t know what to expect from Clarke Griffin. But he hopes he never will.
Chapter Summary

Fill for live-laugh-loaf! Prompt: Clarke is internet crushing on a food blogger and flirts with him over the comments, but he doesn't put his real name online and she has no idea what he looks like. ALSO, she's real life crushing on her BFF's brother Bellamy. Surprise - they're the same person.

Not to be completely shallow or anything, but Clarke starts reading Grumio’s blog because of a screenshot of his hands.

His hands are the only parts of his body that are really visible on any part of his website, but they’re more than enough for her to decide to follow up on him. She’s always had a thing for hands, and Grumio’s are basically perfect. Clarke is aggressively here for smart boys with perfect hands who know how to cook.

Granted, he knows how to cook in the dorkiest way possible, but Clarke’s kind of into that too. She likes people who are passionate and dedicated, regardless of what the passion is for or the dedication is to.

Unless it’s passion about racism or something. Fuck that.

But Grumio is passionate about Roman cooking. Well, okay, he seems to be passionate about Roman culture in general, but the focus of his blog is on researching and recreating historical cuisine using period-appropriate ingredients and tools. It’s not really the kind of thing Clarke is usually into but, again, he has amazing hands. Every once in a while, he’ll do a video, and even though he just plays music in the background instead of speaking, they’re still pretty much her favorite thing to watch.

And, yes, she knows how sad that is. But Grumio is interesting. He’d have to be, to have gotten the following he has. He’s a popular internet dork who cares deeply about history. She’s not the only one who thinks he’s cool.

Which is probably why she decides to tell Bellamy about him.

There is an irrational part of Clarke that feels wrong, talking to Bellamy about Grumio. After all, Grumio is her internet crush, and Bellamy is her real-life crush, and it feels as though talking about one to the other is crossing the streams. But Bellamy teaches Latin, so she’s brought him up a couple times in her comments to Grumio, and it seems only logical to bring Grumio up to him.

If she’s honest, it’s felt logical for a while, but she was putting it off, and Bellamy reminds her of exactly why as soon as she does it.

“Have you heard of Cooking with Grumio?” she asks, and he frowns in a way that suggests less that he isn’t familiar with the blog and more that he’s confused she that she is.

“Have you?”

“No, I put together a random string of syllables and hit a real thing. You know about it?”
“I’m a Latin teacher,” he says, voice gently teasing. “My students have mentioned it once or twice.”

“Oh, okay. I probably should have seen that coming.”

“I appreciate the head’s up anyway.” He takes a drink of his beer, and Clarke’s worried it’s going to turn into an awkward silence, but instead it turns into an awkward question. “How did you find it?”

“How does anyone find anything on the internet? I followed a link and liked it enough to add it to my bookmarks.”

“Oh wow, it’s on your bookmarks,” he teases. “That’s the real sign of internet dedication.”

“What, do you not like it?”

He shrugs. “It’s cool, I guess. I approve of anything that’s educational but tricks kids into thinking it’s fun. I just didn’t think it would be your thing.”

“He’s a good writer,” she says, trying to be just as casual. “And it’s interesting. Just because I’m not an ancient Rome enthusiast, it doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate a cool project.”

“I guess so. Well, thanks for letting me know about it.”

“Even if I’m the thousandth person to tell you.”

He smiles; the expression looks a little off to Clarke, but she can’t really figure out why. It’s not like they’re really friends. Clarke is friends with Octavia, and Octavia is close to her brother. They see each other a few times a month, and Clarke tries very hard to not be into him, because, again, Octavia is close to her brother. There’s nothing inherently wrong with dating a friend’s sibling, but given how Octavia and Bellamy grew up, it’s more like dating a friend’s surrogate father figure. Which is definitely a little weird.

None of which matters, because Bellamy’s not interested in her anyway. He’s just an incredibly attractive person she hangs out with sometimes, and they end up talking mostly by default. Everyone else is kind of paired off.

“Hey, you could always hit the Latin thing I haven’t heard about. Stranger things have happened.”

“Are there Latin things you don’t know about?”

“If there are, I wouldn’t know, so—”

She laughs. “So I’ll let you know if I find any other cool blogs.”

“Yeah, I’d appreciate it.”

* 

**Comments on post You Asked, Grumio Drank Until He Was Okay With It: Time to Bake Bread**

**Sea Geez**
Have you seriously never made bread before???

**Grumio**
Don’t judge, I’m not much of a baker.
Sea Geez
Really? Why not? Baking is basically all I’m good at.

Grumio
I don’t know. It seems boring. I like trying to figure stuff out, and when I’m baking, I basically have all the answers. Add this much, and if you add any more, you fuck it up.

Also, yeast weirds me out.

Sea Geez
Yeast weirds you out?

Grumio
It’s ALIVE.

Sea Geez
You eat meat. You know what meat is, right?

Grumio
And in a life or death situation, I’d probably be fine killing my own food. But I still feel bad for yeast.

Sea Geez
That’s actually kind of adorable.

Grumio
Thanks, I try.

*  

“So, uh, did you see that Grumio post about Saturnalia?” Bellamy asks. He sounds so profoundly awkward, she can’t help smiling.

“Are you trying to make conversation? Because you’re a lot better at it when you’re not trying. That was so awkward.”

“Thanks. I was just curious. I thought it was pretty cool.”

“Yeah, I liked it too. If I were better at cooking, I might try some of it out.”

“Really?”

“I feel weird reading a food blog where I never try to make any of the recipes. Like I’m missing out.”

He rubs the back of his neck, looking oddly nervous. “I’m not a bad cook,” he offers. “If you ever found one you really wanted to try, I could probably help out.”

It’s the first time he’s ever made any offer to hang out with her one-on-one, which is simultaneously awesome and kind of–suspect. Which is ridiculous, obviously. She and Bellamy are friends. There’s nothing at all suspicious about his offering to help her with cooking. That’s a normal, friendly thing.

“Have you made any yourself?”
“Again, Latin teacher. I do them all the time for school events. The kids love seeing stuff they recognize from Grumio, honestly.”

“So, do you have any favorites? Anything you want to show me?”

“I could probably come up with something. I won’t be offended if you don’t want to,” he adds.

He’s so nervous. About offering to cook for her, of all things.

If it’s suspicious, it’s the best kind of suspicious.

“No, that would be awesome. Was there something in the Saturnalia post you thought would be good? Anything you recommend?”

“The Roman cheesecake balls looked pretty cool. I could probably come up with something else to go with them.”

“A full Grumio meal?”

He smiles a little. “That’s the idea.”

*

Comments on post Walk Like an Egyptian, Drink Like a Roman

Sea Geez
Top three recipes you’ve ever made?

Grumio
That’s like asking me to pick my top three children.

Sea Geez
1. Is it?
2. How many children do you have?

Grumio
I see your transparent attempt to trick me into giving out demographic information and I’m not falling for it. But good effort. Here are some of my favorite recipes for your effort.

*

Clarke’s never actually been to Bellamy’s apartment, but when she told him about the incredibly sorry state of her kitchen, he invited her over to his place instead. There is something of a datelike feeling to the whole evening, and she’s doing her best to not read into it. After all, they’re already friendly, and this is a logical way to take it a step further to being actual friends.

It’s not a date. Definitely not a date.

When she knocks on the door, he just calls, “It’s open!” and when she goes in, she finds him in the kitchen, apparently reviewing his giant pile of ingredients.

“Wow. You really didn’t have to go to all this trouble.”

“It’s no trouble.”

She makes a show of looking at his crowded counter tops. “Yeah, that’s just clearly a lie. You
“I saved the receipts, you said you’d Venmo me.”

“Yeah, but—it’s still a lot of effort. Not just money.”

“I like cooking,” he says, with a shrug. “I don’t mind.”

“You say that now, but you haven’t seen how shitty I am at cooking yet.”

“You can’t be that bad,” he says, with the confidence of someone who has never witnessed her in the kitchen.

“Don’t jinx it,” she says. “What am I doing?”

It should be unspeakably awkward, being not just alone with Bellamy, but in his kitchen, but to Clarke’s surprise, it’s actually pretty fun. He really is a good cook, obviously familiar with not only cooking in general, but all the recipes he’s showing her. And even though she’s about the farthest thing possible from an expert, Bellamy is mostly patient, and at least amused when she fucks up.

The two of them agreed on a menu without much trouble, and it is cool, seeing the dishes she’s seen online come together in real life.

And as she watches him chop some herbs, she realizes exactly how much what she’s watching resembles what she’s seen online. Her jaw drops, and before she can think it through, she says, “Holy shit, you’re Grumio.”

He freezes. “What?”

There’s no going back, so she just has to plow forward. “I recognize your hands.”

“My hands?” he asks, incredulous.

She should have noticed before, honestly. Of course Bellamy has nice hands, he always has. She’s caught herself on more than one occasion watching the way he gestures when he talks, but it’s hard to really identify someone from their hands alone. It’s seeing the way they look in action, cooking, that’s so familiar, and somehow she’s sure. Bellamy’s list of dishes was very similar to the one she proposed. He was always a little shifty about the whole thing. It makes sense, for all it feels impossible. Grumio could be anyone, but somehow, he’s Bellamy.

“I was going to tell you,” he says, slumping.

“When?”

“When I figured out how. I didn’t think anyone I knew actually read it. O mentioned it once but just, you know, she saw a link.”

“So no one knows?”

“You know.”

“No one else.”

He shrugs, a little awkward. “I didn’t want my students to know, so it just seemed easier to not tell anyone.” He laughs, shaking his head. “Fuck, I can’t believe you recognized my hands. I didn’t think they were that special.”
“Maybe I’m just a big fan.”

“Are you? Do you comment or anything?”

Part of her wants to lie, but he easily could have denied his own identity, so it’s only fair. “Yeah, um. Sea Geez.”

He stares at her, and then starts laughing. “Holy shit. Seriously?”

“What?”

“You’re my favorite commenter.”

A warm glow of pride fills her chest. “Well, you’re my favorite Roman food blogger.”

“Thanks.” He turns his attention back to the chopping, deliberate. “This was, uh. The best way I could figure out to use it as a pickup. If I’d know you were Sea Geez I would have just asked you out, honestly.”

“Really?”

“You were definitely flirting with me.”

“You were definitely flirting back!”

He grins. “I was. So—did this work?”

“This?”

He gestures to his kitchen. “First date.”

“Does Octavia know it’s a first date?”

“Fuck, she always knows when I have a crush. It’s the world’s most annoying super power. She knows.”

“Then yeah,” she says. “Anything would have worked, honestly.”

“Awesome. Go check the meat, will you?”

“Romantic,” she teases, and he just raises one shoulder, smiles.

“I thought so, yeah.”

*

Comments on post First Anniversary Dinner for Poppaea

Helen of Troy, NY
Wow, that’s a really nice spread!! Poppaea is a very lucky woman. I hope she appreciates you ;)

Grumio
Yeah, don’t worry, I’m pretty sure she does.

Sea Geez
Well, who wouldn’t?
Fill for oddly-vexing! Prompt: Bellarke version of Killjoys! Perhaps something with Clarke as Dutch and the Blake siblings as the Jacobis brothers?

“I slept with Clarke.”

Bellamy’s hands still on the engine he’s working on, but he doesn’t let himself turn. He can see his sister out of the corner of his eye, well enough to know what she’s doing: leaning against the wall, arms crossed over her chest, haughty defiance in every inch of her stance. She’s being so casual about this he can practically feel the strain of it.

“Yes?” he asks. “Good for you.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“I assume you had a lot of chances to stop.”

She huffs. “I was trying to be nice.”

“I’m sure she really appreciated the charity sex.”

“Not to her. To you.”

“How is having sex with Clarke being nice to me?”

“Don’t play dumb, Bell.”

He stands and stretches; his own nonchalance is much more natural than his sister’s, easier. He’s better at this than she is. “I’m not playing dumb. You slept with Clarke, that’s your business and her business. As long as it doesn’t affect your work—”

“My work?”

“I know it won’t affect Clarke’s. Your personal affairs are yours, hers are hers. It doesn’t have anything to do with me. So if you sleep with her again, don’t tell me.”

Octavia’s jaw works. Maybe she was looking for a fight, and he’s not giving it to her. Maybe she wanted to hurt him with this.

“I just didn’t want it to be weird.”

“It’s not weird,” he says. “It’s not a good idea, but it’s not weird.”

“Not a good idea?”

“You work together, you live together. It’s not a good idea to fuck someone when you’ve got that kind of relationship with them. But you already did, so I hope it won’t make it awkward for you guys.”
“That’s it,” says Octavia, flat.

“If there’s a reaction you want from me, just tell me, and we can go from there. Otherwise, yeah. That’s it. There are only so many ways I can say it’s none of my business.”

“Fine,” she snaps. “Sorry I told you.”

“Yeah, I don’t give you updates on my sex life.” She clearly wants to argue, so he adds, “Go check the fuel manifest, will you? It’s been acting up.”

For a second, he thinks she might still argue, but then she turns and leaves.

Once he’s sure she’s gone, he puts his forehead against the wall. “No big deal,” he tells himself, and tries very hard to believe it.

* 

“I slept with your sister.”

“I heard.”

She slides up on the kitchen counter next to him at the stove, and he doesn’t look at her. After five years as partners, they know each other about as well as two people can know each other. He trusts her more than he trusts anyone else in the entire universe, and he knows that whatever happened between her and Octavia has nothing to do with them.

There’s no reason for him to care at all.

“I’m sorry,” says Clarke.

“Was it bad?” he asks, and winces. “Never mind, don’t tell me. You don’t have to be sorry, okay? You’re both adults.”

“It was still a shitty thing to do.”

He considers this. “Okay, so why did you do it?”

“It seemed like a good idea at the time. I don’t know. We were both in a shitty mood, I convinced myself it would make me feel better.”

“But it didn’t.”

“No. And it was really unfair to do to you.”

If it was Octavia saying that, he’d let it go. But this is Clarke. “Yeah? Why?”

“Because she’s your sister, and you’re my partner. I shouldn’t have done that because I should have known it might be—odd or hard or whatever. For you. And if it is, you still have to work with both of us, so—yeah. I’m sorry.”

“I’d rather it didn’t happen again,” he admits. “But you guys are adults who can make your own decisions. If you guys want to—”

“It was a one-time thing,” Clarke promises. “A mistake.”

“Okay,” he says. “Thanks for telling me.”
“Sure.” She shakes her shoulders, like she’s pulling herself out of the conversation. “So, do we have somewhere else to go? New job lined up? Any kind of distraction?”

He can’t help a smile; Clarke does get him. “Yeah. I bet we can find something.”

*

Bellamy and Clarke have been working together as killjoys for five years, and they’re good at it. They’re known for being good at it. They have a great reputation, and the people who hire them know they’ll get the job done.

Which is why it’s so fucking frustrating that Bellamy actually is off his game. Clarke and Octavia having fucked, once, with no prospect of it happening ever again shouldn’t affect him in the least. There’s no reason he should even remember it.

So of course, that’s all he can think about. When Clarke and Octavia talk about the job, he wonders how it happened. Did Clarke start it, or Octavia? Was Octavia trying to hurt him, or did Clarke just strike out at the bar one night? When did they realize it might be awkward with him?

Did Clarke think about stopping?

The thing is, he and Clarke aren’t together, and they never have been. But if Clarke ever said she wanted him, he’d agree without question, without hesitation. He’s not in love with her, but if she indicated he should be, he thinks it wouldn’t take long to fall.

It’s possible what he feels for Clarke is so close to love it’s not worth splitting hairs, but he still needs to. For his own peace of mind, he’s not in love with Clarke. And he doesn’t care that she slept with Octavia.

He just can’t stop thinking about the fact that it happened. Maybe it’s too close to her sleeping with him, or maybe it’s just that she knew it would be hard for him and did it anyway. It’s not usually hard for him when she sleeps with people; they both have active sex lives.

He’s monitoring Clarke and Octavia trying to fool some guys at a club into giving them information when he figures it out: he thinks they could work together, if they wanted to give it a real shot. Clarke hasn’t had a serious relationship in a while, and O needs someone who won’t let her get away with her usual shit.

If he’s all that’s stopping them, he should get the fuck over himself, and that’s what’s been bothering him, all this time. That’s the root of it.

Clarke, on the other hand, is pissed that said revelation meant he wasn’t paying enough attention to them and they ended up in a bar fight, which he has to admit is a valid thing to be pissed about, once he’s gotten his act together and rescued them.

“What’s with you?” she demands. “You nearly got us sold into slavery!”

“Yeah, but I didn’t.” Her eyes flash, and he huffs. “Look, I know. I fucked up. I’m sorry, it won’t happen again.”

“Except it’s been happening all week. This is the culmination of you fucking up on this job.”

“Thanks,” he says. “Appreciated.”

“Am I wrong?”
“No, you’re not wrong.” He lets his jaw work, thinking it over. “Look, if you’re into Octavia, you should go for it.”

Clarke opens her mouth and then snaps it shut, staring at him like she’s trying to see into his brain. Whatever she’s seeing, she doesn’t look satisfied with it, as she probably shouldn’t be. “That’s what this is about? Me and your sister?”

“If you guys like each other, you shouldn’t let me get in the way. You don’t have to—”

“And it didn’t occur to you that I wouldn’t? Fuck, Bellamy, you’re not my keeper. You don’t get to tell me who I—”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have fucking told me about it!”

They’re staring at each other, both breathing hard, when Octavia says, “Am I interrupting?”

They both turn to stare at her. She was in the auto-doc, getting the gash on her forehead sewn up, and Bellamy had figured they’d have more time to bicker before she was done.

“Nop,” says Clarke. “Your brother is an idiot non-stop. You can’t interrupt that.”

“Oh good,” says Octavia. “This seems fine. Definitely nothing going on here. But whatever. I got a lead on the mark before everything went wrong, so you guys want it or what?”

“Want it,” says Clarke. “What’s the good news?”

Octavia’s smile is tight. “You’re not going to like it.”

*

“She could have done this,” Bellamy mutters.

Clarke’s pleasant expression doesn’t falter, but he knows her too well to miss her annoyance. “If you act like it’s this bad to be alone with me, this marriage thing isn’t going to last.”

“Next!” calls the clerk, before he can respond, and he gets his own smile in order as he follows Clarke to the counter. It’s not the first time they’ve had to pretend to be in a relationship for the job, it’s just the first time since the Octavia thing.

“Names?”

“I’m Rachel Dutch, this is my husband, John.”

“Ah, our late additions.”

“We’re so glad we could make it in,” she says, smooth. He always forgets how good she is at acting like a rich person.

It’s easy to forget she had a life before him, honestly. He forgets his life before her as much as he can, Octavia aside.

Clarke chats with the clerk easily, and the man barely even looks at their IDs when they flash them. Before he knows it, they’re up in the room, alone again.

He kills some time making sure there aren’t any listening devices he can find, but not much of it.
Maybe Clarke will just want to talk shop.

“I’m not interested in your sister,” she says, killing any hope he has of that.

“Okay. That’s fine. I just didn’t want you to—“ He shrugs. “It’s okay if you are, too. That’s all.”

For a second, it looks like she’s going to snap at him again. He’s bracing for the fight when she says, “You can be upset.”

“About what?”

“Me fucking Octavia. I’m upset about it.”

He frowns. “Why?”

“Because it wasn’t worth it. It was fine and I thought it would make me feel better, but it just made me feel worse.” She lets out a bitter little laugh. “I fucked your sister and all it taught me was how in love with you I am. And you won’t even look at me.”

His mouth is so dry his voice doesn’t come out the first time, and he has to swallow to make it work. “How in love with me you are,” he echoes.

“Of course you. You know you’re my favorite Blake, Bellamy.” Her smile falters. “It doesn’t have to be anything. It’s not a big deal unless we make it one. But you’re making it a big deal right now, and I get it, but—we need to figure out how to keep working together. So—” She puts her hands up, a little helplessly. “That’s me. I fucked your sister, and immediately after I realized it was a huge mistake because I’m in love with you. It was a mistake, and it’s not happening again. I hope we can get past it.”

“That was the most emotional honesty we’ve had, uh, ever.”

“Well, emotional dishonesty wasn’t really working for me.” She clears her throat, gives her shoulders an awkward shake. “So, yeah. Let’s find the mark and—”

“No, fuck,” he says, quick. “I mean, yes, but—” He shakes his head with a laugh. “I love you too. It can wait until tomorrow. The job, I mean.” He gives her a small, shy smile. “We can lose a night, right?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

Bellamy knows this moment from vids and books. This is the moment after the confession when they finally get to be together, when he gets to pull her close and kiss her the way he’s never let himself think about before. There’s nothing stopping him; they’re on the same page.

But he can’t take the final step.

Clarke is, at least, looking amused, and just about as unsure as he feels. And this is, well, Clarke.

He can do this. He gets to.

Suddenly, it’s easy. “So, uh—I’m going to kiss you.”

“Good,” she says, and he does.
“I slept with Clarke.”

Octavia gives him a supremely unimpressed look. “I can’t believe it took you this long. Seriously, five years and you only just realized you’re into her?”

“Not just,” he says. “I only just did something about it.”

“Yeah, well, I did it first.”

“She’s not an it and it’s not a competition.” He smirks. “Besides, she said all sleeping with you taught her was that she wanted me, so—”

Octavia rolls her eyes. “So, if it was a competition, you’d be winning.”

“Just saying,” he says.

“I can live with that.” She bites the corner of her mouth. “I’m happy for you. Really. Glad me sleeping with the girl you’re in love with didn’t totally ruin your life.”

“Nah,” he agrees. “Got the mark, got the girl. I think my life’s going to be fine.”
Clarke thought she knew exactly how stupid it would be to see Bellamy before her wedding. She knew all the reasons she shouldn’t have seen the person she isn’t marrying, the one she’s actually in love with, the one whose sister has a claim to her throne if anything goes wrong with this wedding. She thought she had assessed all the risks and decided it was worth it anyway.

But she hadn’t known all the risks. She hadn’t thought he’d betray her.

“We can spin this,” her mother is saying. “It’s not great, but it’s not–”

“It’s not royal behavior,” says Queen Katherine, her voice icy. No one can disapprove like a queen, especially a queen who’s also your grandmother.

“I was talking to a friend,” Clarke protests. “That’s not spin. That’s the truth. Just because it turned out I was wrong about our friendship doesn’t mean–”

“Don’t act like you went out there that night to be with your friend, Clarke,” says Abby. “You’re getting married, and–”

“And that’s bullshit!” She doesn’t mean to say it, but it’s the truth too, as important a truth. “It’s bullshit that getting married is supposed to magically make me a ruler. If he died tomorrow, I could still be queen, as long as I was married once.”

“Don’t say that,” says Indra, mild. “It makes it sound like you’re planning to assassinate your own husband.”

“You know what I mean. I can be just as good a ruler with or without a husband.”

“I specifically told you to stop seeing that boy,” says her grandmother. Given she and Abby aren’t actually related, it’s amazing how similar they are. Clarke honestly can’t believe that Katherine disapproved of the marriage.

But there were strict rules about what her father’s marriage could look like.

“I wanted to see him,” she snaps, reflexively, and it’s the wrong thing to say for a thousand reasons.

“Which doesn’t speak well to your judgement. A friend who betrays you–”

“From everything I’ve seen, he didn’t betray her,” Indra interjects, and this time all three of them whirl on her. “I looked into it.”

“And you’re only telling me this now?” Clarke adds.
She shrugs. “I don’t know how much it matters. After all, the main issue remains.”

“Main issue?” asks Clarke.

“The footage is damning, regardless of anything else. Just because Bellamy wasn’t aware of the deception, that doesn’t mean it’s not a problem. But he does seem to have been innocent of all wrong-doing.”

“If he wasn’t doing anything wrong then what was he doing?” Katherine demands.

“Saying goodbye,” Clarke says, less to them than just in their presence. It’s for her. But since they’re there, she adds, “He just–he wanted to say goodbye. That’s what he told me.”

“You’re getting married, not dying.”

She feels exhausted, suddenly. “I stopped my flirtation with him, like you told me I had to. That doesn’t mean I stopped having feelings for him. You know as well as I do what my getting married will do to our friendship.” She exhales, getting her feelings under control. “But it doesn’t matter. Like Indra said, all that matters is how we deal with the fallout of the video. It doesn’t affect anything else. Wells and I are getting married this afternoon. And Bellamy and I are–nothing.”

Her grandmother watches her, a small frown on her face. “I am sorry,” she finally says. “I know this is not–the life of a princess is not an easy one, and I did you no favors when I told you this was your future. It isn’t all balls and true love’s kiss, in real life.”

“No,” she agrees. “But I know my duty. I’ll do what has to be done.”

* * *

“So,” says Wells. It’s bad luck to see him before the wedding, but they have fallout to deal with. He deserves an explanation. “That guy. Bellamy?”

“Yeah, Bellamy.”

“Why aren’t you marrying him? I remember seeing you two dancing at the ball. He seems like a good prospect.”

“He’s not royal. Not even noble. He was there with his sister. Who’s apparently my heir, until I produce another one. So it’s this whole–” She sighs. “His family was working to dethrone me, because I’m not a good ruler.”

“You know that’s bullshit, right?” he asks. “You’re going to be a great queen, Clarke.”

“I hope so.” She bites the corner of her mouth. “But I don’t think I can marry you.”

“I was thinking that too.”

Her smile aches a little. “You were?”

“I want to do what’s best for my home, my country, my people. But I want to do what’s best for myself too.”

“I get that. But–I think this might be easy for me.”

“Which part?”
“What’s best for all of those is the same thing, I’m pretty sure.”

“Yeah? And what’s that?”

This time, her smile is sure. “I need a really good speech.”

* 

As Wells said, Clarke did meet Bellamy first at a ball. He was hard to miss, handsome and charming, but more importantly just a little bit lost. A little like Clarke herself felt, honestly.

When she asked what he was doing there, he answered honestly: he was escorting his sister. In fact, he basically always told her the truth, or at least most of it. He’d been honest about the fact that he thought monarchy was an outdated practice, that he thought the country would be better off with someone who understood the perspective of the common citizen. He and Clarke had bickered about it, her pointing out that she had lived most of her life as a common citizen and Bellamy shooting back that she hadn’t been an Arcadian citizen.

She’d thought that if he was one of the choices for marriage, it wouldn’t be so bad.

Now, though, she knows he isn’t. Even if he didn’t ask to see her the other night because he wanted to see her, he’s still not someone she can marry. She’s a princess, and she needs to marry a prince, not a man whose mother married into the nobility after he was born.

But if he isn’t trying to keep her from being queen, she assumes that means he wants to help.

“Clarke!” he says, when he picks up his phone. “Fuck, I’ve been calling all morning, I wanted to apologize, O’s uncle, he–”

“It’s okay,” she says. “I know it wasn’t your idea. My head of security filled me in. That’s not why I called.”

There’s a pause. “Uh, okay. Then why are you calling?”

“You’re a speechwriter.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m writing a speech to give about why I’m not getting married today that’s hopefully going to convince parliament to change the law about my not being able to be queen. I’ve got most of it done, but I could use another set of ears.”

Another pause. “So, I don’t need to come to your wedding and try to talk you out of it? Because these YouTube videos about how I’m supposed to tie this tie aren’t really helping much, so it would be good if you already changed your mind.”

“I’ve never been the one who needs to be convinced this is a shitty idea,” she points out. Her smile is so big it almost hurts. “I always thought it was a bad law. I’ve been trying to change it, and this is my last chance. So I need to bring my A-game.”

“You came to the right guy,” he says. “After we got O on the throne, the next step was taking out that law.”

Clarke smiles. “So, your plan was to use a shitty law to dethrone me and then immediately get the law overturned so she wouldn’t have to marry some random guy?”
“Like you said, it’s a shitty law. So tell me what you’ve got and I’ll tell you if you’re missing anything.”

“This isn’t getting you out of coming the wedding, by the way.”

“No?” he asks, sounding surprised.

“I’m hoping I’m going to have something to celebrate after. And I want you to be there.”

“You do?”

“I kind of like you,” she says, and there’s another pause.

“Okay, well. Let’s get this thing done,” he says, voice thick. “And then I’ll figure out how bow ties work.”

“It’s not really going to be a wedding. You don’t have to dress up.”

“I still want to look nice,” he says. “Read me your speech.”

*

It’s not hard to come up with a whole list of reasons the Arcadian tradition is archaic and unfair, including its inherent misogyny and homophobia, and apparently her parliament likes her well enough that their response to an ultimatum about changing the job or losing her as the heir is changing the law.

So she doesn’t get married, but they’re still set up for a big party, and as far as Clarke’s concerned, they have a lot to be grateful for.

Unfortunately, everyone else seems to feel the same, because they all want to talk to her, tell her how happy they are, how they always supported her, and it feels like hours before she disentangles herself from the politicians and finds enough space to breathe.

“To your left, in the corner,” Indra says, low, and Clarke follows her gaze to spot Bellamy, looking slightly awkward in the corner with his sister. He’s more dressed up than she’s seen him since the first time he met, but this time he didn’t slick his hair back or put in his contacts. His glasses are sliding down his nose and his hair is a riot of curls.

She told him she liked him better like this, and he listened.

“Can you watch but not stay that close?” she asks Indra. “There’s security everywhere. I just want to pretend I have some privacy.”

“I do love pretending I’m not here,” she says. “Good luck.”

Octavia notices her first, raises her flute of champagne in Clarke’s direction with a wry smile. “Congratulations on getting the law changed. Honestly, I’m relieved.”

“Really?” Clarke asks.

“I know Bell was convinced I’d be a good queen, but I think I can do more good outside the monarchy. Plus, if they didn’t change the law I would have had to marry some noble I’d never met. That would have sucked.”

“Glad I could help. I did it for you, obviously.”
She smirks. "Yeah, for me. Which reminds me, I have to go talk to--" She casts around, clearly trying to find someone whose name she can use. "Lord Kane. Good to see you!"

"Subtle," Clarke tells Bellamy, and he rubs the back of his neck, flushing slightly.

"I told her she needed to come so I'd have backup."

"You need backup?"

"I wasn’t sure." He clears his throat. "Not that I’m not glad you’re not married, but that means you’re going to be the queen. I assume you’ll be–busy."

"I will be. But I could use someone I trusted to talk to. Give me feedback on my speeches. Consult about important issues."

He looks her up and down, dubious. "You want to hire me?"

"No, that’s not–if you want a job writing speeches for me, you can have it, but that’s not really what I was thinking."

"Which was?"

He’s smiling, so she can too. "I’m not really ready to get married yet, honestly. But I wouldn’t mind dating. You, specifically."

"I didn’t think queens dated."

"I think we can do what we want."

"Yeah, I’m pretty sure that’s not true. If the last few weeks of trying to derail your coronation taught me anything, it’s that you really can’t. You technically couldn’t marry me if you wanted to. Not that I’m, uh--"

"I bet that’s a law we could get changed if we wanted to. And it’s not like we’re in a hurry, right? We can figure it out later. When it comes up. But maybe we should start with dinner."

He offers his hand. "How about starting with a dance?"

She takes it, feeling his fingers close around hers, rough and warm. "I’d love to."

*

A year later, he puts a draft of an amendment to the law about female members of the royal family having to marry titled nobles to retain their own status and property.

"It’s not homophobic, but it is misogynistic," he says. "I think you should be able to get it changed."

She smiles, scanning over the papers. "Thanks. Any particular reason you want me to look into it?"

"I figure you might want to get married someday. You want to have your options open. In case there’s a commoner who’s planning to make you dinner and propose soon. Just for example."

"Soon?"

"As soon as the law changes, probably."
“So I should work on it now, is what you’re telling me.”

“So let’s get the law changed and see if we can find a commoner to propose to me.”

He grins. “Yeah. I don’t think it’ll be too hard.”
Clarke knew it was a bad idea to date Bellamy. All of her friends told her to do it, because their sexual tension was so obvious, and he clearly liked her, and she liked him. It was perfect, and Clarke resisted mostly because she knew that if it went wrong, it would be awful. Bellamy is Octavia’s brother and Miller’s best friend, and he gets along with all her friends as well as she does. She’d known that if the two of them ever broke up, she wouldn’t be able to avoid him, and a month after ending it, it’s obvious how right she was.

“Remind me why me and Bellamy broke up,” she tells Raven.

“Dumb shit,” says Raven, without even the slightest pause.

She rubs her face. “It wasn’t dumb.”

“Yeah? Then you remind yourself why you guys broke up. If you don’t remember, maybe it’s because it was fucking stupid, and you guys are stubborn assholes.”

“I remember,” Clarke says, petulant. “Just because we didn’t work out doesn’t mean he stopped being hot.”

“Seriously, I want you to tell me why you broke up again. I bet you won’t think it makes sense either. You’re drunk enough to not censor yourself.”

Clarke’s not sure she’ll ever be drunk enough to ever tell Raven the whole truth about breaking up with Bellamy, because the whole truth is simple and awful and embarrassing, all at once.

The whole truth is that she heard Bellamy talking to Miller about how they could move in together, and it freaked her out, and it still freaks her out. Clarke’s never been serious enough with someone to move in with them before, and the simultaneous realizations that Bellamy wanted to live with her and she wanted to live with him terrified her enough that she broke up with him.

It was not a good response, and she knows that.

“It wasn’t working out,” she says instead.

“So, you need another shot before you tell me.”

“It was fun, but–you know me and Bellamy couldn’t really last.”

“Yeah? Why not?”

Clarke glances over at him again. He’s been completely fine since the breakup, and that’s the other thing that sucks. She expected him to fight her on it, to be upset. When he just shrugged and told her it was her decision, it had just made her more confident that he didn’t care, that his asking–or thinking about asking–her to move in was a checkbox on some mental list of relationship steps.
When she’s being fair, she knows how stupid this is. But it’s hard to be fair.

“We’re too similar,” she says.

“See, that’s what I meant about shitty reasons. You’re both stubborn assholes who won’t admit you’re wrong, but I know you started this one. I get it,” she adds, and Clarke knows she does. Raven’s not great at intimacy either. “But you don’t get to act like this wasn’t all on you.”

“I know.”

“And I think you could still fix it, if you wanted to.”

“Yeah, you’re right, I could.” She downs her beer. “Wish me luck.”

“Luck,” says Raven, dubious, and Clarke finally lets herself go talk to him.

*

She knows all the steps that bring her to the next morning. She goes to talk to Bellamy, he’s friendly, she can’t stop looking at his mouth, he teases her about it, and it just seems like so much of a better idea to flirt with him than to try to have a serious conversation about how she thinks she was in love with him and probably still is and she dealt with it poorly.

It’s so much easier to drag him to the bathroom and blow him, to let him take her home and fuck her.

If she’d just left after that, it all would have been incredibly easy, but Bellamy wrapped his arm around her and kissed her hair and it felt so good, to be curled up against him, to be in his life again.

It still feels good, aside from the profound, existential panic about waking up in her ex-boyfriend’s bed.

Bellamy isn’t there anymore, but she can hear him in the kitchen, probably making coffee, maybe cooking.

There are two options here: he did this because he likes sex with her and feelings aren’t an issue, or he did this because he still has feelings for her and he’ll take whatever he can get.

She really, really wants it to be the second one, so much so it scares her. So much so she doesn’t even want to ask, for fear he’ll tell her that she fucked up so badly he won’t ever forgive her.

On the other hand, they’re already broken up, and he’s probably already pissed at her. She has almost nothing to lose.

She finds her favorite shirt of his, in the same drawer it’s always in, and pulls it on. Her hair hurts and she’s definitely a little hungover, but he has a glass of water on his bedside table, which she’s drunk half of before she notices the condensation on the side.

Her stomach lurches in a way that has absolutely nothing to do with her hangover.

She finds him leaning against the kitchen counter with his phone in his hand. He’s wearing boxers and an old t-shirt, his traditional morning ensemble, with his hair still messy and his glasses on. He looked good at the bar last night, dressed to pick someone up, but Clarke’s always liked him best like this, unguarded and casual.
“Hi,” she says.

His eyes flick up and then go back to the phone. “Hi.”

She props herself against the counter next to him, her arm brushing his. Aside from last night, it’s the first time they’ve been alone since she broke up with him, and he clearly knows it too.

“So, I fucked up,” she says.

“You were drunk.”

He says it so quickly she thinks he must have been rehearsing it, that he must have been thinking about this the whole time she was asleep. He’s so ready to write this one off, to let her off the hook.

“I was too,” he continues. “It’s muscle memory, right? It happens.”

It would be so easy to let it go. To just agree with him, let him give her coffee and leave. He wouldn’t get mad at her, they wouldn’t have a fight about how shitty it was of her to break up with him in the first place.

And they’d still be broken up.

“No,” she says. “Not that. I fucked up when I broke up with you.”

He snorts. “I know the sex is good, but–”

“Bellamy. That’s not why. You know that’s not why.”

“Do I?” he asks. “You told me it wasn’t working for you. I don’t know what changed except that you remembered you’re into me.”

She swallows. “Can I have coffee before I talk about how massively stupid I was?”

The tension still isn’t leaving his shoulders, and it makes her ache.

She fucked up so hard.

“Sure,” he says, pours her a cup and adds sugar and milk, just how she likes.

“I heard you telling Miller you wanted me to move in,” she admits. “I showed up early at the bar, and–it freaked me out.”

“Okay.”

“I just–I realized that I loved you, and this was serious, and if we kept going out, it would just get more and more serious, and I–broke up with you.”

“Because you didn’t want to get serious.”

“No. Because I never have been before and–” She closes her eyes. “There was no good reason, except I thought that if we broke up later, it would be even worse.”

When she opens her eyes again, he’s looking ahead, sipping his coffee, apparently waiting for more.

“I fucked up, and I’m sorry, and I want to fix it.”
“Fix it,” he repeats. “What does that mean?”

“I’m still in love with you and I still want to be with you,” she admits. “And if there’s a way for you to want that too, I want to make it work.”

Finally, he says, “You know you broke my heart, right?”

She doesn’t let herself wince. It’s his pain, not hers. “I thought I might have, yeah. But I was hoping I didn’t.” He snorts again, and she smiles, helpless and embarrassed. “I thought if I broke your heart, you’d fight harder.”

“I never thought it would work out,” he admits. “I always thought you were going to dump me sooner or later. So I was ready when you did.”

“I’m so sorry, Bellamy. And I get it, if it was too much. If you can’t—“

“What if I can?” he asks. He’s still not looking at her.

“Can?”

“What if I just forgive you? What if I just want you back?”

“Then you’ve got me,” she says.

It still takes a second. He takes the mug out of her hands carefully, like he’s expecting her to protest, puts it down like he’s afraid even the slightest contact with the counter will shatter it. For another moment, he looks at her, and then he leans down and kisses her.

They did kiss last night. They weren’t avoiding it or anything. But it was kissing as a first step, kissing hot and hard as they pulled off clothing, kissing because they didn’t want to break contact.

This kiss feels like she broke his heart, and he’s waiting for her to do it again.

“Bellamy,” she murmurs.

“What?”

There isn’t really anything to say, though. She already apologized, and he already told her he wanted to try again.

“I’m going to do better,” she finally settles on, and he smiles a little.

“I’m in love with you,” he says. “I, uh—I thought it might have made a difference, if I said it before.”

“I probably would have freaked out anyway. But yeah, I love you too.”

“I don’t mind freaking out. Just maybe next time, freak out with me. Instead of dumping me.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t a good response. I’m still sorry.”

“Cool,” he says. “Good talk. You want breakfast?”

She wets her lips, lets her hands trace up his chest. She missed him, and all she really wants is to be close again, to feel like this is real. And she can’t imagine he’s going to mind.
“I want a do-over.”

“A do-over of what, exactly?”

“Last night. Once more, with feelings.”

He laughs, and kisses her again, and when she tugs him to the bedroom, he follows her happily. She blows him again, and he eats her out, and this time when he fucks her it’s slow and deep and perfect, and when they curl up together, she doesn’t even think about leaving.

“Better?” he asks, and she kisses his collarbone, feeling perfectly content for the first time since she broke up with him.

“So much better.”

*

Six months later, she’s the one to bring up cohabitation.

“You’re sure?” he asks. “We don’t have to, if you’re not ready.”

“I’m sure,” she promises. “No freak-outs, no breakups, no drunken fumbling.”

He grins. “I like drunken fumbling.”

“Okay, a little drunken fumbling. When we want to.”

“When we want to,” he agrees. “Like when we’re celebrating moving in together, maybe?”

“Sounds perfect,” she says, and it really, really does.
The first thing Bellamy says to Clarke Griffin is, “You must be the new secretary.”

Her eyes flick up to him, barely even looking. “I must be.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m looking forward to working with you.”


He frowns, taken aback. “No, I just wanted to introduce myself. Bellamy Blake.”

“Clarke Griffin,” she says. She’s still not looking at him. “A pleasure.”

It’s as much of a dismissal as he’s ever heard, and he’s not sure what else to say but goodbye.

He figures it out when Kane comes in and introduces her to the room at large. “Everyone, this is Clarke Griffin. Our newest special agent.”

*  

It takes him a day to come up with what he wants to say to her. It was an honest mistake, but he knows from being on the receiving end of many such honest mistakes himself, he knows it’s not a comfort to hear that he had made an assumption he shouldn’t have. For every person whose mistake really was honest, there are five more who are pretending. Agent Griffin has apparently dealt with it enough that she doesn’t even bother with corrections, just lets the error slide and waits for the truth to come out on its own.

So a simple apology seems easiest. He goes to her desk and starts with, “Excuse me.”

He can see her shoulders tense, but when she sees him, she relaxes.

That’s something.

“I just wanted to apologize,” he says. “For the other day.”

“I should apologize too,” she says, to his surprise. “I should have just corrected you.”

“I assume you spent the entire morning with people who knew who you were asking you to get them coffee.”

That makes her smile. “I did. I thought everyone had heard about me by the time you showed up.”

“I’m not exactly in the loop for gossip. I heard some talk of a secretary, and nothing about the new agent.” He pauses, but then adds, “Before I lost my leg, I’d get asked if I was a janitor.”

“And after?”
He taps his crutch. “No one thinks I can do anything useful with just one leg.”

“So you’re saying all I have to do to keep people from asking me to make coffee is lose a leg?”

He lets out a surprised bark of laughter before he can stop himself, but Clarke looks pleased and a little relieved, so he doesn’t apologize. Aside from his sister and his friend Raven, he’s not sure anyone’s ever made a casual joke about his injury, and it’s amazing how nice it is.

“You could try it,” he says. “I’m sure we have someone in lockup who would be happy to take one of yours off.”

“We’ll see how many copies I have to make, but I might take you up on that.”

“I am sorry,” he says.

She shakes her head. “You don’t have to apologize. As soon as you left, one of the secretaries told me you must not know. I’m sorry for giving you the cold shoulder.”

“You have no reason to think better of me than anyone else.”

“So no one needs to apologize,” she says, with a small smile. “And we can start over.”

“Sure.” He shifts on his crutches, freeing his hand so he can offer it to her. “Bellamy Blake.”

She shakes with a firm grasp he’s sure she’s had to work on to be taken seriously. “Clarke Griffin,” she says. “Nice to meet you.”

* 

“So, I guess birds of a feather really do flock together, huh, Blake? I thought you’d be happy we finally had someone more useless than you. Must be nice to not be at the bottom of the barrel.”

Bellamy takes a breath, counts to five under his breath before he says anything. He basically always wants to punch John Murphy, but it’s gotten worse in the last week. Still, the last thing Agent Griffin needs is him fighting for her honor. She can take care of herself. She wouldn’t thank him for doing it for her.

“As long as you’re around, I know I’m not at the bottom of anything, Murphy. If you were better at your job, you’d have something to do other than worry about getting a new coworker.”

“You hoping she’s going to fuck you? I don’t blame you, must be hard to find someone willing to put the effort in, but someone like her must be gagging for it.”

This time, he has to count to ten. “Sounds like you’ve put a lot more thought into this than I have. Thanks for worrying, but I think it’s probably easier if I handle my romantic life and you take handle your own.” He pauses, for effect now, instead of to get his temper in control. “Then again, with your track record, I can see why you’d want my help. Haven’t seen many people willing to put the effort into dealing with a dick like you. I mean yours,” he adds, innocent, and Murphy’s eyes flash.

But he just shakes his head. “Well, I’m rooting for you crazy kids. If two freaks can’t find happiness together, who can?”

He takes off before Bellamy can respond, which probably counts as a win for Bellamy, but it’s hard to feel good about it. It’s exhausting, spending every fucking day fighting just to prove he
It must be exhausting for Agent Griffin too, which is why he stops by her desk at the end of the day and says, “Do you want to get a drink?” Her expression clouds over, and he realizes his mistake. “Because it’s been a long week and I need a drink,” he says. “I thought you might too. My best friend works at a bar, and some other friends will be there. Ladies, as well as men.”

Her shoulders slump. “That would be lovely, yes. Why don’t you tell me where to meet you and I’ll come in an hour or so?”

“Sounds good,” he says. “I’ll see you in an hour or so.”

* *

It becomes a part of their routine, Fridays spent at the bar, trading stories of who’s been awful this week, of how hard it was climbing through the ranks, trying to earn respect with limited success. They discuss the different ways they cope, Bellamy admitting his distaste for the macho posturing he participates in, Clarke admitting she sometimes wishes she could just throw a punch instead of playing it cool.

His feelings for her are inevitable, the natural evolution of how much he enjoys her company, how much he admires her, how much time they spend together and how well they get along. For all he tries to fight it, he falls hard, and for all he tells himself she’s not interested in him, he can’t help hoping. He knows that she’s still nursing a broken heart, that she lost a lover and that’s part of why she relocated. The last thing he wants is to make her think this has all been a ruse, that he’s been playing a long game, getting close to her just because he wants something.

The last thing he wants to do is lose her.

“She knows you better than that,” is what Miller tells him. “Not saying she feels the same way, hell if I know. But I think she knows you well enough that she isn’t going to think you faked everything about your relationship.”

“She knows you like her,” Raven adds. “Hell, she knows you respect her and value her as a person. Like Miller said, she might not say yes, but she’ll know you’re not just asking because you think she’s attractive. You’re attracted to her because you got to know her, you didn’t get to know her because you were attracted to her.”

“I know. Trust me, I didn’t want this to happen.” He scrubs his face. “She doesn’t have a lot of allies. I don’t want her to lose me.”

“You don’t have a lot of allies either,” Miller says. “I know how many assholes there are in your office. She’s not the only one with something to lose, so maybe even if it goes wrong, you guys could keep each other.”

He squints between Miller and Raven. “You really think this is a good idea.”

Raven shrugs. “I think you’d be happier and she would be too. Seems like it’s worth asking. I don’t think you’re going to ruin your life.”

“Thanks.” He runs his hand through his hair. “Okay. I’ll think about it. Good talk, team.”

Clarke shows up a few minutes later, sliding onto the stool next to him, smiling at him, setting his heart racing.
“Hey, sorry I’m late. Got caught up in a project. Did I miss anything?”

“Nope,” says Bellamy, returning her smile easily. “Nothing at all.”

*

The next Friday, he waits until most everyone has left and stops by Clarke’s desk. She’s on the telephone and holds up her hand, so he waits, reminding himself to not be nervous, that this isn’t a big thing. He’s just asking a question. She’ll say yes or no, and they’ll proceed from there.

“Hi, sorry,” says Clarke, looking flustered. “What’s up?”

“Everything okay?”

“It’s fine. Just following up on some cases. Drinks tonight? I probably need one.”

It’s as perfect an opening as he could ask for. “Yeah, I was going to ask, um–you want to do drinks just the two of us tonight? Somewhere a little nicer, maybe.”

For a second, her face is just frozen, but then he sees the change in it, and he knows the answer before she even opens her mouth. “Bellamy, I’m so sorry, I–”

“It’s fine,” he says. “I thought I’d ask. We can just do the usual. Miller’s working, I bet he’ll give you a free drink if you tell him how bad your day was.”

She opens and closes her mouth. “I hope so.” Her phone starts ringing again, and she winces. “Fuck, I’m sorry, I have to–”

“Go ahead. See you at the bar in a few hours?”

“Assuming my phone ever stops ringing.” She bites the corner of her mouth. “I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have anything to apologize for. See you tonight?”

“Yeah,” she says. “See you tonight.”

She sounds like she means it, but it’s six months before he sees her again.

*

In his line of work, people move. They appear and disappear without warning, off on new projects, chasing leads, sent away to where they’re most useful. It happens all the time, and everyone expects it. He knows better than to take it personally.

Still, if it had been him, he would have made time to say goodbye to Clarke before he left.

Murphy’s the one who tells him she’s back, which makes sense, given how much shit he gave Bellamy about Clarke “dumping” him when she first left. Aside from Miller and Raven, there’s no one else as invested in Bellamy’s non-relationship with Clarke as Murphy is.

“Seen your girlfriend yet?” is what he asks, and it takes Bellamy a minute to make the connection.

“I don’t have a girlfriend right now,” he says. Before, he would have made a crack about it, maybe said he didn’t know Murphy’s mother was in town, but Clarke got him thinking about the way that speaking to Murphy in his own language could be damaging to women, so he’s trying to be less combative.
Then his brain catches up with what Murphy actually said, and he nearly loses his balance. He can’t mean her. He can’t. Bellamy must just be hoping.

Murphy looks triumphant. “So, she didn’t tell you she was back. I knew it.”

“More evidence that she’s not my girlfriend. What do you want, exactly?”

“I don’t get you, Blake,” he finally says, and Bellamy shrugs on shoulder.

“The feeling is mutual. I have work to do.”

Word that Clarke is back spreads around the office and the knowledge takes up residence under Bellamy’s skin. The whole day, he’s itchy and anxious, torn between his desire to see her and his nervousness about what they are to each other. He knows it probably wasn’t personal, that she was on business, important business, that she left suddenly, without time for goodbyes, but it still hurt.

He stays late, working until he’s sure the building is empty, but of course she’s waiting for him in the lobby. She looks a little tired, like she’s had a rough few months, and his annoyance flags.

She’s probably had a worse time than he has. She probably needs a friend.

“Hi,” he says. “I heard you were back.”

“Yeah. I thought–” She worries her lip, but when he eyes meet his, they’re steady and certain. “I thought we could get dinner, and I could fill you in. If you’re still—if you want.”

“Dinner,” he repeats.

“I had a lot going on. There was—I’m not good at trusting people. But while I was gone, all I could think about was—” She smiles. “Okay, most of what I was thinking about was what I was doing and making sure I stayed alive. But I thought about you a lot too. I had this fantasy about showing up at the bar and asking if I could buy you a drink, but the timing didn’t work out. So—dinner. Since I didn’t have time for the drink.”

“Dinner would be nice,” he says, mouth a little dry. “That’s why you said no?” he can’t help adding. He’d been so ready for her to turn him down, it never occurred to him that the end of her sorry might not have been I don’t think of you like that.

“Yeah, I just—I didn’t think I had time. Until I got things figured out.”

“And they’re figured out now?”

“I hope so, yeah. Want to get dinner and hear all about it?”

“Yeah, I’d love to,” he says.

They get the drink after dinner, and Clarke tugs him down for a kiss before they part, and Bellamy will admit, she was worth the wait.
“You know, I knew you were a stubborn asshole, but this is a lot even for you.”

Bellamy doesn’t look at her, too busy attempting to navigate through traffic to turn his attention away from the road. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I can’t believe you didn’t let me eat the brain.”

It’s still a little disconcerting to be able to just say it, to have her secret out in the open, or at least open to Bellamy. After years of hiding and lying, justifying erratic behavior and inexplicable hunches, she can just say what she’s doing and why, and he’ll believe her. And, even more miraculously, he’s accepted it, doesn’t seem to have let it change his opinion of her.

Except this one thing.

“It’s not fair.”

“Not fair?” she asks, incredulous.

“It’s cheating,” he grumbles.

“Cheating.”

“Look, it’s not like I don’t–appreciate it,” he says, delicate. “You’re a great resource. You do amazing work. But it’s not police work.”

“Who cares? You didn’t care when you thought I was a psychic–”

“I never thought you were a psychic,” he says. “Come on, Clarke. I knew that was bullshit. I knew there was another explanation, I figured it was like Psych or something. You were just really observant or something.”

“And you let that go, but now that you know I’m–”

“It’s like using magic.”

“Which you’d do, if you had it. Don’t pretend you wouldn’t.”

He sighs, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. “Look, this is hard for me, okay? Not–the zombie stuff, I’m dealing with. I get that. But I already felt like relying on you made me a shitty cop, and now it’s like finding out my lab partner did so well on homework because she had a copy of the answer key.”

“And that’s bad,” she says, mostly to fuck with him.

He takes his eyes off the road for a second to glare at her. “I don’t like cheating.”
“Okay, but–there’s no teacher. We’re catching murders, not doing assignments. *Cheating* doesn’t really apply. That’s not how it works. If it helps you do your job better–”

“Does it?” he asks, and from his tone, this is the real issue. The heart of the matter. “I’m not doing my job better. You are.”

“You’re doing it. I get–flashes. I don’t know everything. And even if I did, I don’t know how to make a conviction stick. *I ate someone’s brain and gained their memories* isn’t admissible evidence in court.”

“I just want to solve a case without–”

“Without me.”

He pulls into a parking spot and turns off the car, gives her a significant look. “If I wanted to do it without you, you wouldn’t be here. I think we’re a good team, but–it’s hard to be sure when you’ve been lying to me on every case.” She winces, and he sighs. “I get why, don’t get me wrong. I wouldn’t have believed you.”

“And I guess I get why it bothers you. But–you’re a great detective, Bellamy. Part of being a great detective is using all your resources.”

“Like my zombie partner who can see victims’ memories by eating their brains, yeah. I want to do this one right.”

“You’re such a Hufflepuff,” she teases.

“Shut up.”

“I’m just being thematic.”

“Don’t remind me.” He lets out a breath. “You ready?”

“Ready.”

Aside from her total lack of background memories from the victim, Clarke is excited for the job. If anyone had asked three years ago, she would have said she’d never be *excited* about investigating a murder, but people really can get used to anything. She has a good job that keeps her busy and satisfied, as well as providing her with a difficult-to-obtain and vital source of sustenance, all her friends are now aware of and accept her status as the undead, and she’s doing pretty well.

Besides, she’s bringing murderers to justice with one of her best friends, and this weekend they’re doing it at a *Harry Potter* convention. Who wouldn’t be excited about that?

Bellamy gets their bags out of the trunk with a sigh, which basically answers that question.

“I know you like *Harry Potter*, don’t pretend you don’t.”

“I like playing *Hearthstone* after work, that doesn’t mean I want to go to a tournament. Hardcore fans are scary. And it’s not just a *Harry Potter* convention,” he adds. “That’s the fandom we’re representing, but there’s a lot more.”

“I know.” She grins. “And I’ll protect you. That’s the point of our cover, right? I’m the fan, you’re my long-suffering boyfriend.”

“That’s the plan, yeah.” He shoulders his bag and then hers before she can object. “Come on, let’s
get this over with.”

*

Even without her skipping out on the brains, Clarke thinks this case would have felt like a test. It’s their first major case since Bellamy found out about her, and one where it’s just the two of them, away from home. They’re sharing a hotel room too, and that means Bellamy is going to have firsthand interaction with, well, her. For all they spend time together, he’s been spared the day-to-day realities of being a zombie. They’re work friends, and this isn’t them becoming friend friends, but it is a new level of intimacy.

And Clarke’s not opposed to an increase in intimacy. It’s just that she knows she’s not exactly easy to live with these days.

“You have to eat brains?” She can’t read his tone, but if he’s disgusted, he shows no sign of it. He might even be curious.

“Zombie. It won’t interfere with the case, but I don’t want to go too long without eating and risk losing control.”

He nods. “Yeah, I’d appreciate if you didn’t try to eat me.” He watches her for a second, and then adds, “So, what personality are you going to get this time?”

“Oh, no. I shouldn’t get one from this.”

“You shouldn’t?”

“Monty and I did some experiments, when I first–when it happened. Just figuring out how the memories showed up, how long the personality changes lasted, stuff like that. This brain has been completely frozen and then thawed, so it won’t have any effect on me. It’s purely nutritional.”

“Huh.” He drums his fingers on the table. “How did you decide to tell Monty?”

She smiles a little. “I didn’t. He figured it out, and he’s Monty, so he’s basically prepared for an eventual zombie apocalypse. At first I’m pretty sure he was expecting me to turn on him any day, but he was hoping if I did it would give him good data on how to fight the outbreak.”

“And he’s working on a cure, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you want that?”

She stares. “Are you kidding? Of course I do.”

“Just checking. I didn’t want to–” He runs his hand through his hair. “It sounds shitty to me, but I figured maybe there were pros that outweighed the cons or something. I didn’t want to say I hoped he found one and then find out that you like being a zombie.”

“You don’t have to worry so much about saying something wrong,” she says, gentle. “I get that it’s fucked up. If you need to freak out.”

“It’s freaky, yeah. But I figure you’ve been a zombie the whole time I’ve known you, so–” He shrugs. “You’re the same person I’ve worked with for years. Except when you’re not.”

“Except when I’m not?”
He gestures to the tupperware she’s eating from, half a smile on his lips. “The wild mood swings.”

“I figured if you really thought I was a psychic, you’d write it off as eccentricity. It’s not my fault you don’t believe in psychics.”

“Good way to get the attention off the zombie thing.” He clucks his tongue. “Okay, I’m going to go grab some food for myself. I assume you’re set.”

“Yeah. But if you want company, I’ll come with you.”

His smile is warm, the kind she doesn’t get from him very often. Maybe, now that everything is out in the open, she’ll get more. “Yeah, company sounds nice.”

* *

“Okay,” she says the next morning. They have an hour before the con opens, which means plenty of time to come up with a plan. “So, we know the victim was very involved in—what fandom again?”

“She’s a cosplayer,” he says. “So she’s a part of that community more than a single fandom. A lot of her friends and associates are here, and she was involved in founding and planning the con. I’ve already talked to her family and friends, but we’ve been having trouble finding her online contacts. Or connecting their online and offline identities, I guess. So we’re going to be asking about Tenshi, not about Angela.”

“Did you ask Monty about this one? If anyone knows how the internet works—”

“If this doesn’t work we will. But she’s pretty well known, and she was posting on social media about being here. So if you ask about it, it’s not going to be suspicious.”

“So basically she’s my favorite cosplayer and I want to find out about her.”

“Yeah. And I’ve got a list of other cosplayers we’re looking at. Honestly, I’m just expecting a lot of buzz about her not being here, so we should pay attention and see what we can find out. And I’m hoping that’s going to let us figure out which of the other attendees are her friends and which ones we should be talking to formally.”

“You know what else would let us figure that out?”

“Good, old-fashioned detective work,” he says, firm, and she smiles.

“That’s exactly what I was thinking.”

On the one hand, it is hard to ignore how much easier this would be if Bellamy wasn’t being stubborn about the whole brain-eating thing. On the other, Clarke will admit that real detective work really isn’t so bad. Not that they don’t do real detective work the rest of the time, but it is a different vibe than their usual. It hadn’t occurred to her that Bellamy would feel like he wasn’t really working, when he took advantage of her information, but it’s not a surprise either, not now that she’s thinking about it. He is that kind of stubborn.

Pretending to be his girlfriend isn’t so bad either. She’s not convinced it’s necessary, or that it would draw attention if she and Bellamy were just two people enjoying the con together. But she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t enjoying it, holding his hand and leaning in close to talk. It’s stupid too, of course, kind of unspeakably so, because she can’t date anyone right now, not with the whole zombie issue, and she’s been trying hard to ignore how much she likes him.
But she really, really does. And now he knows everything, and he still seems to like her as much as he ever did. She’d always thought his finding out would lose her a job and a valued relationship, and knowing she still has both, that he’s still happy to be around her and values her, is a little overwhelming.

It’s probably good she doesn’t have to deal with anyone else’s brain on top of all that. It’s a busy enough weekend as it is.

Still, the case isn’t too bad, as they go. Bellamy has done enough legwork that he figures out the major players quickly, and between the two of them they put together a list of suspects and come up with a pretty decent timeline of what would have happened. They even get to enjoy the con some, after they arrest their suspect.

“I feel like I missed out on eating this one,” she muses, in the hotel room, and his eyebrows shoot up.

“What?”

“I could have made us costumes! It would have been cute. You’d make a great James Potter.”

“Thanks, I think.” He pauses, watching her. “It’s mostly just—presentation, right?”

“Presentation?”

“When you eat someone. It doesn’t change that much of what you do, just speech patterns and hobbies, basically. You don’t become another person.”

“No, not really. Sometimes I get—impulses, I guess? Stuff I wouldn’t want to do if I was just myself. But, yeah, it’s more like hobbies. It’s hard to explain. It doesn’t usually—I’m still myself, but different aspects get emphasized.”

“I guess that makes sense.” He clears his throat. “That was, uh—that was the part that gave me the most trouble. Not that the whole zombie thing wasn’t—it was all a lot to take in. But I felt like I’d never actually met you.”

“Really?”

He shrugs one shoulder. “How was I supposed to know which parts were you?”

“That’s why you wanted to make sure the stuff I was eating this weekend wouldn’t affect me.”

“I wanted to make sure I knew the real you, yeah.”

“And?”

“And you’re how I hoped you’d be. Except for the zombie thing,” he adds, careful.

“Not a zombie fan?”

“It complicates this plan I had to ask you out, yeah.”

If not for that complication, she’d kiss him. As it is, she just smiles. “It’s a little complicated, yeah. But—this is me, if you want to try to figure it out.”

He smiles back, takes her hand to give it a quick squeeze. “Yeah. I’d like that.”
Crawl Inside

Chapter Summary

Fill for fanfeminist! Prompt: they've been neighbors forever, and regularly go visit via the others bedroom window. They dont keep it a secret on purpose, but dont realize its weird until one of them goes into the others room without realizing someone is already in there.

i. ten

Bellamy hates his mom’s new boyfriend.

She’s had boyfriends before, but he’s never actually hated any of them, not while she was dating them. But Bart wants to be a father to Bellamy in just the bad ways, wants to be the one who punishes him for screwing up and ignores all the good marks on his report card to focus on the two areas where he needs improvement.

That’s his excuse for sending Bellamy to bed without dinner, telling Mom that it’s the only way he’ll learn.

“Boys need discipline,” he says. “If you don’t teach him what’s right now, he’ll never learn. You have to take a firm hand.”

Mom doesn’t argue, and he hates them, both of them, with a passion. It was a good report card. One of his needs improvement scores was on penmanship. He doesn’t have to have good handwriting. Plenty of people don’t. Doctors don’t. He’s seen Clarke’s mom write notes; he knows that’s not just a joke in TV shows.

Mom comes to check on him an hour later, when he’s reading.

“I know you think it’s unfair, but Bart is just trying to help.”

“Trying to help who?”

“I know it’s hard for you, not having a father figure in your life.”

“I’d rather not have anyone than have him.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do so.”

She sighs again. “You’ll feel better in the morning.”

“Not if I don’t have anything to eat,” he mutters.

His mother doesn’t have a response to that, just leans over, kisses his hair, and turns off the light on her way out.

He makes himself read two more chapters of his book, and then he carefully opens up the window
and climbs out onto the roof.

It’s not a bad path from Bellamy’s window to the ground, and it goes over the garage, so even if he’s loud (which he isn’t, he and Clarke checked), Mom doesn’t usually hear him. Once he’s gotten to the end of the garage, all he has to do is climb down onto the fence, and then from the fence to the ground. He could fall, but he never has before. He’s good at this.

Clarke’s house is behind his, and there’s a fence between their yards, but that’s never been a problem. There’s a gap in the fence behind the shed that his mom doesn’t know about, and he can still fit through it.

Getting to Clarke’s window is a little harder. He has to climb up a tree, and the branches are just a little too high. But he’s a good climber, and he wants to see Clarke. If he knocked on the door this late, her parents would worry, and they’d tell his mom, and he’d get in even more trouble.

So he has to improvise.

Her light is out, but he does their special knock, and after just a few minutes, she comes over and opens the window.

“Bellamy?” she whispers, looking worried.

“Hi.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I hate Bart.”

She moves out of the way so he can come in. “I know. What happened?”

“He said my report card wasn’t good enough and sent me to bed without dinner. And Mom let him.”

“You didn’t have dinner?” she asks, sounding horrified.

“No.”

“Are you hungry?”

“Just annoyed.”

“Are you sure?”

He smiles. “Do you actually have any food up here?”

“Not much,” she says. “But I have a candy bar.”

“You have a candy bar and you didn’t eat it yet?”

“I was saving it!” She goes over to her dresser and pulls out a Kit-Kat. It’s fun-size, not a real candy bar, but it’s still good.

“Thanks. Do you want half?”

“It’s okay. I had dinner.” She worries her lip. “Sorry about Bart. I hate him.”
“I hate him too. Thanks for the candy.”

“You’re welcome. Are you going to go home?” she asks. “You could stay.”

“Mom might feel guilty,” he says. “I should go home. If she notices I’m not there, it’ll be bad.”

“I guess. Sorry,” she says again.

“You didn’t do anything.”

“I’m sorry that it’s happening. I hope she breaks up with him soon.”

“She always breaks up with them.” He sighs. “Okay, I should go.”

“If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure. I think I’m grounded too, so—I’ll see you when I can.”

“Okay. If you come over tomorrow night, I’ll have some food for you. Just in case.”

He has to smile; Bart might suck, but at least his best friend is great. “Thanks, Clarke. Goodnight.”

“Night, Bellamy.”

ii. fifteen

Nine times out of ten, Bellamy knows better than to fall asleep at Clarke’s, which means that, when he does do it, circumstances must be dire.

Dr. Griffin seems to agree, because she shakes him awake with a weary, “Time to get up, Bellamy.”

Clarke is still asleep, curled into herself on the other side of the bed, and since Dr. Griffin doesn’t try to wake her, he doesn’t either. He slides out of bed carefully, glad he didn’t even take off his jeans, and Dr. Griffin jerks her head to the door.

He follows her into the hall, she closes the door, and they stand for a second in awkward silence.

“Coffee?” she finally offers.

“Yeah, thanks.”

Bellamy has always assumed Dr. Griffin doesn’t understand his friendship with Clarke, in part because he doesn’t understand it himself. It was a mistake of geography, the two of them becoming friends, something that never would have happened if her house wasn’t behind his. They don’t go to the same school, they don’t run in the same social circles.

They’re still best friends.

“You snuck in?” Dr. Griffin asks.

He doesn’t see much point in denying it. “I was worried. I didn’t want her to be alone.”

She nods. “Ordinarily, I’d be telling you sleepovers have to go through me. But—I’m glad you were there for her.”

“Understood.” He takes a sip of his coffee. “How are you doing?”
Her mouth tugs up in a wry half smile. She looks exhausted and wrung out; he assumes she fell asleep crying, the same as Clarke did. “I’m doing the best I can. Thank you for asking.”

He already offered his condolences yesterday, and they felt as hollow then as they do now. He lost his father before he ever knew him, and the pain of that is different from Jake’s death now, today.

“Why don’t you go back up to Clarke’s room?” she asks, to his surprise. “I’ll give your mother a call, let her know you’re here. I’m sure she’ll understand.”

If he made the call, he’d get a talking to, death or no death, but Dr. Griffin should be able to handle it.

Still, her husband just died.

“You don’t have to. I can call her.”

“I think it will sound better coming from me. It’s fine, Bellamy,” she adds, before he can protest any further. “Go look after Clarke.”

A lump rises in his throat; maybe she doesn’t mind his being friends with Clarke so much after all.

“I will. Let us know if you need anything.”

Clarke’s still asleep when he gets back, so he grabs Graceling off her bookshelf and settles in with his coffee.

She rolls over and curls up against him. “What happened?”

“Nothing. Just wanted some coffee.”

“Did my mom see you?”

“Yeah, it was fine.” He slides his hand into her hair, gentle. “How are you doing?”

“Shitty.”

“I figured. Go back to sleep.”

“Ohkay. Thanks for being here.”

“Obviously,” he says. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Bellamy gets home for spring break a week before Clarke does, which always seems unfair. It wouldn’t be that hard for their schools to coordinate so they have the whole vacation together. It would just be polite.

Clarke’s getting back late on Friday, and while he’s sure he could just call her and have her let him in, it seems like a lot of work when he could just climb up to her window.

The light is on and the window is unlocked, so she must have had the same thought.

He taps the glass, just so she has warning, and when there’s no response, he opens it up and slides in.
“If you’re not the neighbor I’m calling the cops,” someone says, and he jerks up to see a gorgeous
girl with long, dark hair staring at him.

He scrambles for an explanation for her presence. Clarke is single right now, so it can’t be a
girlfriend, and she didn’t mention anyone coming back with her, but there were storms in the
northeast, so maybe someone’s flight got canceled.

Either way, she’s already in the room and he was breaking in through the window, so he’s
definitely in the wrong here.

“Bellamy, yeah,” he says.

“And this is just your thing.”

He frowns. “What is?”

“You climb into Clarke’s window?”

It feels like a trick question. “Just when it’s after like eight.”

The girl stares at him, then shakes her head. “Wow, you don’t think that’s weird. I thought it must
just be Clarke. Nope, you guys are somehow just convinced this is a thing that happens.”

“Did you never watch Clarissa Explains It All?” he asks, but there is this prickling awareness up
his neck.

It’s not as if he never thought it was weird. One time, when they were fourteen, he knocked on the
window and she called back that she was changing, and he’d thought maybe that was the end, that
she’d tell him to never come back. That they’d crossed that mysterious threshold of being too old.

But once she was done, she opened the window with a smile, and the moment passed.

“Dude,” says the girl.

“Sorry, but who are you again?”

“Raven. My flight got canceled.”

“Sorry. Nice to meet you, thanks for telling me my life is weird, I guess.”

“Come on, she said her hot neighbor came in through her window but that it wasn’t a euphemism.
Of course I didn’t believe her.”

“Raven,” says Clarke, at the door. It’s just as well, because otherwise Bellamy would have asked if
Clarke called him hot, or if Raven was editorializing. Which would not have helped any part of his
life, honestly.

“I was just saying. You done with the bathroom?”

“Yeah.”

“Cool, then I’m going to shower. Have fun catching up.”

That’s definitely a euphemism, and Bellamy feels himself flush. “Nice to meet you too.”

Once they’re alone, Clarke bites her lip, smiling a little. “Hi.”
“Hi.”

“Sorry about her. I told her you’d probably show up and she made a huge deal about it.”

“I guess I could have just come in through the door like a normal person.”

“Fuck that.” She looks him up and down. “Do I get a hug?”

“Oh, yeah, obviously.”

He wraps her up in his arms, and she burrows in, tucking her nose against his neck. She’s freshly showered and smells clean and bright and perfect. They talk, of course, when they’re at school, but he still misses her so much he can’t breathe sometimes.

“This is kind of weird, right?” he murmurs. “She wasn’t wrong.”

“ Weird how?”

“I don’t do this with any of my other friends.”

“You don’t live this close to them.”

“I wouldn’t, though. Just you.”

She pulls back, studying him, eyes sharp. He loves her in the easiest way possible, has loved her since before he even knew it. And he thinks he could go on loving her like that for the rest of his life, could love other people too, without feeling guilty about it. It doesn’t have to be anything, but it could be. If it wasn’t, he’d always wonder what it would have been like.

So maybe now is the time to find out.

“Just me?” she asks, and he tucks her hair back behind her ear.

“Sorry, do you have a lot of people climbing in your window?”

She laughs. “No, you’re right. Just you.”

Even though there are probably better things to say, he asks, “Did you tell Raven I’m your hot neighbor?”

“Obviously.”

“Cool,” he says, and kisses her.

It’s just like he hoped it would be.

iv. twenty-five

The window in Clarke’s dressing room is probably too small for him to actually climb through, and even if he could, it would really mess up his tux, but tradition is important, so he does the secret knock and waits for Clarke to call, “It’s bad luck for you to see me, dumbass!”

“There are curtains, I can’t see you.”

“So you’re just hanging outside like a creeper?”

“I wanted to say hi.”
“We’re getting married in an hour. I figured we’d probably get to talk then.”

“This is the last time you’re going to have a window that isn’t mine too, okay?”

They’ve been living together since they finished college, so it’s not as if cohabitation is going to be some new thing for them, but of course, Clarke gets it. Clarke always gets it.

“Okay, yeah. Do you want to come in?”

“Not really, just—for old time’s sake.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll lock yourself out of the apartment and have to knock to get in sooner or later. We’re not losing this.”

“Sorry for trying to do something romantic on our wedding day.”

“You should be.” The curtain moves back, and Clarke opens the door. She’s got a blanket around her shoulders, so he can’t see her dress, just her face. “You’re a dork.”

“I know.” He leans in for a kiss. “That’s all I wanted.”

“Definitely worth the risk of a lifetime of bad luck. Go back to your dressing room. If you don’t make it to our wedding because you were too busy trying to climb in my window, I’m never going to forgive you.”

He gives her one more kiss and pulls back. “Don’t worry. I wouldn’t miss it.”
Clarke knows are worse ways to spend Christmas Eve than trapped in a shopping mall with her ex. She could be in a hospital, for example, working like she did last year, or, even worse, there for an actual emergency with herself or a loved one. She could be starving, or homeless, or in some actually bad situation. Hell, she could be stuck here with Finn or Lexa, which would be a thousand times worse than being with Bellamy.

Because, honestly, the worst part of being with Bellamy is that their breakup hasn’t entirely scabbed over, and every time she looks at him, it chips away at her stubborn belief that she’s fine, that she doesn’t regret it.

Maybe Finn or Lexa would be better after all. They would have had an uncomfortable greeting, a quick chat, and then she would have come up with an excuse to go somewhere else. The mall isn’t so large she couldn’t have avoided them, and they probably would have let her.

With Bellamy, she’s already trying to come up with a list of questions to prolong the conversation.

He’s the one who approached her, coming up while she was browsing books, hesitant like he wasn’t sure he’d be welcome. It’s the first time she’s seen him since they broke up almost exactly a year ago, and the sight of him was a shock, but with greetings and the weather sure is frightful pleasantries out of the way, she’s already getting used to it.

She still keeps stealing glances at him, but that’s a different issue.

“You’re not going out to see Octavia this year?” she asks, as they leave the bookstore. It feels like thin ice, skating close to the dangerous waters of their breakup.

“No.” He sighs. “She’s in Norway now, actually.”

“Norway?”

“Apparently she was right about her online marketability. I didn’t think she could actually make a living running around the world posting hiking pictures on Instagram, but she marketed herself, got sponsors—” He shrugs. “I’m not ready for the social media age.”

“I could have told you that,” she teases without thinking, and to her relief, he smiles.

“You did tell me that.”

“I tried, anyway. Still, I’m sorry,” she adds. “It must be tough, having her so far away.”

“It’s got its ups and downs. I don’t know. I think someday we’re going to find a happy medium between how much I need to know how she’s doing and how independent she needs to be, but right now, we’re still working on it.”
“If it helps, that sounded really mature and emotionally healthy.”

He snorts. “Thanks. I’ve been practicing in front of the mirror.” He looks at her hard, considering, and when he asks, “So, who’s the last-minute shopping for?” she thinks it probably wasn’t really what he wanted to say.

But it’s not hard to figure out what that would have been. Not with their history.

“My mom. I was putting it off because I never know what to get her, and she never knows what day it is anyway. I’ll send this late and she won’t even realize I missed Christmas.”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” he says, deliberate.

“I knew it was Christmas Eve.”

“And did you actually know you were putting off shopping this long?”

He’s trying to make it teasing, but the tone doesn’t entirely land. It’s getting too close to old wounds.

Clarke considers her and Bellamy’s breakup a perfect storm of shittiness. She’d been working herself to death at the hospital, convinced that was the only way to become the success she thought she should be, while Bellamy was dealing with his sister drifting further and further away. Their frustrations hadn’t really been with each other, but she couldn’t be the partner he needed, and he couldn’t be the one she needed either.

After years of flirting, it turned out they’d ended up finally getting together at the worst possible time, and Clarke’s regretted how their short disaster of a relationship went ever since, without having a very good idea of how to fix it. Everything Bellamy had said about her priorities had been true, and even if her life has changed since then, she’s never known how to fix it. The problem certainly wasn’t just that she worked too much; he fucked up too. At this point, she’s half-convinced that they just weren’t meant to be romantically involved. That they had some sort of fundamental incompatibility.

But maybe they could be friends again. Maybe that would be enough.

“I knew, yeah. I kept hoping I was going to find something online so I wouldn’t have to go to the post office.”

He smiles. “Yeah, that’s the real pain. But no luck?”

“I’m not good at online shopping. I need to see my options.”

“But still nothing?”

“Still nothing.”

“So, where are you going next?”

“Best Buy.” She frowns. “What were you here for? You’re always on top of Christmas shopping.”

“One of my coworkers found out I didn’t have Christmas Eve plans, so she invited me to a party. Which is now canceled because of weather, so I’m just stuck out here instead.”

“Sorry.”
“I don’t care that much. I wasn’t really excited about going out.”

“You, not excited about a social event?” she teases, and he laughs.

“I know, it’s shocking. Best Buy?”

The relief that he’s coming with her is so profound it’s almost staggering; she tries not to smile too widely.

“Best Buy.”

*

She buys her mother a FitBit, because it seems like her mother’s kind of thing, and Bellamy stuffs his hands in his pockets, waiting awkwardly for her to be done. Every time he has a chance to leave and doesn’t, her heart soars, and she has to remind herself that they were always friends. Getting along was never their problem.

“You think the food court is open?” she asks.

“Probably. Everyone’s stuck here past closing time, the stores are probably thrilled.” He makes a face. “Sucks for the employees.”

The mall was supposed to close at five, but the storm came in suddenly around four-fifteen, roads became impassable out of nowhere, and now they’re stuck here until the plows can clear the parking lot.

“We can put a twenty in the tip jar,” she offers, and he smiles.

“Can’t hurt. What were you thinking?”

They talk options on the way to the food court, end up at the Chinese place because Bellamy’s craving egg rolls. There are a decent number of people milling around—at least she wasn’t the only one caught off guard by the storm—but they don’t have any trouble finding a table with relative privacy.

It doesn’t exactly feel like a date, but it’s nice.

“Is this going to be a problem with work?” he asks, once they’ve started eating. “When’s your next shift?”

“Tuesday,” she says, and waits for his surprise.

It doesn’t take long. “You actually got Christmas off?”

“No, we’re closed on Christmas.” She smiles a little. “I switched jobs.”

A clump of rice drops from his chopsticks. “Switched jobs?”

“Yeah, I’m working at a clinic now. Fewer hours, less overtime—it’s not perfect, but the work/life balance is a lot better.”

“What does your mom have to say about that?”

She shrugs one shoulder. “She thinks it was bad for my overall career. There are fewer opportunities for job advancement, and the pay is worse. But it’s my life, not hers.”
“And you’re happy?”

“Yeah. It’s so much better.” She worries her lip, trying to calculate the correct ratio of apology to gratitude to regret. “I shouldn’t have snapped at you. When you told me I wasn’t happy—you were right, and I shouldn’t have lashed out.”

His mouth tugs up. “I shouldn’t have brought it up in the middle of a meltdown. We were both having a shitty time and decided to make it worse for each other. We both fucked up. But we’re both doing better now, right?” he adds, and there’s a hopeful lilt to his tone.

She thinks there is, anyway.

“I am, yeah.”

“Good. I’d, uh—I’d been wanting to call you. I hated that we just totally lost touch.”

“Yeah, me too. Is it weird that I felt like I had to get my life right first? Either I had to be happy with the job I was in or get a new one.”

“No, I get that.” He taps his chopsticks on the styrofoam container with his food in it. “Maybe we’re just supposed to be—friends when things are going well.”

The hitch in his voice at the word friends is either awesome or heartbreaking, and the fact that he could still break her heart is definitely just scary. Not surprising, really, but scary all the same. It’s probably the biggest reason she never got in touch again, the nagging fear that he wouldn’t want anything to do with her.

“So maybe we just need to get better at dealing with crises,” she offers.

His whole face relaxes with his smile. “Maybe, yeah.”

The silence that follows isn’t exactly awkward, but Clarke doesn’t know how to fill it. She wants to tell him that she misses him, that she regrets losing him, but it feels like a lot to confess in a mall food court.

The PA crackles into life, postponing the issue. “Attention shoppers. We are still working to clear the road and parking lot. The theater will be opening for special showings of Star Wars: The Last Jedi for any patrons who would like to purchase tickets. We apologize for this inconvenience.”

Bellamy catches her eye. “How many times have you seen that?”

“Just once.”

“Wow, you’re behind. Did you not like it?”

“It’s only been a week, shut up.”

He grins. “So, you want to check it out?”

“If we can’t leave anyway.” She frowns. “You still don’t have a car, right?”

“No, I took the bus. I’ll probably get a Lyft home once we’re cleared out.”

“You don’t have to, I can give you a ride.”

He starts a response and then stops it, frowning. “If it’s not too late, sure. That would be nice.”
“You were going to tell me I didn’t have to, weren’t you.”

“And I know you know that, so–yeah, a ride would be great. I’ll pay for your movie ticket, so we’re even.”

“For the negligible cost of gas, sure. I’ll get candy.”

It’s an easy pattern to fall back into, movies with Bellamy. She remembers what snacks he likes, he knows where she likes to sit. They’ve done this dozens of times, throughout their friendship and relationship, and it feels like getting back into the right groove.

She leaves her hand on the arm rest between them, too, like she used to, and after a minute, Bellamy reaches over and takes it.

After the movie, he lets go, and she’s the one to reclaim his hand, lacing their fingers together as they leave. It can’t possibly be this easy, but she thinks there are worse messages to send than that she wants it to be.

“The parking lot has been cleared, and you’re free to leave,” an exhausted-looking cinema employee tells them, as they leave the theater. “Happy holidays.”

“Happy holidays,” she echoes.

They’re quiet as they make their way out to the parking lot, and once they’re outside, it’s even quieter, the whole world white and soft with snowfall.

“So, uh, I was thinking,” says Bellamy, not whispering, but low, trying not to break the spell of the night.

“What?”

“It seems like neither of us has plans for Christmas Eve. So if you wanted to–” He lets out a quiet laugh, squeezes her fingers. “I miss you so fucking much, Clarke.”

“I miss you too. All the time.”

“Good,” he says, and tugs her in by their linked hands, ducking his head to kiss her, soft and careful, perfect.

Somehow, against all odds, it’s actually an amazing Christmas Eve. And Christmas is shaping up to be even better.
Fill for loball22! Prompt: one of my coworkers told me to stop flirting with the hot guy at work, cause she saw him first. Little does she know that the ring on his finger was put there by me.

It starts off perfectly reasonably, as far as Clarke is concerned. On their way to the store on Clarke’s first day, Bellamy says. “So, no one at work knows about us.”

She considers this information for a second. “Miller does.”

“Okay, yeah. But none of the regular staff.”

“And by knows about us, you mean what exactly?”

“I mean I don’t talk about my personal life at work. You’re a seasonal worker, and I didn’t tell anyone we’re engaged. You’re only working for a couple weeks, and I don’t want them to think you’re getting preferential treatment.”

“No one’s noticed the ring?”

He smiles, toying with the metal. “Guys don’t usually wear engagement rings. I think they just assume I like the ring and put it on a random finger.”

“Which you would.”

“I would.” He clears his throat. “If you’re uncomfortable not telling them you’re my fiancée, you can just let them know. But I haven’t yet, and I didn’t want you to be surprised.”

She knocks her shoulder against his. “But you’re not worried I’m offended?”

“Should I be? Are you?”

“No and no. Just curious why not.”

“I was pretty sure you knew I loved you and wouldn’t assume I didn’t tell my staff because I wanted to have affairs or something. If anyone ever asked, I would have told them, but no one has yet, so—”

“So that makes sense. I don’t mind. I’m just Clarke Griffin, holiday temp staff.”

He gives her hand a quick squeeze. “Thanks again for doing this.”

“School’s on break, I need money. Win/win.” She grins. “And I’ll get to hear your employees gossip about you.”

“Fuck, is it too late to fire you?”

“Way too late. I’m already wearing the t-shirt.”
“Yeah, you’re right. Guess I’m stuck.”

It’s her turn to squeeze his hand. “Guess so.”

*

Clarke’s plan is to work at the bookstore for three weeks, while she’s on break from school and Bellamy’s at his busiest. The extra cash is appreciated this time of year, and Bellamy’s basically freaking out non-stop the whole time, so anything she can do to alleviate that is nothing but good, in her opinion.

She used to spend a lot of time in the bookstore, before she and Bellamy started dating, and sometimes she feels like a bit of an asshole for spending so much less time there now. At the same time, it’s not as if she didn’t realize a lot of her motivation for going in as much as she did was how hot Bellamy was and how much she wanted to flirt with him. And once they were dating, then living together, then engaged, it wasn’t nearly as important to be at the bookstore to see him. She sees him all the time.

Plus, grad school is kicking her ass.

In the years since Clarke was a regular, the store has been doing well, expanded some, and he’s hired a bunch of new staff. So even though she’s theoretically familiar with a lot of the processes, she’s still the new girl, one of three temp staff members who are mostly around to answer questions, help locate books, and do gift-wrapping. It feels like a perfectly unobjectionable way to spend a few weeks, and she’s even looking forward to it.

But she should have seen the awkwardness coming as soon as Bellamy said his staff didn’t know about her.

The thing is, it’s all completely logical to Clarke. Bellamy’s their boss, not their friend, and he’s a big believer in that being a firm line. He and Miller are co-owners, so that’s different, but the regular staff are largely high-school and college students, and they’re not Bellamy’s peers. But he’s still, well, Bellamy. He’s intelligent and interesting and, well, hot. And the air of mystery just makes the employees more curious about him.

The questions start almost immediately.

“You came in with Bellamy,” says the girl she’s shadowing, Fox.

“Yeah. We live in the same building,” she says, because it’s true. “That’s why he hired me.”

“Oh! So you’re, like, friends?”

“Yeah, kind of.”

“What’s he like?”

“You work for him,” she says, smiling a little. “Don’t you know?”

“Does he have a girlfriend?”

It’s been less than ten minutes and Clarke is already carefully talking around lies about her own relationship with the man she’s planning to marry at some point. This might not be as simple as she thought.
“No girlfriend, I don’t think. Why?”

“Some of the other girls have a bet. If he’s single or married or gay or what.”

“Single, married, gay?” Clarke asks, making a face. “You know those aren’t all mutually exclusive, right? And definitely not the only options. He could be gay and married. Or bi and engaged. Or–” She fumbles for a third thing, so she won’t leave off on the actual truth. “Asexual and single.”

“But you don’t know?”

“I assume if he wanted you guys to know, he’d tell you. Has anyone just asked?”

“We don’t want to be weird.”

“Bad news, you’re definitely being weird,” she teases. “I don’t see what the big deal is.”

“It’s not a big deal. It’s just weird, right? We don’t know anything about him.”

“I know he’s a nice, smart guy who seems cool,” Clarke says. It’s still all technically true. She’s not lying.

“I guess,” says Fox. “But let me know if you find anything out!”

She has to smile. “Yeah, I’ll keep you posted.”

*

“Your employees have a betting pool on your relationship status and sexuality,” she tells him, as they’re walking home.

“Yeah?” he asks. “Anyone come close?”

“I don’t have access to the pool yet.”

He snorts. “Yet?”

“I’ve got two weeks, right? I’ll figure it out.”

*

Speculation about Bellamy’s romantic entanglements really does run rampant, and as Clarke somewhat expected, she has trouble really talking around her relationship with him. Bellamy tells her she can just tell them any time she wants to, but it’s become kind of a fun game, honestly. And she does feel a little guilty about it, especially with the people she likes, but–it’s hilarious. And the kids seem to enjoy it, so it feels kind of mean, to just give them the answer like that. They deserve to figure it out for themselves.

Unfortunately, it’s pretty easy to figure out the wrong things.

Clarke’s pretty far out of the high school/college scene, so she’s been blessedly spared the kind of relationship drama that comes from an environment like this. But she does remember what it was like, and so it’s not surprising when, after a week, Fox and Charlotte take her aside.

“Listen, Clarke, we all like you, but–we need some answers,” says Fox. It feels like she’s going to get fired, but they definitely don’t have the authority.
“Answers?”

“Are you flirting with Bellamy?” Charlotte demands. “Because you spend a lot of time with him.”

“I do, yeah. Is that a problem?”

Charlotte huffs. “Haven’t you seen him and Miller?”

“Him and Miller?”

“Charlotte thinks they’ve got a thing,” says Fox. “Which they don’t.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re homophobic and you want him to have a thing for you,” says Charlotte, and Clarke holds up her hands.

“Guys. Come on. You know he has a life outside the store, right? His only romantic prospects aren’t me and Miller.”

“Yeah, but he and Miller would be so cute,” says Charlotte. “And Miller is definitely gay. They’re already business partners. If Miller was a girl—”

“Do not make this a homophobia thing! I just don’t think he and Miller are secretly pining over each other. If Bellamy’s gay—”

“He’s bi,” Clarke says. “Bisexuality is a thing, okay? So he could be into me or Miller.”

“See?” says Charlotte. “He’s bi! And he’s wearing that ring because he and Miller are totally engaged.”

“Guys don’t wear engagement rings!”

“If they’re engaged to other guys they do.”

“You don’t know that, you’re assuming because you want him and Miller to be a thing. He could just like the ring!”

“You guys know this is ridiculous, right?” Clarke asks. “Like—he has people in his life you guys know nothing about. You didn’t know I existed until a week ago.”

“We’re getting off-topic,” Charlotte says, in a huff. “The important thing is that he and Miller would be great together, right? We’re all agreed.”

“Yeah,” says Clarke. “They’d probably be cute.”

“And you’ll stop flirting with Bellamy. So Miller doesn’t get his heart broken.”

“If Bellamy wants to flirt with me, that’s kind of his call, right? And Miller can fight for him if he wants.”

“You’re going to fight Miller?” asks Fox, horrified.

“You do like Bellamy, I knew it!” says Charlotte.

“I’m just saying, I’ve known him for a while. I’m not going suddenly change how I act around him because you guys don’t like it.”
“And if he asked you out, you wouldn’t say no, right?” Fox presses.

“I think that’s between me and him. And my break’s almost over,” she adds, with an apologetic smile. “But thanks for the pep talk. Glad to know you guys think I could threaten Bellamy’s possibly engagement to Miller.”

“I didn’t say that,” Charlotte protests, and Clarke just waves over her shoulder.

* *

“Just so you guys know, at least some of your employees either actually think you’re engaged, or really want you to be. And they think I’m threatening that.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” says Miller. “Have you guys considered just telling them that you’re together? That sounds a lot easier.”

“But less funny,” says Monty.

“Whose side are you on?”

“Are the employees betting on their relationship?” Monty continues, ignoring his boyfriend. “Can I get in on that?”

“Maybe we should get married,” Miller says to Bellamy. “Assuming you’re dealing with this in a normal, human way.”

“Definitely not. You’re on your own here.”

“Fuck you too.”

* *

Given how busy they are, Clarke finds it kind of amazing how much time the employees find for their bizarre, almost entirely self-made drama. They divide into two camps, and even the previously unaligned get involved, by virtue of everyone else caring so much. Charlotte and her band try to separate Clarke from Bellamy whenever possible, which Clarke lets them do because she genuinely doesn’t care, while Fox and her friends try to get them together more. Miller does his best to just be completely unavailable, which is close enough to Miller’s regular state of being that none of them find it suspicious.

Bellamy flirts with her a lot, which is kind of nice. Not that she misses the early stages of their relationship, particularly, but there’s something fun and kind of nostalgic about being back in the bookstore, chatting with Bellamy across the counter when it’s slow.

But they maybe should have just come clean before it got to this.

“Why do your closets lock?” Clarke grumbles. “It’s like you’ve never even a romantic comedy.”

“It doesn’t lock, it’s barricaded,” he grumbles. “Is murder still illegal?”

“Murdering your employees because you were fucking with them is definitely illegal.”

“Are we sure I’m not manslaughtering them? I could live with manslaughter.”

“They won’t leave us here for long.” She sighs, leaning against him. “We could just tell them it worked. They locked us in here, our feelings got the better of us, we like each other so much we
“Immediately got engaged.”

“Their understanding of romance seems to have come from Hallmark movies, so they might actually believe it. Sorry I never mentioned you,” he adds, to her surprise. “I didn’t think it would ever really come up. I didn’t even realize they didn’t know until you were coming in to work.”

“I’m not offended. I know how you are.”

“Yeah, but a quick this is my fiancee, Clarke, she’s helping out for the holiday would have cleared everything up.”

“But way less fun.”

“Since when is getting locked in a closet fun?”

“Okay, yeah, not this. But I appreciated getting the behind-the-scenes look at you as a boss. There’s no way they would have told me all that stuff if they knew we were engaged.”

“So we were actively deceiving them for insider information. Even better.”

“I never lied. And I think they’re all more aware of bisexuality.”

He snorts. “Oh good. But we are still stuck in a closet. Literally.”

“So let’s make sure they get what they want out of it,” she says, and tugs him down for a kiss.

They aren’t actually making out when the door opens, but it’s pretty obvious that they were enjoying themselves. Word gets around fast, and Clarke gets some congratulations and some dirty looks, but mostly everyone finds other things to focus on than Bellamy’s relationship status.

Granted, it seems to be Miller’s relationship status, but Miller’s definitely above it all.

On Clarke’s last day, Fox frowns. “Have you always worn an engagement ring?”

“No, I usually don’t actually wear it.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t really like getting questions about my love life. Most people don’t read Bellamy’s as an engagement ring, so he doesn’t mind.”

“For how long?”

“We’ve been together for almost four years.”

“Why didn’t you just tell us?” Fox asks.

“Bellamy said he hadn’t, I didn’t think it would come up. I had no idea you guys put so much thought into Bellamy’s romantic life.”

“Not so much,” Fox protests. “Just a normal amount.” She worries her lip. “It’s cool, though. That you guys are together. I thought you’d be cute.”

“Thanks,” says Clarke. “I think we are too.”

*
Next year, Bellamy just introduces her with, “I assume some of you remember my wife, Clarke.”

“You got married?” Charlotte asks.

“You never tell us anything!” says Myles.

“I’m telling you now,” he says. “And Miller has a boyfriend. Get to work. Merry Christmas.”

“I can’t believe you married him,” Charlotte grumbles. “He’s so weird.”

Clarke’s pretty sure she’s still a little bitter about her dreams of Bellamy marrying Miller getting crushed, so she lets it go. “Yeah,” she says instead. “I can’t believe it either.”
“Okay,” says Miller. “Who wants to go to Ganymede?”

“What’s on Ganymede?” asks Clarke, sounding wary.

“What’s anywhere we’ve got a job?” Bellamy asks, turning to look at her. “A ship that has more money than it needs.”

“Most ships aren’t planetside,” she shoots back.

“Ganymede is a moon, not a planet,” says Monty, absent. “And there’s a ship docked there that we want to hit.”

“Freighter Osiris,” says Raven, pulling the information up on the display. “Stuck on Ganymede for repairs for–well, we’ll see how long I can keep it there. I figure at least a couple days, right?”

“Why keep it on Ganymede?” Clarke asks. “Catch them on the way out.”

“We are catching it on the way out,” says Raven. “But we’re sabotaging it first. It’s a Helios-class ship, those things have security like you wouldn’t believe.”

“This one is a gift,” Monty adds. “It’s like they want us to steal from them.”

“That’s definitely what they want, yeah,” says Bellamy. But he’s still watching Clarke, curious. She’s only been on the crew for a few months, and Bellamy always takes a while to get to trust people. And Clarke is complicated. She’s intelligent and resourceful, a good addition to the team. But she’s also aloof and solitary. Which Bellamy gets, honestly. He, Miller, Raven, and Monty have been a crew for a while, and they’re close. Raven’s the one who vouched for Clarke, and even though they have have some kind of history, it’s doesn’t seem to be a history that lets Clarke just slot into their lives. “You got a problem with Ganymede?” he asks her.

“Clarke’s issues are Clarke’s business,” says Raven. “If she doesn’t want to go to Ganymede, we can drop her off. Same as anyone else, right?”

There’s just enough of an edge to her voice to convince Bellamy to let it go; he might not trust Clarke yet, but he does trust Raven, and Raven trusts Clarke.

Still, it feels like having something stuck in one of his back teeth, every time he looks at her. He doesn’t like not knowing things, and the list of things he doesn’t know about Clarke feels endless.

“I never said I wouldn’t go,” she says, not unreasonably. “I’ll go.”

“Cool,” says Raven. “So, let’s talk plans.”
From a moral perspective, Bellamy’s job might not be the best. After all, “the greater good” is a very nebulous thing, and when one’s definition of the greater good is in conflict with the law, it gets even dicier. On the one hand, Bellamy thinks the laws are bad and the jobs they take are good. On the other, they’re outlaws who steal from the rich and only give back to the poor in the sense that they’re helping their own friends and family. They aren’t, overall, trying to fix the galaxy. They’re just trying to get by, and maybe get some revenge.

He wouldn’t mind a revolution either, if he’s honest, but that’s going to take some time.

For now, the plan is simple: go to Ganymede, hack the ship, and loot it once it’s off world. It’s a federation ship, which means it’s a dangerous hit, but Bellamy trusts Raven and Monty not to do anything that will get them killed.

Which is why he has to ask her about Clarke.

“Is it safe to bring her to Ganymede?”

Raven doesn’t pretend to misunderstand. “It’s her call, right?”

“She was nervous.”

“And if I thought bringing her on a mission would jeopardize it, I wouldn’t do it. Look, if you want to talk to Clarke, talk to Clarke. I’m not your go-between.”

“You’re the one I trust.”

“Then trust me. I’m not going to let Clarke get us killed. No one’s getting us killed, if I can help it. You aren’t still seriously worried about this, are you?” she asks. “It’s been months. If you have doubts——”

“You have to admit she’s not exactly fitting in.”

“And?”

“And I don’t like not knowing about my allies, Raven.”

“So ask her, like I said. I trust her, and if you don’t, that’s between the two of you. If you’re worried, you can always skip Ganymede. We can get by without you.”

“I’m not skipping. You’d be asking the same thing if you were me,” he adds, and Raven shrugs.

“And you’d be telling me the same thing.”

“Depends on the person,” he says. “Some of them, I’d probably just tell you what their deal was.”

“And if you wouldn’t?”

If he wouldn’t tell her about something like that, it would be because it was his friend’s business, and something they didn’t want shared. He can relate, even.

But he doesn’t know how to just ask Clarke.

“Yeah, okay,” he says anyway. “I get it. I’m being an asshole.”
“Par for the course. We good now?”

“We’re good. If you say it’s safe, then it’s safe. That’s all I need.”

“As safe as anything we do. Not going to promise we don’t get caught, but if something happens, Clarke’s not going to be why.”

“Just our usual shitty luck and incompetence?”

“You know it. Now leave me alone.”

As he goes, he passes Clarke’s door, closed, but with the indicator light on to show she’s inside. He could just go and talk to her, even try to be friendly. Hey, you seemed weird about Ganymede, everything okay? It’s what he’d do if it was Monty or Raven, and similar to what he’d do with Miller. It’s what he should do with Clarke.

Instead, he keeps walking. If she wants to talk, she knows where he lives.

*

“Okay, Bellamy and Clarke, you’re going first.”

The two of them exchange a look. They’re an hour out of the jump to Ganymede, and Bellamy hadn’t known what to expect out of this meeting. Him and Clarke being thrown off the ship wasn’t a possibility that crossed his mind.

“Going where?” Clarke asks.

“You’re getting supplies and we don’t want you tied to the Prospero if anyone figures out we’re involved. I’ll take Monty and Raven to the shipyard to work on the Osiris, you two are taking the Ariel And meeting us at the coordinates in the autopilot in two standard days. “Make sense?”

It makes total sense, so much that Bellamy has no possible reason to object. He and Clarke are the most logical people for a supply run, and if anyone gets suspicious, they don’t want their own activities to lead anyone back to the Prospero. They’ve done it before, when they have things to do on the ground, but he hadn’t really put it together this time.

And he’s never been told to go with Clarke before.

“Sounds good to me,” he says, glancing at her. She looks as cool as ever, no reaction to the assignment at all that he can see. “Clarke?”

“Yeah. Meet you in the hanger in twenty?”

“Sure.”

As he gets his things together, he tries to remember if he and Clarke have ever actually been alone before. They have been for brief periods of time, but just little things. Being the only two people in the mess hall or the cockpit isn’t the same as being away from the entire crew, the only two people on the shuttle.

If it didn’t make so much sense from a mission perspective, he’d assume Raven and Miller were forcing them to talk.

Clarke is already in the co-pilot seat, doing pre-flight checks, when he gets to the hanger. He stows his own luggage and takes the pilot seat, gives her a nod. Their only conversation, until they’re in
the gate, is practicalities, and once those have run out, Bellamy isn’t sure what he’s supposed to say.

Clarke gives it a minute and then says, “You don’t like me.”

It shouldn’t be unexpected, but he somehow assumed she realized, perhaps through some kind of telepathy, that he mostly thought well of her. But he can see how it would, without such gifts, come across as dislike.

“I don’t really know you,” he says. “But I don’t dislike you.”

She snorts. “That makes me feel so much better.”

“You don’t like me.”

“I was following your lead.”

“I was following yours!”

She flashes him a grin, and he finds himself smiling back.

“Well, we’ve got a while,” he says. “Might as well take advantage of it and get to know each other, right?”

“Right.” She lets out a huff of breath. “I was a heda on Ganymede.”

It takes him a minute to place the word, and then he jerks to look at her, aghast. “Like—law enforcement?”

“Yeah.”

“Heda is pretty high up.”

“Yeah. I might get recognized.”

“And that’s not worrying you?” he asks. She certainly sounds calm.

“I left on good terms by my own choice, and I was told I’d be welcome back any time.”

She’s speaking common, but it feels as if he’s missing words, somehow. Every individual one is coherent, but put together, he’s still lost. “When was that?”

“Right before I came to you.”

“So, you quit law enforcement, left Ganymede, and called up your pirate friend to join her crew?”

She actually laughs a little, just a soft huff, but it’s encouraging. “She didn’t tell me she was a pirate. But she told me if I ever got tired of being a heda, I should give her a call. I think she knew how corrupt the whole system was. I hadn’t figured it out yet.”

“How did you?”

“I didn’t. My father did, and they killed him. They didn’t realize I knew, and since it was supposed to look like an accident, I had a good excuse to get out. He died in the line of duty, I decided to leave to get my head on straight.”
“And joined some pirates.”

“And joined some pirates. You’re a pirate, I assume you’re not going to try to claim the moral high ground.”

“No, definitely not. I guess if my government killed someone in my family, I’d turn against them too.” He pauses. “Actually, I guess that was kind of what happened.”

“Yeah?”

“I was born on Earth, in a population-controlled area. My mother got pregnant and kept it secret because she wanted to keep the baby. We managed to keep her secret for a long time, but once she was found out, we were told we were only cleared as a two-person family, and one member of the family would have to go.”

“Fuck. I heard about that, but–I can’t imagine. Ganymede’s not perfect, but no one ever got killed for having too many children.”

“She knew what would happen, but–fuck. We got out as soon as we could, after my mom was executed. Used the emotional distress stipend to book a flight to Mars and never looked back.”

“What about your sister?”

“Still on Mars, in school. I told her she couldn’t join the crew until she finished university.”

Clarke smiles. “Finish your education, then join the revolution.”

“You really think we’re revolutionaries?”

“I think we’re working on it.”

“I guess we probably are.” He takes a minute to consider, realigning his knowledge of Clarke. “So, what do you need me to do on Ganymede? Anything special? What should I expect?”

“I don’t know. It’s been almost eight months since I was there, but my family is well known. I might be welcomed.”

“So we’re not going to be subtle.”

“No. That’s why I told Miller I should be away from the rest of the crew.”

“Except me.”

“That was his idea, not mine. Not that I mind,” she adds, quick, and he smiles.

“So we’re actually expecting to be conspicuous.”

“Yeah. My mother is still there too, and wealthy. So we should keep our eyes open for people following us, make sure we don’t get a tracker. We’re the danger here.”

“Fun,” he says, dry. “I’ve never been a celebrity before.”

“It’s not as fun as you think,” she says. “But as long as we don’t all get killed, I’ll count it as a win.”
They don’t get killed. Not that it’s generally surprising to Bellamy these days, when they survive a mission, but it’s always cause for celebration. He and Clarke run into some excitement on Ganymede, but it’s of a completely new kind. When Clarke lived on the satellite, she lived on the other side, but an ex-girlfriend of hers moved over here, and they run into her, and some of the heda recognize her and want to see how it’s been going. She introduces him as her new partner, says they’re traders, which is their official cover story, and that she’s still figuring out where she wants to be, what her place in the universe is. It’s the kind of vague, wishy-washy answer he’d expect from a child of privilege who lost a parent, and he doubts anyone would guess that she decided to join up with pirates. She asks one of the heda about her mother, finds she’s off-world, which simplifies things. They pick up supplies, find a tracker on the ship and get it off, and make it back to the rendezvous without issue. Whatever Raven and Monty did to the freighter, it works, and they get most of the cargo off before anyone’s noticed they’re there. The ensuing chase is a little tight, but they make it to the gate and jump into hyperspace without the freighter on their tail.

“No problems on Ganymede, right?” Miller asks. Time is always tight before they’ve escaped.

“We found a tracker,” Bellamy says. “So unless the one we got was a decoy and there’s a much better one we missed, we’re good.”

“Monty, Raven, do another scan, just to be safe. It would suck if Clarke got attached to us, but at least we can lose the trail in the jump if that happens. Everyone else—”

“There are only two of us, you can just call us by our names,” Bellamy protests.

“Get some sleep,” Miller concludes, ignoring him. “We’ll drop out of jump a couple times just to be safe, and then unload cargo at the dropship tomorrow night. Good job, team.”

He and Clarke walk in silence, but when they reach her room, she lingers for a moment, just a moment, as if she doesn’t want to go in, and that’s all the encouragement he needs. She’s his crew mate, he trusts her. Like all of them, she realized the world she lived in wasn’t the world she wanted to live in, and made steps to change it. He might not know her well yet, but he knows her well enough that he wants to know her better. And that means he wants her to stay.

“Are you tired?” he asks.

“Hm?”

“Are you going to go to sleep?”

“Oh, no. Not right away.” She smiles. “I always have trouble sleeping after a job. Too much adrenaline.”

“Me too. I was going to go to the common room, maybe watch something. Do you want to come?”

Happiness blossoms on her face. She’s always lovely, so it’s hard to call it a transformation, but she is even lovelier. “That would be nice, yes.”

Miller shows up a few minutes later, and then Monty and Raven, once they’re done with the scan of the Ariel. Raven nudges Clarke’s knee, and Clarke presses closer to Bellamy to make room for her. She’s not quite pressed up against him, but she’s warm and close, and he thinks he could happily spend many more evenings like this.

He thinks he probably will.

Clarke pokes his arm. “You’re hitting my ribs.”
He pulls it up and puts it around her shoulders instead, like he would if she was anyone else on the crew. His heartbeat wouldn’t pick up for anyone but her, but that’s a problem for another day. “Better?” he asks instead.

She snuggles in, apparently more than content. “Better.”
MINTY - Waiting All My Life

Chapter Summary

Fill for spilling-my-soul! Prompt: MINTY and something with them reuniting after being apart a long time super fluffy pls

Like, he assumes, most people, Nate has a past that’s full of people he loved and lost track of, and the first one he can really remember is Monty Green.

When he thinks about it, he wants to second-guess the word love, because he was a kid. They were best friends when Nate was in first grade and Monty was in kindergarten, and Nate adored him. Monty was bright and mischievous and fun, a born troublemaker with an angelic smile that let him get away with anything. Nate loved him, but it’s easy to think that it wasn’t real love, something like that. In Nate’s opinion, you can’t really love someone until you know what it means, until you know what you’re saying. And back then, all he’d known was that Monty was his favorite person, and he never wanted him to leave. He told his dad they were going to get married, and his dad smiled and said he hoped he did.

(It would be years before he remembered that, and when he did, he loved his father so fiercely it hurt, for a minute.)

Instead, Monty’s mother got a new job, and they moved to California. He and Nate hugged each other goodbye, and Nate cried about it, but that had been it. He’d made new friends, found new crushes, and while he filed away “passionate friendship for other boy at age six” as part of his journey into queerness, he mostly thinks of Monty Green as just one more person he cared for who’s gone now, like his high school boyfriend and his college roommate. If he saw them again, he’d say hi, be happy, and when they friend him on Facebook, he accepts and is happy to see updates about their lives. But they’re never going to be close again, not like they were.

Of course, he’s not even Facebook friends with Monty, so it matters even less with him. Nate is sure he’s never going to see him again.

So sure that when he does see him, he figures he must be wrong.

He and Bellamy are at Bellamy’s favorite coffee shop, definitely not stalking the cute artist who comes in at roughly the same time they do on Saturdays. Per Bellamy, it’s not stalking because they were already coming in at this time before this, and just because they decided to make it a set thing instead of a loose engagement, it’s not stalking. It’s just making plans to be somewhere when someone else might be there too.

It’s also not stalking because Shut up, Miller, which is a worse argument.

Today, when they walk into the coffee shop, the artist is at her usual table, but she’s not alone, and Bellamy’s shoulders slump a little. Nate gets that it’s not a real thing for him, but it’s one of those fun fantasies. She’s always drawing cool stuff, and she’s pretty. Even if Bellamy knew nothing was ever going to happen, it’s nice to have a person to think about. And now that person is apparently not single.
The guy is facing Bellamy’s artist, which means that they’re just seeing the back of his head when they come in, but their usual table is behind the artist, because Bellamy is more interested in peering over her shoulder at her sketchpad than he is at looking at her expression. So once Nate’s got his coffee and has settled in across from Bellamy, he sees the guy full on.

The first thing he notices is that he’s hot. He’s working on a laptop, so he’s looking down, but Nate can still see his jawline and the slight curve of his smile. He and the artist are talking, quietly enough Nate can’t really hear them, but the guy laughs sometimes, and that’s what he realizes that the other thing he’s feeling is familiarity. It doesn’t take long to realize the guy reminds him of Monty, and he finds himself navigating to Facebook, looking to see if he can find any old pictures of them with half his attention as he keeps stealing glances back at the table.

Bellamy kicks him. “Dude.”

“What?”

“It’s not a big deal, you can stop looking at him.”

“He looks familiar. I think he’s—”

The guy looks up and their eyes meet, and his face breaks out in this huge grin. He closes the laptop and comes over, the artist turning to watch him, and Bellamy looks like he wants to die. It would probably be funny, if he had enough brainpower to focus on Bellamy.

“Nate, right?” asks the guy. Monty, rather. Definitely Monty. “Nate Miller? It’s totally Nate.”

“Monty?”

Impossibly, Monty’s grin broadens. “Holy shit!” He takes Nate’s hand and tugs him up, and suddenly he’s getting hugged, before he’s even quite caught up. He doesn’t get hugged much, but Monty is very solid, smells like coffee and sweat, is an amazing hugger.

“I think I missed something,” Nate hears, vaguely, and when Monty pulls back, he realizes the artist has come over. The small part of him that’s aware of things that aren’t Monty registers that she’s standing next to Bellamy, so Bellamy totally owes him.

“This is Nate!” Monty says, grinning at her. “He was my best friend forever in kindergarten.”

“I think if he was just your best friend in kindergarten, it doesn’t really count as forever,” she teases.

Monty waves his hand. “Details. Seriously, I can’t believe it!” he says, turning his attention back to Nate. “What are the odds?”

Nate’s feeling pretty disbeliefing himself. “No idea. Good to see you, man,” he adds, and feels like the biggest tool of all time.

But Monty is still smiling. “Yeah. Good to see you too.”

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It turns out the artist’s name is Clarke, and she and Monty went to college together. Monty recently got a job with Ark, Nate’s favorite indie game developer, so he’s new in town and looking for a social life.
Which means that Bellamy owes him for the rest of their lives and then some, because Monty
wants Nate to be involved in that.

“Best friends are forever, right?” he asks, as he puts his number into Nate’s phone.

“I thought you said Jasper was your best friend,” says Clarke, sounding dubious. She and Bellamy
are giving them a little space to talk, but not a ton. Clarke seems kind of protective.

“You can have several BFFs. It’s like you’ve never watched My Little Pony.”

“I was watching My Little Pony before you were born.”

“So you should know all about friends. You like drinking, right?” he adds, to Nate.

“As much as the next functioning alcoholic, yeah.”

“Awesome.” He hands the phone back. “Friday?”

“This Friday?”

“I like to really jump into my drinking right away. You know, find a regular place, get a reputation
as a lovable drunkard. That’s how TV tells me it’s supposed to work, right? Twenty-somethings
have a bar where they hang out and drink unrealistic amounts.”

“We actually already have a bar,” Nate admits, glancing back at Bellamy for approval.

“Yeah, my ex-girlfriend is a bartender,” he says. “So she gives us discounts.”

“Your ex gives you discounts on drinks?” Clarke asks, sounding surprised. “Really?”

“What’s so weird about that?”

“I think most of my exes would charge me extra.”

“Bellamy’s got a superpower for staying friends with his exes,” says Nate.

“You should know. Bisexual,” he adds, at Clarke’s cock of her head. He jerks his chin at Nate.

“Gay.”

He is kind of a great wingman, honestly; Nate should get him something nice.

“Wow, queer party,” says Monty. “We really do always find each other, huh?”

“We’re both bi,” Clarke clarifies. “What’s the bar you like?”

Nate’s kind of absently stressed about the whole thing for about twenty-four hours, until Monty
texts a picture of a small, gray kitten, with the caption: Other important parts of being a twenty-
something: new cat!

And then suddenly, they’re talking. It’s not quite as easy as it was in first grade, but that is what it
reminds him of, someone looking at him, liking him, and just deciding they’re going to be friends.
It shouldn’t work, really, not given how long it’s been since they talked, but by some miracle, they
still like all the same things.

Which, admittedly, include video games, superheroes, and comic books, so maybe they’re just
immature, but Nate likes to think they were ahead of the zeitgeist as kids. They’ve just grown into
it.

So he’s not exactly stressed when Friday rolls around. Instead, it’s this kind of optimistic nausea, which isn’t exactly an improvement, but is at least novel.

Monty’s already there when Nate and Bellamy show up, and Monty greets him with another hug, like some kind of freakishly affectionate monster. Who hugs people that often?

“Hey, you came! Which one is your ex?” he adds, to Bellamy. “Will she give me drinks? How blessed are you?”

He’s still tucked against Nate’s side when he asks, and when Bellamy points Gina out, Monty navigates both of them to her.

It’s a lot, and, not surprisingly, it only escalates. Monty seems to consider hugs the standard greeting for friends, so Nate can’t even read into it; Clarke and Bellamy gets hugs too, and Gina once Monty starts to get to know her. Raven and even Murphy get hugs. Nate isn’t special.

But he wants to be.

Part of him can’t help wondering if it’s just some weird residual childhood fondness, or cultural programming, like Monty’s desire to get a cat and go to a bar every week. That same impulse makes Nate think that meeting Monty again like this must be fate, that he wouldn’t be seeing him again unless it meant something.

“Oh he’s hot and you want to make out with him,” Bellamy suggests.

“Or you’re projecting because you want to make out with Clarke.”

“I think this is one of those situations where you’re both right,” says Gina. “Everyone can suck at emotions and be in denial. You guys are great at that.”

“I’m not in denial,” Bellamy protests. “I know I want to make out with Clarke.”

“And I just think there could be other factors at play here.”

“So, you’re saying you think you don’t have a crush on the cute boy who likes video games and went on a thirty-minute rant about all the pros and cons of the Runaways comic and its TV adaptation,” Gina says. “You think that’s not your type?”

Nate pauses, tries to think of any counterargument and comes up completely empty. “I’m just saying, maybe he’s not as awesome as I think he is.”

Right on cue, Monty shows up, shaking snow out of his hair, and hugs Bellamy and Gina before basically draping himself on Nate’s back.

“Hey, sorry I’m late! Clarke’s on her way too, she got caught on the train. Did I miss anything?”

“Nope,” says Gina, with a bright smile. “I think you’re probably the only one who didn’t.”

* 

They’ve been doing Friday drinks, Saturday coffee shop, and playing a lot of Overwatch over the Playstation Network for about two months when Monty says, “We should take this to the next level, right?”
Nate chokes on his beer, but luckily Gina is with another customer and Bellamy, Clarke, and Raven are playing pool, so no one else witnesses it. “What?”

“You haven’t met my cat yet! Not in person. That’s weird, right? You definitely should have met my cat.”

“Really? Is that a known relationship step?”

Monty seems to be thinking this over, giving it more consideration than Nate really thinks it warrants, unless this is actually a good sign. In which case–

“So, what I’m thinking is, you know, once you’re at my apartment, and you see how cute my cat is and how many video games I have an all my awesome superhero posters, you’re going to be overcome with–I guess it’s this weird kind of combination of pity and horniness? Is how I’m picturing it. That happens, and then we hook up, and inertia keeps you doing it. That would be my big, master plan with this.”

He’s not drinking, so he can’t choke again, but–

“Wow. No, that’s really not how it would go.”

“No?” he asks, a little wary, and Nate realizes his mistake.

“I would have kissed you here, if I knew you wanted me to.”

Monty stares. “You didn’t know? How did you not know? I thought I was so obvious! Jasper could tell from like my first text message. I was being so unsubtle! Oh my god, you didn’t know.”

“Sorry?”

He’s laughing, at least. “Wow. I’m–wow. Okay. I’m even worse at this than I thought. But–”

“But I like you,” says Nate. “So can I come meet your cat?”

Monty grins. “I thought you’d never ask.”

The rest of the evening goes basically exactly as Monty said it would, except with less pity and more genuine affection. And after, when they’re lying together in Monty’s bed, Nate can’t help asking, “You know you were my first love, right?”

“I hoped so.” He yawns. “And I’m hoping I’m going to be your last.”

Nate’s heart flips over, and he tugs Monty closer. “Yeah. I hope so too.”
One Deep Breath and One Deep Step - Bellamy POV

Chapter Summary

Fill for amihanmayari! Original fic here.

If Bellamy had to define his relationship with Clarke Griffin in three words, it would be would be with these: he knows better. He thinks that when he first sees her with the Sig-Kaps, who don’t like him, and when he starts talking to her, and when he realizes she’s a freshman and not just a junior he hadn’t met yet. The whole night, he’s reminding himself that he’s smarter than this, and he absolutely should not be letting himself be mildly charmed by a drunk eighteen-year-old. He’s done with hooking up, after all, done with coming to these things to get laid. So if he could just enjoy talking to Clarke without noticing the mole on her lip and the cut of her top, he’d actually be in good shape. Friendship. Friendship would be good.

But he likes her, and he knows better. He certainly knows better than to be friendly when she finds him at the coffee shop, but not being friendly feels unthinkable. She looks more her age in the light of day, a nervous freshman who’s still figuring out where she belongs. So he ignores the rational voice that’s telling him Clarke is a rich sorority girl who’s going to lose all interest in him as soon as she settles in at Ark and asks, “So, did you pledge?”

“Yeah.”

“Sigma Kappa Upsilon?”

“Yeah.” She bites her lip, watching him. “You know Anya, right?”

He has no idea why that would be a significant question, but there’s no reason to lie. “Kind of. Not very well. She seems cool.”

“Yeah, I like her.”

They lapse back into silence, a second opportunity for him to not encourage the friendship, to stop getting to know her. If they sit here awkwardly long enough, she’ll definitely give up.

Instead, he asks, “So, how’s your first semester aside from the sorority? I assume you have classes.”

“No, it’s all Greek life, all the time. Just like in Sydney White,” she adds, with a smirk, and he feels his stomach sink.

This isn’t going to turn out well for him.

* 

Bellamy knows where he fits in the Ark social scene. He’s accepted by Delta Nu and tolerated by everyone else. He’s fun at parties, good as a drinking or video game partner, a fun person to hook up with. The students like him, but as soon as he tells them he’s not actually one of them, he feels like something changes.
He’s an outsider, and even if they like him, everyone is aware that he’s on a different path than they are. And it’s definitely worse this year, when the people who are his age, his theoretical peers, are getting ready to graduate and move on. Even if Miller doesn’t leave, like he’s hoping not to, it’s still this huge step that Bellamy isn’t taking.

Maybe that’s why he likes Clarke. A new person with four years of school left, someone to attach himself to once Miller’s moving on to bigger and better things.

The fact that he prefers that explanation to having a mild crush on her is another warning sign, as is the way his heart soars when she shows up at Delta Nu house while he’s playing beer pong.

He knows better. He fucking knows.

She’s in the crowd when the game finishes, trying to fight her way over to him, and the simple, stupid truth is that he wants to hang out with her, so he’s going to. He can be fraternal, maybe. He’s a good influence. He’s wise.

Yeah, right.

“Quitting while you’re ahead?” Miller asks. “Dude, don’t be—” Then he spots Clarke. “Oh, yeah, I got it.”

“Shut up,” he says, automatic, and ignores everyone until he gets to her.

Then he flips them off, for good measure.

But he greets her with a smile and a, “Hey.”

“Hi. Congratulations.”

“Yeah, me and Miller are the best.” If she’s going to be hanging out at Delta Nu, she probably should know Miller; as a general rule, he trusts the guys in Delta Nu to be respectful of women and keep an eye out to make sure no one’s doing shady shit, but he wouldn’t mind Miller being extra aware.

Miller must be on the same page, because he’s already on his way over. Or he just wants to be a dick.

Bellamy pulls him in for introductions. “Hey, this is Clarke. She’s pledging Sig-Kap.”

“Hi, Clarke.” He glances at Bellamy, clearly calculating exactly how much of a dick he wants to be about the whole thing and going with _decently dickish_. “You know you can impress people playing drinking games, right? You don’t have to stop doing it when they show up.”

Either Clarke’s going to figure it out or Miller is, and Miller is safer, so he rolls his eyes. “No. Tell me more about how smooth you are.”

If he was actually trying to hit on Clarke, he would have gone with it, so Miller narrows his eyes, just for a second. But he’s a good friend, so when Bellamy tells him to shut up, he just shakes his head and takes off with a wave. Bellamy claps him on the back in gratitude, and Miller can’t resist one final sharp look.

They’ll get drunk and talk about feelings later, probably.

“How old is your sister?” Clarke asks, like she’s been trying to come up with a conversation starter
for a while and finally landed on that. He can’t be sure someone told her he’s not a student and is
kind of a townie weirdo, but he thinks they must have. He hopes they did, because he doesn’t want
to have to do it himself.

“Sixteen,” he tells her.

“Are you guys–” She falters, and he’s just enough of an asshole to not bail her out. He wants to find
out how she finishes the sentence without his help. “I assume she doesn’t live in the Delta Nu
house.”

He has to laugh. “Definitely not. It’s, uh–it’s just her and me. Don’t tell me no one in your sorority
warned you about me,” he adds. He’s sure they did, from her careful tone, but she’s being polite
about it. And she was clearly trying to not be a dick, because she winces at the question.

He bumps her shoulder, companionable. She’s still talking to him and trying to be cool; just
because she’s awkward, he’s not going to hold it against her. She was awkward before too.

“You can just tell me what you know,” he tells her, smiling. “It saves me some trouble.”

Her eyes flash, and she squares her jaw like she’s going to fight him. “You don’t go here and you
don’t date college girls. So I shouldn’t bother. No one talked about your sister at all. Which is why
I’m asking you.”

He has to laugh. It’s not like she’s wrong; he’s not sure anyone else but Miller even knows he has a
sister. “Yeah, we live a few blocks off campus. My mom worked in dining services, so I grew up
hanging around college kids. When Miller came here after high school, I wasn’t going to just stop
hanging out with him, so–I’m kind of an honorary Delta. At least through the end of this year.”

“What happens at the end of this year?”

“Miller graduates, Murphy stages a coup and becomes the new president and kicks me out.”

“As long as you have a plan. What do you do? When you’re not an honorary Delta.”

He rubs the back of his neck. “Uh, dining services, actually. I accidentally tricked some girls from
Tau into thinking I was on work study one time, but I’m a civilian. The supervisor liked my mom,
so he hired me when she died. And I have some part-time stuff too. Whatever I can, mostly.”

“When did your mom die?” she asks, and he can see her immediately regretting it. “Unless that’s
weird.”

“A little. Mostly because we’re in the middle of a frat party,” he adds, because getting to know
Clarke sounds so much better than anything else he could be doing tonight. “You want to take a
walk?”

It’s a nice night, starting to feel a little like fall outside, and he feels better being out in the open air.
When he’s not looking to hook up, frat parties are a lot less fun. Not that there’s anything wrong
with friendship, but–when all his friends were trying to get laid and he was trying to hang out, it got
kind of old.

Clarke’s the first one to speak. “You don’t have to tell me about your mom. I was just curious. I
was fifteen when my dad died, so–”

He grins. “Nothing says fun party activity like dead parent stories. I was a senior in high school,”
he continues, sobering a little. “Already eighteen, so that was lucky. We don’t really have any other
family, so I got O without anyone fighting me for her.”

“What about your dad?”

“Never in the picture. O’s was for a while, but he left, and then he got killed in a car accident when I was–” He pauses, trying to remember. He never much cared about his sister’s dad. The guy was an asshole. “I don’t know, twelve? It didn’t matter much, except that monthly child support turned into a lump sum. That’s O’s college fund.”

“What about you?”

That is the million dollar question, the one that’s been getting louder and louder. “I might try for trade school. Or maybe community college, once O’s set. I don’t know. I don’t want to work here forever, the pay sucks and it’s boring.”

She thinks it over for a second, and then asks, “Which dining hall do you work in?”

The subject change is welcome, and the conversation flows easily, after that, even with a reference to his sexual prowess that nearly makes him choke. But Clarke’s tone is teasing, and even though he knows better, he lets himself think she really *does* want more than sex. Sorority girls have friends. And the two of them seem to have a lot in common, somehow.

“So, what are you going to do with all this?” he asks. They ended up in the park, sitting next to each other on the swings, drifting. It feels a lot like how he thought college would be, if he’d gone. Maybe even more than going to the frat is.

“All what?”

“College and the sorority. All your legacies. What do you want to want to do with all that? Do you have a major yet?”

“Not yet. My mom wants me to go pre-med, but I don’t know if I really want to.”

“Is she a doctor?”

“Yeah.”

“So if you go to her college, pledge her sorority, and follow her career path–”

He can see her face twist, even in the dark. “Pretty much, yeah. It’s not like–she has a good life, she’s happy. But that doesn’t mean I want to be her.”

“Do you want to be a doctor?”

“I don’t know. I’m not against it, but–honestly, I don’t know what I want to be yet. But I know how much of a time and money suck med school is, so I should probably figure it out before I go.”

“Probably yeah.”

She kicks her legs up, starting to actually swing instead of just drift. “I guess I have time, right? I’m at the very beginning of my sorority movie.”

He laughs, starts swinging himself. “Exactly. You need to get back?”

“Nah.” She smiles. “Like I said, I have time.”
On Wednesday, she shows up at Mech toward the end of lunch, shifting like she’s not sure she’s really supposed to be there. The dining hall isn’t that close to Greek Row, but it’s not like he doesn’t see people he knows here all the time.

“Class?” he offers, giving her the out.

“Yeah, my English class is in Hubbard. I usually just skip lunch and go to the library, but that’s just wasting my meal plan, right?”

“And generally unhealthy, yeah. Don’t skip meals, Clarke.”

“Thanks.” She hands over her card. “I’ve got English on Friday too, so I guess I need to eat then too.”

“Again, yeah, you should be eating three meals a day. How did you get to college without knowing how to eat? Also, if you’re going to be a doctor, you should definitely learn how nutrition works.”

She grins. “So I’ll see you on Friday?”

“I better, yeah.”

And he does. Clarke starts hanging out with him a few times a week, not just at parties, but at the coffee shop, at the dining hall. He even takes her home for dinner, talks through bisexuality with her and even talks about his own ambitions. It doesn’t feel quite like a friendship, but it feels closer and closer.

If he’s honest, he’s trying to keep it from crossing that line. She has problems, he helps her out. Like a big brother, probably.

Love you too, dork is definitely something Octavia’s said to him. She’s never told him any of her friends think he’s hot, but she probably wouldn’t, because she doesn’t want to feed his ego. The fact that Clarke’s the one saying those things doesn’t mean anything. Especially not when she’s clearly drunk.

Especially not when she’s heading home with a girl.

It’s good news, really. If Clarke gets a girlfriend, his life will absolutely improve. He’ll stop thinking she’s cute, and she’ll probably lean on him less for support. It’s good. Definitely, without question, unambiguously good.

Miller: you haven’t asked about your freshman in like ten minutes did the sleepover kill you?

Me: She left
She texted me
But good job keeping an eye on her
You should never have a pet

Miller: I knew she left
I just didn’t know you did
don’t take our your annoyance that she’s getting laid out on me

Me: I’m always for people getting laid
But I’m sorry I doubted you  
You can get a pet

**Miller:** Thanks, I was really worried  
Good luck with the party

**Me:** I’ll probably live.

Of course, he’s being over-dramatic. The slumber party doesn’t actually have much interest in him, and he’s really just there to be an adult who is available in case of emergency. He doesn’t get a ton of sleep, because they definitely stay up all night giggling and aren’t as good at regulating their voices as they think they are, but they leave fairly early, and he even gets asked to pick up a late shift, so he won’t take a loss on making time-and-a-half.

He wasn’t really expecting Clarke, but of course she shows up anyway, with coffee and muffins. She looks good, better rested than he is, bright and upbeat, and he can’t help a small scowl.

She beams wider. “You look more hungover than I do.”

“Teenage girls are loud, Clarke.”

“I’m a teenage girl.”

It’s true, but it doesn’t feel true. It’s less a matter of maturity and more just an air she’s got. She is eighteen, but he has trouble imagining her squealing at a slumber party. She’s the one at parties reminding everyone to drink enough water. “You’re basically thirty,” he tells her. “And you don’t hang out in my house squealing in the middle of the night.”

“I could start if you want.”

“Tempting. Seriously, what are you doing here? Did you just want to brag about how you got laid?”

For the first time, her smile falters, and she looks nervous. “I’m going to the airport right after class on Tuesday, so if I didn’t see you this weekend, I wasn’t going to until after the break. So here I am.” She holds up her bag. “With muffins.”

The reminder is unexpectedly painful. “I forgot you were leaving soon. Isn’t it just like a week?”

“I still wanted to say goodbye before I left. Are you busy?”

“They called to see if I could do the afternoon shift, so I’m going in to work at two. But nothing until then. I just figured you had better things to do this morning than hang out with me.” He smirks. “Like get laid.”

She rolls her eyes, clearly not impressed. “You’re trying to gossip, you don’t get to make fun of teenage girls.”

“Not gossiping. Just checking in.”

“Uh huh. I feel comfortable identifying as bisexual now.”

“Congrats.” He takes a sip of coffee, getting his own reaction in check. It’s not a big deal. “Are you going to see her again?”
“We go to the same college, Bellamy. We’re not going to date,” she adds, when he prods her foot with his. “She’s aro, so looking for a relationship even less than you are.”

He shouldn’t argue the point, but he can’t help it. “I never said I’m not looking for a relationship. I’m just not looking very hard.”

“Well, she’s not. So I can get laid if I want, but, yeah. Not a girlfriend.”

“Is that okay?”

It’s her turn to kick him. “Stop worrying. It’s fine. I didn’t want to date her. If she was looking for a relationship, I wouldn’t have hooked up with her.”

“No?”

“She’s cool, but–no romantic feelings. It happens, right?”

He knows better than to be happy about it, but he is anyway. “It happens,” he agrees, and settles in next to her, trying not to smile.

*  

“So, have you asked Clarke out yet?”

Bellamy nearly hits his head on the fridge, but he manages to not.

In all honesty, it’s amazing that it’s taken her so long to make fun of him about Clarke. It’s a lot of restraint, for Octavia.

“Or is this asking you Clarke out?” she goes on. “Romantic dinner, Christmas presents–”

“It’s not me asking her out.”

“Good. It was going to be super awkward with me here.” She leans against the wall. “Seriously, what’s happening? You’ve never done anything like this before. For anyone. And she’s–”

“She’s what?” he asks.

“I don’t know. She probably doesn’t know she’s getting special treatment, you know? She just thinks you’re like this.”

“I am like this,” he says, frowning. “She’s my friend, she’s not taking advantage of me. This was my idea.”

“Your friend,” she repeats. “Because you invite Miller over for fancy meals all the time.”

He closes the fridge with a sigh. “What’s your point here, O? I like her, yeah. If she wanted to date me, I’d say yes. But she doesn’t, and she’s not leading me on. I know exactly where I stand with her.”

“I don’t know, I think if you just asked her with, you know, words, instead of just deciding she’s not interested. Because she’s coming over here all the time too. Like, I wouldn’t hang out with a guy this much if I didn’t want to date him.”

“It’s different in college,” he says.
“How would you know?”

He shoves her head. “Go do literally anything else.”

“Ask her out!” she calls over her shoulder. “It beats being weird.”

Not that he’d ever tell his sister, but he is a little nervous about the whole thing. He thinks Clarke does like him, genuinely, really is his friend, but it’s not as if O was wrong either. He doesn’t do this stuff for Miller or any of his other friends.

He definitely isn’t going to miss any of them as much as he’ll miss her.

It’s nothing he wants to think about, so he throws himself into the food preparation, gets so in the zone that he misses Clarke arriving completely until she says, “Octavia’s making me help.”

He whirls to see her leaning on the door frame, arms crossed over her chest. There’s a little snow melting in her hair, and winter break is going to feel endless, with her gone.

“Shit, I didn’t even hear the doorbell. Hi.”

“Hi. You look incredibly busy.”

“It’s a celebration,” he says, trying not to feel too weird about it. “I’m going all-out.”

She goes over to wash her hands; she’s helped him with enough meals by now that she knows the drill. “It’s my first semester. If you go all out for this, I’m going to need a week-long cruise for graduation.”

His mouth goes dry at her casual tone, the easy assumption that he’ll be involved in her graduation celebrations. Octavia’s right, he could just ask her out.

But he knows better. He always knows better.

“To clarify,” he tells her, “this is as good as it gets. Every time we have something to celebrate, I’m going to make you dinner. That’s it. We’re not going to escalate.”

She bumps her shoulder against his. “I wasn’t really expecting anything, so it’s hard to be offended to find out you’re going to cook me a nice meal whenever you feel like I deserve it instead of getting more and more elaborate.”

He ducks his head. “Yeah, when you put it like that, I guess I’m good.”

They have dinner and exchange presents, and he falls asleep on her watching a movie. She wakes him up to take her home, which is appreciated, even if he spends the whole walk back wishing he could reach over and take her hand.

He’s never felt like this before. He’s not actually prepared for it.

“So, you’re back like–early January?” he asks, because it’s either that or leaving, and he’s not ready for that yet.

She tucks her hair behind her ear. “Yeah.”

“Cool.” He nods, once. It’s not actually awkward, it just feels that way. “Have a good break. Merry Christmas, happy–”
He barely catches the fond expression in her eyes before she’s tugging him down. It’s not the kiss he’s half-expecting, but instead just a hug, her arms warm around his neck. It’s been a while since someone actually hugged him like this, a proper hug instead of a quick, drunken squeeze of victory from Miller, and it’s–nice.

Maybe Octavia’s right. Maybe he should ask.

“Try to take three consecutive days off, okay?” she says, into his neck.

“No promises. Happy New Year,” he adds, making himself let go.

She smiles. “Happy New Year.”

Octavia’s on the couch watching Netflix when he gets back, and he sits down next to her, picking up the copy of *The Golden Compass* Clarke gave him.

“I should maybe ask her out,” he admits.

“Yeah,” she says. “You think?”

* 

“I’m in love with Clarke,” he tells Miller, on New Year’s Eve. He and Clarke have been texting the whole night, and he misses her exactly as much as he thought he would. It’s the worst.

“I’m gay,” says Miller, without missing a beat.


“Yes, you’ve been trying pretty hard to keep her in the dark.” He leans over to clink his beer against Bellamy’s. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re a hot guy who can legally drink. Literally any college freshman in the universe would be all over that.”

“Yes, I know. I don’t really want her all over this,” he admits. “Not like–”

“You’re in love with her. I got that. She’s crazy about you,” Miller adds. “Like, I wouldn’t worry about it. Just ask her out, maybe don’t go right into a confession, but–yeah. You’ll be fine. Welcome to having feelings.”

“It sucks,” he mutters, and Miller pats his shoulder.

“Like I said, you’ll be fine. Drinking solves everything,” he adds.

“Cheers to that,” he says, and lets himself be distracted.

* 

He knows when Clarke gets to campus, obviously. She texts when her plane takes off and when it lands, and when she asks if she can come over, he’s not sure if he’s more excited or more nervous. This is when he’s supposed to do something, he knows that. This is when he’s supposed to tell her.

“Clarke’s coming over,” he tells Octavia.

“Shocking. If you’re going to hook up, do it in your room.”

“I’m still probably too much of a failure to make a move,” he admits. “But thanks as always for
your support.”

Part of him wants to do something special, get changed or try to get his hair in order. Buy her flowers, maybe. This is uncharted territory for him.

So he just waits on the couch with his sister, trying not to glance at his phone every five seconds with limited success.

When the door buzzes, he jumps, and Octavia is definitely snickering at him, but he doesn’t care. He’s a lot more concerned about acting like an even slightly normal person in front of Clarke.

“You know better,” he tells himself, and manages what he hopes is a normal smile for her. Her cheeks are a little flushed from the cold, and the wispy curls of her hair are framing her face.

She opens her mouth, closes it, and then blurts out, “Hi, I’m in love with you.”

For one wild, confused second, he thinks he must have dropped into some weird alternate universe, where he heard his own words in her voice, because that’s been on repeat in his brain for weeks, but it doesn’t make any sense.

Clarke realizes what’s happening before he does, and she’s tripping over her tongue as she tries to apologize, “Sorry, that really wasn’t what I was going to say, I was going to–”

He snaps out of it all at once, laughs and kisses her, and she kisses back, and it’s not the best kiss he’s ever had, but they can probably work on that when they’re not on his doorstep and smiling like idiots.

“Whatever else you were going to say, I hope you meant that,” he teases, wrapping her up in his arms. He really fucking missed her.

Clarke hugs back, settling in like she’s just as relieved as he is. “Yeah.”

“Good.” He presses a kiss to her hair. “I, uh–fuck, Clarke. I’m crazy about you. I missed you so much. And I’m–”

Octavia clears her throat, and Bellamy remembers with a guilty jolt that not only is she here, but she told him not to do this. Clarke didn’t even know, and she jumps away, blushing. “You’re in the living room,” she says, but she’s smiling. “Hi, Clarke. Bell has his own room. You guys don’t have to make out in front of me.”

“We’re not–” he starts, and then remembers that he kind of wants to. A lot. “I guess privacy wouldn’t be bad?” he asks, and Clarke’s only response is to tangle his fingers in hers and tug.

That’s all he needs, anyway.

*

“Jesus, I should have known better than to date a sorority girl,” Bellamy mutters.

“I sort of assumed you did,” says Clarke, but she comes over and turns him away from the mirror, taking over the tie herself. He doesn’t know what it is about bowties that gives him so much trouble, but no matter how many YouTube videos he watches, he always feels like he’s going to snap one of his fingers when he’s putting one on.

Clarke does it with an ease that is confusing, given she never has to tie her own ties.
“If you were doing it on me, you’d be fine,” she says, before he can ask. “My dad wore a tie to work every day, I wanted to learn how to do it.”

“The adorable youth of the rich and famous,” he teases, and she gives the tie a final tug.

“Not famous, just rich.” She gives the tie a final tug, and then steps back, apparently satisfied with her work. “Come on, it won’t be that bad. The Sig-Kaps like you!”

“They like you and accept me. It’s not the sisters I’m worried about. It’s the black tie. How many formal events do you guys have?”

“Like one a year.”

“Until you graduate.”

“Or you break up with me.”

He leans in for a kiss. “Until you graduate.” It’s strange to be so sure, but that’s kind of how he and Clarke are. Stubborn assholes who know exactly what they want. “It could be worse.”

“Yeah?”

“I could be not dating you.”

She laughs. “Smooth. Very charming. Are you ready?”

He checks his tie one last time, and then offers Clarke his arm. “Let’s get this over with.”

“Stop complaining. You knew what you were getting into.”

It’s not entirely true, because he mostly knew how impossible it felt that he could ever have this, but that doesn’t feel like something worth bringing up now. Not before a stressful evening of pretending to be sophisticated at the Sig-Kap formal.

“I was ready for this, yeah.” He ducks his head for one last kiss. “As long as you keep tying my tie, I’ll keep wearing one.”


It’s impossible to argue with that, so he just holds the door open for her. “Yeah. So worth it.”
The first time Bellamy meets the woman he’s going to marry, she doesn’t make much of an impression. If not for the taste of milk in his first sip of coffee, he probably wouldn’t have even taken a second look at her, if he’s honest. She’s pretty, but he’s met plenty of pretty people. And he’s worked in customer service. He gets how it works. The person behind the counter can be attractive and welcoming, but it doesn’t mean anything. And Clarke, at their first meeting, wasn’t even notably welcoming. She messed up a drink, apologized, and gave him a replacement. It wasn’t anything special at all.

But on his way to school the next week, he remembers the board full of custom drinks, the shelves full of books and, okay, the cute girl. He definitely remembers the cute girl, but that doesn’t matter. Not really. He doesn’t even really think she’ll be there.

So she makes much more of an impression when she is, sitting behind the register with what appears to be a notebook. She closes it and stands when she sees him, giving him the same bright smile she did the last time he was in, even though it’s like eight hours earlier and he kind of hates the world right now. She really is a professional.

“Good morning,” she says, once he reaches the counter. “What can I get you?”

There are enough custom drinks that it’s actually kind of overwhelming, so he just picks the first one with only ingredients he likes. “Can I get the Mother of Dragons with–do you do almond milk?” he asks, hopeful.

Of course, she shakes her head. “Just soy.”

“What size?”

“Large.”

“Anything else?”

The case of pastries is as overwhelming as he remembers, but it’s easier in the morning. He can stick with the breakfast genre. “How’s the cherry-bran muffin?”

“I’ve heard it’s good. I’m not really a bran person, but it’s my best friend’s favorite. It’s not too sweet.”

Either she remembers him or she just figures it’s useful trivia information; if it’s the first, he doesn’t want to be an asshole, so he checks her name tag and makes a mental note of Clarke, then tries out a smile. It’s not even seven a.m., so he’s not sure how he does, but the effort’s probably appreciated. “Then, yeah, one of those. Thanks.”
“Cool.”

They’re the only ones in the entire shop and he feels kind of weird just waiting in silence, so he casts about for something to say. He’s never been great at small talk, and he doesn’t really want to bother her.

In retrospect, “What were you writing?” is a stupid, invasive question, but she doesn’t seem to mind.


It’s the kind of thing he’s pretty sure he would have gotten fired for when he worked in a coffee shop. “Your boss doesn’t mind?”

“I am my boss,” she tells him, with a slightly smug smile.

“Oh.”

She slides him his drink. “So, yeah. I’m keeping an eye on it to make sure it doesn’t interfere with my work.”

He has to smile. “As long as you’re aware of the situation. Thanks.”

“Have a good day,” she says, and that should be it.

But she nags at his attention as he drives to work. He doesn’t think she can be that old, probably not even thirty, and it’s not like you need to be, to be a manager. She doesn’t have to own the place, but part of him thinks she must. After all, he went in because it had recently remodeled, and it has a kind of young, artsy vibe. It would make sense, if the owner was a young artist. And that’s interesting. He can’t help wondering who she is and where she came from.

And then there’s the drink. It’s fine, really. It’s not a bad drink. He thinks it’s probably a great drink, with real milk. And so is the next one. And the next one. It just keeps happening.

“How hard is it to just figure out how soy milk works?” he grumbles to Raven after his third visit. She’s lactose intolerant too; she should get it.

“Everyone knows how soy milk works,” she says. “What are you even complaining about?”

“New coffee shop. Her proportions are off.”

“Whose proportions?” asks Gina.

“The barista. I think she needs to adjust her ingredients when she uses soy.”

“Wow. This might be a new level of asshole for you,” says Raven.

“I’m not telling her that. I’m just telling you. I’m hoping I’m going to find the one that’s good with soy milk. You know, eventually.”

“So, you’re going to keep going back to this place that has drinks you don’t like, hoping they end up making a drink you do like?”

“I like the drinks. They just could be better.”

“You know it’s hard to go wrong with a latte, right?” Gina asks.
“She forgot the soy the first time.”

Raven and Gina exchange a look, and he knows he’s being obvious, but he can’t help it. He did the same thing to Raven before he started dating Gina; it’s like a disease.

“Same barista?”

“I think so,” he says, like there’s any universe where they’d believe he doesn’t know.

“And you keep going back.”

“The muffins are really good,” he says, and Raven pats his shoulder.

“Yeah, I bet.”

*

If anyone had asked, he would have assumed Clarke sort of knew him, after a few weeks of visits. She doesn’t have to take his name, because it’s usually pretty quiet when he comes in, but he pays with credit card sometimes and she might have noticed. He never gets the same thing, so she hasn’t had a chance to learn his order. She’s made a much bigger impression on him than he has on her, he assumes.

The assumption rides until one morning, when he’s checking her board and says, “Isn’t the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster alcoholic?”

“Caffeine is a drug too,” she says, prim. “You can make it Irish if you want, I won’t stop you.”

“Or Betelgeusean. I’ll take that with soy milk.”

“I’ve got almond.”

She says it with this kind of deliberate casualness, a tone that makes him somehow sure that he’s the only reason this happened, her entire motivation. She personally decided to start stocking almond milk, for him.

So she definitely knows who he is.

“Almond would be great, thanks,” he says. “Is that going to be a regular thing? The almond milk.”

“I’m trying it out. As long as people want it, it’s not hard to stock a carton or two. I’ll see how demand is.”

“I appreciate it,” he says, and she smiles.

“Have to give my regulars what they want, right?” She slides him the drink. “How’s that one?”

Given she’s buying him special milk and going out of her way to be welcoming, he figures honesty probably isn’t the best policy, at this time. And it’s not like it’s bad. It’s just slightly off.

“Great, thanks,” he says. And then, because if she’s buying milk for him, she probably won’t mind, he adds, “Have a good day, Clarke.”

Her smile is warm. “You too, Bellamy.”

*
He spends the next couple months becoming very much a regular. He and Clarke chat most mornings, and once he tells her about it, she takes on lactose-free coffee drinks that taste good as a personal mission. The basic issue that she clearly doesn’t actually like milk replacement products remains, but he gets the impression she’s kind of stubborn, and she’s not going to give up until she solves this problem.

He has a crush on her, without question, but that’s not a big deal. It’s not a real crush, or a real relationship, even, and he’s not going to do anything stupid like think they’re friends. He’s a customer to whom she is positively inclined. From what he can tell, she likes talking to him, and interacting with him isn’t a chore. But they do that in a strictly customer/employee capacity, and he doesn’t want to be that asshole who thinks a barista who’s nice to him because it’s her job secretly wants him to ask her out. He’s pretty sure she doesn’t want him to ask her out, in fact. There’s just enough of a this is professional vibe from her that he thinks she knows he’s interested and is trying not to encourage that. It stings a little, but just his pride. Not to brag, but he doesn’t think he’s the worst boyfriend in the world. Not that he’s tried actually being a boyfriend that often, but still. He would be.

Clarke not wanting to date him doesn’t actually need an explanation, obviously, but when he meets Lyra, it does feel like he gets one.

He knows, intellectually, that his reaction to unsupervised children is not normal. But over the course of his many odd jobs, he’s had ones where lost children were common, and they had protocols to deal with it, and he can’t turn off the part of his brain that’s aware, very keenly, when he’s near a kid who is alone in a public space.

Besides, coffee shops are busy. It would be easy for one to just wander. This one has settled in with a book, too, and he can’t help fretting that someone just left her here while they ran other errands, hoping that no one would notice. And, granted, a thirty-year-old stranger talking to her isn’t exactly the best look, but people here know him, and he’s pretty sure if he explained to Clarke, she’d let him off the hook with a warning.

The girl’s on one end of the couch, so he takes the other, pulls out one of his own textbooks. It’s nothing he hasn’t done before, but he’s only half paying attention to his own reading and mostly watching the girl out of the corner of his eye. He’d put her at seven or eight, probably, with long black hair in two braided pigtails, and she looks healthy and happy, shows no signs of worrying that her adult might not be coming back.

She also seems to be aware of him, so he deliberately and a little unfairly, laughs.

“What’s funny?” she asks, as he hoped she would.

“Just the book I’m reading.”

“What are you reading?”

“It’s for school.”

“Aren’t you too old to be in school?” she asks, sounding suspicious.

“I’m in graduate school, getting a master’s degree.”

“Oh! My dad did that.”

That’s a good sign. “What about you, what are you reading?”
She sticks her thumb in the book to hold her place and then shows him the cover as she enunciates. “The Wainscott Weasel.”

“I haven’t heard of that one. What’s it about?”

Her face lights up, and she scoots over on the couch so she can show him. “It’s really good! I’ve read it before but I really like it. It’s about this weasel named Bagley and–”

It feels mean to derail her, so he just kind of lets her go, racing through a muddled plot summary as she flips between pages to show him her favorite pictures. Whatever else might be true about who she is and how she got here, she’s clearly a bright, happy kid, and he doesn’t feel like she’s lacking in attention so much as she’s just happy to have someone to appreciate a favorite book.

Still, when Clarke comes over to check on them, he figures he should probably get the conversation back on track. Just because he’s a teacher and an acquaintance doesn’t mean he couldn’t be a creep.

He flashes Clarke a quick, embarrassed smile, then turns his attention back to the girl. “That’s really cool. But I wanted to check–do you know where your grownup is?”

“Present,” says Clarke, raising her hand. “Bellamy, this is my daughter, Lyra.”

The girl–Lyra, apparently–turns her attention up to Clarke, pouting a little. “I was just telling him about my book. I wasn’t going to go with him.”

“I know,” says Clarke, sitting down next to her and giving her shoulders a squeeze. “He wasn’t trying to take you, he just wanted to make sure I knew where you were.”

“Oh.”

“His name’s Bellamy, he’s a friend of mine.”

Now that he’s looking, he can see the family resemblance to Clarke. Something in the shape of her face, the curve of her jaw and nose. It’s not exactly a disappointment, finding out she’s already in a relationship–if anything, it’s nice to have an explanation–but he’s kind of amazed she has a child as old as Lyra. Maybe she’s actually forty and is just aging well. That would explain a lot. “Nice to meet you, Lyra.”

“Nice to meet you.”

Clarke smiles, but it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. “She hangs out more on when she’s on break, like you do.”

“It’s the cool place to be. Sorry they dragged you out to make sure I wasn’t a kidnapper,” he adds. Hopefully, she appreciates that he was worried. He thinks he would, in her place.

This smile is stronger, so he assumes she does. “I didn’t really want to do payroll anyway. But yeah, you don’t have to worry. She’s very supervised.”

“It’s good that you own the place,” he muses. “I used to bring my sister to work with me, but I got fired once my boss found out.”

“What a jerk.”

“Yeah, it’s almost like he didn’t want his employees distracted on the clock.”
“He didn’t have to fire you.”

“Yeah, he was a jerk for unrelated reasons,” he admits. Octavia was a handful, and not nearly as happy to just hang around and read as Lyra seems to be.

Of course, as soon as he thinks that, she says, “Mom, can I get hot chocolate? Sorry for interrupting, but I finished my chapter, so—”

Clarke squeezes her shoulders. “Yeah, that’s fine. Small, okay?”

“If it’s small, can I have whipped cream?”

“Deal.”

Bellamy watches her go, still trying to figure it out. Plenty of people have children, of course, but he had something like a theory of Clarke going, and Lyra doesn’t exactly fit into that. He’d assumed she was a few years younger than he was, single, probably busy with owning her own business. And the single thing was, admittedly, mostly wishful thinking. But there had been a few times when he thought—

Well, assumptions are probably stupid, at this point. She’s right here, and Lyra’s right there. It’s the most natural conversation starter in the world.

So he asks Clarke, “How old is she?”

“Turning eight in February.”

Even if she’s his age, she would have had Lyra just out of college. “Can I ask how old you are, or is that rude?”

She smiles. “I just turned twenty-seven.”

“Just?”

“Two weeks ago.”

“Happy belated birthday.” This is still Clarke, so he figures he can stop stressing. They have a decent dynamic going, and that doesn’t have to change. “Did you get pregnant on prom night?”

She laughs. “Close.”

“Just wanted to check the cliche levels.”

“Good sleuthing.”

He does the math quickly. “So she’s in second grade?”

“Yeah.”

“Where?”

“Elmwood.”

“That’s where me and my sister went.”

They lapse into quiet for a minute, but then she offers, soft, “Thanks for not being weird.”
“My mom had me when she was seventeen, I’m used to it. And you seem like a better parent than she was, so—”

She snorts. “Based on the last ten minutes?”

“You have your whole staff looking out for her,” he says, watching as one of the baristas helps her with her drink. “She’s smart and talks to people and knows she’s safe here. That’s more than lots of kids get.”

She worries her lip. “We’re doing our best.”

He’s not sure how to phrase the question, finally settles on, “Is her dad still around?”

“Yeah. My best friend. We slept together twice in high school, to see what it was like. Twice,” she huffs, some teenage bitterness shining through. “And we ended up with a kid.”

“But you kept her.”

Clarke shifts a little, leaning forward. “Yeah. It was—I don’t know. Sometimes I still feel like it was stupid. Not because—I’d never give her up. Not for anything.” She flashes him a grin. “But I feel like there should be some sort of biological lock that keeps you from getting pregnant before you can legally drink.”

“If not longer. It’s, uh—yeah, teaching high school, it’s fucking scary. Thinking about what my mom went through.”

“Do you tell her that?” she asks, with enough warmth he feels guilty about the answer.

“She died when I was nineteen, so—”

The color drains from her face. “Shit, I’m sorry.”

“Not to be a dick, but—it kind of improved my life.”

She opens her mouth, clearly about to ask, but Lyra comes back over with a small mug overflowing with whipped cream and plops herself between them.

“Don’t touch your book until your hands are clean,” says Clarke.

“I know, Mom.” She turns her attention to him, to his surprise. “You can look at it if you want.”

He picks up the book, looking for where she’s marked her place. “Where were you?”

“Chapter four.”

“Huh.” He finds it, glances at Clarke, but she’s looking at Lyra, not him. “It sounded pretty good. You want me to read it aloud?”

“If you want,” she says, like she’s doing him a favor.

“Yeah, I’m not doing anything else. Clarke?”

“I should probably actually do the payroll. Lyra, if you need me, I’ll be in the office.”

“Okay! Thanks, Mom.”
Once they’re alone, he starts up reading, falling into the rhythm of it easily. He used to read to his sister, and sometimes when he worked at the history museum too, for events.

He’s always thought he’s pretty good with kids.

They make it through a couple chapters, Lyra generously telling him he could keep reading even after she finished with her cocoa, and it’s the worst kind of nice. Clarke still isn’t interested, and it might not be just because she has a daughter. One afternoon of his hanging out with her kid doesn’t make a different.

Especially not when a really hot guy shows up to pick her up, and Lyra lights up and says, “Dad!”

It’s not as if he really believes that Clarke has to have a thing for Lyra’s father. But it’s hard not to think about how simultaneously easy and complicated that would be. It would probably simplify her life hugely, if she got together with him, but it would be just as hard to ask for that, if they’ve got a good thing going now.

“Hey, kiddo!” says her dad. “How was your day?”

“Really good! This is Bellamy, he’s a friend of Mom’s.”

Bellamy stands and offers his hand. “Bellamy Blake. Just a customer.”

“Nice to meet you,” he says. “I’m Wells. You were showing him your book?”

“He likes to read,” says Lyra. “He’s still in school, like you were.”

“Getting my masters,” he explains. “I teach high-school history, but I don’t have my degree yet.”

“Cool. Where’s Mom?” Wells adds, to Lyra.

“In the office.”

“Is your coat there too?”

“Uh huh.”

“Okay, why don’t you grab your coat and go say bye?”

“Okay!”

It leaves Bellamy and Wells kind of awkwardly looking at each other, failing to make conversation. They’re strangers, and neither of them has Lyra’s energetic, childhood easiness with strangers.

“So, uh, what do you do?” Bellamy finally asks. “Help out with the shop, or–”

“No, this is all Clarke. I’m in computer programming. Nothing fancy, but it pays the bills.”

He nods, and they lapse into silence again.

“Teaching must be tough,” he says. “High-school kids are pretty dramatic.”

“Yeah, I like it, but I don’t know how long I’ll last.”

Clarke and Lyra come back before the awkwardness can last much longer, and Bellamy turns his
attention away while they do family logistics stuff.

But Lyra calls, “Bye, Bellamy! Nice to meet you! Thanks for reading to me!” as she leaves, and he turns back to wave.

“Bye, Lyra.”

Once they’re gone, Clarke says, “I can’t thank you enough for reading to her.”

“I don’t mind. It’s fun. You’ve got a great kid.”

She ducks her head, her cheeks a little flushed. “Thanks. I like her too.”

* 

“How’s that barista thing?” Gina asks.

“Clarke, right?” Raven adds. “Clarke the argumentative barista. You should invite her for New Year’s.”

“I know you guys aren’t telling me to ask a service professional out,” he says. He drums his fingers on the bar, debating. He could just lay it all out, but he doesn’t think either of them knows anything about kids. Besides, he doesn’t have a chance. It’s not fun talking about a crush that’s not going anywhere. “She’s probably working. Or already has plans.”

“You could ask,” says Gina. “As long as you’re not a dick about it, which I know you won’t be, there’s nothing wrong with asking a service professional to come to a party.”

“I’ll think about it,” he lies. “If she seems interested.”

Lyra’s back in the coffee shop the next time he comes in, and she comes over to sit next to him and chatter, and Clarke is watching them with a smile, and he can’t imagine doing anything to jeopardize that.

It’s not worth it.

* 

“Don’t be weird,” he tells his sister.

“I’m not the one being weird. You’re the one who’s bringing me back to what’s now your regular coffee shop, where you’re flirting with this barista, who’s not interested in you because she has a kid and you think she secretly wants to hook back up with the kid’s dad.”

“It sounds weird when you put it like that,” he grumbles.

“What’s the non-weird way to put it?”

“I’m not flirting with her. She’s cute, but she’s not interested, so I’m not going to flirt. We’re just–friendly.”

“Uh huh. I’m going to be the judge of that.”

He holds the door open for her, smiles when he sees Clarke leaning on the counter, chatting with another customer. There’s no sign of Lyra or Wells, which is probably good; Octavia would read into it.
Clarke’s smile looks a little tired when he gets to the register, and he wonders if it was a rough day. He makes sure his own expression is warm when he greets her. “Hey. How’s it going?”

She shrugs. “Not bad. Lunch rush is over, Wells and Lyra are coming in half an hour to pick me up so we can go to the movies.”

“Cool, sounds fun.” He wants to ask more, but Octavia appears at his side, demanding his attention. “Don’t be a brat, O, I’m getting to you.” He yanks her in with an arm around her neck, because he’s kind of a disaster and a little embarrassed now that he’s actually introducing O and Clarke. Not that he doesn’t know her family, but–he’s a mess. It happens. “Clarke, this is my sister, Octavia. O, this is Clarke. This is her place.”

“You’re an adult, you’re not supposed to give me noogies!” Octavia protests, kicking his ankle hard enough he actually jumps.

“Jesus, you’re wearing heels, that was not fair. Way worse than noogies.”

“They’re not heels,” she says, lofty. “They’re wedges.”

“That just means there’s more to kick me with.”

“Is this what having a sibling is like?” Clarke asks, sounding amused. “I used to think I was missing out.”

Octavia beams. “Basically. Nice to meet you. My brother says he’s a dick to you about almond milk and tea.”

“I don’t think we can limit it to just that,” Clarke points out, and he laughs.

“Yeah, okay. I’m a dick about everything. What are you getting, O?”

They get their drinks, and he’s honestly expecting Octavia to be an asshole non-stop, but once they get to the table, all she says is, “I forgot how nice this place is. I can see why you like it.”

“That’s it?” he asks, wary.

“What do you mean, that’s it?”

“You’re not going to ask me about anything else? Like–”

“I’m monitoring the situation,” she says, and he shakes his head.

“Whatever you say, O.”

He’s not expecting anything to come of it, but it’s only about five minutes later when Clarke comes over, lingering by their table, looking a little nervous. “Can I hang out while I wait for the kid and her dad?” she asks.

O beams. “Yeah! I’m curious about the kid.”

Clarke glances at Bellamy, like she expects him to have an explanation, and he just shrugs. “Why?” she asks.

“I like other weird families.” She taps her jaw. “So the dad is–do you guys live together?”

“Yeah.”
“But you’re not dating?” she asks, and it sounds totally natural, like a question anyone would ask.

It’s possible he’ll owe her for this.

“Nope,” says Clarke, and Bellamy’s heart lodges somewhere in his throat. “We’re really not like that. I’d say he’s like my brother, but—” She pulls a face. “It’s kind of weird saying you had a kid with your brother. But the longer we live together, the more I can’t believe we ever had sex.”

“You were really young, though, right?”

“O,” he warns. She’s way too perky about this conversation.

Clarke flashes him a reassuring smile. “Yeah, I was nineteen when I had her.”

He feels himself flush. “Oh, uh—that reminds me. It’s her birthday this week, right?”

“Yes,” says Clarke, with a slight frown.

“I, uh. I thought she’d like this,” he says, pulling the present out of his bag. He forces himself to not say anything else as Clarke examines the package. It’s really not a big deal, in terms of gifts, just a copy of Redwall. If Clarke thinks it’s inappropriate, he won’t be offended.

“You got her a birthday present?” she finally asks.

He can’t read her tone, and his confidence falters, falls away. “I, uh—yeah? Sorry, if it’s weird you don’t have to—it’s okay if you don’t—”

She’s shaking her head before he’s even finished. “No, no. This is—it’s really nice of you. Thanks.”

“Yes,” he says, and remembers, very suddenly, that Octavia is here, and definitely watching them. He clears his throat. “When’s Lincoln coming to get you?”

They chat until she has to go, and it’s fun, good to see her, easy. Of course she slips in that he’s single, but—Clarke seems to be too. It doesn’t have to mean anything, but all his friends might be right; he should find out if it could. He wants it to, wants it so much it almost hurts, and finding out he doesn’t have a chance would suck.

But he wants to know.

“Sorry about her,” he tells Clarke, smiling. “I was grading all weekend, so we barely had time to see each other. Lincoln’s down the street, so—”

“No, that was—It was fun to meet her. I actually thought she was your girlfriend,” she says, slow, and he almost chokes.

“Based on what?”

“The first time you guys came in.”

He blinks, genuinely surprised. He didn’t think she remembered that. He had no idea she’d recognize Octavia. “Really?”

“She was cute, you were waiting for her.” She’s not making eye contact, and he figures it out suddenly. She was looking for him to have a girlfriend. She wanted to know if he was single. “I just kind of assumed.”
“Huh,” he says, trying to maintain his cool. “I guess there isn’t a ton of family resemblance.”

“I’m not gonna judge on that,” she says.

He smiles. “Lyra looks a lot like you. I couldn’t believe I didn’t notice.” He straightens up, takes a breath and lets it out. “Speaking of, did you notice how subtle O was in mentioning that I’m single? Subtlety is not her strong suit.”

Clarke bites the corner of her mouth. “I appreciated it, though,” she admits, and just like that, all the tension drains out of him, and he’s sure. He’s not being inappropriate; she doesn’t mind.

“She also wanted verbal confirmation you weren’t into Wells. I was pretty sure, but—I don’t know. Best friend can mean a lot of things.”

“I’m not into Wells. At all.”

“Yeah.” He lets himself put his hand on hers, and even though he was sure, it feels so good when she doesn’t pull away. “So, uh, do you—”

Wells and Lyra come in, and he jerks back, tries to act normal. Clarke might not want them to know about–whatever this is. It’s not even a date yet, just–

“Do you want to come?” Clarke asks him. “We’re just catching a movie and grabbing dinner.”

“I don’t want to impose,” he says, without much input from his brain.

Clarke takes his hand back and turns to her daughter. “Lyra, you don’t mind if Bellamy comes to the movie, right?”

She’s practically bouncing. “Yeah, you should come!”

“If you guys really don’t mind.”

“Definitely not.”

She follows him to his car, and he gets to kiss her for the first time right there, in the front seat, uncomfortable and a little cramped, but perfect, and when he pulls back he thinks, for the first time, that he’s going to marry this woman.

And about eighteen months later, he does.
We Were Born to Make History

Chapter Summary

Fill for arthurpendragonz! Prompt: bellarke + 'out looking for another bunker when they accidentally stumble across an old intact museum, bellamy gives clarke a tour using his History!Nerd knowledge'

Chapter Notes

Undefined S1 AU, for the record!

When Clarke thought about the ground, she thought about a lot of the things they got, grass and trees, running water, the feeling of dirt under her feet and the sound of birds in the trees. Sunlight is just as good as she thought it would be. Nature, for the most part, hasn’t let her down.

“But shouldn’t there be more stuff?” she asks Bellamy, with a huff.

He glances at her over his shoulder, snorts out a laugh. “What, there isn’t enough down here for you, Princess?”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t want more too. We should be in the middle of civilization here, Bellamy. There should be history, right?”

“There should be, yeah.” There’s a pause, and Clarke lets the silence stand, waiting for him. Their friendship is still a tentative, nebulous thing, and she’s trying to figure out how it’s going to go. She’s trying to get a feel for him.

He doesn’t make her wait too long. “Do you know where we are?” he asks.

“Right now?”

“Historically speaking. Where they put us down.”

“United States, eastern seaboard.”

“Near D.C. The capital is around here somewhere, Clarke. There must be so much stuff around here, if we could find it.”

“Have you been looking?”

“I figure we can survive winter first,” he says. “And then work on exploring.”

“What do you call this?” she asks. “If it’s not exploring.”

“This is surviving. We’re looking for bunkers, not–”
“History?”

“Ruins.”

“Aren’t bunkers ruins?”

“Useful ruins. And we’re not looking for them for historical reasons.”

“But they are history.”

“What, does that really matter to you? They’re history, fine. That’s still not what we’re actually looking for.”

“But do you know, in theory, where any history might be?”

“You want to go on a field trip?” he asks, sounding dubious.

“I’m just wondering if there’s anywhere you’ve been wanting to go.”

“My geography isn’t that good. But if we’re out here enough, we’ll probably find something, right?”

That’s the answer she was really looking for. “So, you’re going to be out here a lot?”

He shoots her a smirk. “Just until you want to bring someone you actually like,” he teases, and she laughs.

“So, you’ll be out here a lot.”

“Yeah,” he agrees. “Sounds like it.”

*

When they find the museum, it’s completely by accident. Three days later, on the trail of what they think is another bunker, but when Bellamy gets the hatch open, even the air smells different.

“It looks bright down there,” he says.

“Automatic lights, maybe?”

“Maybe. What do you think is powering them?”

“Could be solar cells. Rigged to turn on when—“

“Someone breaks in? Friendly.” He glances at her. “Going in?”

“Like you said, they seem friendly.”

He climbs down first, like he always insists on. He’s not one of those people who wants to lead so other people will do his dirty work; Bellamy Blake is always willing to be first in the line of fire.

Instead of looking back up to spot her as she follows him, though, he’s staring into the bunker, apparently transfixed.

“Bellamy?” she prompts, soft enough she hopes no one will hear, if he’s found people down there. “Problem?”
He looks back at her and grins; it’s an expression she’s never seen on him before, not even when they found the gun cache. There’s no mean edge to the expression at all; he’s delighted.

“You have to get down here.”

He does watch her as she climbs down, but he’s looking almost giddy, like a kid in a candy store.

“How many guns are down here?” she asks. “Is there a tank?”

He turns to the room with a flourish of his arm; all drama, all the time. “You said you wanted history, Princess.”

*The Apocalypse Archive*, says a bright sign over a set of clear double doors. *A Museum for the After Times.*

“Holy shit,” she breathes.

Bellamy is practically bouncing. “They must have seen it coming. Whoever made this place. And they wanted to store it for posterity.”

“Do you think we’ll find anything useful in here?”

“You were the one who wanted to find something historical,” he says. “Don’t tell me you changed your mind now that we actually did.”

“Just wondering where you stand on raiding a museum for supplies.”

His look of absolute horror is an answer all by itself. “It’s a museum, Clarke.”

“What if they have a tank?”

“So you wanted to find historical ruins and take their stuff.”

“Isn’t that where the first museums came from?”

He glares at her as he holds the door open. “We’re not taking anything unless we need it.”

“I’m actually more interested in the space,” she says, looking around with interest. “If this place is big enough and has actual power, we could live here.”

“You want to move into the museum?”

“Just if it makes sense. But we should investigate first. See what’s around. Although,” she adds, frowning, “I don’t know where to start.”

If anyone had ever asked, Clarke would have said she had a decent understanding of museums. She read about them when she was a kid, and there was a display of artifacts from the ground in Alpha Station, curated carefully, but it was nothing like this, a strange hodgepodge of things, with no clear order she can see.

“With the introduction,” says Bellamy. “*We, the staff of the Apocalypse Archive, recognize that many of our current facilities may not survive climate change, nuclear war, and everything else humans are doing. We hope that some of us will survive it, and that if we do, this museum will serve as a record of what came before, both good and bad. It would be impossible to capture the full scope of human history, but we’ve done our best. It repeats in a few other languages,*” he adds, fingers tracing the words on the wall. “Spanish, I think Chinese, French, maybe Arabic?”
“That’s Korean under it,” says Clarke. “I’m pretty sure.”

“So, this looks like a timeline,” he says, moving down the wall. “I guess they wanted to keep it as universal as possible, I don’t see any other text. Starting with the Big Bang here—” He gestures to an image of an explosion that Clarke wouldn’t have immediately called as the start of the universe. “And then we go into the history of life on Earth.”

“Imagine not knowing if all this knowledge would survive.”

“It might not have,” he points out. “Grounders seem to have lost it.”

“Which is weird, if you think about it. We had people who survived and remembered, that’s part of why we know. They lived down here, but they made whole new lives.”

“Maybe the reason they survived was that they’d already given up on all this stuff.” He follows the timeline, pointing out innovations as he spots them. It’s quite a piece of work, huge, showing how continents moved, splitting, when humans show up, and tracking different civilizations across the world. It’s not comprehensive, but it’s detailed enough that even with both of them working together, they can’t figure out what all the pictures represent.

Bellamy still gets most of them.

“I wonder how long this took,” he muses, tracing an image of a mushroom cloud.

“I wonder when they started.”

“The introduction said climate change,” he says. “That puts it after 2000, I think. Global warming was preferred before that, it was this political thing to switch it so people couldn’t say that a colder spring meant the problem wasn’t real. Probably 2010 to 2020.”

Clarke blinks. “You have it down to ten years?”

He shrugs. “That was when the climate change problem got really noticeable, and it just got worse in the Trump presidency, when the United States was doubling down on destroying the environment. It’s amazing they put off the end of the world as long as they did, honestly, after that mess. Plus, this is the new UN symbol here,” he adds, pointing to the end of the timeline. “That went into use in 2025, and it would have taken them a while to build this place. Probably started around 2018.” He looks around. “I think we’re supposed to start here. Ancient civilizations.”

“How did you get interested in this stuff?” she asks, curious.

“What stuff?”

“History.”

“My mom always liked it. Octavia too. It wasn’t like we could socialize much. Even if—having friends meant they wanted to spend time with you, and it wasn’t safe, so I just didn’t have friends. I read to O a lot, and she always had a lot of questions. I was her brother, I was supposed to know everything. And I like it. I like the true stuff.”

“Okay, so—tell me about the ancient civilizations we’re seeing here.”

“Don’t act like you don’t know plenty about it too.”

“I’ll handle the art, you can take the history.”
He smiles. “Deal.”

It doesn’t feel like meeting Bellamy for the first time, not really. But it feels like finding a new part of him, a part she’d always known about, but only in the broadest strokes. He knows who Oppenheimer is, but she never knew why he knew, and she tells him about her father’s fascination with the atomic bomb, while he shares his own favorite historical periods, the ones that interest him most.

“I spent a lot of time thinking about how we got here,” he admits. “And why the Ark was how it was. I still don’t get how we all decided to speak English.”

She has to laugh. “Yeah? What would you have picked?”

“Esperanto is a pretty logical choice.”

“I’ve never even heard of that one.”

“It’s kind of cool. I don’t know if it ever could have taken over completely, but it would have encouraged people to stay multilingual, which would have been nice. Some guy in–late 1800s, I think? Made it as an international language. I actually learned it, for fun.”

“You never stop surprising me,” she says without thinking, and he frowns.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I remember when we first got down here. I never would have guessed you taught yourself languages for fun.”

“I thought that was the only way to lead. To protect everyone.” He smirks. “You saw how much good trying to talk about survival was doing.”

“You were the one who was arguing with me!” she protests, laughing.

“What, you think Murphy wouldn’t have done the same thing?”

“He wouldn’t have been as good at it.”

He taps his finger against one of the statues. All of the works of art in the Archive are reproductions, she’s pretty sure, made to survive and educate, and they’re well done, if not completely convincing. They get the job done. “I was doing what I thought I had to do. To protect myself.”

“And us.”

“I wasn’t protecting everyone.”

“We needed a leader, and like you said, what I was doing what I wasn’t working. I’m not saying you were perfect, and we could have done better those first few weeks, but we could have done worse too.”

“Wow. Don’t get too enthusiastic,” he says, but he doesn’t quite land the delivery. Now that she’s getting to know him, she knows how he uses sarcasm. “Oh, hey,” he adds, the most obvious subject change of all time. “Philippines. I want to look at this.”

“Yeah?”
“That’s where my dad’s family was from. At least that’s what my mom told me.”

“I don’t think I know anything about them. My history is pretty spotty.”

“That’s another language I tried to learn, Tagalog. My mom told me my dad spoke it too, but he died before he could teach me.”

She slides her arm through his, deliberate, and he startles, but just for a second. “So let’s check that out,” she says.

“Yeah,” he agrees. “Let’s see what they’ve got.”

*

By the time they’re thinking of leaving, it’s too late to make it back to camp that night, and the archive is getting cold and dark.

“I guess it is solar powered,” says Clarke.

“And they weren’t planning on anyone living here.”

“Which is weird. I guess it was designed to survive whatever happened, but not keep anyone alive in here.”

“Maybe after they did all this, they weren’t sure we really deserved to survive.” She cocks her head at him, and he raises one shoulder. “Sometimes, reading history makes you think humanity was a bad idea.”

“But you still want us to survive.”

“Us personally, yeah. But I don’t think I would have made it on the Ark. If they’d floated O, I don’t know—”

He looks away, and Clarke’s heart lodges in her throat. It’s easy to remember how close they all came to not making it, to being floated to give the Ark more air, to dying even if they didn’t. But Bellamy should have had his whole life ahead of him, and it’s hard to remember that even without knowing anything, he didn’t see a future for himself.

“We should just spend the night here,” she says, giving him a smile. “See how it is. If this is somewhere we could live, it would be a lot better than the drop ship. There’s a lot of space.”

“If we got rid of the stuff.”

“Survival first, history second, right?” she asks, and he looks around the museum, clearly unsure.

“Maybe we’re making history now,” he finally says. “We just need to figure out where we fit in with all this.”

“Let’s do that in the morning. This cloth isn’t historically relevant, right?” she adds, nodding to a drop cloth under a bust of an ancient philosopher.

“I doubt it.”

“So lift that up so we can sleep on it.”

He does, but his eyebrows are raised as he looks at her. “We?”
“It’s cold in here. And there’s only one blanket.”

He doesn’t object as she finds a clear patch of floor, and when she gestures for him to lie down, he does it. The cloth isn’t huge, so she settles half on top of him, and between the two of them they get themselves wrapped up, close and tight.

“We are going to make history,” she tells him. It’s easy to feel sure of it, when they’re close and warm in the darkening bunker. “You and me. Together.”

“Yeah, I think we are. In the morning, though.”

She smiles against his neck. “Yeah. In the morning.”
“You were in love with her, weren’t you?”

It’s not a question Bellamy was expecting now, although it was one he was expecting. He was all ready for it earlier, in the first few months. Sometime between his looking like an open wound and his learning to hide it. And he was expecting it from Echo or Murphy, someone blunt, who wanted him to just get over it. But it’s been over five years, they’re still stuck up here, and he wasn’t expecting anyone to ever bring her up again, not until they were on the ground and it was his job to tell her mother what happened.

He especially didn’t expect it from Raven, and especially not when they’re curled together, naked and sweaty and sated. It’s been a long time coming, the two of them, and he was ready to bask in the afterglow, a much better one than they got the last time they did this.

He’d like to protest, to say the question is unfair and unnecessary, but he doesn’t have to ask who she means, and that’s probably reason enough for her to ask.

Still, it’s easy to answer, easier than it would have been when Clarke was still a part of his life. It’s easy to love ghosts; no one will ever expect you to do anything about it. “Yeah.” He kisses Raven’s hair. “That doesn’t have anything to do with this. Us.”

“I know. Just curious. We all figured you did.”

“You loved her too, right?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t want to date her.”

“Really? I feel like you guys would have been good together.”

She laughs, and it’s the strangest thing to be laughing about, but this is the good part. The two of them talking about their friend, whom they both loved, in their own ways. “Wouldn’t have wanted to get between you two.”

“That would have been fun too,” he teases, and she leans up to kiss him, and he’s not an open wound anymore, not really.

A part of him is always going to be bleeding, but that’s fine. As long as he’s alive to bleed.

*

It takes them six years and two months to make it back to the ground, and Octavia is the first person he sees, bright and defiant, so perfect he feels like his chest might break itself open.

“Oh,” he says, voice breaking on it, and he staggers to her, crushing her to his chest.
“I didn’t live underground for six years just for you to hug me to death, Bell!” she protests, but she’s laughing, clinging back to him. “We thought you guys didn’t make it.”

“I thought we might not,” he admits. He lets her go and looks her over again, grin almost splitting his face. “What were you doing underground for six years? The radiation cleared out after a year. Don’t tell me it was so great down there you didn’t want to leave.”

“You’re one to talk. And we were buried! We couldn’t get out until Clarke got the miners to clear the door.”

Some distant part of his brain registers the change in her expression, the moment when she realizes he didn’t know, but most of his body is frozen, shock and dread and uncertainty churning through him.

“Clarke,” he manages. His throat feels like it’s going to crack open.

“Yeah. She’s alive, Bell. I don’t know what Nightblood is, but it’s really something.”

He looks over his shoulder, finding Raven, and she’s looking back at him, expression unreadable. “Yeah,” he says, not looking away from her. “It must be.”

* 

He’s the one to fall into step with Raven as they head to the new settlement, the one to take her hand. She looks back at him, eyes closed off, and he understands why. It’s not what happened with Finn, but it must feel related to her. If Clarke was alive, this might never have happened, the two of them.

But it did. It still is.

“You okay?” he asks.

“I’m fine,” she says, like there isn’t tension all through her shoulders. “You don’t have to worry about me.”

“That doesn’t sound like me,” he says, and she at least cracks a smile.

But it doesn’t last. She lets out a breath, uneven and harsh, like she’s trying to keep control. “We don’t have to do this. If you’re done, you can just tell me. I get that–”

“Raven,” he says.

“Don’t tell me you don’t care,” she snaps, and he tugs her aside, away from the group.

“Of course I care. You do too. But it’s not–I love you. You’ve never been a replacement. And I can’t pretend I’m not–” He smiles. “I have no idea how I feel right now, but I’m not planning on losing you. It’s not like that.”

She rubs her face, looking wrecked. “Fuck. It’s not like I’m not happy. Of course I’m fucking happy. But I’m done with–if you want to be with her, you need to tell me.”

“I don’t.”

“If you ever do.” She wets her lips, manages a smile. “There were only eight of us in the entire fucking world. We’ve got more options now.”
“So, what, you want to dump me? You can just tell me if you do.” She glares, and he leans down to kiss her. “I love you,” he says again. “And I’ll tell you how I’m doing with everything else.”

“So how are you doing?” she asks, and he shakes his head.

“I don’t even know. I’m not going to believe it until I see her. I can’t believe she–”

“Yeah,” Raven agrees. “I thought we lost her too.”

“But we didn’t.”

“No. We didn’t.”

*

Of course, Clarke isn’t at the settlement when they get there, still out hunting with some of the crew from the other ship that came down.

Octavia frowns when she hears. “I thought she’d come back when she saw the ship, but maybe she didn’t want to get her hopes up again. They’ll be back before dark.”

It doesn’t really help. They keep busy, of course—the logistics and reunions and introductions to deal with—but the knowledge of Clarke is in the back of his mind, a loose thread he can’t forget about. She’s here, she’s alive, she’s not even that far, he could find her if–

“Are you Bellamy?”

He jumps, looks down at the girl. She’s probably about ten or eleven, small and pale, frowning at him like she doesn’t quite trust him. Which makes sense; he doesn’t trust her either.

“Yeah. Why?”

“I’m Madi. Clarke told me about you.” She looks behind him. “And that’s Raven.”

“Yeah. How do you know Clarke?”

“She found me. After the fire. She told me nightbloods have to stick together.”

He finds himself smiling a little. “And you guys did, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. I’m glad you guys had each other.” He pauses, but Echo went off with some of the Azgeda, Miller took Monty and Harper to check out the dining hall, and Murphy and Emori are self-sufficient. Plus, this is someone who matters to Clarke, which means she’s going to matter to them too. “You think you could show us around?”

Her eyes flick to their linked hands with something like distrust, but it’s just for a second. “Sure!” she says. “Clarke’s going to be so happy to see you.”

Raven smiles. “We’re going to be happy to see her too.”

*

Through Madi, they get a lot of Clarke’s story before she ever makes it back, and the more they hear, the worse Bellamy feels. It was bad enough, thinking he’d let Clarke die, but it had never
occurred to him that she’d be down here almost entirely alone, waiting for five years, anticipating the day when they finally came down.

They’re over a year late; she must have given up hope. It’s not his fault, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t feel bad about it.

They’re sitting in the mess hall, letting Madi tell them about the settlement, when a horn blows, and she perks up. “That’s them! They’re coming back. Come on, I want to see her face when she sees you.”

He and Raven exchange a look, and she leans in to ask, “You okay?”

“Still can’t believe it.”

“I know.”

The rover rolls in and an unfamiliar man gets out of the passenger seat first, and then a woman, and then there she is, *Clarke*, her hair shorter, a patch of red in it, but unmistakable. Alive and even smiling, trading barbs with one of the strangers.

And he’s frozen again. He doesn’t know what to do.

“Clarke!” says Madi, waving, and he knows the exact second she sees them. Reactions crash over her face—shock, disbelief, confusion, hope—almost too fast to see, and then she’s smiling like the sun and in his arms, and he’s holding her as tightly as he held Octavia, breathing her in, feeling the beating of her heart against his chest.

“It’s you,” she says, and he finds himself laughing.

“It’s me.”

*

“So, you and Raven.”

They lit a bonfire to celebrate, and Raven’s helping Monty set up some complicated drinking game, leaving Bellamy alone with Clarke. He doesn’t feel guilty about it exactly, just—torn. He wants to reassure Raven and stay with Clarke at the same time, and it seems impossible.

“Me and Raven,” he agrees.

“I’m happy for you,” she offers. “I’m glad you guys have each other.”

“You have us too,” he says, before he’s actually thought about it. But it’s still true. “We missed you.”

“I missed you too.” She bites her lip. “I thought I’d never see you again.”

“I thought you were dead.”

“It’s not a competition, Bellamy,” she says, and he surprises himself with a laugh.

“So you’re saying I’d win.”

She puts her head on his shoulder. “I think it’s a tie.”
He’s torn between feeling he should shake her off and wanting to pull her closer. Every time she’s out of his reach, he feels sure she’ll disappear, that she’ll turn out to be a dream. Having her touching him is the best, unmistakable and warm and real.

Raven comes and, to his surprise, takes the spot next to Clarke, and not him, and Clarke reaches over and takes her hand.

Maybe they don’t seem real to each other either.

“Not drinking?” Clarke asks.

“Nah. I’d rather be with you guys.”

Bellamy reaches behind Clarke so he can put his hand on her back, and for the moment, his life is perfect.

It even feels like it could last.

* 

“Gina and I talked about this,” Raven tells him, a week later.

He blinks. It’s evening, and they’re in their room, curled together on the bed. He’d been reading, but Raven sounds like they’re in the middle of a long conversation.

“Talked about what?”

“I really like him, but what happens when Clarke comes home,” she says, pitching her voice high, but she doesn’t sound upset. Amused, maybe. “In case you were wondering, you’ve always been obvious.”

He swallows. “It wasn’t like that,” he says, but he remembers her, when ALIE was inside her, telling him he was never so devoted to Gina. It might be true, but it might not be, too. He never needed to be devoted to Gina. “It’s not like that with you.”

“I know. I’m still worried about her.”

“This conversation would be a lot easier for me if you just told me what you want. I can’t tell you I don’t love her,” he says. “She’s–you know I do. That doesn’t mean I don’t love you. Or that I’m going to–”

She kisses him. “That’s not what I’m saying. I didn’t even know how much I missed her, you know that? I was so busy worrying about you, I never even though about how I was feeling. But it’s so fucking good to see her. And I know how much she missed us. So–maybe it doesn’t have to be like this.”

“Raven, seriously, I need you to–”

“What if it’s not about you having me or her? What if it’s just all of us, having each other?”

His breath catches, the thought sweet and sharp all at once, impossible in its perfection. He’s never had the kind of life that works out so neatly. He couldn’t.

“Like this, but Clarke’s in the bed?” he asks.

“Me getting between the two of you, right?” She looks away. “You don’t have to say yes. But–I
started thinking about it, and I can’t stop. It seems so easy.”

“You don’t have to—I don’t need this,” he says. “I don’t need anyone but you.”

“That’s bullshit,” she says, without heat. “But I think we all need each other. I wouldn’t just do this for you, don’t worry. We’re not the only eight people in the world anymore. We could take advantage of it.”

“Do you think she wants to?”

Raven snorts, kisses his collarbone. “I think we just need to ask.”

*

He makes her wait another week, or rather, tells her he needs time, which she seems to accept. It’s his whole life, it feels like, or so much of it. The two women who matter most to him, aside from his sister, and there’s Madi to think of too, this little girl he and Raven already think of as theirs too.

This is his family, and once he realizes that, he doesn’t have another choice.

“You’re sure?” he asks Raven, one last time. “We don’t have to—“

“I was in the shower with her yesterday and I couldn’t stop checking her out. Trust me, this isn’t for you. If I thought I had to do this to keep you, I’d dump you.” He frowns, and she kisses him. “If I’m not enough for you, the answer isn’t adding someone else. But if she finds someone else—“

It hadn’t even occurred to him, somehow, and it feels like a piece of his flesh being ripped out, this sudden, sharp flash of pain and anger.

It makes Raven laugh. “Yeah. She’s ours.”

And that was all he needed.

“You have any idea what to say?”

“Yeah, I’ve got it.” She flashes him a smile. “Don’t worry. We’re going to be fine.”

*

Raven takes advantage of Madi asking Bellamy for axe-throwing lessons to talk to Clarke, which is bad only because the last time Bellamy wants to be distracted is when he’s hurling a sharp object around with a child. But it’s probably good he has to concentrate extra hard. It means he doesn’t have much brain power left.

It hasn’t even been that long when Clarke shows up at Madi’s back, flashing Bellamy a quick smile before she watches Madi’s throw.

“Getting better, huh?”

“I hit the bullseye on the last one.”

“She did,” Bellamy confirms. He sounds very normal. Totally calm.

“Awesome. I need to talk to Bellamy and Raven about something,” Clarke tells Madi. “Can you go help my mom at the clinic?”
“When are you going to be done?”

“We’ll meet you at dinner. You don’t have to hang out at the clinic the whole time. But I’m going to be busy.”

“Okay,” says Madi, easy. “Thanks for the lesson, Bellamy!”

“Sure.”

They stand in awkward silence for a minute, until Madi’s gone, and then he clears his throat, makes himself ask, “So, what did you and Raven talk about?”

Clarke smiles. “How much we like you.”

“And each other, right? Not just—“

She starts to laugh. “This is exactly what we were talking about, yeah. And how much we like each other.” She bites her lip. “Don’t worry, I was jealous of your entire relationship. I want all of it.”

“So talking to Raven was a euphemism,” he says. His mouth is starting to twitch into a smile, and once he starts he’s not sure he’ll ever stop.

“I figure we’ll talk too.” She bites her lip. “I already made out with her, so she said I should make sure I made out with you too.”

“You’re going to have plenty of chances, right?”

“Sorry, do you not want to make out right now?” she teases, and he lets himself cup her jaw, lean in and kiss her, and it’s so close to perfect.

When she pulls back, she says, “Okay, we should go see Raven,” and that’s what’s missing, of course. It’s not just him and Clarke. That’s not enough.

“Yeah,” he says. “Let’s go home.”

Raven’s on their bed when they get there, and Bellamy settles in on one side of her, and Clarke takes the other, and that’s it.

That’s perfect.
"Oh, hey, it’s the only person in the world who sucks more with technology than you do, Clarke.”

It’s one of those small, unassuming moments, the kind that wouldn’t be memorable at all if not for what came later. When she says it, all Raven is thinking is, oh, it’s this guy again, he deserves to be made fun of. And Clarke always deserves to be made fun of.

She doesn’t really think anything’s going to come of it.

Bellamy raises his eyebrows, looking between Raven and Clarke. “Do I have a reputation? Do you guys talk about me behind my back?”

“Yes, all the time. But Clarke doesn’t actually work here, so she’s not in on our complaining. What did you do this time?”

“What makes you think I did anything?” he grumbles.

“Sorry, did you come to IT because you didn’t break your computer again?”

He huffs. “It’s actually my phone.”

“Oh, yeah, my bad. What happened?”

Clarke only gets involved once, when Bellamy is saying he didn’t do anything weird, and she asks, “Do you think everything you do on your phone is weird?”

Bellamy looks surprised, like he’d forgotten she was there. “What?”

“Is there anything you do on your phone that you don’t think is weird? Or does technology just weird you out all the time?”

“I didn’t do anything different on the phone,” he corrects. “Just the usual weirdness.”

Clarke smiles down at her computer like she won something. “That’s what I thought.”

“The phone did it, not me.”

“Yeah, of course.”

He scowls. “Do you just hang out here waiting for something of yours to break?”

“Basically,” says Raven. “Here. You somehow reset the sensitivity on the touch screen. I don’t know how, you have a gift.”

“It probably could have happened to anyone,” he says, eyes flicking to Clarke, but her attention is
very pointed on her book.

Raven just snorts. “Probably, but it keeps happening to you. See you next week.”

“You might not. But thanks.”

And she assumes that’s the end of that.

*

The next time it happens, Clarke is in because she is the first person Raven has ever witnessed who managed to get a virus on her iPad, and Raven actually had to call in Monty to help.

“There has to be a way for you to monetize this,” Monty is saying, when Bellamy comes in. “Like, it’s a mutant superpower. You could hire yourself out to people who want to destroy their enemies’ tech.”

“How does that pay?” Bellamy asks, and they all turn their attention to him. “I think I got a virus on my iPad. Does that happen?”

“Oh my god, there’s two of them,” says Monty, horrified.

“Fuck, it better be the same virus,” says Raven. “They don’t pay us enough to deal with two different iPad viruses.”

Clarke just pats the chair next to her. “Have a seat. I get the feeling it’s going to be a while.”

“You guys aren’t actually required to hang out,” Monty says, and then immediately rethinks it. “Or, wait, Bellamy, you should hang out long enough to tell us what you did so we can make sure no one ever does it again.”

“Yeah, tell my story.” He takes the seat next to Clarke and cocks his head at her. “I know Raven and Monty, but I didn’t get your name. Just that you’re also a regular.”

“Also Raven’s roommate.” She offers her hand. “Clarke.”

“Nice to meet you. So, what did you do?”

“Nothing weird,” she teases, and he rolls his eyes, smiling.

“Of course not. Just a couple of normal technological natives, that’s us.”

“That’s us,” she agrees, and Raven and Monty share an eye roll and get back to work.

*

“That Bellamy guy is in my queer studies seminar,” Clarke tells Raven, at the start of the next semester. “The one who breaks all his stuff.”

“Huh,” says Raven. “Is he queer?”

“He said he was probably bi. I figured it would be weird if I didn’t sit next to him, right?”

“Because you guys are so tight.”

“It’s weird either way,” Clarke admits. “When you sort of know someone. If you don’t sit with
them, it feels like a statement.”

“You don’t have to justify yourself to me.” She lets the statement sit for a beat, but she can’t help teasing. “He’s cute.”

“He’s kind of a dick.”

Translated from the Clarke, that means he’s really cute, and Raven smiles. “Yeah, you definitely want to sit next to the dicks. That’s how I do it.”

Clarke glares. “Shut up.”

* 

“Oh no, if you guys got another virus, you’re on your own,” Raven hears Monty say, and she looks up to see Clarke and Bellamy coming up to the IT help desk together, which either means one of them made a move or they’ve started working together to destroy all of their devices.

Or, most likely, Clarke’s still stubbornly pretending she doesn’t have a thing for Bellamy, and following him around because that’s total bullshit. Raven doesn’t know Bellamy well enough to know where he stands on having a thing for Clarke, let alone denying it.

But judging just from the way he’s glancing at Clarke occasionally as they walk, Raven would assume he has a thing.

“No viruses. We just can’t get this game to work.”

“Game?” Monty asks. “I don’t know if IT is actually supposed to help you with games.”

“It’s for our queer studies class,” says Clarke. “Completely school-related. But we can’t get it to run on either of our laptops.”

“Okay, that’s a valid use of IT resources.”

“Also Raven is my roommate and does these things for free if she has to.”

“Yeah, but I deserve to get paid,” Raven says, straightening up. “Let’s see what you’ve got.”

It doesn’t take long to get the game running, but Monty wants to see what it is, so Clarke and Bellamy stick around, bickering over how to play, and Raven can see how their inevitable hookup won’t be that bad. They’re cute, at least.

“Do you think when they make out, it’ll destroy all the technology in the room?” Monty muses, once he and Raven are alone again.

Raven snorts. “I guess we’ll find out.”

* 

Except that, suddenly, Bellamy disappears. Raven wouldn’t even know—she often goes weeks without seeing him—except that it’s the middle of the semester, and Clarke still has the class with him.

“At what point do I get to reach out to someone I don’t really–” Clarke stops herself, sighs, and flops on her bed. “Bellamy’s missed two classes in a row, and I’m worried. How do I ask about that without being too–”
“Having a crush on him?” Raven supplies.

She sighs. “Yeah.”

“Email, probably. You guys are talking and hanging out in class. He’d notice if you weren’t around too. Shoot him an email, see what’s up.”

“That’s probably the normal way to do it, yeah.”

“What were you going to do?”

“Go to his room and see if he was okay.”

Raven feels a smile tugging at her mouth. “Yeah, stick with email for now. Lowkey.”

“Lowkey,” Clarke agrees.

It’s another week before Bellamy gets back to her, and when he does, it’s to tell her that his mother passed away and he had to leave school to help out with his younger sister.

Raven takes Clarke out drinking, tells her there are other fish in the sea, and figures, once again, that that’s the end of it. For real, this time.

*

“It’s–Raven, right?”

Raven looks up from her coffee, finds herself looking at–

“Tech disaster.”

He snorts. “Jesus. I guess that’s less embarrassing than being wrong about recognizing you.”

“Bellamy,” she says, taking pity on him. It’s been five years, he’s probably feeling weird about the whole thing. “Long time no see.”

“Yeah.” He smiles with half his mouth. “Sorry, this is awkward, I just thought I should say hi.”

“No, have a seat if you want. You’d be helping me out.”

“How so?”

“Well, Clarke is meeting my boyfriend for the first time and I think they might kill each other, so I could use someone to deflect attention.”

The change in his expression is quick, but Raven doesn’t miss it. “Clarke? From college?”

“How many Clarkes do you think I know? Yeah, Clarke from college.”

For a second, he’s clearly fighting with himself, but then he huffs. “If you’re just being polite, tell me. I want a drink and there aren’t any free tables, but I can get it to go.”

“New in town?”

“Yeah.”

“So have a seat. Make some friends.”
He smiles. “Let me get the drink first.”

Raven really is planning to warn Clarke, but she’s still trying to figure out the right text when Clarke collapses into the seat across from her, shaking snow out of her scarf.

“I beat Roan here?”

“It’s not a competition, but yeah, you did.” She considers, but it’s too good to resist. “You didn’t beat Bellamy.”

Clarke freezes. “Bellamy? From college?”

“That’s exactly how he identified you. Yeah, Bellamy from college. He stopped by to say hi, I told him to come sit with us. He’s in line.”

Clarke glances over, frowns when she spots the back of his head. “Is he still hot? He still looks hot.”

“Definitely still hot.”

“Okay. I guess I’ll go get a drink. Say hi.”

“You owe me one.”

“I don’t owe you, I haven’t gotten anything. I’m just saying hi.”

“You might owe me.”

Bellamy turns back to them, spots Clarke and gives her a smile and a wave.

“I might owe you,” Clarke agrees, out of the corner of her mouth. Since most of her attention is dedicated to smiling back at Bellamy. “Wish me luck.”

“Luck,” says Raven, and smirks into her own mug once she’s alone.

Five years later, they’re still cute.

* *

“I don’t need to be nervous, right?”

Raven looks up from her tablet. “It’s a first date, everyone’s nervous. But if he still likes you after five years, you probably don’t need to be that nervous, yeah. You guys still get along, right?”

“Apparently. And he’s still hot.”

“Upgraded from cute?”

“He can be both.” She exhales. “I can’t believe I’m actually going on a date with Bellamy Blake.”

“Hey, it’s not like he ever turned you down in college. He dropped out to raise his sister. If he hadn’t, you definitely would have just gotten laid back then. So it’s not a huge surprise.”

“That’s easy for you to say. I was still wondering if he actually liked me liked me when he left.”

“Well, he asked you out, so I’m pretty sure he did. And you guys have a second chance. So you probably don’t have to be nervous. Just let me know if you’re not coming home tonight,” she adds,
with a smirk, and Clarke rolls her eyes.

“Of course I’m coming home. It’s the first date, Raven.”

“And?”

“And I think this could be something. I don’t want to rush.”

“I’m just saying, if you want to fuck him, you should. It’s not going to ruin anything, and I won’t judge. Just don’t want to be worrying.”

“I know. I’ll let you know.”

Two hours later, she gets the text: *You were right, I’m not coming home tonight.*

It’s been a while since Clarke had a good relationship, and she deserves a win; Raven doesn’t even say *I told you so.*

* 

“Okay, survey time,” says Clarke.

“You’re asking my opinion on something?” Roan says, dry. Raven doesn’t even bother worrying; after almost two years, she knows her boyfriend and her best friend like each other. They just show it through sniping and sarcasm. Like most of Raven’s friends do.

“You’re a guy, you can tell me if there’s some part of your lizard brain that would be upset if Raven proposed to you.”

“I assume you’re planning to propose to your boyfriend and this isn’t a complicated scheme to find out if I want Raven to propose to me,” he says, about half to Clarke and half to Raven.


“None taken. I don’t want to propose to you.”

“But you want to propose to Bellamy?”

She shrugs, smiling a little. “I want to marry him. So I might as well propose, right? We’ve talked about it in general terms, but—he’s made most of the first moves so far, I want to do this one. Assuming you guys don’t think there’s going to be some kneejerk gender role weirdness.”

“Do you have to surprise him with it?” Raven asks. “Can’t you just say, *hey, you mind if I propose?*”

“I want to be a little more romantic than that. I know he wants to get married, and I know—he’s Bellamy, I know he doesn’t care about this stuff. I’m just nervous.”

“As I understand it, you’re supposed to be nervous when you ask someone to marry you,” Roan says. “This might be normal.”

“So you guys think I should just go for it?”

“I think he’s going to say yes, so yeah, why not?” says Raven. “We should get in touch with Monty once you’re engaged. Tell him that you’re going to have the most technologically incompetent
children of all time.”

Clarke laughs. “Yeah, we can do that. After he says yes.”

“You don’t have anything to worry about. You know that, right?”

“I know,” she says. “But still. We don’t have to jinx it.”

*

**Clarke:** Monty I don’t want to freak you out but I’m going to marry technological nightmare Bellamy Blake
Raven thought you’d want to know
Prepare for the luddite antichrist we’ll produce if/when we have kids

**Monty:** HOLY FUCK
THE END IS NEAR
I mean
Congrats on your engagement!!
How did that happen?

**Clarke:** Raven, actually
I really owe her

**Monty:** I can’t believe you betrayed the tech, Raven
I thought you were on my side

**Me:** Trust me, I’m as surprised as you are this actually worked out
I did not see this one coming

**Clarke:** But in a good way, right?

**Me:** The record will show I’m happy for you
But I’m never letting your kid touch my phone

**Clarke:** We’re not THAT bad

**Me:** You are
But you guys are cute
Buy me a drink and all is forgiven

**Clarke:** Two
I definitely owe you a couple
For Now I Know We Are Alone Here

Chapter Summary

Fill for zombee! Prompt: last man on earth au

Before the virus hits, Clarke can count on one hand the number of patients she’s seen die. Death happens, of course, at the hospital, but she doesn’t witness it often. She’s a gynecologist who doesn’t deal with births, and if she finds a life-threatening problem with one of her patients, she refers them to someone else.

Specialties don’t really matter, once the virus hits. It’s all hands on deck, and it’s still not enough. It’s a horror movie played in fast forward, quarantines breaking down, patients dying before they make it to the hospital, doctors becoming patients in spite of every precaution. And Clarke working endlessly, shifts bleeding together as she tries to save just one person, as she waits for the sickness to hit her.

It never does, and while she doesn’t take credit for Madi surviving, she knows neither of them would have made it alone. She couldn’t watch the whole world die. She has this one girl, just the two of them left in the entire city, from what she can tell. Maybe the entire world.

“What do we do?” Madi asks. “Why did we–”

“We won the genetic lottery,” says Clarke, although it doesn’t really feel like that. Being the last two people alive isn’t exactly a prize she wants to win.

But if they survived, other people must have too. The mortality rate is high, but it’s not everyone. They can find other survivors, and they can rebuild.

“We just have to figure out where the other people are,” she decides. “We should check the other hospitals in the city, look around, see what we can find. Maybe get a radio? And if there’s no one in town, well—I assume gas is free. We’ll find the other survivors.”

“What if there aren’t any?”

Clarke doesn’t know Madi, not really. She was in the hospital because her foster parents were mistreating her, and she was still there when the virus hit. Clarke had heard she wasn’t getting sick from one of the other doctors, and as everything else got worse, Clarke looked out for her.

“Then we have each other,” she says, because that’s it.

That’s all they know for sure.

*  

Once they’ve searched the city and found no one, they get Clarke’s car and go on the road. They find a dog on the way to New York, but aside from that, there’s nothing, just empty roads and empty towns, a whole world left without anyone in it. It’s slow going, because they want to be sure, not to miss anyone, but it seems as if anyone who survived would be looking for them too. It doesn’t seem as if it would be hard.
They’re in Virginia when Madi says, “Maybe we should stop.”

“Stop?”

“Maybe there isn’t anyone else. We should find a good place to live. We can put out notices on the radio, but—”

But it’s hard, moving around. It’s so fucking hard, coming into a new place to find everyone dead, to drive through another ghost city. They can’t keep on doing it without getting beaten down.

“Where do you want to go?” Clarke asks, and then slams on the breaks.

There’s a piece of plywood with a message on it by the side of the road, the type they’ve seen tons of. Most of them say things like fresh peaches or tomatoes for sale next exit, but this one says, Alive in DC.

“Do you think—” Madi asks, voice so soft she can barely hear it.

There’s a date in the corner; the sign is only a week old.

“I don’t know. Let’s find out.”

*

The signs continue as they get closer to DC, always the same style, apparently painted by the same person. Once they get close enough, the message changes to, Okay, technically I’m alive in Arlington, I figured DC would be easier to navigate to, and they follow the signs into a suburb, Clarke’s nerves getting worse and worse the closer they get.

It’s not as if she doesn’t want more survivors. But with so few of them, it feels dangerous. She and Madi get along, but what if this third person is awful? Cruel or difficult or just–annoying? Beggars can’t be choosers, and Clarke knows they need to work with whomever they can find.

But still. She can’t just be excited like Madi is. She can’t help worrying.

Madi is bouncing. “Where do you think they are? Do you think there’s a lot of them?”

“No idea,” says Clarke. “But they’ll probably hear us coming. Are you hungry?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s hit the grocery store. Find some supplies, and then we’ll see if we can find the survivors. They’re putting up signs, so they might not even be here right now. They might be out looking for survivors too.”

“Do you think it’s safe?”

Clarke has to smile. “Honestly? I don’t know. But we don’t have a choice. Hopefully anyone who lived through that is more interested in survival than—” She shakes her head. “Anything else. We don’t have enough survivors we can just throw allies away.”

“But we’re going to be careful.”

“Yeah. And if we don’t like them, we’ll leave.”

“But then we’ll be alone again,” Madi says, soft, and Clarke smiles.
“We’re not alone. We have each other. And Milo,” she adds, smiling at the dog in the backseat. “And if one person survived, there are more. We’ll find the good ones.”

“I still hope this one is a good one.”

“Yeah, me too.”

They grab some nonperishable food, get batteries and medicine too, just to be safe. Electricity is spotty at best, and Clarke’s not good enough with technology to figure out alternate power sources for anything. Once they’re settled somewhere, they’ll need to figure out how they’re going to live, on a daily basis, but for now they’re getting by taking food from abandoned stores and using the car for power.

It’s only been a few weeks, and the future already feels endless.

There’s someone waiting for them when they leave the store, and Clarke finds herself moving between the stranger and Madi without even thinking about it. It’s man, a few years older than Clarke, probably, with curly black hair and a pair of hipster glasses. His arms are crossed over his chest, which emphasizes his muscular build, and he’s frowning like they aren’t exactly what he expected. Or maybe not what he was hoping for.

Then his face clears. “Holy fuck, you’re real.”

Clarke has to laugh. “We’re real, yeah. You put up the signs?”

“It was that or steal a car, yeah.” He rubs the back of his neck. “Thanks for showing up. I thought I might be the last person left in the country.”

“In the country?”

“Maybe the continent. I’m hoping it didn’t make it across the ocean.”

Clarke bites the corner of her mouth. “I think it started in Europe.”

All the color drains from the man’s face, but his expression stays hard. “What makes you think that?”

“I’m a doctor. I was at the hospital when the first case came in. The first case for us. We’d been hearing–it moved so fast we didn’t get much warning, but–”

“Fuck. My sister is in Germany,” he adds. “I was hoping–”

“If it’s a genetic resistance, she might have it too,” Clarke offers. “She could be alive.”

“Yeah, she could.” He looks between them. “Are you two–”

“We’re not related,” says Clarke. She doesn’t want to give him false hope. “She was in the hospital for something else, and–we were the only survivors.”

“Where’s the hospital?”

“Boston. You’re the first person we’ve met.”

“Jesus.” He nods, once. “Well, uh–if you want cooked food, I’ve got my stuff mostly working. You two are welcome.”
“Three,” says Madi. “We found a dog.”

He smiles. “You three, sorry.”

“Should we leave the car here?”

“Up to you. It’s not far to my place, but if you want it close in case I’m a psycho, I don’t blame you.”

“So now if I bring the car, I’m admitting I think you might be a psycho.”

“I think you might be a psycho, if it helps.”

She has to smile. “Yeah, I feel a lot better. I’m Clarke, by the way. This is Madi and Milo.”

“Bellamy,” he says. “It’s just a couple blocks.”

*

“My landlord was really into solar energy,” Bellamy explains, unlocking the door of a duplex. “Which is lucky for me, I guess. All my stuff is still running. I’m still going to be in trouble once I run out of food, but—” He shrugs. “That was always going to be bad.”

“You’ve just been staying here?”

“I don’t have a car, and I haven’t driven in years. DC seemed like a pretty good place to stay. It’s the capital, so if someone comes looking—”

“Yeah,” says Clarke, looking around his place. It’s fairly tidy, almost eerily normal. The kind of place she would have visited before. “We didn’t really have a plan for where to go.”

“It’s a little weird,” he admits. “Being just—here. But it’s not like going somewhere else would help.”

“It’s weird everywhere, if it makes you feel better. We were just talking about how we need to stop moving. It was too hard going from town to town, finding nobody.”

Bellamy smiles with half his mouth. “So I came along at the right time, huh?”

“We came to you.”

“Same difference.” He looks between them. “I don’t want to brag, but my shower still works, if you guys want to get cleaned up.”

“A real shower?” Madi asks.

“I assume the water’s going out eventually, but it hasn’t yet. There’s shampoo and stuff in there.”

“Can I?” she asks Clarke, and Clarke smiles. It is, admittedly, a little weird to be basically a parental figure, but Madi’s a good kid, and she needs someone. Clarke’s just glad neither of them is alone.

And now Bellamy isn’t either.

“Go ahead,” she says. “I’ll wait.”
By unspoken agreement, she and Bellamy wait until Madi’s in the bathroom with the water running before they move. Bellamy rubs the back of his neck, offers Clarke a smile.

“I have alcohol in the kitchen.”

“That would be great.”

“I did everything I could,” Bellamy explains as he prepares drinks. “They said to stay inside if you weren’t experiencing symptoms, so I did. And then—I tried to follow the news on Twitter, post about it using the hashtag, try to get some attention. But the internet went down when the panic and looting started, and it never came back.”

“So here you are.”

“Here I am. You’re welcome to stay as long as you want.”

“We are?”

“You’re the first humans I’ve seen in a month. For all I know, we’re the last people left alive in the world. If you guys were angry cannibals I’d probably still want you to stay.”

She has to smile. “Yeah, I get that. We were looking for a place.”

“And now you’ve got one.”

“We do.”

*  

Survivors trickle in slowly. First comes Raven Reyes, a tech genius who found them by tracking energy usage somehow. She gets their a radio signal working, and that brings in Monty, and then Miller, and others. By six months after the virus, they have a community, albeit a very small, very sad one, and it’s starting to feel like they’ve figured out how it’s going to be.

Which is probably why Roan brings up repopulation.

“I’m not saying we have to do it now,” he says, “but it’s something we should be thinking about. This is our gene pool. We should be thinking about expanding and maximizing it.”

“Maximizing it?” Bellamy asks, wary.

“We should be thinking about genetic diversity, making the most of our limited resources. We have to assume we’re the only people left alive, and if that’s the case, it’s on us to continue the human race.”

“Are we in a hurry?” Clarke asks. “If anyone wants to get pregnant, they can, but I don’t think we need to start telling people to have more sex.”

“I think plenty of people are already having sex,” Bellamy adds. “If they get pregnant, they get pregnant.”

“We could be encouraging it.”

“Or you could just tell Raven you want to hook up,” says Clarke. “That would be a lot faster.”

“It’s not just about me and Raven. I think this is a conversation we need to be having generally.
Our romantic relationships aren’t just our own business anymore. The future of the species is at stake.”

“So you want to fuck a lot of girls,” says Bellamy. “Got it.”

“Genetic diversity. Romance is all well and good, but we have other concerns now too.”

“Consensual pregnancy with willing partners,” says Bellamy. “That’s all we ask. If you want to bring this up as a group concern, knock yourself out, but if anyone says you’re pressuring them—”

“Give me some credit. I want to be logical, not non-consensual. I’m not going to start forcing anyone into unwanted relationships.”

And that seems to be true, but once the topic is out there, it’s suddenly all anyone can talk about. Clarke has been deliberately Not Thinking about romance, and even if this isn’t romance, it’s uncomfortably close.

Especially when Bellamy suddenly becomes everyone’s most desired potential partner. Not that Clarke’s surprised—he’s young and attractive and intelligent, and he’s certainly her first choice to father a child.

If she was having a child. And he was–

“I’m going to kill Roan.”

Clarke smiles as Bellamy collapses next to her. “It’s hard being popular.”

“I’m all for survival, but if I’m parenting half the kids in the entire world, it’s not great for genetic diversity.”

“So pick your favorite co-parent and go with it.”

He clears his throat, looking awkward. “She hasn’t asked.”

It’s not as if Clarke can be sure everyone else has asked. But they don’t have so many women, and he probably wouldn’t be so awkward if he wasn’t thinking–

“Not all of us are ready to start repopulating the Earth just yet,” she says, careful.

“I’m not either,” he says. “It just feels a little–trivial. To worry about romance, with everything else going on.”

“We could probably use some triviality. And babies, eventually. So you should tell her.”

He looks pained. “Clarke, please tell me you don’t–”

“I just want to hear it,” she says, and that makes him laugh, lean in, bump his nose against hers.

“Do you want to help me repopulate the Earth?” he asks.

“Not right now,” she says. “But I bet we can figure out something else to do.”

“Yeah,” he says. “I bet we can.”

It’s not how Clarke would have chosen to meet her husband and the father of her children, not even close, but, well. There’s no one else she’d rather have by her side at the end of the world.
And that’s something to celebrate.
It starts off simply enough: Bellamy’s sister is sick, and if he brings her the heart of a star, she’ll be healed. And, of course, finding a star isn’t so easy, but if that’s the cure, then that’s what he’ll do. He doesn’t have another choice. She’s his sister, and his responsibility; he’d never let anything happen to her.

So he’s going to get her a star. There’s no other option.

It’s just his good luck that a star falls when he needs one.

“It’s your fate,” his mother says, when he tells her. “You were never meant to live here.”

“It’s your house,” he points out. Most of his attention is on packing, but there’s always time for mouthing off, too. “You’re the one who decided I was going to live here.”

“And I always knew you’d go someday. This is what you were meant to do.”

“Taking care of my sister,” he agrees. “That’s what you always told me.”

Aurora smiles. “I did. But–this is about more than just your sister, Bellamy. You’re going home.”

She’s always said his father came from across the Wall, but he can’t say he’s ever believed her. It felt like a polite kind of fiction, a father he could be proud of, instead of whatever father he really had.

His life is simple: he’s the only son of a seamstress, and his sister is ill. He’s going across the Wall to find a cure for her. That’s all that matters. That’s all there is to it.

As quests go, it shouldn’t be too hard.

* 

Bellamy thought he knew what to expect from the star. When a star crashes out of the sky, it looks huge, but by the time it hits the ground, it’s just a little piece of rock, an ordinary, everyday thing. He can believe there’s magic in that because no matter how ordinary it looks, it’s still a magical event. And anything that happens over the Wall is, by definition, magic. He can let himself think that the part of the star that lands beyond the Wall is the heart, and that it can cure his sister’s illness.

So it’s very annoying when he gets to the valley where the star fell, and someone else already has it.

“Look, I appreciate you probably need this thing too,” he tells the girl, approaching carefully, as if she’s a wild animal. She looks a little disoriented, as if she wasn’t really planning to take the star, or maybe just didn’t notice it until it struck the ground. “But my sister’s going to die if I don’t take
it home.”

She blinks a few times. “Excuse me?”

“The star you picked up. I need it.”

“The star I picked up.”

“We can share it,” he says. “I don’t think she needs to eat it or anything. Just–be exposed to it. I don’t know. I just need to save my sister, and then you can have it back.”

“Have the star back.”

He rubs his face. Is this a Wall thing? Can she just repeat whatever he says? “Fuck, I don’t have time for this. Will you just give me the star?”

“So you can save your sister.”

“What part of this hasn’t been clear?”

She scowls, which he can admit might be justified. He did come out of nowhere demanding that she give up the star she’d rightfully claimed. “I don’t owe you anything, whoever you are.”

“You’re right, you don’t. I’m sorry.” He offers his hand. “My name is Bellamy Blake. My sister is ill, and I was told the surest way to save her was to bring her the heart of a star. I don’t think she has to keep it. It’s your prize, but–I can’t let her die, and I don’t know if another star will fall in time to save her. So–please.”

The girl looks him up and down. “You think you can just take a star home to your sister and cure all that ails her?”

“I’ve been told, yes.” And then, desperation coloring his voice, “I don’t have anything else. If the doctor says this will save her, then this is what I’ll do.”

“And then you’ll come and find me and give the star back?”

“On my sister’s life.”

Her mouth twitches. “So if your sister dies, I don’t get the star back?”

“If she dies, it’s not worth much as a magical item,” he points out. “I’ll give it back no matter what. On my life, and my sister’s. You have my word.”

“The word of a stranger I’ve never met.” She wets her lips. “Where is she? Your sister.”

“Across the Wall.”

“How far?”

“I was able to travel quickly here, but I have to walk back. It’ll take a week or two, I think.”

The girl looks him over again, and then nods, as if agreeing to a statement he didn’t make. “All right. I’ll go with you. I’ll hold onto the star, until we reach your sister. I don’t have any reason to trust you.”

“I guess you don’t. Thank you,” he adds.
“Will she make it? Or will two weeks—”

“She’ll make it,” he says, making himself believe it. “She has the time.”

“Still,” says the girl. “We should hurry.”

“We should,” he agrees. “Thank you. Again.”

She smiles. “You’re welcome again. Now, which way are we going?”

* 

Over the next few hours, he starts to suspect there’s something off with the girl. Her name is Clarke, but that’s about all she seems sure about telling him. When he asks her how old she is and where her family comes from, she hesitates, and when he asks what she wants with the star, she only shrugs.

“Stars are lucky.”

“I don’t see why a fallen one would be,” he points out. “If it fell out of the sky and ended up here, how lucky can it be?”

“Lucky for whoever finds it.”

“And you need luck?”

“Who doesn’t need luck?”

He shakes his head, smiling, and she looks pleased, as if she’s won something. And maybe she has. Probably, she’s one of the fairy folk, someone whose life is incomprehensible to Bellamy. That’s how it’s supposed to be, across the Wall. Magic is real here, and thriving, and whatever Clarke wants to do with a star is almost certainly outside of his understanding.

“How did you get here?” she asks, a few hours later. “You said you had a way to travel quickly, and that’s why you came just after the star fell.”

“My mother had a Babylon candle.” He pauses, but if there’s anyone he can safely tell about himself, it’s this girl from beyond the Wall, whom he’ll never see again once she’s gotten her star. “She came here, she said. Before I was born, she said she came beyond the Wall to the market, and that’s where she met my father.” He rolls his eyes. “It’s a nice story, but I know better than to believe it.”

“Why don’t you?” Clarke asks. She sounds curious, as if she really doesn’t know. “If she had a Babylon candle, she must have gotten it somewhere. Why couldn’t your father be some man from this side of the Wall?”

He glances at her sidelong. “Because she knows so many more from the other side. I know she wanted to make me feel better, about not having a father, but—I’d rather she just told me the truth.”

“You’re the one who decided she didn’t. If you’ve already made up your mind that she’s lying, what’s she supposed to do?”

“For someone who refused to tell me anything about her family, you have a lot of opinions about mine.”

“If I wanted your opinions on my family, I would have told you about them. Since you did tell
He has to smile. “Fine, you’re right, it’s my own fault. But no one’s going to worry about you?”

“They know where I am.”

“This cryptic thing is already getting old, in case you were wondering.”

She beams; it feels as if she’s getting more cheerful as it gets later, which is not how Bellamy tends to experience the world. “Not really, no. It’s working out very well for me.”

“As long as one of us is enjoying this,” he mutters, but there’s a smile tugging at his mouth.

Whatever else she might be, she really isn’t so bad.

* 

A week later, he’s feeling much less patient with her.

“You need to tell me what the fuck is going on.”

“What makes you think I know?” she asks, but he knows her well enough by now that the tone doesn’t fool him. He just scowls until she wilts. “Stars are useful. You’re not the only one who wants one.”

“So how does everyone know you have one? And what do they want to do with it?”

She bites the corner of her mouth, clearly torn. They’re actually staying in an inn for once, sharing a room with two beds because he’s not willing to leave her alone after a week of people trying to kill them. Just because they dealt with today’s sorcerer and came out unscathed on the other side doesn’t mean he can stop worrying.

On the contrary, he feels as if he has more to worry about than ever.

“Clarke,” he says, pitching his voice low. “Come on. You can trust me. Tell me what’s going on.”

“I thought you’d figure it out,” she says, with a huff of a laugh. “I’m the star, Bellamy.”

He blinks. “You’re the what?”

“What do you think I was doing there? I didn’t just end up in the center of a crater with a falling star by accident.”

“How are you the star?” he asks, still trying to catch up. “You’re not a star, you’re–”

“This is what happens when stars fall over the Wall. We join you.”

“And when were you going to tell me that? Was I the only one who didn’t know?”

“No. Plenty of people don’t realize what I am. But most of them weren’t looking for me.”

His jaw works as he looks her up and down. It’s not such a huge betrayal, not as long as– “Can you save my sister?”

“I don’t know.”

The bottom drops out of his world. “You don’t know?”
She doesn’t back down, chin raised defiantly against his advance. “I don’t know,” she confirms. “I’ll do everything I can. But when we go past the Wall–magic doesn’t work, on the other side. If I’d fallen there, I’d be a piece of rock, and I wouldn’t be able to save anyone.”

“So why did you come with me?” he demands. “What did you–”

“You didn’t give me much choice,” she snaps. “If I told you I wasn’t going to give you the star, or that it wouldn’t work, what would you have done?”

He exhales, trying to get his temper under control. “So she’s going to die.”

“No,” says Clarke. “Look, do you know what I was going to do? I was going to leave you. As soon as I thought I could get away. I was going to find somewhere safe, where I didn’t have to worry about anyone going after my heart.”

“So I’m supposed to be grateful you stayed?” he asks.

“I stayed because I want to help,” she says. “I can’t go to your sister, but if you get her to me–maybe I can do something. Maybe I can save her.”

“Maybe.”

“You never knew if it was going to work. All I can tell you is that I’m on your side, and if you get your sister to me, I’ll do everything in my power to save her. I promise.”

He looks her up and down, as if he can see the lie. “What happens to you after that?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, if you’re really as powerful as you say you are, aren’t there always going to be people looking for you? Trying to–”

“Cut the heart out of me?” she asks. “Maybe. I’ll figure something out.”

“That’s what they want to do?” he asks, horrified. “Cut your heart out?”

“That’s what you needed too, wasn’t it?” she asks, and of course, she’s right. “The heart of a star.”

“I thought whatever got down to us was the heart of the star,” he grumbles. “How was I supposed to know the star was an actual person?”

“No one sees it coming.”

“Fuck. So you just have to–live with this?”

“I’ll figure it out,” she says again.

It’s impulsive and a little ridiculous, especially given how much of his relationship with Clarke has been a lie, but he still thinks he knows, well, the heart of her. Who she really is.

“We’ll figure it out,” he says. “Once I know–once my sister’s taken care of, you’ve still got me, Clarke. I’m yours.”

Her smile brightens. Not just that, her whole face brightens, her whole body. “Really?”

“Really.” He tucks her hair back. “You should maybe work on that–whatever’s happening right
now."

“I’m a star, Bellamy,” she says, like this is obvious. Like he didn’t only just find out. “I shine.”

*

He doesn’t think much of the shining; it’s just another thing Clarke does. When she smiles, or she
laughs, when she’s happy, she brightens. It happens to humans too, just not quite as literally. It
doesn’t seem like a big deal. Like she said, she’s a star. It makes sense she’d have some quirks.

They get back to the Wall, and Bellamy has to carry his sister across it to Clarke, finds her in their
room in the inn with a knife out and ready to fend off one a man who doesn’t actually seem to be
getting any closer.

“Ah,” says the man, glancing at Bellamy. “That explains it.”

“Explains what?” Clarke snaps.

He holds up his hands, dropping his own weapon, a perfect model of non-aggression. “I won’t take
a useless heart. And yours won’t do me any good.”

Bellamy feels the blood drain from his face. “Clarke, what’s–”

But she doesn’t look upset. “Useless?”

“At least to me.”

“Oh good,” she says, which is even more confusing. Seeing his expression, she adds, “It’s fine. I
can still help your sister. You just have to ask.”

“Ask?”

“Tell me to save her.”

It seems odd, but it’s magic. Magic is inherently odd. “Save her,” he says.

“Help him get her on the bed,” Clarke tells the man, and to Bellamy’s surprise he does. And since
he doesn’t leave after that, Bellamy takes a position next to him.

“You don’t have anything to fear from me,” says the man. “As I said, she’s useless to me. The first
to claim the star’s heart keeps it. Now that it’s been claimed, I couldn’t do anything with it if I got
it.”

He frowns, torn between the desire to argue the point and the total lack of desire for the man to
change his mind. “I had no idea I was so lucky.”

“I’m sure you still don’t. But you’ll figure it out.”

He doesn’t get a chance to, not until the next night, with everything else going on. First he has
Octavia to take home and get squared away, and then he’s not even sure he should be going back,
if Clarke still needs him.

But even if she doesn’t, he still can’t leave without saying goodbye.

She’s still at the inn, and when she sees him, she lights up the whole room with her smile.
“How’s your sister?”

“How completely recovered. I can’t thank you enough.”

“You don’t have to thank me. I should be thanking you.”

He frowns. “Because I claimed you?”

She looks down at her hands. “You didn’t claim anything. You didn’t—” Her eyes flick back up to his, nervous but sure. “It’s my heart, Bellamy. It’s mine to give. And it’s yours.”

“Mine,” he repeats.

“Yours.”

When he kisses her, the room goes bright again, so bright he can see it through his closed eyes, and he grins against her mouth. “So I should stick with you, huh?”

“I was hoping you would want to.”

“Well, stars are lucky, right?” he teases, kissing her again. “I could use some luck.”

He gets it, too, but none of the good that follows—and a great deal of good does follow, as his mother apparently knew he would—is ever equal to the simple fact of having Clarke by his side.

She really is the best good fortune of all.
Chapter Summary

Fill for shirawords! Prompt: Bellamy talks to himself/someone else in Tagalog and Clarke w/ her huge crush wants to know what he's saying so she can maybe start a conversation and he'll notice her except it turns out he's talking about her in Tagalog

Chapter Notes

Italics indicate conversations in Tagalog!

Bellamy tells his grandmother about his cute neighbor for two reasons: one, she keeps asking if he’s seeing anyone right now, and two, he figures the odds of said neighbor ever finding out about it are fairly low. She has, occasionally, been in the hallway or at the bus stop while he’s talking to his grandmother about her, but he can’t imagine she knows Tagalog, and if she does know, she’s never reacted to anything he’s said, up to and including things about how she’s cute and he’s working on talking to her.

And, okay, that second one is a lie, but, again, this is his grandmother. Who is very concerned about him since he and that nice girl Gina broke up, and hasn’t it been a while, and anyone would be lucky to have him.

He loves his grandmother, he does, but he’s kind of glad he only has one of them. He doesn’t need any more people pressuring him about his love life.

“We’ve never even spoken,” he’s telling her, one morning in April, as he walks to the bus stop. “I only know her name from her mailbox.”

“Why not?” she asks. “You live next door to each other, you must have things to talk about.”

“If I ever need to borrow an egg from someone, she’s the first one I’ll ask. But I’m good at just buying my own eggs. It’s fine,” he adds, before she can protest. “The buses here aren’t great. I’m sure sooner or later ours will be late and I can start talking to her about that.”

“You usually talk to me when your bus is late,” she points out, not unreasonably. He likes to call her on his way into work. It’s a nice time for both of them to chat, and there aren’t a lot of those, considering the time difference.

“I’ll hang up on you and talk to her next time if you want.”

“That would be the smart thing to do.”

He does hang up on her not long after that, but not to talk about how the bus is running late, even though it is. The bus is always a little unreliable; it has to be a lot later than this to be worth remarking on.
So it’s up to his neighbor to say, “Hey, can I ask you something?”

Bellamy’s never actually spoken to Clarke Griffin before. He just knows she lives next door to him and is pretty and still reads physical books, so he can see she has good taste and seems like someone he’d get along with. It’s nothing deep or profound or anything; at best, it’s safe. She’s someone he can idly think about without any danger of anything happening.

Or she was, until she decided to start a conversation.

He stops halfway to putting his earbuds in and smiles at her. “Sure, what’s up?”

She worries her lip. “On the phone, is that Tagalog?”

He makes himself not react, which isn’t that hard. She was behind him walking, so she might have overheard the whole conversation, but this doesn’t feel like a trap, the gotcha moment where she reveals she’s secretly been eavesdropping on him for the last three months.

It’s still dangerous territory, but at least he feels safe saying, “Yeah. This is when I call my grandmother. She’s in Manila, so it’s just after nine at night for her.”

“That’s cool,” says Clarke. “I pretty much just talk to my grandparents on holidays and birthdays.”

He doesn’t have a particularly good response to that, but he also feels as if he doesn’t need one. He doesn’t have to justify how much he talks to his grandmother to her. “Yeah,” he says instead.

“So, this is weird, but–I’ve been wanting to learn another language. Would you maybe be willing to teach me some Tagalog?”

Weird feels like something of an understatement. “You just want to learn a foreign language? Any foreign language?”

“Pretty much.” Her smile says she knows what he’s thinking. “I took Spanish in high school and then forgot everything as soon as I wasn’t required to do it for a grade anymore. I tried to pick it back up on Duolingo but when I don’t have someone to talk to I have trouble with actually keeping up. But I like knowing other languages? I like using that part of my brain. Again, I know this is completely weird, you can just say no, I won’t be offended.”

“That really is weird,” he says, but he finds himself smiling. “I’m trying to figure out what actually happened here. You overheard me on the phone, decided hey, he speaks a foreign language, cool, then researched what I was speaking and decided to ask me to teach you?”

“Obviously it sounds bad when you actually just say what I did,” she says, and he laughs.

“Yes, obviously.”

The bus shows up before he has to answer, but when they get on, Clarke claims an empty pair of seats, cocks her head at him in invitation, and she is really cute. He should definitely be working on talking to her, even if she’s totally weird.

“I’ve never actually taught anyone Tagalog,” he says. “I just grew up speaking it. I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“I was thinking I’d buy a book and we could just practice once a week, maybe? It’s also possible I’m kind of new in town and don’t have a lot of friends yet,” she adds, when he doesn’t say anything.
“You don’t say,” he teases, and she gives him a somewhat sheepish smile.

“The first step is admitting you have a problem.”

“I feel like in this conversation alone you’ve admitted to having way more than one problem.” He pauses, thinking it over. “You know, if you just want to hang out, we don’t have to learn Tagalog. That’s not a requirement for friendship.”

“But it’s more efficient,” she says. “Make friends and learn a new language.”

“Or we could start with friends and go from there,” he says. “I’m doing drinks tonight with some other people, if you want to come along.”

“You don’t have to—” she starts, and he figures if she can ask him for Tagalog lessons because she’s been eavesdropping, he can admit he’s checking out her reading material.

“Did you like The Fifth Season?”

She doesn’t miss a beat. “Yeah. I’m on the waiting list for the second one but I’m thinking about just caving and buying it.”

“I’ll bring it for you tonight if you come.”

Her smile is always beautiful, but he’s never had it turned on him before. “Yeah?”

He shrugs. “What are friends for?”

*

“My neighbor asked me to teach her Tagalog,” he tells his grandmother, the next week.

“I hope you said yes.”

“Then how would I tell you about her?” he teases. “I told her to come to the bar with me and Miller, and she did. We talked about books.”

“And are you going to talk more about books?”

“I think so, yeah. She only moved here a few months ago, she doesn’t know a lot of people yet. And I think she wants to chat. She just sat down next to me.”

“I see how it is. Now that you have a girl you like to talk to in the morning, you don’t want to talk to me anymore.”

“That’s exactly how it is,” he agrees, with a smile. “Don’t worry, I’ll keep you posted.”

*

Bellamy has to admit, he likes his new routine a lot more than his old one. Not that his old routine was bad, but it’s nice, following up his morning call to his grandmother with a chat with Clarke. They aren’t doing actual Tagalog lessons, but Clarke does seem to be pursuing the language on her own, and she’ll ask him about vocabulary and grammar, not actually based on his conversations, just on her own, independent study. She doesn’t seem to be getting any closer to understanding what he’s saying.

Then they talk about books and work and their lives, whatever comes to mind. They always sit
together on the bus, and they even start leaving the apartment building together. After a few weeks, he explains how his grandmother half-raised him, back in Manila, and Clarke shares details of her own family.

It feels like they’re on their way to being friends, which is cool, albeit a little terrifying. She was supposed to be a safe, unrealistic crush, and now he talks to her every day, likes her as a lot more than just a concept or a construct. He likes her, the real one, and it’s nothing he was ever prepared for.

His grandmother tells him he should just tell her, before it gets worse, and the idea does have some appeal, but he doesn’t really know where to start.

“All you have to do is tell her you’d like to go on a date with her,” says his grandmother. “Watch out. If you don’t do it soon, I might tell your sister about this.”

“That’s just cruel,” he says. “I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

As usual, once he’s ended the call, Clarke closes her book and turns her attention to him. “How do you guys have so much to talk about?”

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“I call my mom about once every two weeks and I never have that much to say to her.”

“You manage to talk to me every day,” he says, and to his surprise, she flushes.

“It’s not easy.”

She clearly says it without thinking, and he has to laugh. “You don’t have to, you know.”

There’s a pause, and then she leans forward, wetting her lips. When she speaks, the words are deliberate, purposeful. “I couldn’t figure out anything to talk to you about, so I figured I could ask about Tagalog. It was the only conversation starter I could come up with other than knocking on your door and asking to borrow some sugar.”

He has to laugh. “Yeah, I was going to borrow an egg from you if I had to.”

“Yeah?”

He looks over at her, feeling half his mouth tug up at the corner. “You know what I’m talking to my grandmother about most days? You. She thought I needed to start dating again, so I told her my neighbor was cute. I thought it was pretty safe. I didn’t think I’d ever actually talk to you.”

“Did you tell her we started talking?”

“I did, yeah. She thinks I should ask you out.”

“I have to say, your grandmother sounds like a very intelligent woman,” says Clarke, and he grins.

“She likes the sound of you too. I told her you had good taste in books.” He wets his lips. “So, are you busy tonight?”

“I’m not. And you need something to talk to your grandmother about in the morning, right?”

“Right,” he agrees. “She’s going to love this.”
It’s about a year before he and Clarke can coordinate a trip out to visit. His cousin gives his grandmother a ride out to meet them, and Clarke’s language studies have progressed far enough that she can say, “Hello, it’s so nice to finally meet you.”

They’ve spoken on the phone, so it’s not as if it’s really the first time they’re talking, but meeting in person always feels different.

“She is pretty, like you said,” his grandmother tells him, once she’s given Clarke a hug. “And good taste in men too. Did you get all that?” she adds, to Clarke.

“Not quite all,” she says, picking her words slowly. “Bellamy says my book is—less good.”

“It is,” he says, and switches to English. “I’m hoping we can find something better here. She just bought one online.”

“Well, I said you’re very pretty and my grandson has good taste,” she tells Clarke, linking their arms. “And now you can tell me all the things Bellamy won’t when we call.”

“I’m going to regret this, aren’t I?” he asks, with a somewhat overdramatic sigh. The whole effect is probably spoiled by the way he can’t stop smiling, though. Octavia will be here the day after tomorrow, and then he’s got two whole weeks to spend with all his favorite people. It’s hard to be anything but excited about the whole thing.

“You always say that,” says his grandmother. “But we all know you’ve been looking forward to this for months.”

“I have,” he agrees. “But now I’m going to have to learn a new language so I can say nice things about Clarke behind her back.”

Clarke laughs. “Well, there are worse problems to have, right?”

He takes his grandmother’s other side as they head back to the car, feeling warm and fuzzy and content in spite of—or perhaps somewhat thanks to—the jetlag. He’s here and Clarke’s here and they’ve got a whole vacation for her to get to know his family. He’s never gotten this far with anyone else, and he’s hoping Clarke’s the only person he ever brings home, now.

“Yeah,” he tells her. “It could definitely be worse.”
Fill for howdareyouthughdancy! Prompt: non-au where bellamy comes back to earth & they missed each other so much that it is now like SUPER AWKWARD & UNCOMFORTABLE TO BE AROUND EACH OTHER?? but then something something grounders, they get captured by whoever they're currently at war with & HANDCUFFED TOGETHER & make a break for it & have to fight their way out in cuffs

“I can’t believe after six years and two apocalypses, we still haven’t just made some fucking friends,” Bellamy grumbles, letting his head fall back against the wall. “Hasn’t anyone ever heard of giving peace a chance?”

Clarke laughs, this soft, amused little huff that makes his heart skip. It’s easy to be annoyed when they’re stuck in some jail cell, imprisoned by people he didn’t even know existed, but at least they’re stuck together. The most unbelievable thing is that Clarke is alive, and next to him, and just as pissed off about the whole thing as he is.

That part is, admittedly, completely believable. He and Clarke are great at being pissed off about the same stuff.

“We’ll get there,” she says, with a calm he does have trouble understanding. “What’s the quote? The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

“Martin Luther King Jr., right?” he asks. “You must have had a while to read while we were gone.”

“I had nothing but time,” she says, and he tries not to wince.

The thing about leaving Clarke behind is that no one did anything wrong, but it still feels like he fucked up. Like he should have done more, even though they’re all agreed that what he did was exactly right. He left her. He was supposed to leave her. And they’re all alive.

This is the happy ending.

“So, how do we get out?” he asks, raising his left hand and pulling hers with it. “And out of this?”

“I don’t know. I assume they want us as hostages. To leverage against your sister and my mom.”

“Which is why we should get out. They can’t use us if they don’t have us.”

“Great,” says Clarke. “How exactly?”

“Teamwork? Novel concept, I know.”

It’s a stupid thing to say, but it’s been a hard few weeks, harder than he expected. It was supposed to be, well, different. She wasn’t supposed to be alive at all, and while the fact that she is remains probably the single best thing that has ever happened to him, they haven’t settled back into being a
Part of him can’t help worry that they never will again. That six years is too wide a chasm to cross. “Teamwork doesn’t bend bars, Bellamy,” she says, but it’s teasing. “It might, we haven’t tried yet.” She smiles, and his heart twists, a little painfully. He’d been ready for a future without her in it, but that was when she was dead. The prospect of future with her in it, but not *his*, that’s something he’s still getting used to. “I guess we’re not doing anything else.” They don’t have any luck with finding an exit, but it’s good to have something to *do*. As much as Bellamy’s wanted a good few hours to sit down with Clarke and talk, this wasn’t really what he had in mind. And he still doesn’t know what to say to her, honestly. Sometimes, he wonders if he even knows her at all, anymore, if he ever will again.

Then, their guard opens the door to feed them, and it’s like no time has passed at all. Without discussion or a single word spoken, they take him out, even handcuffed together, even with all the awkwardness between them.

Clarke gets the keys with her free hand, and Bellamy gets the man’s weapon. It’s their good luck that it’s his left wrist bound to her right one, leaving both of them with their dominant hands free, and Clarke leads the way while he covers her with the gun. “Just like old times,” he mutters, and Clarke spares him a smile. “Like you said, I wouldn’t mind something different, one of these days.” The timing is perfect, because that’s when they break out of the ship, into the barren landscape of broken trees and wilted grass. It’s how everything looks, outside of Clarke’s patch of green earth, and it still gives Bellamy a creeping feeling of cold dread in his gut. There’s so much more barren ground than there is new growth, and sometimes he thinks they can’t survive this. That it won’t ever be enough. “So, where now?” asks Clarke, and when he looks at her, the tension eases a little. *Enough* is relative. All the people he loved who could survive the fire did, and they’re together. They have food and water, and they’re working together. Clarke is by his side, and even if right now, it’s because she *has* to be, he thinks this could work. “Cover first,” he says. “And then we find our way back home.” “Home,” she agrees. “Let’s go.” *

They’re in a cave, Bellamy trying to break the chain on the cuffs with a rock he found while Clarke watches the rabbit they caught with one eye, when she asks, “Did you think about not coming down?” “What?” he asks, glancing up at her. “Focus, Bellamy,” she says, with a small smile. “If you break one of our hands because you’re not
“paying attention–”

“Then it’ll be because you distracted me. And breaking a hand is an option, to get out.”

“It’s not that bad,” she says, and takes the opportunity to shake out her shoulders, shifting on the ground to get more comfortable. “I was just thinking, about a month after the five-year mark, I started wondering if maybe the Earth looked so bad, you just decided not to come down. I know that’s not what happened,” she adds, before he can say it. “But–was it better up there?”

“No,” he says. “And you wouldn’t have been happier.”

That gets him a dubious look. “No?”

“Maybe you would have,” he grants, inclining his head. “But Madi wouldn’t have made it alone.”

“No, she wouldn’t.”

“You remember how it was on the Ark,” he goes on, putting down his rock to take a break from the fruitless attempts to break the bond between them. “It never felt like living, just killing time until we could get back to the real world. And it was worse, the second time. When we all knew what we were missing. Or at least, most of it,” he adds.

Clarke frowns. “Most of it?”

“We didn’t know you were still down here,” he reminds her, with a small smile. “And it wasn’t like I wanted to stay up there. But–I couldn’t even imagine it. What would Earth even be like if you weren’t being a pain in my ass?”

She laughs, a bright, surprised sound that’s as unexpected and unfamiliar as it is welcome. “I’m sure you’d find someone else to fight with.”

“No one I like as much as you.”

It feels too honest, and when Clarke looks away, he’s sure it was. But she’s smiling when she looks at him again. “I didn’t know what I’d do either, if you didn’t come back down. That was all I had for–”

His hand is so close to hers that it’s easy to reach over, to twine their fingers together. It’s not until he’s done it that he realizes this isn’t normal for him and Clarke, that for all he considers her one of the most important people in his universe, they don’t do this often. Physical contact was as easy as breathing on the Ark, the close quarters and the lack of other people bringing them all close together. But he and Clarke only held hands once that he can recall, when she took the Nightblood in Polis, years and years ago. It felt staggering back then, to have her demanding his attention and affection, and now he can’t help feeling as if this was too casual.

But she squeezes his fingers.

“I’m still sorry,” he says. “For making you wait.”

“I know.”

He wets his lips, looking down at their joined hands. “I think we’ll probably need to wait until we’re back to get the handcuffs off. Raven should be able to get them off in half a second.”

“Yeah.”
He looks over at her, but she’s not looking at him, and he doesn’t know what to say again. It was easy, for about ten minutes after they landed, when all they did was hold each other, catching up on how they survived. And then, once he let her go, he found he didn’t know what to say, and she didn’t either.

They’re allies and leaders and friends, but it’s somehow not enough, and he still can’t figure out why.

“I think the rabbit’s done,” he offers, and Clarke looks relieved.

“I think so, yeah.”

Eating is more than a little awkward, since they both keep trying to use their hands as normal, and dragging each other around without remembering what’s going on, but once Clarke starts laughing about it, he relaxes too, and then it’s just another thing for them to deal with, this strangely funny obstacle that keeps tripping them up.

The awkwardness comes back after, when they have to leave the cave to relieve themselves, but that’s nothing compared to when they make it back to the cave, and it’s time to sleep.

“Side by side?” he finally suggests. “I usually sleep on my back.”

Clarke flinches like he struck her, but all she says is, “Yeah, that’s fine.”

The cave floor isn’t particularly comfortable, and even with his eyes closed, he’s too aware of Clarke, the warmth of her shoulder just close enough that he can feel it, like a light’s on in the corner of his vision, keeping him awake.

“Clarke?” he finally asks.

Her response is instantaneous and alert, as if she hadn’t been even close to sleep. “What?”

“I miss you,” he finally admits. “I missed you all the fucking time, and I still miss you, and you’re right here.”

For a second, there’s nothing, just silence so loud it feels like it’s pressing his ears down, and then she rolls, curling into his side, and he brings his free arm up around her, burying his face in her hair.

“Hi,” he says, and she laughs.

“Hi. I miss you too.”

“I used to think about what I’d do if I ever got to see you again,” he admits. “When I wanted to fucking torture myself.”

“And?”

He pulls back, waits until she looks up before he touches her jaw. When she doesn’t shy away, he leans down and she leans in, and the kiss isn’t one he’d ever imagined, on his back in some strange cave, one hand out of commission because it’s cuffed to her, but that’s not really a bad thing. It’s too strange and uncomfortable to be another dream.

Clarke lets out a shaking breath, and he smooths her hair back with his right hand, smiling.

“And I’ve been wanting to do that for almost seven years.”
“Since when, exactly?” she asks, sounding curious.

He smiles. “Hard to tell when it switches over from I guess I’d say yes if she asked to I’m in love with her. I don’t have an exact second.”

Even in the dark, he can see her smile. “But you are.”

“Yeah. I always thought I’d tell you the first chance I got.”

“Well, we haven’t been alone much.” She bites her lip. “I love you too. And I thought you must have—you thought I was dead. I thought you’d moved on, that you wouldn’t need me anymore.”

He kisses her again, will probably never get tired of kissing her. “I got you back,” he says. “It was a fucking miracle.”

They manage to fall asleep, not entirely comfortable but at least close, and when the sun comes up, Clarke is still there, and he still gets to kiss her.

She makes a face, pushing him off. “Your mouth tastes disgusting.”

“But that’s the only problem, right?”

Her smile is even better when there’s enough light for him to see it. “I’d like to get rid of the handcuffs too. Just so I have full use of my hands.”

He laughs, getting to his feet and pulling her up with him. She settles into his arms for a long hug, fitting in like she belongs there, and he kisses her hair one more time before he lets her go.

“So let’s go home and get ourselves fixed up.”

“I think this was the big thing that needed fixing,” she admits, twining her fingers back in his. He hopes they hold hands this much once they’re not stuck together; it feels like they might.

“Yeah,” he agrees. “So let’s go fix everything else.”

“Yeah,” says Clarke. “That sounds like us.”
Clarke’s used to not having holidays in the traditional sense, these days.

When she was a kid, it seemed impossible to think that she’d work through things like Thanksgiving and Christmas; those days were special, and even her mother, who worked all the time, made sure to take them off so she could be with her family.

In a way, the first surprise was that she stopped caring about the holidays. It didn’t take too long; she was in her first job, working at an insurance company, and while the office was closed on Thanksgiving itself, they needed someone in the office every other day of the week. Clarke, the newest employee, was at the bottom of the pecking order, but she found she kind of liked it. The train was empty, the office was deserted, and she had tons of time to get her own work done with no one else around. Her mother’s remarried, living on the other side of the country, and it was nice to have an excuse to not spend the vacation hours and plane-fare money. When Christmas rolled around, her boss told her that she was first in line to get time off, and she said she didn’t mind staying in the office.

Five years later, and she’s got a reputation: she’s the person who works holidays. She takes longer vacations at other times of year, and the pressure is off a lot of holiday stuff. She makes charitable donations in her mother and Marcus’s names and exchanges small presents with friends, but it is, overall, not a big deal.

And then Bellamy Blake shows up.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with Bellamy. He’s a good worker, smart and dedicated, kind of funny, in small doses. On a personal level, they tend to butt heads, but during all-company meetings, they’re really good at catching each other’s eye when they’re annoyed about the same stupid statement.

If he weren’t annoyingly hot, she might like him more. But that’s not the issue.

The issue is that, for the first time ever, she’s not the only one working the Christmas holiday.

“Don’t you have a family?” Clarke asks, wary.

“I’ve got New Year’s plans,” he says, spinning around in his chair. It’s 4:05 on Christmas Eve; she can’t blame him for having given up on work entirely. “What’s your excuse?”

“Family’s in California. Flights are long and expensive and horrible. You don’t have enough vacation to take the whole week?”

“I’d rather save it for later.” He smirks. “Were you going to sneak out early if no one was around?”

Clarke rolls her eyes. “No. But I was going to listen to my music really loud.”
“Hey, don’t stop on my account. I’m very curious about your taste in music. Taylor Swift spotify?”

“Paramore, thanks.”

His facade falters. “Okay, yeah, here’s where I confess I don’t actually know much about music.”

“So you want me to play something to broaden your horizons.”

“I’m an empty vessel.”

“Definitely.” She takes her headphones out and starts her playlist back up, but her curiosity gets the better of her before she can get back to work. “So, no Christmas plans?”

“You don’t have any either, so it’s weird of you to call me out. I’m not much of a Christmas guy.”

“What do you do for New Year’s?”

“Nothing, usually. But my little sister is getting married this year.”

“Congratulations,” she says. “I’ve actually got a wedding too. And some other vacation.”

He nods. “See? Totally logical reasons for skipping Christmas.”

“Totally. You didn’t skip Thanksgiving,” she can’t help adding.

“Jesus, it’s not a competition. I know it’s basically a celebration of genocide and colonialism,” he adds, with a shrug. “But I like cooking.”

“Really?” she asks. “I wouldn’t have pegged you for a cook.”

“Maybe I’ve got hidden depths.”

“Let’s not get carried away,” she teases, and he snorts. “So, what did you make?”

They get caught up in Thanksgiving traditions, and before Clarke knows it, it’s five o’clock and time to take off.

“Have a good Christmas,” Bellamy says, a little awkward outside the office. Snow is wisping down, and Clarke will admit he looks good like this, bundled up with the wind teasing a few errant curls under his hat.

“You too. When are you leaving?”

“Not until the 30th.”

Clarke nods. “So I’ll see you on Wednesday.”

He salutes, this odd, dorky gesture. “See you.”

*

The office staffing is anemic for the rest of the week, but it’s only her and Bellamy for the day after Christmas, and then the others trickle back in, and then it’s Clarke’s turn to go on vacation, which she’ll admit she’s looking forward to a lot. She’s got a full week of vacation, and it’s this destination wedding in Hawaii, because that’s where Lincoln and his fiancée live, and they figured if they were going to make their friends and family come out to there, they’d better make it worth
their while.

So, of course, a snowstorm hits the day she’s supposed to be leaving, and everything gets completely fucked over. The flight isn’t canceled, but she’s suddenly on a later, worse trip, and she’s going to be stuck in the air on New Year’s Eve. Which really shouldn’t be a big deal—all she’s done on New Year’s the last couple years is gotten drunk with Wells and Raven—but Lincoln and Octavia have an actual party planned, and she was looking forward to it.

She’s still stewing in annoyance when Bellamy sits down next to her.

“Fancy meeting you here.”

Clarke blinks at him. “What are you doing here?”

“I figured that was pretty obvious.”

“I meant here. At this gate.”

“My flight got canceled, I got bumped to this one. You?”

“This was my flight, I’m just delayed.” She frowns. “Weren’t you flying yesterday?”

“I’ve been here so long I don’t remember the outside world. It’s amazing I recognized you.”

That makes her smile. “Yeah, I’m blessed. You look exhausted, by the way.”

“Thanks.” He scrubs his face. “I’ve been calling my sister a lot and feeling shitty about it. I’ve got shit to do for the wedding and I’m not doing it, so she has to not only talk to me about how I’m delayed, but pick up slack when she’s already busy.”

For a second, Clarke does think that they could be going to the same wedding, but it’s only a second. She’s not on a direct flight; he’s probably going to LA, not Hawaii.

“Have you eaten anything?” she asks instead.

“In my life?”

“Don’t be a dick. I have a protein bar.”

“What are you eating?”

“I haven’t been at the airport forever.”

He seems to be thinking it over. “Okay, yeah. I’ll take your pity bar.”

“Remember what I said about not being a dick?”

“Nope,” he says, accepting the bar with a smirk. “Probably faint from hunger.”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“So, where are you going? LA? California wedding?”

“Hawaii. I’m just transferring in LA.”

His hand stops halfway to his mouth, and then resumes. He takes a careful bite, chews and swallows before he asks, “Where in Hawaii?”
It can’t possibly be the same wedding. “Some resort. One of my college friends works there so he got a deal. Don’t tell me your sister’s name is Octavia,” she adds, when he just stares at her.

He starts to laugh. “Holy shit.”

“Seriously.”

“Seriously. You went to college with Lincoln?”

“Yeah, he was basically my big brother. Talked me through deciding to do art instead of pre-med. He’s a couple years older than I am, but he did grad school there too, so—I don’t see him much, but we talk a lot. I can’t believe he never said anything. We work at the same company.”

“This does explain some cryptic stuff my sister said.” Clarke cocks her head at him, and he gives her a crooked smile. “Just some questions about new coworkers. You didn’t complain about me, did you?”

It takes her a second to remember, and then she groans. “Maybe once or twice.”

“Yeah?”

_We hired this new guy and he’s hot but such a fucking asshole_ is definitely something she said to Lincoln in the first few weeks of Bellamy starting his job, and she remembers his humming his agreement, non-committal as always.

“I assume it’s not news that you can be kind of–abrasive.”

“Dick,” he supplies. “You’re one to talk.”

“And if you complain about me, I don’t blame you.”

He smiles. “Fair enough. So, you’re friends with Lincoln.”

“And you’re Octavia’s brother. What do you have to do for the wedding? How bad is it?”

He groans and drops his head back against the wall. “That’s the worst part. I’m pretty sure she just gave me things to do so I’d feel included, and now I’m not even there to do them. So it’s minor stuff that needs to get done but isn’t really a big deal, and now she has to do it anyway.”

“So, you’re just kind of a mess.”

“My sister’s getting married,” he says, like this is an explanation.

“Yeah, what a disaster.”

He gives her a half-smile. “I know, I know. I’m happy for her. Lincoln’s great. But–she’s never going to move back from Hawaii.”

“Which means you have an excuse to visit Hawaii whenever you want.”

“Yeah. But not nearly as often as I want to see Octavia. She–my mom worked all the time, I did most of the work raising her. I get that I’m supposed to be happy she’s grown up and self sufficient, and I am, but–”

“But you miss her.”
“Yeah.” He sighs. “And I’m not even going to make it for New Year’s.”

“So, you care about Thanksgiving and New Year’s? Those are your holidays?”

“I do Thanksgiving with my best friend and his boyfriend. I don’t care about holidays, I care about people.”

“Aww.”

“Shut up,” he says, without heat. “You’re the one who gave me a pity protein bar.”

“You’re right, this is on me.” She leans back next to him, closing her eyes. “I was looking forward to New Year’s too, if it helps.”

“Your suffering does make me feel better,” he teases, and she laughs.

“That’s the spirit.”

*

She’s aware of him the whole flight to California, a niggling awareness in the corner of her mind that somewhere on this very flight, about five rows behind her, is Bellamy Blake. It doesn’t actually matter, of course, but she still knows, and she knows that it’s going to be just as weird on the next flight, because they were, somehow, put on the same connecting flight to Hawaii, too.

About thirty seconds after she finds her seat, that becomes both better and worse, because Bellamy leans over to the woman in the middle seat with one of his most charming smiles. Which, for Bellamy, is saying a lot.

“Hey, I’m so sorry, but I was wondering if you might be willing to switch seats with me,” he says. “We were sitting together, but we got bumped from our old flight, so—” His smile ticks up a notch, impossibly. “I’ve got a window seat, so—”

The woman is powerless to resist. “Oh, of course. What seat are you in?”

“Thirty-five A. I really can’t thank you enough.”

“You’re welcome. Enjoy the flight.”

Clarke stands to let the woman out and Bellamy in, mostly because there’s no good way for her to say no at this point. And it’s not as if she wouldn’t rather sit next to him than a stranger, anyway. Especially when he’s volunteering to take the middle seat.

“We were sitting together?”

“Sorry, did you want to sit with her?” he asks. “I can get her back.”

Clarke feels her mouth twitch. “She’d probably think I dumped you.”

“Probably, yeah.” His smile softens. “Honestly, I just like traveling more when I’m not alone.”

“I get that, yeah. And I guess if we’re going to be hanging out for the next week at this wedding, we should probably get used to each other. Besides, it’s New Year’s Eve. We should do something, right?”

“Yeah?” he asks, a glint in his eye. “What did you have in mind?”
It’s honestly a lot like her usual New Year’s Eves, except instead of drinking at home with Raven and Wells, she’s drinking on a plane with her kind of infuriating coworker, who’s getting less infuriating and more attractive by the second. Or, well, not more attractive. But definitely more appealing. He’s got the best smile and the whitest teeth and just—wow.

She might also be drunk.

“I can’t believe we’re missing New Year’s in Hawaii,” he groans, dropping his head onto her shoulder. “It was supposed to be epic.”

Clarke pokes him. “Are you saying I’m not epic?”

“You would have been in Hawaii too. Fuck, I can’t believe you know Lincoln. You’re going to be there all week.”

“We don’t have to talk.”

He looks up at her, glasses crooked, freckles incredibly distracting. “That’s not what I meant.”

“No?”

“A whole week of you hating me is going to suck.”

“I don’t hate you.”

“No?”

She wets her lips. “I told Lincoln the new guy was hot but kind of an asshole. He definitely knew it was you.”

Bellamy laughs. “That’s my brand, yeah.”

“It’s a good brand. I like that brand.”

“Yeah?” He straightens up, meeting her eye, and Clarke doesn’t let herself look away. “Kind of your brand too, you know.”

“And do you like it?”

“It’s my favorite, yeah.”

The flight attendant announces when they hit midnight, and Bellamy’s the one to lean in, but he lets Clarke make the last move, pressing her mouth against his, quick but firm.

“I hear whatever you’re doing at midnight on New Year’s is what you’re going to do for the rest of the year,” he murmurs.

“Can’t wait to spend all of 2019 stuck on a plane,” she teases, and he laughs.

“Yeah. It’s going to be awesome.”

* 

When the time-off requests go up for Thanksgiving the next year, Clarke takes the whole week, for the first time ever.
After all, someone’s got to help Bellamy with all that cooking.
Clarke and Roan don’t really have an open relationship, because in order to have an open relationship, they’d need to have a lot more of a relationship than they do. They’re friends with benefits, and fidelity has never been expected on either side. Clarke assumed Roan was fucking other people if and when he wanted to, and that she’d do the same.

She hasn’t been, but that’s neither here nor there. Part of why she and Roan started fucking was that finding relationships is a pain and getting laid is fun, and once she has a regular source of excellent sex, she cares a lot less that she doesn’t have a significant other.

Not that Roan isn’t significant. But he’s not a significant other in the traditional sense.

So the appearance of Bellamy into their lives shouldn’t be a big deal. Clarke is meeting Roan, Octavia, and Lincoln for drinks, and she always knew, in a somewhat vague sense, that Octavia had a brother, and that Roan had once dated Octavia’s brother, and even that Octavia’s brother was moving to town, but she hadn’t known that, one, Octavia’s brother would be here and, two, Octavia’s brother is hot.

Roan does have good taste in guys.

“Here’s Clarke now,” says Octavia. “Is she officially Roan’s girlfriend? Where did you guys settle on labels?”

Octavia’s brother has curly black hair and hipster glasses and raises his eyebrow at Clarke in a way that makes her feel his interest down to her toes. There’s no actual reason for her to feel guilty about it, of course; she isn’t Roan’s girlfriend, and Roan used to date the guy, so he probably thinks he’s hot too.

Still, it’s not really the right time to be attracted to Octavia’s brother.

“Friends,” says Roan.

“With sex,” Clarke agrees. “Hi, it’s Bellamy, right?”

He stands to shake her hand. “Yeah. Nice to meet you, Clarke. You work with Lincoln?”

“Artists have to stick together,” she says, taking the seat next to Roan and only feeling a little weird about it. It’s been a long time since she was interested in anyone, since the issue of what her relationship with Roan is and what would constitute cheating on him even entailed, and it had been easy to ignore the issue and hope that she’d never have to deal with it.

Not that she has to now, of course Bellamy might not even like women; just because Clarke wants the entire world to be bisexual doesn’t mean that they are. And just because she thought he was checking her out doesn’t mean that he was.
It doesn’t have to be a big deal.

But Roan is Roan, so on their way back to his place, he remarks, “Bellamy’s bisexual. In case you were wondering. You seemed to be wondering.”

“Is that a problem?” she asks. “That I was wondering.”

“Not at all.”

“Why did you guys break up?”

“Because he went to grad school on the other side of the country. I’m not much for long distance.”

She glances over at him, surprised. Of all the reasons she shouldn’t be interested in Octavia’s brother, Roan still being into him hadn’t occurred to her. If she’s honest, she has some trouble thinking of Roan as an actual, well, boyfriend. Not just to her, but to anyone. He just doesn’t seem like the boyfriend type.

“I’m sorry, were you hoping for more of a tragedy?” he teases.

“Yeah, I was hoping you guys had a blood feud,” says Clarke, with a roll of her eyes. “I’m just not used to you having feelings, what can I say?”

“I have up to three distinct feelings every day, thank you.”

“So, are you going to try to make it work again?” Clarke asks, curious. “He’s back now, no long distance.”

Roan smiles. “Are you asking if I’m competition?”

“I’m not going to date your ex-boyfriend,” she says.

And she really does think it’s true, when she says it.

*

Clarke discovers that Bellamy lives down the street from her quite accidentally, and that the two of them leave the house at roughly the same time to go to work, and then take the same train into work. All of which means it only makes sense for them to meet up on their way in every morning and take the trip together. It’s not like she wouldn’t do it with anyone else who lived close by.

“So, uh, you and Roan,” he asks, a little awkward, about a month after their first meeting.

“Me and Roan,” she agrees, even.

He snorts. “Wow, you’re not going to help me with this one at all, huh?”

“We’re sleeping together, which I assume you figured out. What else did you want?”

“I don’t know. I’m used to sleeping together being code for unrequited love, and I don’t really get that vibe from you guys. More of a bros for life kind of thing.”

That makes her smile. “Yeah, that seems right.” To her surprise, she doesn’t actually want to leave it there, and she leans forward, thinking. “I don’t know. Sometimes I think it’s stupid. Not—we have fun. He’s my type and the sex is great. Not dating him feels stupid. But there’s something missing, I guess. Sorry,” she adds. “Just thinking out loud.”
“I asked, you don’t have to apologize. He is a good boyfriend, if you’re ever looking. I wasn’t convinced either.”

“No?”

He shrugs. “He doesn’t like acting like he cares.”

“I know that. You should go for it,” she adds. “If you want that again. You definitely have my blessing. I won’t get in your way.”

There’s something a little off in his smile. “Good to know, I guess.”

Her own smile could be brighter too. It’s going to suck, if her fuckbuddy leaves her for the first guy she’s been romantically curious about for what feels like years, but there’s nothing she can do about that. Bellamy and Roan are a love story she stumbled her way into by accident, a side role that will, inevitably, fade away once the main romance kicks into gear.

And that’s fine. She’s going to be happy for them.

But it’s good that she has some prep time. Just to figure out how to do that.

*

“Bellamy asked if I wanted to get dinner,” Roan tells her. It’s only been a week, which isn’t really long enough.

“So this was a goodbye fuck?” Clarke asks, keeping her voice mild.

“I don’t see why my having dinner with Bellamy means we can’t sleep together anymore.”

“Roan. We both know where this is going.”

“Do we? I assumed he wanted to get dinner so we could have a discussion about his interest in you. The two of you have been spending a lot of time together, haven’t you?”

She smiles. “You know, I think all of us are convinced that the other two are going to leave us. For three people with zero romantic relationships, we have a shocking amount of baggage.”

“Personally, I think leaving people is overrated,” says Roan, mild. “If Bellamy’s looking for an exclusive relationship, I don’t know if that’s worth it. To me.”

Clarke blinks at him, her surprise genuine. “Really? Which part?”

“I have a good thing going now. Throwing it away for an uncertain future with my ex-boyfriend seems–unnecessary.”

“But you think I will. Throw you away, I mean.”

“I think it’s your decision.”

She wets her lips, the suggestion forming on her tongue at the same time it occurs to her. “If we both like him, it seems kind of stupid to act like we have to give anyone up.”

Roan’s mouth twitches into a smile, and he leans into kiss her. “I was wondering when you’d think of that.”
“And you couldn’t have just said, *Hey, maybe we should have a threesome*?” she teases.

He trails his hand up her back, and Clarke does *like* him. Like she told Bellamy, there’s just always been something missing.

And maybe this could be it. Maybe they just need someone else to make them fit together right.

“I wasn’t thinking of a threesome,” he says, deliberate, and Clarke nods.

“No. I wasn’t really thinking of that either.”

* Bellamy blinks when he sees Clarke at dinner, but he takes it in stride.

“Hey, good to see you, Clarke. Roan,” he adds. “Should I have brought a date? Or backup?”

“Roan thinks you should date us,” says Clarke. There’s no reason to beat around the bush. “I wanted to be here to see how you reacted.”

“I believe I wasn’t the only one thinking that.”

Bellamy’s looking between them, amused. “Wait, seriously?”

“What?” asks Clarke. “I was going to be noble and let you and Roan ride off into the sunset, but if I can not do that, it seems a lot better.”

“What if I don’t want to date either of you?” he asks, but the smile remains.

“Then this is going to be a slightly awkward dinner,” says Roan.

“I think that goes without saying,” says Clarke. “It’s just what kind of awkward it ends up being.”

“What an exciting surprise that’s going to be.” Bellamy sighs. “Okay, so—what were you thinking here? You guys want to fuck me? Some weird friends-with-benefits timeshare?”

“Something more serious than that. Dating, as Clarke said.”

“You guys aren’t even dating each other,” he points out, not unreasonably. “I’m not opposed, just—not sure what you’re picturing here.”

“We’re on a dinner date now,” Clarke says. “So—start here, see how it goes? We’re thinking, you know. Romance.”

Bellamy snorts. “Romance, huh? If I don’t get laid at least once before this thing falls apart, I’m going to be pissed. I’m just saying.”

“As goals go, I think that one is fairly achievable,” says Roan. “Achievable today, even.”

“You think I’m going to put out on the first date?”

“You put out on our last first date.”

Bellamy seems to be thinking this over, and then he grins. Clarke’s stomach flips, and when she reaches under the table to take Roan’s hand, it happens again, harder.

This could be good.
“So, dinner,” says Bellamy, bringing her attention back from a wide world of possibilities. “Sex. Anything else happening on this date?”

“Let’s have dinner and go from there,” says Clarke, pressing her foot against his under the table.

He smiles back. “Yeah. That sounds good to me.”

*

On Monday morning, Clarke can’t help feeling a little awkward. The date went well, the sex was awesome, and she, Roan, and Bellamy even hung out on Saturday, watching movies and fooling around and having, in general, a very chill day of lowkey dating.

It was awesome, in short, but now she feels a little odd being alone with Bellamy, like they’re getting development that he and Roan don’t have.

Then again, he and Roan actually used to date. She and Bellamy are behind, maybe.

Besides, he’s her boyfriend too, now. That’s how this is supposed to work.

“Morning,” he says, a wry smile twisting his mouth. “You think it’s going to be more awkward now that we’ve seen each other naked, or before, when we just wanted to see each other naked?”

Clarke laughs. “Who says I wanted to see you naked before?”

“You did, on Friday. When we were having sex.”

She pauses. “Other than then.”

“Oh yeah, there were no signs. I had no idea.” He soars a little, expression going serious as he looks her up and down. “Seriously, you’re still–this is good, right? This really is something you–”

She leans up to press her mouth against his. “So far? This is exactly what I want.”

“This really wasn’t what I was expecting to happen when Octavia said Roan sort of had a new girlfriend,” he says, and Clarke takes his hand as they walk, feeling herself start to smile.

“Well, who wants to choose between two awesome people? Love triangles suck. Polyamory forever.”

He laughs. “Or at least as long as we can manage it.”

“You don’t think we can make it?”

He considers. “I think I want to find out,” he settles on.

“Me too,” she says. “So we’re all on the same page.”

He laughs, ducks his head, smiles, and so far, this is the best. “Yeah. Somehow.”
Clarke understands why people hate clickbait headlines. She really does. They’re attention-grabbing in all the worst ways, and she hates when they make someone who’s doing good out to be an asshole, or imply that gluten murdered someone’s entire family or whatever.

But as a writer? They’re really fun to come up with. She loves figuring out the right angle to sell things, and given she ends up writing a lot of bullshit, filler articles, it’s nice to come up with a good lead.

There’s an argument to be made that she’s tricking people, but, honestly, clicking on an article in error really isn’t so bad, in a global sense. Anyone who’s seriously upset that they wasted two minutes of their lives reading something they didn’t want to probably would have clicked on an article with an accurate headline to complain about the content anyway.

Besides, ad revenue is ad revenue. She knows what her job is, and it’s not keeping people from leaving outraged comments about how she deceived them with her headlines.

In fact, that’s kind of a bonus.

She’s idly vanity-googling herself when she finds a twitter poll titled “Whose clickbait headlines are better/worse, Bellamy Blake or Clarke Griffin?” and that’s what really kicks the whole thing into high gear.

The poll is neck-in-neck, which is of course the biggest issue. If Clarke was winning handily, she could let it go, but there’s actual debate in the responses, people making cases for her versus this unknown person.

It doesn’t take much to bring out Clarke’s competitive spirit. Clarke has her competitive spirit on speed dial.

The first step is obviously figuring out who Bellamy Blake is and what headlines they’re writing, and that’s pretty easy. He writes for Arkadia Online, which is–unexpected. She’s heard of Arkadia Online, and they have a somewhat older demographic, one of those websites that talks a lot of shit about millennials, and judging from Bellamy’s twitter and articles, he is a millennial, and he doesn’t really fit in with the rest of the brand. He’s a good writer, just nothing like any of the other Arkadia Online staff.

And his headlines really are something else.

It’s not just that they’re clickbaity, it’s that they’re actually inaccurate. It started, from what she can tell, with an article he published after the 2016 election, titled World’s Best Brownies, written in the style of one of those recipe blogs that refuses to just get to the actual recipe. The vast majority
of the post was a long diatribe about the political state of the country and how shitty everything was and then finally, at the end, So yeah, let’s eat some fucking brownies, and the recipe.

The response had been mixed, to say the least, and now Bellamy has a reputation as the guy who injects politics into everything, and Clarke can’t say he doesn’t deserve it. An article called Top Five Cutest Kittens includes five adorable kittens, but they’re used as palate cleaners between examples of police brutality. It does seem like a bit of a cruel trick to Clarke, but as soon as anyone clicks in, he’ll have a subtitle with the actual content of the article, for anyone who bothers to read it.

Still, when Clarke wants cute kittens, it’s because she knows she needs a break from the garbage fire that is the world, so she wouldn’t really appreciate getting baited and switched like that.

Even if he does have excellent taste in kitten pictures.

Emailing Bellamy happens without her really meaning it to, clicking on his address at the end of the post and writing the subject line: is what you do actually clickbait? before she’s actually come up with any kind of follow-up message.

She stares at the body of the message for a second, then finds the link for the Twitter poll and pastes it in, adding, Asking for the internet.

It’s one of those emails she sends without really expecting to get a response. Obviously, she wouldn’t mind getting one, but the email is out in the ether. The ball is in Bellamy Blake’s court, and he might just file it away as spam or hate mail or something. If she got a message from an unknown person with that subject line, she’d probably assume it was someone yelling at her and delete it.

Maybe she could have thought that one through a little more.

In fact, though, it’s only about half an hour before he responds, and suddenly they’re corresponding, which she should have recognized as the warning sign it was almost immediately. But she’s always been a little slow with these things.

From: Bellamy Blake (bellamy-blake@arkadiaonline.com)
To: Clarke Griffin (griffin@edeningnews.com)
Subject: Re: is what you do actually clickbait?

Merriam Webster defines clickbait as “something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest,” so after some consideration I’ve decided that what I do is actually reverse clickbait. The headline is designed to make people click, but the content isn’t of dubious value. Hope that clears everything up.

From: Clarke Griffin (griffin@edeningnews.com)
To: Bellamy Blake (bellamy-blake@arkadiaonline.com)
Subject: Re: is what you do actually clickbait?

Did you really start a response with “Merriam Webster defines”? Not doing that is like journalism 101.

From: Bellamy Blake (bellamy-blake@arkadiaonline.com)
To: Clarke Griffin (griffin@edeningnews.com)
Subject: Re: is what you do actually clickbait?
Punctuation goes inside the quotation marks, if we’re doing writing critique over email.

From: **Clarke Griffin** (griffin@edeningnews.com)
To: **Bellamy Blake** (bellamy-blake@arkadiaonline.com)
Subject: Re: is what you do actually clickbait?

According to Purdue University, question marks and exclamation points go outside of quotation marks when the punctuation applies to the whole sentence.

Hope that clears everything up

*

She’s expecting that to be the end of it, less because they were both kind of assholes and more because there isn’t really anything else to say. They had a conversation, and that conversation is now over. She follows him on Twitter, because he does seem decently cool, and she’s a little curious what else he’s going to write. Friends don’t let friends miss out on weird headlines.

He follows her back, and two days later DMs her, which she’s maybe unreasonably excited about.

**bellamyblake1**: So if you were writing an article about getting rid of the electoral college, which fall fashion trend would you reference in the headline?

Asking for a friend

**edenclarke**: What are the fall fashion trends I’m picking from?

**bellamyblake1**: Shit
I was hoping you’d know some
Scarves? I feel like I don’t understand when/why people wear scarves now
That probably makes them a fashion trend

**edenclarke**: Wow
You really thought this one through

**bellamyblake1**: “Five Scarves You Need This Holiday Season”
That works, right?

**edenclarke**: You know, I’ve looked at the rest of your website
It’s very normal
How do you possibly get away with this?

**bellamyblake1**: I write very normal articles
They love them
I’m hitting a demographic they don’t know how to reach
They feel my puff pieces appeal to women and millennials

**edenclarke**: So no one actually reads what you write

**bellamyblake1**: Not for a while
My best friend is our tech guy
He does all the coding, checks the email, etc etc
Everyone else on staff is a technophobe
And coming from me that’s saying a lot because I’m still scared of twitter
edenclarke: That’s not technophobia, that’s survival instinct
Everyone should be scared of twitter
So you get away with those headlines because no one’s paying attention?
That makes me feel better

bellamyblake1: What’s that supposed to mean?

edenclarke: I actually have editors reading my stuff
I couldn’t get away with the stuff you get away with

bellamyblake1: Oh yeah that makes sense
I figured you weren’t really committed to the whole thing

Clarke frowns at the screen. It’s a trap. She knows it’s a trap. He’s obviously fucking with her, and she deserves it, since she was kind of fucking with him. She can let this go and be a smarter, more mature person.

edenclarke: Not really committed?

bellamyblake1: You’re just in it for the clicks

edenclarke: As opposed to you, with your higher moral calling

bellamyblake1: Hey, I’m convincing people to read stuff that’s good for them
I’m okay with considering that a higher moral calling

edenclarke: Sometimes people might actually want to see a bunch of cat pictures
It’s not actually fair to make them read about politics when they’re trying to take a break

bellamyblake1: True
But in my defense, I do show them the cat pictures
I found five scarf pictures on my own, by the way
So thanks for nothing

edenclarke: No problem
Any time

* 

That’s basically how it goes, for the next couple months. The two of them will chat every few days about the next ridiculous headline they’re planning to use, each of them egging the other on to new heights, and Clarke’s always expecting someone with some kind of authority to protest to what they’re doing, but some of the weirdos on twitter have taken notice of the escalation and are talking about it a lot, so her bosses are happy, and Bellamy’s paper seems to genuinely have no idea what he does. They still think he’s writing lifestyle articles instead of attempting to incite revolution.

It’s kind of cool, but a little–unsatisfying. Clarke likes Bellamy, in a fairly limited sense, but her internet stalking hasn’t really turned up much about him. Pictures from college show an attractive, smiling boy with messy hair and white teeth, but she hasn’t found further records of him. He’s a few years older than her, apparently single, with a younger sister who likes to make fun of him on twitter.

She thinks she might like him, but it feels like she needs more information to really make up her mind about it. And she’d like to get it, so she can stop having these fluttery feelings every time she
sees his name. Those can’t be right.

Still, when he DMs her, it still makes her heart skip every time. And when she sees the message, Hey you’re in Seattle, right?, it goes into overdrive.

edenclarke: Stalker
Yeah
Why?

bellamyblake1: I’m going to be in town next week
Interview

edenclarke: Interview?
You’re leaving behind the exciting world of online journalism?

bellamyblake1: Even better
I might get hired as an actual political writer
Instead of lifestyle
Not that I mind lifestyle, but

edenclarke: Yeah, your heart seems to be somewhere else
So you might be relocating?

bellamyblake1: Maybe
It’s mostly online so they don’t require moving
But they prefer it and my lease is up in a month or so and I kind of hate LA

edenclarke: Wow, yeah
I can’t imagine you living there

bellamyblake1: I grew up here
But I’m thinking it might be time for a change
Anyway, I was hoping you’d be willing to meet up
Show me around town a little
Sell me on the place
Or not, I guess, depending on how you feel about me moving there

edenclarke: I can probably pencil you in, yeah
Send me your flight details
And schedule
We’ll see when we’re both free

The next few days feel endless. Bellamy’s coming in on Saturday afternoon and staying until Wednesday, to get the best deal on flights. When she offers to grab drinks with him after he lands, he agrees, and asks if she would have time on Sunday to do some sightseeing.

She agrees to that too, and can’t help hoping they won’t actually have to meet up on Sunday, because she will have just brought him home with her. He’s got an Air BnB, but she can’t help thinking she’s a better prospect.

Saturday afternoon she throws up an article while he’s on the plane, goes for a run in an attempt to calm her nerves, and heads over to the bar once Bellamy texts that he’s on the ground. She arrives way too early, given he still has to deplane and get out of the airport, but it’s not like obsessing at her apartment is helping. She might as well obsess at the bar.
Ten minutes after he tells her he’s on his way, he sits down next to her, offering a sheepish smile that probably would have won her over even if she hadn’t already been mostly won.

“Hey, Clarke.”

His voice is rich and smooth and he has glasses sliding down his nose and the entire effect is just way too much. “Hi. Nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, nice to meet you too.” He looks her up and down, worrying his lip a little. “Just to get it out of the way, uh–can I buy you a drink?”

“You don’t have to buy me a drink,” she says, feeling her own smile start to grow. “You can just flirt with me.”

His grin is honestly one of the best things she’s ever seen in her life. “I was already doing that. I figured I should step it up in person.”

“Feel free,” she says, and he slides his stool closer, smiling.

He cancels the Air BnB the next day.

*

Bellamy Blake @bellamyblake1
New article up, Fifteen Outrageous Reasons to Get Married (You Won’t Believe #7)! Please R&R.

Clarke Griffin @edenclarke
Replying to @bellamyblake1
Are you sure that’s where the exclamation point goes? I think we should consult Purdue University

Bellamy Blake @bellamyblake1
Replying to @bellamyblake1 @edenclarke
That’s seriously your question?

Clarke Griffin @edenclarke
Replying to @bellamyblake1 @edenclarke
Definitely my question, yeah

Clarke Griffin @edenclarke
Replying to @bellamyblake1 @edenclarke
My answer is yes
Despite what everyone seems to think, Clarke hasn’t found fires are any more likely to commit crimes than any other group. It’s a perception problem, like most things. Everyone is convinced that fires are a problem, so stories about fire-sign criminals tends to get more traction. And, of course, anything that reinforces stereotypes takes off even more. Cold, calculating air-sign serial killers, earths who use their strength to break locks or bones, water-sign empaths manipulating people into committing crimes.

But fires are already stigmatized, already considered volatile and unpredictable, dangerous by coincidence of when they were born. It’s neither fair nor reasonable, but Clarke has seen it time and again. It was all over sample cases in law school, and when she said she wanted to be a public defender, everyone warned her this was going to happen.

So when Bellamy Blake tells her about his sister’s case, she’s not surprised, but she is pissed off.

“She was born on April Fool’s Day,” he tells Clarke, as a conclusion, the icing on the whole awful thing. She winces, and his smile goes wry. “Yeah, exactly. With Mars rising. Probably the worst time anyone could have been born, socially speaking. So my mom just–lied about it.”

“I can see why.” She worries her lip. “I’m Sagittarius cusp, so–”

He cocks his head at her, clearly surprised she’s just admitting it. “Scorpio or Capricorn?”

“Capricorn. Fire and earth. Premature babies, always screwing up careful planning,” she adds, with a little smile.

“They were trying for an earth?”

“Grounded, practical, strong. The Griffin family traits.”

“And are you?” he asks.

“I’m definitely strong,” she says, showing off her arm muscles, which aren’t actually that impressive. Like everyone else, if she wants muscle definition, she has to work for it. She’s just starting from a much higher base strength than most people. Not as high as it would be if she was a full earth, of course, but still more than enough. “And I’m practical enough to tell you that the case against your sister shouldn’t be as good as it is, except that she’s a fire. A fire who lied about it, even.”

“She doesn’t lie about it now,” he admits, rubbing the back of his neck. “She won’t shut up about it. She wants me to be more open about it. I’m a cusp, like you,” he adds, before she can ask.

“Cancer/Leo.”

“Cool. I’ve never met a water/fire cusp before. That I know of,” she adds. “Not everyone mentions
“Yeah, I can pass as a Cancer, most of the time.”

“I would have believed it.”

His smile is a little rueful. “Thanks, I think.”

“So, your sister.”

That sobers him up. “My sister. The case against her is–”

“Circumstantial,” says Clarke, looking at the file. “If she wasn’t an Aries, she wouldn’t have been taken in. What’s her power?”

Bellamy makes a face. “Fire-breather.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, that’s what our last lawyer said. Even if they can’t prove arson, the best he thought he could really spin was that she set the fire by accident in a moment of heightened emotion.”

“Which is why you’re looking for a new lawyer.”

“Yeah. I heard you had a history of defending fires, so–”

“You’ve got a good case. It looks like the police saw a fire, looked at the employee data, found an Aries, and called it a day.” Her eye snags on a line from the report, and she glances at Bellamy. “You were at the scene too?”

“I’m a firefighter, my unit was called in to respond. I’m fireproof and intuitive,” he adds, with a shrug of one shoulder. “It was kind of a no-brainer career choice.” He cocks his head at her. “Can I ask what you got from Sagittarius?”

She raises one finger and places it on a piece of paper, focusing her mind on the single point of contact, feeling the paper warm under her touch. She lifts it again and smiles at the sight of the small hole. “Flameskin,” she says. “That’s about as much as I can do, though. Not that I’m complaining, intense flameskin is a pain. I already have trouble with singeing bedsheets during weird dreams.”

“I bet.” He scratches his neck, looking awkward. “So–will you take the case? If you won’t, I need to try to find someone else who will.”

“No, no. Of course I will.” Her smile doesn’t reach her eyes, she’s sure, but Bellamy doesn’t know her very well. He might not realize it. “I don’t see any evidence your sister did this. All we have to do is prove that.”

*  

It’s not the first time Clarke’s seen this. A fire starts with no clear source, and it’s easy to blame the person on staff with fire powers. But the motive is, in this case, completely lacking. Octavia Blake is a staff member in good standing, and her supervisor and coworkers don’t really think it was her. The only red flag in her history is an inaccurate date of birth recorded on her birth certificate, from her mother having tried to pass her off as a Taurus. She updated the birth date herself at age fifteen, with Bellamy, seven years older and her legal guardian, vouching for her true date of birth, and for
his mother swearing him to secrecy. Neither of them did anything wrong, and they made the changes as soon as they were legally able. Octavia’s employee file shows her correct date of birth and her power is on file, disclosed willingly.

“It’s just so lazy,” she tells Raven. “The police must have just looked at the employee registry, seen an Aries, and decided the case was closed. She’s been working there for three years. Who sees an arson case at an abortion clinic and decides that a longtime employee is responsible?”

“I’ll bet you ten bucks the prosecution’s motive is that she heard someone wanted to get rid of a fire-sign baby and when the clinic didn’t refuse, she lost her temper,” says Raven.

“Because this is definitely the first time in three years that’s happened,” Clarke says, with a roll of her eyes.

“Mars was in retrograde when the fire happened. I’m not saying I think she did it,” Raven adds, before Clarke can protest. “I’m just helping you figure out what you’re up against. Are you going to have the brother testify?”

“I think so,” she says, thoughtful. “He’s a fire cusp too, I think the more we can demonstrate fires behaving calmly and reasonably, the better. And he was one of the first responders. He’s a character witness and a professional.”

“Which makes him biased.”

“I think we’re better off talking to him. If we don’t, it feels like an omission. Her brother was there, he was her legal guardian for years, and we’re not even talking to him? It feels like we have something to hide.”

“And you don’t? You think he can handle himself?”

It’s a question that makes her bristle a little, but not an invalid one. Most fires, even fire cusps, do have quick tempers. Clarke does, and she assumes Bellamy does too. Like everyone else, they learn to deal with it, but if Bellamy loses it under cross examination, it’s also damaging to their case.

So the question is logical, like all of Raven’s are, and Clarke taps into her Capricorn side to think about it.

“I think he can, yeah. He’s been completely calm in every one of our meetings, including when his sister is ranting about all the bullshit. He says he passes for a Cancer most of the time. He had to change his own date of birth too, his mom put him a few days into Cancer to hide the cusp.”

“Guess that makes sense. It’s not like you can tell by looking at someone, most of the time. Unless you’re Monty,” she adds. Like her, he’s an air; unlike her, he’s always floating a couple of inches above the ground. “So, you like the brother?”

The question jars her for a second, because she had been liking the brother a little, in an unfortunate, guilty way. He’s intelligent and considerate and passionate, on top of being quite attractive, and while some of those are fine things to notice about a client’s brother, others really aren’t.

But Raven is asking if she likes him as a witness, so she recovers, manages a smile. “Yeah. I think he’ll be good.”
Clarke is used to people not touching her. It takes a little while, depending on their personality type; some people aren’t touchy at all, and it’s not a struggle for them. Close friends who like physical contact will get used to it, like her parents did. She’s not so warm that she can’t be touched, as she knows some full fires are. But it’s something people have to get used to, and not everyone wants to do that. Some water signs can’t; she met an Aquarius with frostskin in college, and when they tried holding hands as an experiment, they generated steam.

Bellamy is the first person to ever touch her and not react at all. She’s at the office late on the third day of the trial, and the door is unlocked, so he announces himself with a knock on the door frame and a soft, “Clarke?”

She blinks a few times, eyes uncrossing. “Bellamy?”

His smile is crooked. “I saw the light on my way home. Tell me it’s not that bad.”

“It’s not that bad,” she says, obedient, and he snorts. “But really, it’s not. I’m always like this when I’m in court. Long hours, and then I sleep for a week.”

“Have you eaten anything?”

She has to check the garbage can by her desk. “A protein bar?”

“Jesus. Do you like meatball subs?”

“That’s weirdly specific.”

“Mancini’s has the best in town, I was going to get one for myself. Do you want one?”

“You don’t have to—” she starts, and he puts his hand on her shoulder. It’s the lack of response, the way he doesn’t flinch and jump back, that shuts her up, as much as the gesture. No one’s ever been so prepared for the temperature of her skin.

“I know I don’t have to. I was doing it anyway.”

She swallows, wets her lips. “That would be great. Thanks.”

He gives her shoulder one more squeeze before he lets go. “Back in a few.”

It’s useless to try working while he’s gone; all she can think about is the cool, firm feeling of his fingers. Most of the contact was through her shirt, but there’s a lingering, phantom sensation of the side of his finger against her bare neck. Fires are rare enough she hasn’t met many of them, and as far as she knows, he’s the first fireproof. It hadn’t occurred to her that heat might not bother them, but of course it should have. Not burning is one thing, but even if they don’t burn, the heat should be a problem. If he’s fireproof and heatproof—

It doesn’t really matter. But it’s interesting.

“I got you a salad too,” he says, when he gets back, putting a bag in front of her. “And a gatorade. You should really go home.”

“I will. Eventually.” She clears her throat. “I wouldn’t mind company, if I’m taking a break.”

He smiles, takes the seat across from her. “Cool. My stuff would have gotten cold if I went all the way home.”

“Not a problem for me,” she says. “I’m my own portable heater.” She waits for a few seconds as he
settles in, then asks, “So, do you have a higher heat tolerance?”

If he understands why she’s asking, he shows no sign. “I guess. I’ve never been too hot. Which is actually dangerous, in my line of work.”

“Yeah?”

“I might be fireproof, but my lungs aren’t smoke proof. There was a fire next door when I was a teenager, I nearly got myself killed trying to rescue them. It felt so easy, I didn’t realize how much trouble I was having breathing.”

“And you still made a career out of it?”

He shrugs. “I was still good at it. I just needed to learn how to do it safely.” He takes a big bite of his own sub. “How did you end up a lawyer?”

“I didn’t want to be a doctor, but I still needed to get an overpriced degree so I didn’t let the family down.”

“Obviously. Are your parents both earths?”

“Yeah. Your mom sounds like an air, if I’m going to stereotype.”

“Trying to lie about her kids’ signs?”

“I might do it too,” she admits. “But–it can’t last.”

“Practical. Yeah, she was an air.” He leans forward, frowning a little, adjusting his glasses. “I don’t really get it. It would be better to combat the stigma against fires than just pretend we don’t exist. It’s not like it’s always existed. It doesn’t even exist everywhere. Plenty of cultures don’t discriminate.”

“Yeah. That’s how I feel too.”

His smile is a little sheepish. “Preaching to the choir, huh?”

“Think of it as an appreciative audience.” For a second, she tries to talk herself out of it, but she can’t help asking, “So, my skin didn’t feel weird to you?”

He blinks, clearly caught off guard, and she can see when he figures it out. “Oh, because it’s–no. I didn’t notice. I guess skin is skin.”

There’s no inherent meaning to that, no magical, perfect connection. But she can’t help hiding a smile in her gatorade. She’s had friends and significant others who got used to her touch, who didn’t mind it.

But it’s a little nice, to not be noticed at all. She thinks she could like it.

* 

A week after Octavia Blake is declared innocent of setting the fire that destroyed her workplace, Bellamy stops by Clarke’s office after hours again. This time, he comes with the sub already in hand, and he looks profoundly unimpressed.

“Do you have a life outside of work?”
“Not when I have paperwork to file. What are you doing here?”

He holds up the bag. “Bringing you dinner.”

“Why?”

“I have two answers, you can pick,” he says, starting to unload the food. “First, I like you and I wanted to thank you for what you did for Octavia, even though I know I don’t have to. I like taking care of people, it’s not a big deal.”

“Okay. What’s the other answer?”

“I like you and I want to keep seeing you. Ideally for a real meal, outside of your office.”

“Like a date?”

“Something like that, yeah. Your call, like I said.”

“I like option two,” she says. “I was trying to figure something like that out myself.”

“Good.” His eyes flick over her, and then he leans in, presses his lips against hers, quick and easy, his mouth soft and just a little cool against hers. “That’s the one I wanted you to pick.”

“Don’t you have intuition?” she teases. “Shouldn’t you know?”

“I’m just a cusp, my intuition isn’t that good.” He ducks his head. “I had a good feeling.”

It’s appropriate that the warm glow of hope in her chest feels like an ember. Maybe fire cusps are supposed to stick together. “Me too,” she says. “Thanks for dinner.”

“You can treat me next time,” he tells her, and she smiles.

“It’s a date.”
As a kid, Bellamy never got roller coasters. As a fairly quiet, cautious boy, he put roller coasters in the same category as horror movies, skydiving, and haunted houses. Some people liked them, but he thought he’d much rather have fun without being frightened.

Once he hit middle school and started caring about social standing, he got over it, because in middle school not being seen as a wuss was important to him. And while he’s come around to appreciating most of the things he once found terrifying—not that he’s tried or is ever planning to try skydiving—he still doesn’t love them. Which is fine. It’s not hard to avoid interacting with these things. If Miller really wants company for a scary movie, he can go, and if there’s a group outing to a haunted house, he’s not going to skip out. But left to his own devices, they’re not how he likes to have fun.

Unfortunately, the Arcadia High School senior class trip is always to an amusement park, and Clarke Griffin loves roller coasters.

It’s not as if Bellamy has to spend all his time on class trips with Clarke. For a while, he actually tried to avoid it; the last thing he wanted was to give away his stupid crush, but their relationship has evolved from coworkers to friends to good friends, so it would be weird if he didn’t hang out with her. And he wants to hang out with her. She’s one of his favorite people. That’s why he has a crush on her. And there is still something kind of unavoidably appealing about going on rides with her. It’s not a date, because they’re responsible for a bunch of asshole teenagers, and they’re not really there to have fun, but they’re allowed to have fun.

And this year, Clarke is apparently planning to have a lot of fun.

“Come on,” she says, giving him an unimpressed look. They’re in the bus en route to the park, and she’s got a map she printed off the website. It’s covered in notes as she tried to figure out the best route. “We’re going to the roller coaster capital of the state, Bellamy.”

“How do you want to be involved in the plan?”

“Is that a self-appointed title? Was there a vote? Did you vote? Are you in some kind of roller coaster enthusiast group?”

Clarke rolls her eyes. “You know you don’t have to be a grumpy old man all the time, right?”

“Yeah, but if I stop I have to come up with a new thing, and that sounds like a lot of work.” He slumps a little lower in the seat, looking at the map with a frown. “Okay, fine. I’ll bite. What’s the plan? Why do you need a plan? How am I involved in the plan?”

“How do you want to be involved in the plan?”

“Depends on what it is.”

“It’s not a plan,” she says. “Just a list of rides I want to go on, and what order I should go to them.
I’ve got kids signed up for it.”

“Jesus, really?”

“I’m an authority figure.”

“Oh.”

“I’m legendarily into roller coasters,” she says, not unreasonably. “They know they can trust me. But I could use another chaperone. Just for emergency backup.”

“So I’m involved in this plan in a purely professional capacity.”

“Yup,” she says, straight-faced. “Thankless and joyless, but it’s for the kids.”

“Yeah, that sounds like my entire life.”

Clarke nudges him with her elbow. “You’re definitely going to have fun.”

“You can’t make me,” he says, but the smile is inevitable. He knows there are already plenty of rumors about them floating around, and that hanging out on field trips like this won’t help, but it’s a high school. There are always going to be rumors about them. And he’s never had any luck avoiding Clarke, anyway.

So, yeah. He’s going to have fun. He won’t be able to help it.

* 

“Okay,” says Clarke, with a gravity befitting a sacred ritual. “Those of you who choose to join us are embarking on an important quest. It’s–Mr. Blake?”

He startles. “What?”

“You’re better at speeches. You want to take this?”

“It’s your speech.”

She pats his arm. “You’ve got this.”

“Fine. Listen up, if you’re with us, it’s because you care about exactly one thing: roller coasters. You don’t eat. You don’t sleep. All you care about is the ride.”

“Legally, we probably need to let them eat,” Clarke says. “Or at least not stop them from eating. And it’s a day trip, so they’re not actually sleeping.”

“I thought you wanted me to do the speech.”

“You’re doing a great job,” she says. “Keep going.”

“Thanks. Ms. Griffin has a game plan,” he says. “If you fall behind, you get left behind. Or one of us will come find you eventually, we’re not going to actually leave you here, we don’t want your parents to yell at us. But this group isn’t playing around. We take roller coasters seriously.”

“You and Ms. Griffin take everything seriously,” says Matt Owens.

“Why is there so much talking when we could be on a roller coaster right now?” adds Crystal
"So you’re all sure about this,” Bellamy says. “We’re all all-in in the roller coaster experience.”

“Stop stalling, Mr. Blake!” another student he doesn’t know calls, and when he looks at Clarke, she smiles.

“I think they’re ready.”

“I think they are.” He gestures for her. “Lead the way.”

As he expects from Clarke, her roller coaster itinerary is rock solid. It’s not just that she checked which ones were best; anyone can do that. She checked locations, wait times, which were most popular with tourists and which were most popular with enthusiasts. She has backup plans, if the lines are too long.

He’d marry her any time she wanted. There has to be someone here who could perform a wedding.

“Do you ever actually come to these things on your own time?” he wonders at the third stop.

“Amusement parks?”

“Yeah.”

“Sometimes. My college friends and I used to go on summer trips, but now we’re all too geographically diverse.”

“So you just have to stuff all the roller coasters you can into school trips?”

“You have to admit, it’s a great system. I’m getting in for free.”

“All you have to do is go on the rides with a bunch of kids.”

“We’re young adults!” says Ara.

“You’re eavesdropping,” says Clarke.

“You’re talking behind me.”

“Anyway, I don’t have to go with the kids,” Clarke says, turning her attention back to him. “I just let them benefit from my wisdom and experience. Like you.”

“Yeah, my life is incredibly enriched.”

Clarke’s smirk is far too knowing. “It really is.”

Ara and Val end up being the last two to make it onto this coaster, so he and Clarke get to wait together, watching the kids. It’s one of the coasters where your legs are dangling and your chest is strapped in, which is Bellamy’s least favorite kind of coaster, but Clarke is here, so he’s here.

But it’s a little harder to be confident when it’s just the two of them. Not showing fear in front of the kids is important; in front of Clarke, he couldn’t care less.

And Clarke, of course, notices. “What’s up?”

“I don’t like these ones.”
“You need to be more specific, I’m not sure what you’re talking about.”

“The roller coasters where your legs dangle. They freak me out.”

Clarke frowns, and he knows her well enough to be sure she’s reviewing, thinking of all the times they’ve been on these together, every time he’s followed her.

“You never said,” she finally says, frown deepening.

“I figured I should give them a try. I read somewhere you have to try a food ten times before you’re sure you don’t like it, maybe it’s the same thing with roller coasters. I’m still making up my mind.”

“You know you don’t have to come, right?”

“I know,” he says. “I want to come. You’re not forcing me onto roller coasters, Clarke. I have fun.”

“Still. You can always opt out. I can go alone.”

“No way. I could still start liking them.”

“You still should have told me,” she says. “I could have made a plan for just sitting coasters.”

“Or gone without me.”

“Or made a different plan,” she says, firm, and he doesn’t get a chance to reply before the cars come back and their students get unstrapped.

“We’re going to get funnel cakes!” says Kyle. “Do you two want anything?”

“Nope,” says Clarke. “But we’re not waiting for you. You can meet us at the Cyclone if you want to keep going. I told you, no eating.”

“Mr. Blake told us that, not you.” He grins. “Don’t worry, we’ll be there.”

They’re first in line for the next ride, so there’s still no more time for talking, but Clarke glances around to make sure the kids are gone and then reaches over, gives his hand a quick squeeze.

“Thanks for coming with me,” she says, and the queasy excitement in the pit of his stomach has nothing to do with the roller coaster.

The kids are waiting for them when they’re done, and they’ve got more coasters to visit. Bellamy’s skin is tingling with stupid awareness, the kind of strange nerves that come when it feels like something is about to happen. It might not–this might be nothing–but it feels relevant, that Clarke knows this is about spending time with her, that he knows she’d skip the coasters he doesn’t like, if it meant she got to be with him.

It’s hard to not feel optimistic about the whole day, right up until Matt throws up on him.

Okay, it’s not on him, entirely; he throws up and Bellamy is very slightly in the line of fire, but there’s still enough vomit on his body that it’s hard to think about romance.

Especially when Clarke is trying so hard not to laugh at him.

“I’m really sorry, Mr. Blake,” Matt is saying. He still looks a little green around the gills, and everyone’s giving him a wide berth. “I thought I had time to digest.”
“No problem,” he says. “It happens. We can take a walk, go get some Sprite. It can do double duty cleaning my shirt and settling your stomach.”

“Please just buy a new shirt,” Clarke says. “I’ll pay for it if you don’t have cash.”

“I like this shirt,” he says.

“You don’t have to burn it,” she says. “Just stop wearing it until you can wash it.”

“We’ll take Matt,” says Alex. “You two can keep arguing about Mr. Blake’s shirt.”

If the students gave him time, he’d argue with them, but the group is already breaking up, Matt’s friends taking him to get some water or something, the rest of the students drifting off, apparently less interested in getting back on the rides after someone threw up.

In no time, it’s just him and Clarke.

“New shirt, definitely,” she decides, looking him up and down.

“Have you seen the shirts they have here?” he grumbles.

“Have you seen the vomit on you? I’d go with the ugly t-shirt any day.” She loops her arm in his. “Come on, I bet we can find you a good one.”

On the one hand, he doesn’t trust her as far as he can throw her, in terms of fashion choices. On the other, they’re alone and she’s kind of flirting with him, so there’s no way he’s not going to let her drag him wherever she wants, vomit or no.

“Store first, then bathroom,” she declares. “Here.”

He blinks at the tissues she’s offering in surprise. Not that there’s any reason to be surprised; Clarke is definitely one of those people who carries absolutely everything in her purse.

“Sorry I dragged you into this,” she adds, as they start walking.

“You didn’t. I follow you around like a lost puppy at these things. I’m amazed you didn’t notice.”

She ducks her head, smiling. “It’s easy to not notice when I was doing the same thing to you. I just thought you liked roller coasters.”

He has to laugh. “Please tell me this isn’t some weird *Gift of the Magi* situation. Neither of us actually likes roller coasters but we want to hang out with each other so–”

“I like them. I just thought they were a mutual interest, not–”

“I’m good as long as my legs aren’t dangling,” he says, holding the door to the souvenir store open. “But you’re the main appeal.”

She smiles over her shoulder, bright and brilliant. “Wow, I can’t wait to talk about this more when we’re not on a field trip and you’re, you know–”

“Clean?”

“Sorry, this look isn’t doing it for me.”

“I think I can wait.”
They find him a horrifically ugly, way too tight shirt with the park’s logo on it, and he buys it and
changes in the bathroom, despite Clarke’s mild protests about missing out on the show. When he
says she can help him take it off, she grins, checks to make sure they’re shielded from the rest of
the park when she pulls him down for a brief, perfect kiss.

“I think I’m done with roller coasters for the day,” she admits, with a somewhat rueful smile.
“Want to find something else to do?”

He kisses her one more time, squeezes her hand, and then makes himself pull away, professional
again. Mostly. “Yeah,” he says. “Let’s see what we’ve got.”

Chash
Nate can admit that Octavia Blake’s wedding is something of a wake-up call for him. Or, if not a *wake up*, exactly, at least a good reason to reassess his life. A happy occasion with an edge of panic, because his best friend’s little sister is getting married, and he hasn’t had a serious relationship since he and Bryan broke up. It doesn’t bother him, most of the time, but it’s impossible to avoid the thoughts in circumstances like this. He remembers when Octavia was a half-wild girl tagging along behind him and Bellamy, and now she’s in a serious enough relationship that she’s marrying someone. Nate still feels like he’s too irresponsible to own a dog, let alone commit himself for the rest of his life to another human being.

At least Bellamy is, one, older than he is and, two, currently trying to hide behind him. So he’s not the least competent person in the room.

“I can’t believe she came,” he says, not actually glaring at Clarke, but spiritually glaring at her. Glaring at her as much as he can without actually looking at her.

“Yeah, fuck her, coming to a wedding she was invited to.”

“It’s *my sister’s wedding*. She knew I was going to be here.”

“She’s friends with Lincoln, I assume he wanted her here. And you know your sister still wants you guys to get back together.”

Octavia isn’t the only one rooting for Bellamy and Clarke, of course; they broke up because Clarke was leaving town for a fellowship, but she’ll be back in a month or two, and Bellamy still isn’t over her, and judging from the careful, furtive way Clarke is scanning the reception hall, Nate is pretty sure she’s not over him either.

“My sister’s got wedding brain. She wants everyone to get together.”

“Yeah, that’s awful. How dare she.”

“Shut up. You think we can go to the drinks table?”

“I don’t think anyone’s going to stop us. But if there’s one place Clarke is likely to be, it’s with the alcohol. You can’t avoid her forever,” he adds.

“I don’t have to avoid her forever, I just have to avoid her tonight.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” says Nate. “Whatever. *I’m* going to get a drink. And if I see your ex-girlfriend, I’m going to say hi and tell her where you are. Because this is ridiculous.”

“You’re a traitor.”
“You’re afraid if you talk to Clarke you’re going to sleep with her.”

Bellamy opens and closes his mouth, and then says, “I’m afraid if I talk to her, she’s not going to want to sleep with me. Or just want to sleep with me. Fuck, she’ll be back here soon. What if she comes back and she doesn’t—”

It’s a logical concern, for certain values of logical. If Bellamy never talks to her, she can’t tell him she’s not interested. But if she thinks he doesn’t want to see her, that’s not actually going to help.

“Only one way to find out,” he says, and Bellamy snorts.

“Yeah. That really helps.”

Clarke spots him and lights up, which is all the evidence Nate needs. He claps Bellamy on the shoulder. “You’ll be fine. I need booze.”

He doesn’t let himself look back, so when someone comes up next to him at the bar and says, “So, are you Miller?” he’s completely unprepared and nearly spills his drink on himself.

The guy is hot, with short, straight black hair and a slightly nervous smile, apparently a little uncomfortable in formal wear. Nate’s got a pretty good geek-dar, and whoever this is is pinging it hard.

Then the actual statement catches up and he blinks. “Uh, yeah. I’m Miller. Nathan Miller.”

“Awesome, I’m Monty, Clarke’s plus one. She told me you were her ex’s best friend and I was going to try to distract you for her, but I assume that’s him she’s talking to now?”

Nate lets himself glance over, finds Bellamy easily, his smile warm and soft, the expression he only ever wears for Clarke and his sister.

“That’s him, yeah.”

“Cool.” Monty drains his drink and offers Nate a smile, somewhere between nervous and flirty. “Can I distract you anyway?”

Nate smiles back. Maybe the best way to deal with his low key wedding crisis isn’t a one-night stand, but there are definitely worse ways to deal. “You already are. But you should keep doing it.”

two. Monroe & Harper

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me Nate was coming!”

Clarke frowns. “Honestly, I thought you knew. Aren’t you guys still together?”

“We’re not together,” says Monty, trying not to sound too petulant. “We’re just—fucking. Sometimes. When he texts me. Gah,” he adds, rubbing his face. “How did this happen? I try to be cool and hook up and I just—suck at it.”

“Sounds like you’re pretty good at it,” she teases. “Since you’re still hooking up with him.”

“Shut up.”

Apparently he’s convincingly petulant, because Clarke sober. “I thought you’d know, but even if
you didn’t, I thought you’d be, well–happy. You guys seem great together. We can all hang out, it’ll be fun.”

Monty’s glad Clarke and her ex worked everything else, and he does like Bellamy. But even with the two of them around, it’s hard to believe that his ex-girlfriend’s wedding is going to be improved with the inclusion of the guy he’s currently having occasional casual sex with.

But he doesn’t want to keep having that conversation, so he switches tactics. “Okay, but why are Bellamy and Miller coming to this? How do we all know the same people?”

“Bellamy’s my plus one,” she says. “Miller and Monroe went to college together, I think. And I don’t know how we know all the same people, but I assume that was part of why you wanted to move here in the first place. You knew people.”

“I didn’t want to know them all, together, at a wedding.”

“Yeah, okay,” Clarke grants. “But it’s not all bad, right? There’s still an open bar.”

Monty has to grin. “There is still an open bar.”

And, okay, Clarke’s right, it’s not terrible. Harper and Monroe are cute and everyone’s having a good time, and Nate looks really hot in formal wear. And Monty does like Nate. That’s part of why he wishes they weren’t just having casual sex. He thinks Nate could be a great boyfriend.

But in the meantime, they dance, and make out, and go home together, and when Nate rolls over and tells Monty he might as well stay the night, it’s not be perfect, but he’ll take it for now.

three. Bryan & Michael

“So, what am I doing, exactly? What’s my angle?”

Nate glances at Monty in the passenger seat, can’t help a smile. He looks so fucking focused. He’s dedicated to this. “Angle?”

“As your date, what am I doing? Do you want your ex to be, like, jealous? Wishing he hadn’t let you get away? Or do you just want to show off how much you’ve moved on?”

This is the problem with not just being upfront about what he wants. Nate could have just asked Monty to the wedding, as a normal date, because he wanted his company. Which he does. But it felt so–weighty. So he chickened out, added the rambling “it’s my ex’s wedding and I don’t want to be alone and pathetic and he knows Bellamy so I can’t bring him” explanation to the end of the invitation, making it sound less like he wanted to go with Monty and more like he wanted a warm body.

He’s bad at this. It’s not a new thing.

“You don’t have to do anything special,” he says. “Just be yourself.”

“Is this the last guy you dated?”

“Yeah, but it’s been a while.” He does the math quickly. “We’d already been broken up for like a year and a half when I met you. He and Michael have been together for almost that long.”

“So he’s marrying his rebound guy and you didn’t even have one,” Monty surmises. “Is this, like—
did you want the wedding invitation, or is he rubbing it in your face? Do we like him?”

Nate has to laugh. “Dude, I dated him. Of course I like him. And I’m happy for him.”

“Yeah, but unofficially.”

“Unofficially, it’s a little weird. But the breakup was amicable. I wanted to bring you,” he adds, finally. “I like hanging out with you. I thought I’d have more fun if you were here.”

“Oh,” says Monty, surprised but apparently pleased. “So you really do just want me to be myself?”

“If I wanted to come with anyone else, I would have asked them. I’m, uh—I’m not good at this,” he admits, as he parks the car.

Monty thinks it over for a second. “So, is this a date?”

“I hope so.”

“Cool, I hope so too.” He leans over and kisses Nate, soft and quick, and most of the tension in Nate’s chest uncoils itself. “I’m still going to be an awesome date, don’t worry.”

“ Obviously,” he says, and when he gets to introduce Monty as his boyfriend?

Best wedding ever.

four. Bellamy & Clarke

Monty will admit that he hasn’t actually been that excited about any of the weddings he’s gone to recently, at least not as weddings. Harper’s was nice, but it was complicated by being his (admittedly distant) ex and the way he didn’t really know Monroe at all. He was happy for them, but in a kind of intellectual way. And Bryan and Michael’s wedding was fun, but for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with them and everything to do with his being on his first date. With his boyfriend.

Clarke and Bellamy’s wedding is nothing but awesome, though. Two of his favorite people are getting married, his boyfriend is the best man, and he has absolutely no responsibilities in the wedding party, so he doesn’t have to worry about anything except having a good time.

And, okay, providing backup as needed. He’s still running around doing whatever needs doing, but he’ll get to just watch the ceremony, and then they’ll all be getting drunk and dancing and celebrating.

That’s what weddings are supposed to be: the purest form of joy, directed at people you love.

It helps that the whole thing is fairly lowkey. Bellamy and Clarke have small families, and neither of them is religious or has much by way of family traditions. Clarke’s stepfather performs the ceremony, a quick introduction, a few readings, the vows, and then a kiss. It’s over in about fifteen minutes, all told, and then there are pictures and mingling and a reception.

Nate comes to find him when the pictures are done, leaning down for a kiss. “You didn’t want to be in pictures, huh?”

“I saw Lincoln with his camera, I think I’m going to be in pictures whether I like it or not. But, yeah, I can skip official posed stuff. You know what my face does when I try to smile on purpose.”
He laughs. “I do. We still would have liked to have you.”

“I know. It was a personal choice, not sacrificing myself for the greater good. That’s not really my thing. More Clarke and Bellamy.”

“Yeah, that sounds right.” He takes Monty’s flute of champagne and takes a sip. “Octavia asked if we were next.”

“That’s always such a weird question to me. Like, next by what measurement? If it was just you and her and Bellamy and Clarke, you’re kind of next by default, unless someone else gets divorced. No one else can be next. But other people are going to get married before we do, like, in the world.”

“You’ve put way too much thought into this,” Nate says, fond.

“Story of my life. I think about things.” He wets his lips, finds himself unaccountably nervous. Nate brought it up, and he’s not nervous. This is okay. “Do you want us to be next?”

“I don’t know about next. I’m not in a hurry. But I want us to be someday.”

His smile feels like a warm thing growing on his face, something a little foreign, but still welcome. “Yeah,” he says. “Someday is what I want too.”

five. Nate and Monty

Someday is about five years after the first time they met, when the wedding does happen. Not exactly five years, because having the same anniversary as Lincoln and Octavia would be awkward. But five years, give or take.

By the time it’s happening, Nate gets it. He’s grown up, he’s in love, and he’s more than ready.

By the time it’s happening, he can’t wait, actually.

It’s so easy, when he’s sure.
I Cannot Be

Chapter Summary

Fill for spxcebitch! Prompt: "You're the only person I ever want to wake up next to" + jealousy + Bellarke.

Falling asleep with Bellamy is a terrible idea, and Clarke knows it. And it is an idea, she can’t deny that. It would be nice if she could tell herself it was an accident, one of those things that happens without anyone meaning it to. After all, they live together, and falling asleep on the couch with your roommate after a late night of drinking and Netflix is completely possible.

That’s what Bellamy did, after all. It’s just not what Clarke did. Clarke saw he was asleep and that he looked warm and inviting, and she let herself curl up against him and pretend, for a moment, that this was real, that this was how they were.

A terrible idea, obviously, and worse now, in the morning, waking up with him and seeing his sleep-mussed hair and foggy eyes.

This is the only way she ever wants to wake up. For the rest of her life, this is it.

Except, of course, it’s not. Bellamy blinks, frowns, smacks his lips like he’s trying to get the taste of sleep out of his mouth, and then he focuses on her.

“Did we fall asleep on the couch?”

Clarke makes herself get up, shaking our her shoulders. “The dangers of binge-watching, I guess.”

“This is going to fuck up my back,” he grumbles, and she flashes him a smile, trying not to let herself watch him. He looks good all the time, but there’s something so intimate about seeing him like this, glasses crooked, beard going a little messy. It shouldn’t be so much more overwhelming than a normal morning, but here they are.

“Sorry you’re so old and achey.”

“It’ll happen to you.” It’s his turn to stand and stretch, and Clarke doesn’t watch that either.

It’s so fucking inconvenient, being in love with her roommate. She has so many opportunities, every day, to want him. It feels like she does it all the time.

“Thanks for that grim vision of the future. Do you want coffee?”

“I think tea this morning.” He pauses, watching her, slightly wary. “Do we need to be awkward about this?”

Her smile is inevitable. “I don’t know. Do you want to be?”

“Seems like kind of a waste. We could just get back to Netflix instead.”

“Yeah,” she says. “That sounds a lot better.”
He makes tea and she makes coffee and they grab cereal and end up back on the couch, next to each other, like always, but she can’t stop thinking about the way his arm came up around her in his sleep, the feeling of his face against her hair.

It might have been the most enjoyable mistake of her life, but it was a huge mistake.

*

“I have a girl for one of you!” Octavia says, that night. They’re out for drinks, and Clarke was regretting leaving the warmth of the apartment even before this declaration.

She glances at Bellamy, but he’s looking curiously at his sister, which just makes it worse.

“What do you mean you have a girl?” he asks. “Is she in the trunk of your car?”

“She’s my new coworker. She’s super cute and pansexual, so I have to set her up with someone. So how does this work? Do you guys play rock-paper-scissors to see who gets to date her or what?”

“Jesus, how do you think dating works, O? Did you and Fox play rock-paper-scissors for Lincoln?”

“No way, I wasn’t letting anyone else have a chance.”

“What makes you think either of us wants to date this girl?” Clarke can’t help asking. “Just that we’re all queer?”

“She’s cool, like I said. I’m giving you guys dibs. Clarke, she likes cider and yelling about the patriarchy. Bell, she minored in history in college and she’s really interested in exploration and colonization.”

Bellamy perks up. “Yeah?”

Judging from Octavia’s smirk, she thinks he’s hooked. Clarke can’t blame her; Bellamy has gotten drunk and ranted to her about how cool it would be to have a ship and discover a new land and not be a colonizing dick about it on multiple occasions. He’d probably love to have a more informed audience to discuss it with.

“I can give you her number.”

It’s stupid, that it makes Clarke relax. But there’s no way Bellamy is actually going to call this person. If Octavia gave him a date and a place for a date, he’d almost certainly go, but left to his own devices, he won’t contact some stranger and try to arrange a meeting. Bellamy can’t even be bothered to set up an online dating profile; the most effort he’s willing to put into dating is going to a bar and flirting. Which, given the combination of his face, his smile, and his voice, is always enough to get the job done.

Not that she’s biased.

“Cool, go ahead,” says Bellamy, handing over his phone. “I’m never going to call her, but it’ll be fun to clean out my contacts in like three years and try to remember who she is.”

“Clarke, you want it too?” Octavia asks.

“I don’t want to be in non-competition with Bellamy,” she says, and this time he does look at her, head cocked, expression inscrutable.
But all he says is, “Thanks for having my back.”

She manages a very normal smile. “Any time.”

*

They’re watching some awful low budget animated movie on Netflix because Bellamy finds them morbidly fascinating when his phone buzzes, and he frowns. “Huh.”

“What?”

He straightens up and unlocks the phone to look at whatever it is. “That Luna girl texted me. O’s coworker.”

“Really? Saying what?”

His fingers are moving over the keypad, his focus on the message. “About what you’d expect. Hey, this is awkward, but your sister gave me your number and said I should ask you about some video game called Colonization.”

“At least she seems normal.”

“Yeah. And if she’s new in town, she’s probably looking for a social group. I might as well be nice. Maybe O’s right and she’s cool.”

“You know if you guys actually get together, she’ll never let you hear the end of it. Like, she’ll get up at your wedding and take credit for it.”

“So I’ll never get married, obviously.”

“Obviously. You’re really going to go out with her?”

“So far I’m just not ignoring her texts,” he points out. “For all we know she’s not even looking for a relationship. It’s not like O’s a reliable source. But maybe she’s cool.”

“Maybe,” Clarke agrees, watching as he types with lead in her stomach.

She’s going to kill Octavia.

*

Luna is, unfortunately, interested in becoming part of the friend group, beautiful, intelligent, and cool. She and Bellamy have a lot in common, enjoy talking history, and Clarke tries not to let it bother her. Bellamy’s still her best friend and her roommate, and it’s not like Luna is replacing her.

But Octavia clearly thinks she’s the best matchmaker ever, and Clarke can’t disagree, from what she’s seen. And it’s not like Luna would be replacing Clarke, if she and Bellamy started dating. Luna would be his girlfriend, a new role in his life. Just because Clarke wants to fill it doesn’t mean she is.

So it’s hard not to worry. Especially when Bellamy and Luna seem to always be texting. And, again, she knows this because she lives with him, so it’s not like she doesn’t see him all the time. If it was a competition, she might be winning. But they’re also not actually playing the same game.

“Are you actually going to ask Luna out on a date?” she finally asks, after about a month of watching them flirt.
“Huh?” he asks, absent. He’s reading while she sketches, and it would be a nice evening, if Bellamy’s phone would stop buzzing.

“The girl you’ve been texting all night. Are you going to ask her out?”

“Oh, uh–I don’t know. Do you think I should?”

He looks so nervous, she can’t help smiling. “That’s really more your call than mine. Do you want to go on a date with her? If you do, you should ask her out. If you don’t, you shouldn’t.”

“Thanks for breaking that down.” He shifts a little, his discomfort clear. “Fuck, I don’t know. Do you think she thinks I want to date her? Am I sending signals?”

“Bellamy,” she says, amused. “Breathe. I think she’d probably say yes if you asked, but who wouldn’t? You’re not leading her on if you’re not interested.”

“I should–try, right? She’s cute. Dating is a good idea.”

“Not if you sound that unenthusiastic,” she teases. “It’s a good idea if you want to do it. Don’t do it just to date.”

“I know.” His phone buzzes, and he jumps like he’s been stung. “Fuck. I should definitely want to ask her out.”

Clarke shouldn’t be thrilled, but, well, she’s never claimed to be an unbiased third party. Not to herself, anyway. “I didn’t mean to cause a crisis. I was just curious.”

“I know. I don’t know either.” He sends another text and then throws his phone across the couch. “Fuck, whatever. I’m not going to think about it tonight. That’s been working so far, right?”

“Right.”

She doesn’t actually fall asleep on the couch again, but she does close her eyes, fakes it just to see what he’ll do. At the end of the episode they’re on, he turns off the TV, leaves, and comes back with a blanket for her.

It’s not plausible deniability cuddles, but it’s at least nice of him. She’s planning to just give it a few more minutes, but the blanket is warm and the couch is comfortable, and she drifts off, wishing she’d be waking up with Bellamy again.

* 

“So, I don’t want to be rude or presumptuous, but I am curious,” says Luna.

Clarke’s a few ciders in, so it takes her a few seconds to parse the statement. “Curious about what? Rude about what?”

“You and Bellamy.”

“What about us?” she asks, like she doesn’t know.

Luna’s not having it either. “You’re not that drunk.”

Clarke sighs, deflates. “I really don’t know. Not–what specific part. If I’m asking if I like him, of course I do. But there’s nothing going on, and if you like him, you should tell him.”
“Have you told him?”

Clarke shrugs, tries out a smile. “Not worth it. He’s my best friend. You don’t have anything to lose, so you can–”

“I’m not interested in Bellamy,” Luna says. “Obviously, he’s a very attractive man and I like his company. But every other text he sends me is about you. I couldn’t decide if you knew or not. But you don’t.”

Her mouth opens and closes, and then she manages, “What kind of texts?”

“Nothing—he doesn’t ask me for advice about you or wax poetic about your eyes and smile. But you’re the star of all his stories, and from what I could tell there’s nowhere in the world he’d rather be than at home with you. Even if I wanted a chance, I wouldn’t have one. But—you should tell him. In my opinion. I’d tell him, if I were you.”

Clarke takes a drink of cider to wash down the lump in her throat, lets herself look for Bellamy even as it terrifies her. He’s at the bar, chatting with Miller and Monty, gesturing broadly, and it’s almost too much to let herself think about, having him.

He smiles, cocks his head like he’s worried, and she shakes hers, smiling.

“You know him this well, how do you not know?” Luna asks, sounding genuinely mystified. “All you have to do is look.”

“Yeah,” says Clarke. “I’m working on it.”

* * *

“So, are you going to go out with Luna?” Bellamy asks. They’re walking home, and Clarke is trying to to figure out what to say to him. Somehow ‘I’m in love with you’ seems like a little much.

“Me?”

“You guys were talking. It looked serious.”

“Oh. No.” She wets her lips. “Do you remember when we fell asleep on the couch?”


“You fell asleep first,” she admits. “And I should have left, but–you looked really comfortable, and I thought I might not ever get another chance. Which is creepy. Sorry.”

There’s a pause as he considers. “I don’t know what you’re apologizing for, exactly. What did you do?”

“Snuggled you in your sleep. And it—” She huffs. “Look, I already knew how I felt about you, that wasn’t new, but—I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it. Every time I wake up, I wish you were there. And thinking about you dating Luna was—”

“Clarke,” he manages, almost awed. “Jesus, I was never–the only reason I was even thinking about asking her out was to try to get over you, which would have been shitty, so–” He lets out a bright, sharp, shocked laugh. “Fuck. Really?”

They’re almost home, halfway to the steps, but she can’t wait. She stops and tugs him down, and
when he kisses her, she feels it down to her toes, feels it everywhere.

“Really,” she says.

“Good.” He kisses her again before he unlocks the front door. “Me too.”

* 

It turns out there’s only one thing better than waking up with Bellamy on the couch: waking up with him in his bed. And she gets to do it every day.
The Ambassador of Attolia

Chapter Summary

Fill for chicleeblair! Prompt: the 100 crossover with The Queen's Thief! Bellarke-centric w/ wlw!Raven (which is primary is up to you). also plz include Octavia

Chapter Notes

Familiarity with the Queen's Thief series will make this less confusing.

It wasn’t as if Bellamy had any fondness for the previous Attolian ambassador. The man had been appointed before the Thief had gone and stolen himself a throne, and the appointment had clearly not been a reward. Thelonious hated the mountain kingdom, its people, their accents, everything about Eddis, from what Bellamy could tell. As his guard, Bellamy heard all his complaints, and in the end he just replied in grunts, which suited both of them.

But the new ambassador should be educational. He hasn’t ever been to Attolia, has only heard legends of their hard queen, but he thinks her choice of representative will say a great deal about how she feels about her new marriage.

Still, when Clarke arrives, he doesn’t know what to think of that.

He’d assumed Clarke was male without even thinking about it. The name was part of it, but the larger part was her station. Ambassadors are men; he’s never met one who wasn’t. It’s not something women do. It always seemed a little silly to him, as he’s never met a noblewoman who wasn’t as skilled with or better at diplomacy than her husband, but that’s still how it is.

So he’s unprepared for the bright young woman stepping off the carriage, and in his unpreparedness, he does falter.

“My lady,” he says, offering her a hand down. “Is your husband coming later?”

“Much later,” she says, with a tight smile. “I’m not married. I’ve been sent from Attolia, to represent my queen.”

“You’re the ambassador,” he says, flat.

“I am. Clarke, of House Griffin. And you are—“

He swallows, pulls himself together. If she’s lying, he’ll find out soon, and in the meantime, there’s no harm in being polite. Eddis won’t fault him for that, even if he’s being deceived.

“Bellamy. I’ll be your personal guard while you’re in the court here. Unless you have objections.”

“Do all ambassadors have personal guards in Eddis?”
“They do. I also served your predecessor.”

To his surprise, she snorts, a soft, unladylike sound that she doesn’t seem to have meant to let out. “You have my condolences.”

He smiles too. “Appreciated. May I show you to your room?”

“Please,” she says. “Thank you.”

It’s not much to go on, but Bellamy still can’t hoping she really is the new ambassador. She seems much better than the last one.

* 

“So, how’s the new ambassador?” Raven asks, when he gets to the tavern that night.

“A woman,” he says.

She blinks. “A woman?”

“It makes sense, I suppose,” he says. He’s been thinking it over. “Why wouldn’t a queen send a woman to another queen? If we’re going to have women ruling, we should have other women in positions of political power.”

Gina passes him a cup of wine. “What did Eddis say?”

“Nothing. I assume she knew and didn’t tell me. I assume she had someone reporting back to her so she’d be able to imagine the expression on my face.”

“That sounds like her,” Raven agrees. She isn’t as closely related to the queen as Bellamy is, but she’s still part of the court. They’re all cousins, more or less, one way or another. And Raven’s brilliant; Eddis knows better than to waste a mind so useful as hers. “How is she aside from being a woman?”

“Nothing wrong with her so far. Polite to me and to the queen, no muttered asides about how uncivilized our mountain is, so an improvement over the last one.” He shrugs. “Still an Attolian, so I guess we’ll find out.”

“Still,” says Gina, with a smile. “To being better than the last one.”

It’s a good hope to drink to. “To being better than the last one.”

* 

Guarding Clarke is very much like guarding Thelonious was, at least in broad strokes. He’s with her throughout the day, some strange combination of protector and assistant. Not that she doesn’t have an actual assistant, a quiet, somewhat sarcastic Attolian named Monty, but they’re still learning their way around the palace, and sometimes it’s simpler for Bellamy to do errands than it is to try to explain to Monty how to do them himself. And Monty always comes with him, learns for next time, so Bellamy doesn’t mind.

The biggest difference is that Bellamy’s counterpart, the one who guards Clarke’s rooms on the night shift, is no longer Miller, but Octavia, a nod to the impropriety of having a man guard a woman as intimately as he used to guard the ambassador. That rule has always been a bit odd to Bellamy—the only difference between his guarding Clarke and Eddis is how many rooms they have
between where he stands and where the women sleep, to say nothing of the incorrect assumption that he couldn’t have inappropriate interest in a man he was guarding—but in this case, he’s grateful for it. His sister would have joined the army in a second if she was a boy, and she’s giddy to finally have a role as a combatant. For that alone, he’d like Clarke.

But that’s far from the only reason. Because that’s the real biggest difference, the one that worries him. He likes Clarke. Not just for an Attolian, not for someone he’s being made to spend time with, but without qualifications. She’s sharp and quick, smiles at his muttered comments, seems to value his opinions when she asks for them. It’s hard for him to really feel as if he trusts her—she’s a diplomat, and a foreign diplomat at that—but he’s coming dangerously close.

Which is why, when she says, “Isn’t there anything fun to do in Eddis?” he doesn’t immediately bristle.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asks instead.

She huffs. “I’ve been here for two months, and so far all I’ve done is read, attend meetings, and be glared at and flirted with at state dinners. Is there something else I could be doing?”

“I’m not sure I’m the best person to ask, I’m just a guard.”

“You are not,” she says, rolling her eyes. “You and the queen are cousins.”

“That’s nothing special in Eddis. And I hate the court. I’m much happier being a soldier than a noble.”

“And what do soldiers do for fun?”

He thinks that over. “Two things.”

“Just two?” she teases. “How are you not bored?”

“Two things I think you’d want to do. And that aren’t reading,” he adds. “I read a lot.”

“Of course you do. What are the other two?”

“Exploring and drinking.”

“Those sound perfect,” says Clarke. “When can we start?”

He grabs Octavia, just for appearances’ sake, so it won’t be him and Clarke alone, and while his sister grumbles a little about losing her day, he knows she doesn’t really mind. Lincoln’s one of the queen’s guards, and he’ll be spending the day with Eddis; Octavia likes having things to do. She’s never been as interested in history as Bellamy has, preferring myth and legend to fact, but Bellamy learned the stories of Eddis from the thief’s mother, and once Clarke finds out he knows about the old gods and where the temples were supposed to come from, she wants to hear those stories too.

He manages to keep her amused with those trips for another month, and then she says, “What about drinking?”

“I was under the impression you drank at dinner. Better wine that I get, I’m sure.”

“Bellamy.”

“You want to come to a tavern in the city with me?”
“Why wouldn’t I?”

He’d say he assumed she didn’t like it, but he remembers the Thief smuggling his cousin who is Eddis but wasn’t back then out of the palace so she could have a break from court intrigue and in-fighting.

Everyone needs a break sometimes.

“Stay here,” he tells her. “I’ll ask Octavia.”

It seems like the kind of thing his sister will be thrilled about; dinner is usually the start of her shift, and she complains of how boring it is staying in Clarke’s antechamber until the night shift begins and the palace guard takes over patrolling. He assumed she’d jump at the chance to get out.

Instead, she looks him up and down like she’s trying to find flaws.

“What?”

“You’re taking her out?”

“I take her out all the time.”

“To a tavern.”

“She wanted to come with me. If you’ve got something to say, just say it,” he adds, and Octavia huffs.

“Are you interested in her? Romantically.”

He should have expected the question, but of course it stops him short. It’s so easy for him to not let himself think about these things, to turn his mind away from the curve of her smile and the sound of her laugh.

“Fuck,” he mutters, and his sister snorts.

“Wow. You didn’t know?”

“She’s an ambassador!”

“You’re the queen of Eddis’s cousin.”

“We’re all cousins on the mountain,” he says, but the old joke doesn’t feel that funny. “I’m not taking her out to—woo her,” he says, with a vague gesture. “We’re friends. It’s not anything. She might not even be ambassador for that long. Some of the nobles from Sounis are trying to complain it’s improper.”

“And?”

“And I’m just taking her out so she can get a drink, it’s nothing to worry about. Are you coming?”

“Not if you paid me. The last thing I want to see is your inept flirting. Besides, if we’re both there, everyone will realize she must be the ambassador. If you just send her with Raven you can pretend she’s an old friend from the country.”

She’s not wrong. It’s hard to say how bad it would really be for someone to identify Clarke, but now that the former thief is starting to wield power on his new country’s behalf, the Eddisians
seem to feel less as if they pulled off a coup and more as if the Thief betrayed them.

All in all, Bellamy would rather she was just a friend from the country.

“Thanks for the advice,” he says. “Next time you think I’m in love with someone, don’t tell me.
I’m going to go talk to Raven.”

“Thanks for giving me the night off!” O says, and he glares at her, for good measure.

Raven and Clarke have met a few times, in passing, but Raven doesn’t like actual politics, and
prefers to spend her time in her study, doing her own work.

Not that Bellamy blames her; if he had a study where he could do nothing but read and work on his
own projects all the time, he wouldn’t leave it much either.

“Octavia says I’m in love with Clarke, so I need you to bring her over to the tavern today.”

Raven considers this. “Octavia had to tell you? Fuck, I thought you knew or I would have told
you.”

“Thanks.” He sighs. “She wants to come out drinking. I figure if she comes with you, maybe no
one will realize she’s the ambassador.”

“What about the in love with her part?”

He shrugs. “I’m pretty sure it’s been going on for a while, so I can just–keep doing what I was
doing.”

“That seems like a good solution to a non-problem.”

That’s not a statement he’s sure he wants to try to interpret, so he just rolls his eyes. “Listen, will
you come walk Clarke over or not?”

“Obviously. Can’t wait to see you drinking with her. That’s going to be great.”

Clarke’s clearly expecting Octavia, not that Bellamy can blame her, and he’s not sure what to make
of her change of expression at the sight of Raven, but he’s also having this minor problem where he
doesn’t know how to look at her or think about her because he doesn’t want to consider what his
being in love with her would actually involve.

It’s either a good or bad thing that he’s about to be drinking.

“O pointed out that if you showed up with both of us looking like guards, it would blow your
cover. So you and Raven can head over first and I’ll meet you there. It’s safer.”

“And Octavia isn’t coming?”

“Taking advantage of my watching you for the night to spend time with her husband,” he says.
“Sorry.”

“We’ve got you,” says Raven. “Don’t worry.”

Clarke’s smile is a little wary, but all she says is, “So, so, so,” and she leaves without further
complaint.

So it’s probably fine.
And she does seem to be in good spirits when he arrives at the tavern. She lights up a the sight of him, brilliant like the sun rising, and he has to swallow back his own smile.

“Looks like you started without me,” he says, taking the seat next to hers.

“I was meeting Gina!” she says, as if this is the high point of her month.

“Glad to hear it. How are you, Gina?”

Gina’s smile is a little more knowing than he’s really comfortable with. Raven probably told him that he didn’t know he was in love with Clarke, and now they’re both overly amused about it. “I’m excellent. It’s good to finally meet your–old friend.”

“Of course it is. I’m not regretting this at all,” he grumbles, and to his surprise, Clarke puts her arm through his.

“Of course not,” she says, and he somehow finds it’s true.

It’s not until they’re walking back to the palace, Clarke still leaning on him, the two of them looking like nothing so much as a pair of lovers, that she says, “I really was happy to meet Gina.”

“I had no idea you’d been wanting to.”

“I hadn’t! I didn’t know she existed. All I ever heard was rumors about you and Raven and how your engagement was going to be announced any day. I even asked–the secretary who tracks those things if the two of you were too closely related to marry. Apparently you’re not.”

It’s not an unknown rumor to Bellamy, of course. He and Raven have been friends for a long time, and that’s always a convenient story for people to tell themselves. Wouldn’t it be sweet, if the two of them married? And even he’d thought they might, for a while. They got along well, and they do love each other.

But she’s happy with Gina, and he’s–

Honestly, he’s not sure what’s happening with Clarke, but he suspects it’s going to go well for him.

“I did know I could have married her, yes.” He clears his throat. “I forgot you’d hear those. The rumors. I mostly forget they’re still going around, but it’s–”

“Convenient,” Clarke supplies. “For Raven and Gina.”

“I didn’t mind. I wasn’t looking to marry.”

“You weren’t?” she asks, careful, and he has to smile.

“I wasn’t looking, no.” He clears his throat, offers a smile. “My sister had to tell me how I felt about you. Today. I don’t always notice.”

She laughs. “No?”

“I never fell in love with any of the other Attolian ambassadors, how was I supposed to know I’d start now?”

“Well, once your Thief stole our queen and her throne, anything seemed possible,” she teases.

“Maybe he had the right idea after all.”
Clarke slides her hand into his and squeezes. “I think my guard is off duty tonight,” she says, with a wicked smirk. “If you’d like to come home with me.”

It’s a bad idea, but not a terrible one. He can’t imagine Eddis will object to the match. And even if Attolia and her new king do, he can still get tonight.

As many nights as he can manage.

“I’d love to,” he says, and Clarke smiles, and yes.

The Thief really did have the right idea about Attolians.
Chapter Summary

Fill for thisismyoverthemoonface! Original fic here.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bellamy never thought he would quit a job for a relationship. It was one of those things that happened on TV and always struck him as unrealistic: short-sighted, dramatic, and, ultimately, dangerous. He’s never been so well off that he thought he could gamble his livelihood for, well, romance. He was old enough to know better when he was twenty, when he was thirty.

Which is probably why he doesn’t tell Clarke right away when he does it. Because it feels so juvenile, some big gesture that he’s dumping on her, like a cat bringing a dead mouse to its owner’s doorstep and expecting them to be impressed at its thoughtfulness and not horrified.

“Yeah, when you put it like that, it was a shitty idea,” says Wells.

Sometimes, just sometimes, Bellamy remembers that the president of the United States is giving him feedback on his love life, and it’s surreal.

Mostly, though, he can forget.

“Seriously, what the fuck am I supposed to say to her?”

“I got a job at the Newseum. That’s–” He counts on his fingers. “Seven words. Easy.”

“And then she asks why I quit, and I give her fifteen good reasons that aren’t I’m fucking in love with her and sick of having a conflict of interest.”

“If you don’t tell her you’re in love with her, it’s a waste.” Wells claps him on the shoulder. “I have to go be the president. Congrats on the new job. Same time next week? If you haven’t told her by then–”

“I’m not leaving for a month, I have plenty of time to tell her.”

“The sooner you tell her, the sooner you can ask her out,” Wells points out, not unreasonably. “I’m just saying.”

“Yeah, yeah. Go run the free world.”

* *

Obviously, Wells does not make up a political scandal just to force Bellamy to talk to Clarke, but Bellamy can’t help combining the two. It’s his job to talk to Clarke about political scandals. Wells doesn’t give him enough details to break the story even if he wanted to, but the simple, “It’s about our parents; I think tomorrow’s going to be rough for her,” is more than enough for him to go by. He hadn’t like Wells at first, back in college, because President Jaha was, from everything he’d
seen, kind of a dick, and it’s no surprise that the guy was kind of an asshole.

But Wells is good, and he and Clarke don’t deserve to have to deal with this stuff.

“Get to the White House as soon as you can,” he tells Monroe in the morning.

She frowns. “I haven’t heard anything.”

“Trust me, it’s going to be a busy day. Good time to show you how to trick interns into talking to you. But I’ve got other stuff to do too.”

“Connections to leverage?” she teases. She’s always very impressed that he and Wells went to college together.

“Something like that. See you there.”

He stops by Casa Coffee on his way in, grabs enough supplies to get Clarke through at least the first couple hours of her day, and he makes it in by eight. As he hoped, Monroe is already there, and Clarke looks about ten seconds from strangling someone.

“I will actually murder you,” she says when she sees him, confirming his suspicions.

He loves her a lot.

“Good morning to you too. I brought you coffee.”

It takes a second for her eyes to focus on the cup; her night must have been rough. “I don’t accept bribes.”

It’s automatic to deny it; he always denies these things. “It’s not a bribe, it’s–no, actually, it’s a bribe,” he amends. “But it’s so you don’t kill me, not because I think it’s going to get me advance information.”

She accepts the coffee and drains what looks like half of it. “I won’t kill you yet.”

“That’s the best I ever hope for. Where’s your intern who doesn’t know how to shut up? Myles? He’ll tell me what’s happening, right?”

She glares at him, and he finds himself beaming, feeling kind of stupidly happy, considering the circumstances. It’s going to be a rough day for all of them, but–this is probably his last major crisis before he leaves this job. It’s just a little bit fun.

“Nothing is happening,” says Clarke, like he has ever in his life believed this.

“Wow. That’s really what you’re going with? Really? You look like you haven’t slept and you usually at least let me be an asshole before you start threatening to kill me. Wells doing okay?” he adds, remembering the weary, defeated tone in his voice last night.

“President Jaha is fine,” Clarke snaps, which means it’s true. “You can wait for the press conference like everyone else, Bellamy.”

The worried look he pastes on his face is complete bullshit, and they both know it. “So now I can’t even express concern for my old friend on what’s clearly a–” Her elbow hits his ribs, and he laughs. “Fine. How long to the press conference?”

“I still haven’t made up my mind to not murder you.”
“If it’s more than an hour, I’ll bring you another coffee at nine,” he says.

She makes a show of thinking it over. “Make the next one a latte and we’ll talk,” she says, and that’s about as much as he was expecting.

He’s got another hour and a half before the press conference; plenty of time to do his job before he comes to flirt again.

* 

It’s a predictably hectic day. He makes time to get Clarke another coffee and a muffin, but this is Monroe’s first really busy day, and he needs to show her the ropes, which leaves him with a lot less time to flirt and fret than he’d like.

"Shouldn’t you be introducing me to the press secretary?" she asks, over lunch. “She’s your main point of contact, not her interns.”

Bellamy considers. “I haven’t told her I’m leaving yet,” he admits. “So I can’t really introduce her to my replacement yet. We’ll do it when it’s less, uh, like this in here. You don’t want her to remember you as the reporter who decided to introduce herself in the middle of a crisis.”

“Isn’t there always a crisis?”

“Less of a crisis. Or a less personal one.” He wets his lips. “Trust me, this is a bad day for it. I’m going to try to butter her up for you.”

“Does she get buttered up?” Monroe asks, with a wariness that is probably warranted. “I heard you’re her favorite and she still doesn’t really like you that much.”

“She loves me,” he says, without thinking, and doesn’t let himself think about the statement too hard. “She’s fine, once you get used to her. Mostly bark. I promise, I won’t let her kill you.”

“Wow, I feel so much better.”

“I’m buying her a sandwich to remind her that she likes me and everything.” He flashes her a smile. “Trust me.”

“That’s even worse,” she grumbles.

She’s going to be so good at this job.

* 

He doesn’t make it back to Clarke until well after four, which makes him feel like a bit of an asshole. He wasn’t planning to go without checking in for so long, but their schedules are off, and it’s not his actual job to take care of her.

Which might be the biggest reason he needed a new job, honestly. He’s at the point in his life where he wants to prioritize people over his career, and Clarke is one of his most important people. Wells, too. And he’s tired of them having to talk around what’s going on with them because he’s a reporter, tired of knowing they can’t and shouldn’t trust him. It should be his job to be there for her.

She’s sitting down when he gets to her, which is a good start. Her eyes are closed, and she looks more exhausted than he’d expect, given someone could see her.
He sits down next to her, shoulder brushing hers, offers the sandwich he bought at lunch, and she
opens her eyes to give him a wary look. “At what point did we decide I can’t feed myself?”

It feels like a bigger question than it really is, but it feels like the right time to answer a bigger
question. “Wells called me last night to fill me in,” he admits.

Her jaw actually drops, which he didn’t think was an actual thing humans did. “But you didn’t–”

“I didn’t break it. He didn’t call because he was giving me an exclusive. He was worried about
you.” He clears his throat. “I quit my job.”

“When?” she asks still stunned.

It’s not the question he was expecting. “Three days ago. Wells knew, which is probably why he
called me. I’m staying on until the end of the month to train the new kid, tie up loose ends, etc.”

She shakes her head. “I feel like I missed half this conversation. Are you–” He can see her swallow.
“You’re not leaving DC, are you?”

“Nope. I got a job at the Newseum.”

“The Newseum?” she asks, dubious. “Seriously?”

“What? The Newseum is cool.”

“You’re a Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist.”

She sounds almost offended on his behalf, and he has to smile. He is her favorite, he knows that.
“It’s a good job. Kind of different, yeah,” he admits, when she just looks dubious. “But if it sucks I
can probably convince another newspaper to hire me. Or write another book. I’ve got options.” He
rubs the back of his neck, unsure. She still hasn’t asked the big question. “But, yeah. I’ve got three
more weeks at the Post and then I’m done.”

“I still feel like I’m missing something,” she says, because somehow, she still is.

“I thought you would be having a shitty day. And you don’t deal well with direct displays of
affection, so I figured I’d just bring you coffee and pester you until you felt better.”

She scowls, but not really at him. Just at the world. “And then you disappeared.”

“Like I said, I am theoretically training a replacement. I was teaching her how to trick Myles into
giving away state secrets.”

“Don’t you just ask him for state secrets and he starts talking?”

He has to smile. “You really need to work on your hiring process for interns, yeah. Your boss says
you are required to leave at five,” he adds, showing her the text message he got half an hour back.
There’s no way anyone else is leaving at five, but he’s not sure Clarke would ever leave, if Wells
didn’t kick her out.

“You could have faked this text,” she says, finally.

He rolls his eyes. “I could have. You still look like you haven’t slept in days, though. And,” he
adds, careful, deliberate, ”I think I owe you dinner.”

It feels as if the whole world freezes, but he’s pretty sure it’s just the two of them–her, then him.
“Are we really doing this now?” she asks, soft.

“I was going to wait, but, yeah. I’m kind of worried about you. The stuff with your mom can’t be easy. I won’t—I’m not looking for an exclusive here,” he tells her, and it feels so good that it’s true. “I just want to help you.”

“You couldn’t have told me that this morning?”

“I didn’t want to distract you.” She frowns, clearly confused, and he feels heat race up his neck. “I was hoping finding out I was quitting my job would distract you,” he admits.

That finally gets through to her. “You didn’t quit your job for me, did you?”

“Not just for you,” he says, which is true. “The hours are better too.” He doesn’t want her to respond, so he stands again, changes the subject immediately. “So, five? Dinner’s on me.”

She’s starting to smile, and he feels years of tension start to drain from his chest. “You bought breakfast and lunch. I can cover dinner.”

"Okay,” he says, grinning. “It’s a date.”

"Where’s your replacement?” she asks, standing herself.

“ Weird subject change. But talking to your intern, I think.”

“ I want to meet her.”

“Now?”

"Today was a nightmare,” she says. “I’ve got half an hour left, I don’t want to actually keep dealing with this. My shitty interns can do it. I want to meet your replacement and then I want to go home and make out with you until we’re ready to order dinner. Unless you have something else going on.”

He lets out a surprised laugh. “That’s a very specific plan.”

“ That’s what I’ve wanted to do every single time we’ve had a crisis for the last two years,” she says, looking him up and down with an unsuitable heat in her gaze. “If I finally get to do it, I’m going leave early for it.”

“ So let’s just go,” he says. “I bet you’ve been here since five a.m. You can meet Monroe tomorrow.”

She bites her lip, clearly torn, and then, to his shock and delight, she grins.

“ You know what? Fuck it.” She tugs him down and kisses him, and he laughs against her mouth.

“ We should at least go home first,” he reminds her. “Anyone could see.”

“ Wanted to get it out of the way. Text Wells for me, will you?”

She slides her hand into his once they’re on their way out, and he couldn’t stop grinning if he wanted to.

*
Me: Your press secretary is leaving early to get dinner with me.

PRESIDENT JAH!!: Thank fucking god

Chapter End Notes

AO3 and I had a fight about patriotic emoji
Bellamy’s not sure at what exact point he got bad at dating.

He was fine at it in high school, although he thinks part of that was that he didn’t really date in high school. He was mostly just enough attractive to be kind of popular, and that never seemed that difficult. And even college was basically fine. He had a couple serious relationships that happened fairly organically. But once he stopped being in an environment where dating was based primarily on proximity, any game he had basically fell apart.

Which is probably how he ends up texting the cute girl he has wanted to talk to for months *Five animals have peed on me today, in case you didn’t believe me that dog urine isn’t a big deal in my life.*

It feels like kind of a charming and witty thing to say as he’s typing it, but as soon as it sends, he realizes that he is talking about dog urine, and he needs to rethink basically his entire life.

Fuck.

_That text seemed more normal in my head_, he adds, and puts his head down on his desk.

His crush on Clarke had been, up until yesterday, a very nebulous thing. *Crush* was too strong a word, honestly. He just noticed her, and thought she was pretty, and sort of vaguely hoped she’d come in with a pet sometime. He timed his morning coffee with when he’d seen her walk by, but that wasn’t really a lot of effort on his part. His sister had noticed, but he’d been able to say, in all honesty, that it wasn’t a big deal. It was eye candy. Nothing was going to happen.

And then, the cute girl showed up with a pitbull puppy she found, and suddenly she was *Clarke*, worried about the puppy being left alone, a little too serious, and still cute.

And he’s texting her about dog urine.

He hears his phone buzz and looks over to see Clarke has replied: *No, no, that was the most normal text I’ve ever gotten about animal pee.*

He has to smile *Cool, that’s what I like to hear.*

For the rest of the afternoon, he tries to figure out if he has anything else to say to her, but once he’s told her to get in touch if she hears from the rescue, he doesn’t actually have anything to say. After all, just because he knows her name and has her number, it doesn’t mean they’re going to interact. It doesn’t even mean they should.

He keeps telling himself that as she doesn’t text him about the dog, as his day wears on and he hasn’t come up with anything else to say to her. Another dog pees on him and he thinks about letting her know about that, but as brands go, he doesn’t really want that to be the one she associates with him.
Maybe he’s already scared her off. He wouldn’t blame her.

“Self-centered much?” Octavia asks, and he snorts. “Come on, Bell. You know I’d tell you if I thought you were being that weird, but you really aren’t. She’s the one who came to you. You’re actually being normal.”

“Thanks.” He clears his throat. “If I offer to take her shopping for supplies, is that normal?”

“No really,” she says. “But talk me through it anyway. What’s the plan?”

“She’s never had a pet before. She could probably use someone to consult with.”

Octavia looks dubious. “That’s a little weird. But you could probably convince her that you’re just over-invested in all the animals that get adopted, not that you want to marry her.”

“I don’t want to marry her,” he grumbles. “I just think she’s cute. And she could use some help with the whole adoption thing. I give out lists to plenty of people. This is like that, just–”

“Just you have a crush.”

“Yeah.” He sighs. “None of which matters if she doesn’t come back, so–what’s my schedule look like this afternoon? Let’s talk about literally anything else.”

“Easier said than done,” says O, and he gets it as the bell over the door chimes and Clarke comes in. “Hey, Clarke!”

“When do you usually work?” he asks, frowning. He had expected her to text before she showed up, and hadn’t expected her to show up until after six, if she did. Which he wasn’t sure she would. He wasn’t really prepared for this.

“Usually, nine to five-thirty,” says Clarke, with a friendly smile. “I left early today.” Her expression falters, and she looks nervous, suddenly. “They’re bringing the dog back over at around six so I can take him.”

“Yeah? Awesome.”

Despite his best attempt at a warm tone, she looks more apprehensive. “Yeah, but–they didn’t really want me to.”

It’s O’s turn to frown, and Bellamy hopes Lincoln wasn’t involved. Regardless of anything else, he doesn’t deserve to get blamed for this one. Some people aren’t suited for rescue dogs, and he can understand Clarke not seeming like a great candidate.

“Why not?” Octavia demands.

“Apparently he’s got some issues, because–” Clarke shrugs. “Left his mom too early, trained to fight, stuff like that. I guess they didn’t really think he was a very good starter dog. So I told them you’d help and I guess they thought I meant we were dating?”

It takes him a second to realize she’s not only talking to him, but about him. “Us?” he asks.

“Yeah, I didn’t really–” She sighs. “She said that made a difference, so I just kind of went with it. You don’t have to do anything except reply to my frantic texts and, you know. Be my vet, obviously.”
Clarke doesn’t know that, though, so he clears his throat, offers her a smile. “Yeah, no, I was sort of, uh—planning on that. I’m invested now, so—yeah. If anyone asks, I’ll just—” He clears his throat again, trying not to make eye contact with anyone. Octavia is probably laughing her ass off. But at least it’s internally. That’s the best he could hope for. “Yeah. I’m cool with minor relationship fraud for the greater good. And I was going to, uh—do you have a car?”

She frowns. “No car.”

“Yeah, I figured, uh—if you need a ride to Petsmart, I could take you? And help you get, uh. Stuff. Since it’s your first dog, I figured you might appreciate some guidance anyway.”

“You really don’t have to,” she says, but it sounds like kneejerk politeness, and when he smiles, she returns the expression.

He might not ever be able to look his sister in the eye again, but at least Clarke seems to like him.

“I don’t mind,” he assures her. “Like I said, I’m invested now. But it’s up to you.”

“No, that would be really great, honestly. I’ll buy you a pizza or something.”

“And then when I come over to eat it, you trick me into helping you set up all the stuff I told you to buy. I can see how this is going to go.”

She frowns, and he remembers, a little guiltily, that this is new for her. She’s going to be overwhelmed by some of it. “Do puppies need stuff that requires extensive setup?” she asks.

He’s going to tell her, but Iris Takahashi shows up before he can really get going. Which is fine; he has a job, and Clarke Griffin and her new pitbull are not going to be the focus of his life. It’s not a big deal. “We’ll talk about it later?” he offers, giving Clarke an apologetic smile. “I close at six on Fridays, so we can probably go after you get the dog.”

“Thanks. Really. You’re being surprisingly cool about—literally everything.”

“That’s me, surprisingly cool,” he says, and Octavia manages to not laugh, so he probably owes her. She’s not actually completely sabotaging him.

And he finds out she’s sabotaging him even less than he thought, because once Iris and Magellan are gone and they’re alone in the lobby, she asks, “So, what am I telling Lincoln?”

It hadn’t even occurred to him, and he feels the blood drain out of his face. “Oh god. She told your boyfriend that I’m dating her.”

“It’s not like she knew. And it’s not like Lincoln and I talk about you that much. No offense, but we have better things to do when we’re together than discuss your love life.”

“That’s the opposite of offensive. The last thing I want is for you guys to talk about me.” He sighs. “Just tell him it’s pretty recent and I’m bad at feelings. He’ll buy that, right?”

“It’s even true!” she says, bright. “Completely new and you’re a disaster at feelings. But she’s the one who lied about being in a relationship with you, so it’s not like you’re the only weirdo here. Plus, you’ve got an excuse to talk to her. She has a new puppy and Lexa thinks you’re taking care of it, so if she finds out you’re not, she’ll probably actually murder you.”
“That was so close to being all good news.”

“Whatever, I bet you’re going to be for-real dating her in six months or less.”

“I’ll take that action,” he says. “I’m going to text her that she can come over.”

“Awesome. I’m going to text Lincoln that you’re a human disaster.”

“Sounds about right. Good plan.”

*

It doesn’t feel as if it should be difficult to go from a fake relationship to a real one. Or asking about a real one, at the very least. She seems to like him, enjoys his company, even outside of getting dog advice. Even if his excuse for stopping by her place is to check on Faramir, he’ll hang out for hours, watching TV or just talking to her, and he thinks it really could go somewhere. He just doesn’t know how.

“How did you tell Gina it happened?” Miller asks. He finds the whole thing hilarious, and Bellamy can’t really blame him. If he was Miller, he’d find it hilarious too.

“What?”

“You and her. You told her something, right?”

“Nothing good. I said Clarke asked me out at the grocery store.”

“Wow. You couldn’t come up with anything better?”

“Fuck you, it wasn’t my idea to be in a fake relationship with her. She didn’t give me a fake relationship history to give out, I had to improvise.”

“And obviously you’re really good at it.” He snaps his fingers. “Wait, I got it.”

“Got what?”

“I’m going to save you.”

Bellamy squints at him. “How?”

“I’m going to actually have a birthday thing this year. Invite your sister and Lincoln, have it at Gina’s, invite Clarke because they all think you’re dating. Get drunk, get out of your head, maybe actually make a move on her. It’s easy.”


“Sound more enthusiastic. This should be a slam dunk, but you’re a fucking mess, so–yeah, just tell me how much you love me and buy me a really great birthday present.”

“You’re the best,” he says, obedient. “Thanks for giving me an excuse to ask out the girl I’m supposed to be dating.”

“Thanks for continuing to say shit like that,” Miller says, and they drink to it.

*
It still takes him a couple days to work up his nerve, which is pathetic, but he’s accepted that he’s pathetic. He knows.

They have a nice routine worked out, a month after Clarke found the puppy. She stops by on her way to work, and he goes to her place after most nights. She doesn’t always have specific questions or needs, but they usually chat a little, and he stays for dinner more often than not.

On Thursday, he goes over as usual, and, as is slightly less than but still not that unusual, Clarke is having puppy issues.

“He decided he hates all his chew toys and just wants to gnaw on the table leg,” she says, making a face, and Bellamy has to smile.

“Well, he knows you like the table leg. Did you tell him no?”

“He did it while I wasn’t home.”

Bellamy shows her how to demonstrate where the problem is, and Faramir seems to get it, and then he has no choice but to bring up the whole birthday thing, because otherwise she won’t come, and Miller will make fun of him until the end of time.

So once they’ve got dinner ordered, he clears his throat, reminds himself they are friends and she likes him and says, “Hey, it’s my friend Miller’s birthday tomorrow. Or, uh, his birthday was yesterday, but he’s having a party tomorrow.”

Clarke gives him a smile. “And you’re upset you have to be social?”

“We’re getting drinks at the bar where Gina works.” Clarke cocks her head, looking confused, and he clears his throat again. He’s the worst at this, honestly. “O and Lincoln are coming, so, uh–he’d probably think it was weird if you weren’t there.” But she’s still looking confused, which means, unfortunately, he just keeps talking. “Not that I wouldn’t–Miller wants to meet you, so I would have invited you anyway. But you might have to come and also pretend to be dating me.”

“Does Miller know about the whole–” She gestures vaguely, and he has to smile.

“Yeah. Gina doesn’t, but Octavia would have told Miller if I didn’t. No big deal if you’re busy,” he adds, like the entire thing wasn’t expressly set up for her benefit.

By some miracle, she looks pleased. “No, that sounds really fun. I love pretending I have a social life. My coworkers are gonna be so confused when I say I have plans on a Friday.”

“They will definitely think you were replaced by a pod person. Monty can come too, if you want. Basically any friends you want to bring. Assume this is me officially moving to merge our friend groups,” he adds, and thankfully, she laughs.

“Wow, that’s quite a step.”

“You’re the one who took us from zero to fake relationship in like a day.”

“True. Thanks for inviting me.”

She might actually be blushing, and he might really have a shot at making this into an actual, honest-to-god relationship. “Don’t thank me. You haven’t met my friends yet.”

“You have met all my friends, so you should get why I’m desperate.”
“Poor Monty,” he says.

“Monty and you,” she counters. “End of list.”

“That’s not a burn, you’re just telling me you consider me a friend.”

“That’s not actually a surprise, is it?”

He shrugs. “I like to make sure.”

“We’re definitely friends,” she says, and he’s still hoping she’s just going to agree to go out with him, but if she doesn’t, he could live with just this.

This is nice.

*

It’s hard to say at what point in the evening he decides she feels the same way he does. It’s some combination of the alcohol and all the physical contact, but by the end of the night, he’s sure that the only reason he isn’t actually dating his cute neighbor is that he hasn’t asked her if she wants to yet. She’s been tucked under his arm for most of the night, and when he kissed her hair, she just smiled.

He does it again when he’s walking her home, just to check, and she snuggles closer.

“My friends really liked you,” he tells her. “They’re going to want you to hang out more.”

“I want to hang out too. I like them too.”

“Awesome. You should. I’m gonna ask a lot more.”

Clarke pokes him. “The puppy’s going to feel abandoned if we go out all the time.”

“We can stay in too,” he says without thinking, and when she doesn’t reply, he nearly just asks, but she’s swaying a little, and so is he. “Uh–you’re drunk, right?” he asks instead.

She seems to really be thinking it over, and he nearly kisses her again. But she says, “Kind of,” and he nods.

“Me too. So–I’m gonna come over tomorrow. And talk to you.”

“As opposed to when you usually come over and refuse to talk to me,” she teases.

“My sister likes to remind me I’m not great at human interaction.”

“You’re great at interacting with me,” she says, and it doesn’t even sound like sarcasm.

“Can I get that in writing?”

“For Octavia?”

“No, for personal reasons.”

“I’ll tell you whenever you want,” she says, with a soft smile, and it’s that as much as anything that lets him hold onto the thread of conversation until they make it back to her door, and it’s the brightness of her smile that gives him the confidence to lean down and press his mouth against
It only lasts a second, but it’s still long enough for her eyes to be closed when he pulls back, and his heart flutters in his chest.

“Talk about that,” he says, and makes himself leave before he can do it again.

* 

Saturday is his short day, but it feels like he’s worked at least forty hours by the time he’s finally ready to be done. He tries Clarke’s door first, just to be safe, but she’s almost never inside when he finishes on Saturdays, so he doesn’t let himself read into it.

He finds her on the back porch, makes himself go through the normal motions of shedding work clothes even as his heart is pounding so hard he’s worried Clarke will hear it.

“No answer at the door, I figured you were out here,” he says, and almost sags with relief when she settles against his side, head on his shoulder.

There’s no way she’s mad.

“How was work?” she asks.

“Fucking terrible.”

She looks up at him, clearly concerned. “Shit, what happened?”

“Nothing,” he says, and kisses her hair when she settles back. “I was at work instead of here with you, mostly. And, honestly, I was kind of worried I fucked up,” he admits, even though he’s not worried anymore. “Thought maybe you were just putting on a good show for—”

She cuts him off with a kiss, and it’s so much better now, when he’s sober and sure, when she’s the one initiating, when it feels like they have all the time in the world. He slides his hand around the back of her neck and she shivers, presses closer, and it’s so, so good, a long, leisurely kiss he wants to live in.

“So, that’s okay,” he murmurs, rubbing his thumb against her jaw.

Her eyes are still closed, like last night, and he loves it. “That’s great.”

“Good,” he says, and she laughs and kisses him again.

“That’s it?”

“I’m trying very hard to convince you I’m cool.”

She grins. “Yeah, you know you text me detailed opinions on documentaries, right? That ship has sailed.”

“In that case, please tell me I can buy you dinner. Like, a lot. I want this puppy to have a family, Clarke.”

“Just using me for my dog, huh?”

“In my defense, you started it. I was all ready to play this long game, offering you occasional tips on dog care, working up to asking you out.”
“And then I accidentally told the rescue place we were dating,” she says, with a very fake sigh of resignation.

“Zero to fake dating in no time.”

“By accident!” she protests, her facade breaking as she laughs. “I really didn’t mean to tell them that. I was planning to just keep asking you awkward dog questions too.”

“At least I know my plan would have worked,” he says, kissing her again. The puppy’s going to start interrupting them at some point; he needs to take advantage of this opportunity while he can. “So, can I buy you dinner?” he asks, resting his forehead against hers. “Or are you still convinced you have to buy me dinner all the time because I’m not getting anything out of this?”

“Are you saying you don’t like free dinner?”

“Split it?” he asks, smiling.

Clarke settles in close, smiling just as big as he is. “Deal,” she says, and Bellamy has to admit, this one really seems to have worked out for him.

He might be bad at dating, but he’s great at dating Clarke. And that’s the only dating he’s planning on doing, from here on out.
I Do Know Why You Stayed Away

Chapter Summary

Fill for youvegotsuchabigheart! Prompt: angsty au where one of them gets into an accident and suffers from memory loss

If anyone had asked, Bellamy would have said he’d love a second chance with Clarke Griffin, but no one ever really thinks about what a second chance means. What he wanted wasn’t a second chance, not really. He wanted Clarke to change her mind about him, but that’s not really a second chance.

A second chance, in its purest form, least desirable form, is when Clarke has a skiing accident over winter break and comes back to school with no memory of the last six months.

No memories of him at all.

Campus is small and he and Clarke have a decent number of friends in common, so he finds out about the accident from Raven, before he actually sees Clarke, and it sounds like, if not a joke, at least a hoax.

“Does that really happen?”

Raven shrugs. “Amnesia. It’s a thing. I guess the head trauma knocked the last few months out of her brain. She’s got a doctor’s note and everything.”

“Fuck. Is she okay? Have you seen her?”

“Not even pretending you don’t care, huh?”

“Seriously, Raven.”

She sobers. “I saw her, yeah. Not like she forgot me, but she’s pretty freaked out. The whole last semester is just–gone.”

“So, uh–what should I be doing? She won’t remember me, right?”

“Yeah, but she’s still in second-semester of Art History with you. I told her she could sit with you and you’d help her out if she needed it. You will, right?”

“Yeah, of course.” He rubs his face. “Is she supposed to get her memory back?”

Raven shrugs one shoulder. “Her mom’s a doctor, and she’s optimistic. But she doesn’t know how long it’ll take or what, so–be nice. She’s having a shitty time.”

“I’m nice,” he says, and when she frowns, he adds, “Seriously. Clarke’s cool, I want to help out.”

And some part of him does think that maybe, just maybe, the second time will be different.

Maybe he’ll do better.
Clarke is at the front of the lecture hall when he gets to class, looking the same as she always has, smart and put-together, talking to Professor Pike with a somewhat strained smile.

Pike spots Bellamy and points him out, and Clarke cocks her head at him with bland, polite non-recognition, as if she’s never seen him in her life.

He manages a weak wave, and her expression clears into a smile. She nods to Pike and comes over to him, offering her hand. “You’re Bellamy?”

“Yeah,” he says. “Hi. Sorry about–”

“It’s fine. Sorry I don’t remember you.”

His first impulse is to tell her she’s just as happy not remembering, but it feels oddly–private. He doesn’t want this version of Clarke trying to put together their old relationship. He doesn’t want her trying to remember why they didn’t get along.

“I hear it’s not personal,” he offers, and she smiles.

“Definitely not personal. You don’t mind helping out? Raven said you wouldn’t, but–”

“I don’t mind,” he says.

“Great. Thank you, Bellamy.”

She has a few low questions throughout the class, which he answers, and after she thanks him again and tells him she’ll see him on Wednesday.

It’s the most polite, easy interaction that the two of them have ever had, and he honestly kind of hates it.

*  

“Bellamy, right?”

Bellamy startles, looking up to see Clarke lingering by his table in the library, a polite, slightly hesitant smile on her face. “Hey, Clarke.”

She relaxes. “I thought it was you, but I’m still kind of–second guessing myself.”

“I guess so, yeah,” he says. “What’s up?”

“Can I sit with you?”

“Yeah, of course.” He moves his books so she has a little room, and she settles in across from him.

They’ve had two more classes since the first, and it’s been more of the same: polite, shallow conversation, and she leaves after class. It’s a far cry from heated arguments that spilled past the end of class and continued as they walked to lunch, even continued when they ran into each other at parties. Sometimes he’d find her at parties just to fight with her, and he’d started finding her just because, well–

He liked her, before. And now, he’s back at square one, and she’s being perfectly, completely friendly.
It sucks.

“How’s it going?” he asks, trying his own hand at politeness. “Being back?”

“Mostly better than being at home. My mom was treating me like I was made of glass. I get why, but–she’s hoping being here is going to help. Jog my memory.”

“Any luck?”

“Not so far.” She looks at him, thoughtful. “Were we friends?”

“Sorry?”

“Raven said you’d help me out, but it felt like she was kind of–she didn’t seem sure. So I thought maybe–”

“We didn’t always get along great,” he says, careful. “But we were pretty good by the end of last semester. And we’re good now, right?”

She still looks a little wary, but she shakes it off, smiles. “Yeah. I think we’re good.”

* *

It gets really, really weird when, three weeks later, he thinks Clarke starts flirting with him. They’re at a party, and she’s not drinking much because of a bad interaction with her medication, and he’s not drinking much because even if she doesn’t remember him and they’re still basically strangers, he likes her, and he doesn’t want her to be lonely. And they’re having a perfectly nice, civil conversation about their class, and it’s nice, and Clarke is swaying closer, and he’s had this exact fantasy before, except she remembers him.

And, obviously, she doesn’t have to remember him to make out, but he’d kind of like her to.

“I still don’t get you,” she says, looking him up and down, frowning a little, so maybe they really are on the same page here.

“What about me?”

“I don’t know. It’s–I can’t figure out how we were last semester. How didn’t we get along? Why weren’t we friends?”

“We met because we got in a fight during the first art history lecture of last semester,” he says. “I’ve heard you never get a second chance to make a first impression, but–”

She laughs, but her gaze is still intense, thoughtful. “So, you think I didn’t like you?”

“I think we were starting to get along. I, uh–I thought we’d do better this semester.”

“And are we?”

“Yeah,” he says.

She smiles, and her eyes flick over him, and it should be good, but—it feels like cheating on someone he’s never dated, like taking advantage of someone who can’t really agree to this. He doesn’t know if Clarke would be checking him out, if she remembered him, and even if she would, this isn’t quite her.
Thankfully, she doesn’t push it. All she says is, “Good.”

And they leave it at that.

*

“So, run this by me again,” says Miller. “Clarke forgot you exist.”

“Not just me. All of last semester.”

“And now she’s into you, like you’ve been wanting.”

“Yeah, I think so. But it’s not—it’s not her. Or it is, but it’s not the same.” He rubs his face. “I think I was in love with her. And I still am, but I have no idea if she was into me before. Now she is and it feels like I’m fucking—” He waves his hand. “Using a cheat code or something. And being an even bigger asshole.”

“Did you tell her that?”

“How much would it suck to hear someone’s turning you down because he liked you better before you had amnesia?” he asks.

Miller doesn’t blink. “Not as bad as it would suck to have no idea why you were getting turned down.”

“Yeah.” He sighs. “Fuck, I miss her. She’s here and she’s great but she’s just—it’s not how it was. And that’s what I want: how it was.”

“That sucks. You want to get drunk?”

He has to smile. “Yeah, can’t hurt.”

*

It’s not entirely a surprise when the person to talk to him about the whole mess isn’t actually Clarke, but Raven. He’d been thinking about consulting her too, but it felt a little awkward. She’s not only Clarke’s friend, but someone he slept with once upon a time, so she’s simultaneously a great and awful resource.

Clarke’s not at the next party though, and Raven gives him a beer and asks, “So, did you actually turn her down or just give off uninterested vibes?”

“If we’re talking about Clarke, neither. She doesn’t remember me,” he adds, when Raven doesn’t say anything. “If she did, I’d be asking her out right now.”

“She’s still the same person.”

He takes a sip of beer. “Yeah? Be honest. If she remembered me, would she want to hook up? Or does amnesia Clarke just think I’m hot?”

“Holy shit,” says Raven. “You’re really into her.”

“What did you think I was?”

“Honestly? I thought you were in denial. Both of you. She likes you,” she adds. “She always did. She likes people who argue with her. And like the first thing she asked me after she met you was if
she had a thing for you before, so—“ She shrugs. “I don’t know much about amnesia, but you’re her type.”

It’s great news, mostly. Aside from the lingering nausea.

“It doesn’t feel like—Clarke, I guess. I thought it’d be nice if she didn’t hate me, but I wanted to earn it.”

“She didn’t hate you before,” says Raven. “But I get it.” Her smile is sad, a little tired, and this semester’s probably been rough on everyone, even if not as rough as it is for Clarke. “I’m sorry. You should tell her.”

He mirrors her expression. “Yeah, that’s what I’m hearing.”

* * *

“What did we argue about?” Clarke asks the next week. They haven’t really talked, but he thinks Raven must have said something. She’s been tiptoeing around his feelings like they’re made of glass.

But she’s also been coming to the library just to see him, so—some version of Clarke likes him a lot. It’s mostly good.

“Everything. Honestly, I started picking fights just because I liked talking to you.”

“Did you think about just trying to talk to me?” she asks, but it’s teasing.

“What a concept.” He shrugs. “I didn’t think you wanted to hang out, but I knew you’d argue with me.”

“And now you don’t want to make out.”

“I never said that.” He gives her a smile, sheepish. “I’m really sorry, I just don’t—“

“You liked another Clarke.”

“I like you too, but it’s—weird. Like I’m talking to your identical twin or something.”

“Should I start fighting you more?”

“Just when I deserve it.”

“I definitely would have liked you,” she says, soft. “Before. You’re so completely my type it’s ridiculous.”

“Awesome. I’ll, uh—we can figure it out, right? Just give me some time to get used to—“

“Yeah. I get it. Probably not the best time to get a crush, honestly.”

“Yeah,” he agrees. “But it’s not just you.”

“No. It sucks for everyone.”

He puts his arm around her, and she leans into it, and it’s so, so close to being enough.

*
The next week, they get in a fight in class.

It’s a total accident, as unexpected as the first time it happened last semester. He’s talking about his interpretation of a piece and Clarke just says no and it’s instinct, honestly. It’s second-nature, and he finds himself smiling as they go back and forth, and Clarke is too.

It’s what’s been missing.

“Much as I always enjoy your very passionate opinions,” says Professor Pike, sounding almost like he means it, “let’s get back on track. Next slide.”

Clarke kicks his ankle under the table, and he kicks back, grinning so hard his cheeks hurt.

Still, when she pulls him down to kiss him as soon as they leave class, he has to push her away.

“Fuck, Clarke, I’m sorry, I’m still not—“

“The first time we fought it was about Roman sculpture. I thought you were a dick, but I also wanted to drag you off to make out. Seriously, you’re really, really my type.”

He stares, jaw agape. “Clarke?”

“I’m not saying fighting with you actually cured my amnesia, but—“

He tugs her in by the waist, leaning down to catch her mouth again, the sheer relief of it crashing through him like a wave. She kisses back, grinning into it, and he’s never been so happy to be fighting with her.

“You remember everything?” he asks. “You’re—“

“I think so.” She rests her face against his neck, and he wraps his arms around her, holding her close and safe. He doesn’t ever want to let go. “I remember that party at your friend Miller’s at the end of the semester. I was going to ask if you wanted to go out sometime, but I chickened out and asked if you wanted to play beer pong instead.”

“I wanted to do both.” He smooths her hair back. “I guess you’ve probably got some doctors to call and stuff.”

“Yeah. But—come with me?”

The answer is easy. “Yeah. There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”
Time of Your Life

Chapter Summary

Fill for faramile! Prompt: Time travel bellarke. For some reason one or both travel to
the past and it was not good.

Chapter Notes

I couldn’t come up with a historical era for them to go to, so I just made this a Star
Trek AU with them coming back to now oops

If and when Bellamy gets back to his own time, he’s going to petition Starfleet to add some
mandatory classes on what to do if you’re thrown back in time and/or into a parallel universe,
because he thinks generic guidelines and word-of-mouth tips just aren’t cutting it. They need to
stop acting like this doesn’t happen all the fucking time.

“At least we’re on Earth,” says Clarke, looking around with a frown.

“I don’t know, Vulcan might be better. If we told Vulcans we were time travelers from the future,
they’d probably roll with it and help. This doesn’t look like an advanced enough Earth to give us
any help.”

“I think the Prime Directive forbids talking about being a time traveler.”

“Yeah, and we never ignore the Prime Directive.”

Clarke huffs a laugh, and he smiles too. He wouldn’t admit it without some serious interrogation,
but Clarke is probably his first choice for a companion in any tight spot. She’s smart and capable
and practical, idealistic without being stupid. Which is kind of a problem with Starfleet, in his
experience.

“Never,” she agrees, and when the computer finishes its analysis with a ping, she’s the one to go
check it. “You want the bad news?”

“No, I like going into potentially hostile situations blind.”

“It could be worse. Early twenty-first century. Pollution levels are near critical, so I’d say between
2015 and 2020.”

“Fuck, we probably landed in the Trump administration,” he says, rubbing his face. “Just our
fucking luck.”

“We just need to survive long enough to repair the ship.”

“Yeah, because if there’s one thing we’re great at, it’s ship repairs.”
“You know what doesn’t help? This shit,” says Clarke, mild, but with just enough of an edge to snap him out of it.

“You’re the optimist here,” he says. “But I’ll go with it. So—what’s the plan?”

She looks around the ship, thoughtful. “First step is figuring out if the replicators work and if we have anything we can sell without compromising the timeline.”

It’s as good a place to start as any.

“Yeah,” he says. “Let’s see what we’ve got.”

*

The replicator works long enough to make them some period-appropriate clothing and breakfast, but given the overall shaky state of the ship’s systems, they don’t want to make anything they don’t have to. They have better things to do with their power; they’re going to have to try to get by on their own.

Unfortunately, they’ve landed smack in the middle of late capitalism with no identification papers, in a country that thinks poverty should be a death sentence.

So that’s good.

And then, of course, there’s the much larger issue, which is that they have to get home, and even if they repair the ship, they have no idea how to do that. They set up a beacon that Starfleet will be able to detect, in case Raven figures out where they went and how to get to them, but Bellamy has no fucking clue how they got here, let alone how to reverse it and get back.

Which is the downside of being stuck with Clarke. It would really help if they had an engineer with them. As it is, all they have is the computer and time.

“And this,” says Clarke, tossing him something.

It’s so small, he barely sees it, but he still manages to catch it, blinks down at the ring in his hands. “Antique?”

“Yeah, a family heirloom. There’s some sentimental value, but I think my mother would understand why I sold it. It won’t be enough money to go far, but we can sleep on the ship, so all we need is food and supplies.”

“Supplies for a ship from two-hundred years in the future,” Bellamy points out. “I’m not saying you’re wrong, just that whatever parts we might need are probably going to be expensive and hard to access. We should maybe be trying to settle in for the long haul.”

Clarke’s shoulders slump. “I know.”

“So—we’re a young couple who fell on hard times,” he says, slow. “You’re selling your wedding ring to help us make ends meet. We should replicate papers now, before we’re worried about power. If we have to, we can probably find jobs, get a post office box–what?”

She’s staring at him, slack-jawed, but at the question, she smiles, shakes her head. “You have an amazingly detailed plan ready for how to survive in the collapsing United States.”

He shrugs. “Have you ever looked into Starfleet records? People get sent back in time a lot. This
one works for most capitalist societies.”

“So, you think we might have to stay?”

It’s a staggering thought. The country is on its way to a much needed and ultimately successful revolution, but Bellamy doesn’t really want to witness it.

“I think we need to make sure we can survive here first,” he says. “And once we’ve done that, we can work on getting home. But unless you have an idea for what to do right now to fix the ship and get back—”

“You’re right.” She sighs. “So we’re going native for a while.”

“At least they speak English,” he says. “Come on, let’s go pawn the wedding ring.”

*

There is something academically fascinating about traveling into the past. Bellamy’s done it before, to an extent, the same way everyone has: in the holodeck, as a curiosity. He never went to this exact year, but he’s been to places like this, in recreation. He knows how it’s supposed to be, and it’s interesting to see the differences.

If he knew he could just end the program and go back whenever he wanted to, he’d probably enjoy it. As it is, he’s too aware of the dangers they’re facing, of how close they are to being found out and detained as illegal immigrants or terrorists or whatever else this regime is afraid of.

It’s not all bad, of course. Most of the time, they’re just living their new lives, taking advantage of their fictitious histories and credentials. Bellamy gets a job at a university, working in the library, and Clarke finds one at a hospital. He never stops being worried every time he sees a police officer, but he learns the routine of it, the same way Clarke learns to keep her head down and not respond when men tell her to smile or whistle as she walks past.

They can’t afford to make waves. They can’t afford to be caught.

“I do like seeing the television programs,” Clarke says, with false cheer. It’s been a month, and she saw her third person die of an injury she could have cured in a matter of seconds at home, and had to turn away someone else because they couldn’t pay for their own treatment. She crawled onto their lumpy couch next to him and curled into his side, and he wishes he had something better to do than just hold her. “They’re interesting.”

“Yeah, it’s amazing how much of this stuff didn’t survive. Apparently they’re in a golden age of television, but I missed most of them.”

“For a golden age, there are a lot of white men,” Clarke grumbles.

Bellamy has to smile. “Most golden ages in history have just been for white men, yeah.” He leans back. “I wonder which of our proudest accomplishments will seem barbaric in three hundred years.”

“It’s not like plenty of people don’t know it’s bad now. And we have an advantage, at least.”

“We might get out of here someday?”

Clarke snuggles closer, which feels like an advantage all by itself. He knew how much he cared about her before, but it’s different now. He thinks she might care about him just as much, for a
“We know it’s going to get better,” she says.

That makes him smile. “We do, yeah.”

* 

After six months, Clarke starts a countdown to the revolution that they both know is coming.

“We should really get out before that,” she says, and he snorts.

“Yes, I figured. I still don’t know a fucking thing about time anomalies, though. If you have any ideas, I’m all ears.”

“Honestly? I was thinking we could start looking at science fiction.” He snorts, and she elbows him. “I’m serious! I’m not saying we’re going to find the answer we’re looking for, but we might get some ideas. Something we could run by the computer for projections. I’m not coming up with anything on my own, so—”

“So let’s start seeing what other people have thought of.” He shakes his head. “I guess you’re right, it couldn’t hurt. I think you just want to interact with more media,” he teases.

“I don’t just want to interact with more media,” she shoots back, and he laughs.

But somehow, it works. They nearly turn off *Back to the Future* once it becomes clear that it’s not actually going to help, but the whole thing is fun and amusing, and it’s not like they don’t have time to just enjoy themselves.

And then, in the second movie, the main character gets a letter from the past, the distant past, and Bellamy thinks, well, why not.

“We could do that,” he says.

“Which part?” Clarke asks. She’s already half asleep; her hours are longer than his, most days. And the healthcare system is slowly killing her, he’s sure.

They have to get out of here.

“We could leave a message for Raven. There are some companies that are still in operation, we just have to find one. Tell her where we are and when. Set a delivery date. You remember when we got lost, right? It can’t hurt.”

Clarke’s awake now, and laughing. “I can’t believe you actually got a plan from *Back to the Future II*.”

“It was your idea,” he shoots back.

“Teamwork.”

He has to smile. “Teamwork.”

* 

They get a zipcar out to the park where they hid the ship, have the computer find a list of local attorneys or delivery companies that are still operating under the same ownership. The computer comes up with more options than Bellamy was expecting, which turns out to be a good thing, because none of the first few work out. Some think it’s a prank and refuse outright, and others
agree, but with the kind of patronizing expression that made Bellamy think they weren’t really going to follow through.

At the fifth place, Clarke takes a different approach.

“I know this is a little strange,” she says, “but—we wanted to leave a time capsule. For our descendants, if we have any.” She holds up the package, neat, and wrapped in brown paper. “To be opened on the three-hundredth anniversary of our daughter’s birth.”

The man smiles, indulgent, but not opposed. “So, this is the date we, as caretakers, should open the package?”

“And then follow the instructions to find any surviving relatives of ours.”

“Like she said, we know it’s unconventional, but we had a time capsule from my grandparents, and we wanted to give something to that to future generations,” Bellamy adds.

“Well, I can’t promise anything, of course,” says the man. “No one can see the future, and that’s a long time for the business to survive. But we have performed similar services for others, so if you’re willing to risk it—”

“We understand,” says Clarke. “Thank you.”

They leave a few others, just to be safe, and then it’s suddenly—awkward. That’s the thing about time travel; if it works, they should find out soon. They don’t have to wait for Raven to get it, because sometime in the future, Raven will have gotten it as soon as they left, and even if it takes her months or years to solve the problem, they shouldn’t feel that delay.

All they told her was the day she couldn’t come before, to avoid a paradox; everything else is up in the air, and all they can do is hope.

“I wonder if she can even hit an exact day,” says Clarke. “Or if she’ll accidentally show up three years early or something.”

“If anyone can figure it out, it’s Raven. And she has all the time she needs.”

“Let’s hope she doesn’t waste her life trying to figure out how to come get us.”

“We did tell her we’d be fine if she didn’t make it back,” he reminds her. “She knows that.”

“I know.” To his surprise, she takes his hand and squeezes it. “We will be fine, Bellamy.”

* *

Raven doesn’t make them wait long; they check the ship two days after they deposit the messages, and there she is, repairing the engine like she’s been there forever.

“Seriously, you two had to land here?” she demands, by way of greeting. “There’s so much air pollution I can barely breathe.”

“We’ve been here for six months,” says Bellamy, and then they both break into smiles and hold on to each other together. He passes her onto Clarke, and then it’s all business, Raven getting the repairs done while Bellamy and Clarke have the strange responsibility of putting their affairs in order, quitting jobs and leaving apartments with no notice, only a few steps above vanishing
without a trace.

It’s hard to care that much. They’re going home.

Raven brought another ship and more crew to help, and it only takes a day, all told, for them to be redoing whatever she did to get back the first time. After all that waiting, it’s almost anticlimactic. All that worry, all that stress, and then they’re just–home. No money to worry about, no police watching him with wary eyes, just their ship and their people, like it’s supposed to be.

There’s only one thing missing: he and Clarke barely see each other, the first week. They’re together at meals, and sometimes throughout the day, but their duties have never brought them together very much, and after six months of cohabitation, it feels like nothing.

She must feel the same, because at the end of that week, she shows up at the door to his quarters. “I thought we could watch something,” she says, with a small smile. “Maybe some golden age television.”

He laughs and tugs her in. “Can I kiss you?” he asks. “Because I’ve been wanting to kiss you, and if I can’t, I want to know now.”

“I’ve been wanting that too,” she murmurs, and tugs him down.

And just like that, Bellamy’s finally home.
The Classic Blunders

Chapter Summary

Fill for sweetiepie1019! Prompt: Bellarke AU based on the Princess Bride

Being kidnapped three times in one week is, Clarke has to say, excessive.

The first one admittedly isn’t what most people think of as a kidnapping; it’s supposed to be wonderful news. The prince sent riders throughout the kingdom to look at all the young ladies of marriageable age and select the most beautiful one to be his bride, and she was chosen.

In theory, it’s a great honor, but as far as Clarke’s concerned, if she can’t say no, it’s less an honor and more a nightmare.

Which doesn’t mean that she’s happy about being kidnapped, obviously. Her current best-case scenario is escaping from her captivity and running away, and she liked the palace best for that. After all, once she found out she wouldn’t be able to get out of the marriage, she switched to acting as if that had been maidenly shyness and not active hostility that made her say no. It probably wouldn’t have been so hard, to slip away from one or two guards in the night. She wouldn’t have known where to go, but she wouldn’t have been there, trapped into a marriage she didn’t want with a prince she didn’t like.

Getting away from the first kidnappers would have been much less simple; there were three of them, and none seemed interested in her pointing out that the prince would pay handsomely for her return. The second kidnapper is alone, at least, even if he isn’t any more interested in her offers of ransom than the first group.

“If you don’t want money, you could just leave me at the port,” she finally says.

As she’s getting used to, he doesn’t respond. She hasn’t heard him say a word, yet.

“I’m sure you’re planning to sell me to someone, but my family isn’t actually wealthy, and if you want to sell me somewhere, the prince is my first choice. But if you wanted to just rescue a princess, the port would be best. You’d be my hero.”

There’s a long pause, long enough she assumes he’ll say nothing, and then he finally asks, “What would you do at the port?”

His voice is deep and rough, a little creaky, and something about it makes her shiver. “Find passage—somewhere. I haven’t decided where yet. You kidnapped me before I was planning to be gone.”

“And when were you planning to be gone?”

On the one hand, she has no reason to trust him, and he could use her admission against her with the prince. But this is the first time he’s reacted at all; if she can keep him talking, that’s reason enough by itself. People who speak give things away.

“As soon as I could be. If I made it to the palace, I would have fled.”
Another pause, and then he asks, “Don’t tell me the rumors about how the prince chose his bride were true.”

“It is flattering,” says Clarke, sarcasm slipping through. “To be singled out as the most beautiful maiden in the land. But that doesn’t mean I want to marry the prince.”

“A sweetheart at home?” he asks, and she winces.

“I wasn’t aware I needed a reason to not want to marry an awful man I don’t love,” she snaps, the still raw pain of losing Bellamy making her temper flare.

They ride on in silence for another minute, until the kidnapper says, soft, “I’m sorry.”

It’s her turn to not respond, waiting for him to elaborate, and it takes a minute before he adds, “I want to tell you everything, but we’re not alone. Your prince is following us, and I want to lose him before—I’m not planning to sell you,” he says. “I am rescuing you. I promise.”

“You promise isn’t worth much to me,” she says, and he makes a soft noise, something like a laugh.

“No, I guess not. How’s this, I’ll untie you in half an hour, once we hit those trees.”

“The trees I can’t see, because you still have me blindfolded.”

“I’m sorry, did you want me to leave you for the prince to pick up?”

He sounds so much like Bellamy in that moment that it makes her ache, and it’s that more than anything that makes her stop talking, that convinces her to wait, as he told her to.

They ride on in silence for the promised half an hour, and then he pulls the horse to a stop, dismounts and helps her down.

“I’m going to send the horse on the road,” he says. “In case anyone is tracking us, I want them to think we went that way. But we’ll go through the woods.”

“And you’ll untie me?”

“As soon as we’re under cover.”

“I don’t have much choice,” she says, and he squeezes her shoulder.

“I know. Uh, in here.”

He sits her down on a stump or a branch, and then she hears the smack of flesh on flesh, the man’s voice telling the horse to go, and the sound of hooves galloping off on the hard-packed road.

It takes another second for him to come back, but Clarke feels his hands on the blindfold as soon as he does. The cloth slips off her face and there’s a harsh, painful brightness for a second before his face comes into focus, and–

“Sorry,” says Bellamy, his expression hopeful and helpless all at once, and Clarke nearly wrenches her arm out of its socket trying to embrace him.

“Bellamy!”

“Yeah.” He goes for her hands next, leaning in close enough that once they’re free, she can throw
her arms around his neck, and he clings back just as tight, burying her face in her hair. “Sorry,” he says again. His voice is his own again, undisguised. “I’m sorry.”

“You should be. I thought you were—I thought—”

“I know.” He pulls away from her, just far enough to look her up and down, and she can see the second it takes he forces himself to let her go. “We need to keep moving. I don’t know how close the prince is, but—we can talk on the way. I’ll tell you everything.”

Some small part of her wants to object, to make him explain himself now, to hear everything, but even if it wasn’t Bellamy, she’d see the wisdom of moving.

And it is him. Her best friend, her lost love, the most important person in her entire world.

She slides her hand into his, feeling the familiar shape of it under her fingers. “Start talking,” she says, and he obliges.

By the time they’re through the forest, they’ve mostly caught up. The pirates who’d supposedly killed Bellamy let him live, but his freedom to go where he pleased is a new thing, and as soon as he had it, he tried to get back to her, only to discover she was engaged to the prince, he assumed by her own choice. He’d heard of the other kidnappers when he was trying to decide what to do, and he’d still been trying to decide when he got her.

“I wouldn’t stop you, if you wanted to marry him,” he admits, ducking his head. “But I was hoping it might make a difference, if you knew I was alive.”

“I didn’t want to marry him anyway,” she points out. “I didn’t need you to be alive for that.”

He grins. “But it does make a difference in your life.”

“It better.”

They talk about his ship and his crew, about how he fetched his sister before he got her, what they might do next. It’s not as if the last five lonely years didn’t happen, but she can feel the ache in her heart closing up, feel herself becoming lighter. He’s alive, and he’s here, and they’ll go back to his crew and—

And the prince is waiting for them as soon as they leave the forest, a company of soldiers with him, all their bows trained on Bellamy, and it’s the easiest choice in the world. She only just got him back, and losing him again is hard, but so long as he’s alive, that’s all that matters. She can find her way out of the palace and back to him, or he’ll find his way into the palace and to her.

So she makes a deal, lets the prince take her, and allows herself to look back only once, only long enough to see that Bellamy is riding in the other direction.

It’s the best she can do.

On their way back to the palace, Clarke tries to talk Prince Finn into not marrying her, without saying he shouldn’t in so many words. The man seems—vain, and a little vapid, and she can easily understand how he decided the best bride for him would be the most beautiful one. And now he’s fixed on her as a prize, the best wife for the best husband. She’s not, of course, but he doesn’t seem inclined to have his mind changed, so she switches tactics, trying to convince him she’s just as helpless and airheaded as he is.
It doesn’t stop him assigning her guards. For her protection, of course. She can’t even blame him; she’s been kidnapped twice, even leaving aside the prince’s own kidnappings. He’s not wrong to think someone might try to take her.

But it really shouldn’t be his primary worry; she’s planning to take herself.

The wedding plans were already most of the way finished by the time Clarke was selected as the bride; the date was set, the invitations sent, and all they were waiting for was an appropriate woman to slot into the proceedings. So she has three days and very little time to herself, once she’s at the palace, being dragged around for fittings and meetings and all the things that she has to do before becoming a princess.

She is, not to put too fine a point on it, awful at all of them. But no one seems to consider this a reason to find someone else for the prince to marry, so she has no choice but to spend the free time she has in her room, devising escape routes and coming up with plans. She assumes Bellamy is doing the same, but it’s probably easier for her to get out than it is for her to get in.

Or, as it turns out, equally easy. She’s halfway down the side of the palace on the rope she made out of her bedclothes the night before the wedding when she looks down to find him waiting for her, broad smile on his face, horse waiting.

She slides the rest of the way down and he’s there to catch her, still smiling.

“Guards?” she asks.

“O broke in, dressed as a kitchen wench, drugged their dinners. They’re all asleep.”

“So I could have just gone out the front door.”

“This was a lot more dramatic.” His eyes sweep over her, and she can see him swallow, even in the dark. “I never asked if you—” He clears his throat. “I wanted to make sure you were rescued, but I never asked where you wanted to go.”

She gets her feet on the ground, but doesn’t move out of his embrace, sliding her hand into his hair instead. “You know exactly where I want to be, Bellamy.”

“Out of this fucking palace and on my ship, going anywhere else?”

“Exactly. How long will they be asleep?”

“Another half an hour, give or take. Why?”

She tugs him down, kissing him as she’s wanted to for the last five years, as she hasn’t been able to since he left to make his fortune. Just as she remembered, he’s warm and firm and smiling, and when his arms come around her, she feels herself melting into him.

He’s here. She got him back. And all they have to do is leave before they’re caught, and she can keep him.

He must be thinking the same thing, because he pulls back, smiling at her with just a little wry amusement. “That couldn’t have waited until we made it to the ship?”

“Definitely not.”

“When you put it like that.” He offers his hand to help her up onto the horse, and swings up behind
her once she’s settled. She leans back into him, and he wraps his arm around her, kisses her hair, and spurs the horse on, taking them out of the palace and into their new life.

It’s the last time anyone ever kidnaps her, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.
The thing about the holiday window display is that Clarke is—kind of—a real artist. She certainly wants to be a real artist, and is getting her MFA in graphic design, and has even won some contests for her work. She has, not to put too fine a point on it, skills.

Which is why Roan asks her to do the window displays at the store in the first place.

Well, okay, that’s why he says he asks her to do the window displays, but Clarke’s pretty sure about ninety percent of his motivation is that he doesn’t want to do it himself, and he’s just using the art thing to butter her up. But she’d be pissed if he asked any of the other employees, so whatever his motivation, she’s not objecting. She likes doing the window display. It’s fun. Usually, she changes them once a month, with different themes, and everyone agrees she does a good job with that.

But the holiday season is on another level.

“I’m thinking one every week,” she tells Raven. Raven doesn’t actually work at the store, but is dating Roan and therefore hangs out a lot because she likes spending time with him and he gave her the employee wifi password. Clarke considers her a perk of the job.

“You want to do a new display every week?” Raven asks. “Starting when?”

“That’s the question. I’m against holiday creep, but I accept that it’s a thing, and if we don’t go with it, it might hurt business.”

Raven frowns. “Has anyone in the history of the world ever looked at a store, found they don’t have Christmas lights up, and decided not to shop there?”

“There are people who believe the war on Christmas is a real thing,” Clarke points out. “Honestly, anything is possible.”

“Yeah, okay. So, getting in early?”

“I was thinking I’d do weekly after Halloween,” she admits. “Just lean into it.”

“You’re part of the problem. But yeah, sure. Knock yourself out. No one cares, so it’s not like anyone’s going to stop you.”

“Wow, thanks for your resounding support,” she teases.

Raven shrugs. “Do I look like I care about holiday windows? I’m just nodding and smiling here.”

“And I appreciate it. It’ll be good, right?”
“Sure it will,” says Raven, and goes back to her laptop.

*

Clarke is outside on November 4, checking out her first window, a winter scene painted against with some of their taxidermy animals and some fake snow set up beyond it, when Bellamy stops next to her and asks, “Already?”

“Already what?”

He takes a sip of his coffee, eyes fixed on the display. “It’s not Christmas. It’s not even Thanksgiving.”

“What part of this says Christmas to you, exactly?”

He snorts. “Come on.”

“It’s the holiday season.”

“Every season is a holiday season,” he shoots back. “I didn’t see you starting to paint fireworks at the beginning of May to get everyone pumped for the Fourth of July.”

“You still haven’t told me how this is holiday-themed.”

“Evergreen and red berries,” he says, gesturing to the painting with his travel mug.

“Winter.”

“It’s November and it’s like sixty degrees. Climate change is real.”

She elbows him. “I’m modeling good behavior for the weather,” she says. “Showing it what it should be doing.”

“Uh huh,” says Bellamy. “Let me know how that works out for you.”

“Dick,” she says, and he smiles.

“Happy holidays to you too.”

*

Bellamy and his best friend Miller run a board game cafe across the street, but Clarke has never actually gone in there, mostly because she knows if she did, it would just be to talk to Bellamy. She isn’t actually interested in board games, and she’s sure that if she tried to show interest, it would become immediately and undeniably obvious why she was really there. So it’s safer to just see him around, or when he stops by the antique store every week to see if they have any new (to them) books he wants.

On November 5, though, someone has painted IT’S NOT EVEN THANKSGIVING YET in bright orange print, with an arrangement of apparently fall-themed games under it. The opposite window adds, YOUR WAR-ON-CHRISTMAS HEADQUARTERS, which Clarke would worry is bad for business, except that they also have a rainbow flag and a black lives matter sign prominently displayed above the door, so she’s pretty sure they are actively trying to alienate alt-right nerds. Which seems like the right call.

Regardless, the window seems like a very clearly an invitation for her to go in and yell at Bellamy,
and she will happily take it.

Inside, the store is cute, mismatched chairs and tables with a bookshelf full of demo games and hourly rates for table space on the wall. They also have a regular retail area and the cafe area, and that’s where Bellamy is.

She nods to Miller at the game counter, but her focus is on Bellamy.

“Morning,” he says. “Coffee?”

“Are you really picking a fight with window displays?”

“Who said anything about a fight?”

“Your war-on-Christmas headquarters,” says Clarke, and Miller snorts.

“Shut up,” he tells Miller, reflexive, and then he turns his attention back to Clarke. “I’m picking a fight with Christmas, not with you.”

“The day after you told me it was too early for a holiday window display.”

He smirks. “I thought it wasn’t a holiday window.”

“So I don’t have a holiday window and you’re not picking a window fight,” she says.

“Sounds right, yeah.”

“Yeah, this is clearly a bunch of mature adults having a normal conversation here,” says Miller.


She takes a sip; it’s perfect, which means she has a new excuse to come in here. “You know I have to go back to work, right? I’m taking this mug with me.”

He shrugs. “I’ll get it back later. I know where to find you.”

“You do. Thanks for the coffee. Happy holidays,” she adds, and he smirks.

“Happy holidays.”

*

Bellamy doesn’t change his display until the week of Thanksgiving. The war on Christmas remains in the right window, but the left switches to HAPPY PIE AND GENOCIDE DAY get a board game to avoid talking to your racist relatives about politics, with a new selection of games under it. Someone’s put star-shaped post-it notes onto the boxes, with notes like Cooperative, low risk of murder and Talking is against the rules.

“You need any?” Bellamy asks, and she jumps.

“What?”

“Thanksgiving board games. They’re great if you don’t know how to interact with your friends and family.”

“Do you not?”
“My only relative is my sister, and we do Thanksgiving with her dad and his family. It’s usually ten to fifteen white people and me, and we all know I’m not actually related to them.”

“Ouch.”

He shrugs. “I just bring a couple games and sit in the corner waiting for people to get curious, it works out pretty well. So, you need any?”

She considers for a second. “Something for me, my mom, and my stepdad, to fill awkward silences?”

He unlocks the store and holds the door open for her. “Yeah, I’ve got some ideas.”

*

Clarke spends her Thanksgiving break trying to figure out what to do for her next window. She’s definitely culturally Christian, in the sense that she grew up celebrating Christmas and Easter, but always in a pretty secular way. She got presents and candy, but they never went to church or said prayers or anything. So she’d like to actually capture something like the spirit of the season without going full Christmas.

Hanukkah starts on December 12, so that gives her two weeks right there. A couple of her classmates are Jewish, so she enlists their help in designing two theme windows, one to go up on the ninth and one on the sixteenth. The week before that and the week after, she can do more generic winter stuff, and then Christmas, the new year, and then she’s done. Holidays solved.

It’s going to be fun.

To her delight, Bellamy’s already at his store when she arrives on the second, working on his own display. He’d been doing them on Sunday, apparently so he could react to hers, but she’s much happier seeing him working across the street, trying to figure out what he’s doing. It’s definitely more than just text.

Once he’s got the games arranged, he brings her the usual mug of coffee.

“Finally time for Christmas?”

“Hanukkah first, and then solstice, then Christmas,” she says. “It’s the holiday season, remember.”

He snorts. “No Kwanzaa?”

“I have no background in Kwanzaa and don’t have anyone I can call in for a consult, so I figured I should just skip it.”

“Yeah, that sounds right.” He sips his own drink, waiting, and she tries to figure out how to ask without asking.

“You’re no longer fighting Christmas?” she finally says. He scrubbed the right window clean, and there’s nothing new there yet.

“Want the space for other stuff,” he says. “Need any heavy lifting done?”

“Nope, all set.”

“Cool, good luck.”
When she’s working, she’s oblivious to the outside world, so it’s not until she’s done that she sees his display, finished before hers. As usual, he’s got less art than she does, with more focus on text.

The text, though, is new. In the left window, he has **WORLD AIDS DAY, DECEMBER 1**, with an AIDS ribbon in the right, and, below it, the smaller text **25% of all sales through December 8 will go to AIDS research**.

Roan’s in by now, so she says, “Can I go across the street for a second?”

“You know I’m not paying you to flirt.”

“Your girlfriend basically lives here,” she points out, and he inclines his head, granting her the point.

“Be back in fifteen minutes.”

Bellamy’s at the cafe, as usual, and he’s actually looking a little nervous.

“Like it?”

“It’s great, yeah. I feel like I should give you money.”

“Or you could just donate to a good cause. I like yours,” he adds. “All of them. I feel like I haven’t mentioned that yet.”

Her smile is probably a little much, but he doesn’t seem to mind. “You haven’t. But thanks.”

* 

“I assume you don’t have class on Friday morning like I do,” Clarke tells Bellamy, the next Saturday. They’re both done with their displays, and Roan gave her another fifteen minutes to flirt, because he’s a good boss.

“Good assumption. Why?”

“Because you could just update your windows on the appropriate days, instead of doing it on Saturday.”

This week, his left window is celebrating “Pretend to Be a Time Traveler Day” (December 8) and his right “National Cupcake Day” (December 15). It is, admittedly, a good way to promote both games and food, and Clarke can’t help being a little charmed.

“It’s a week-long thing. Also, they’re time travelers. They can show up whenever they want.”

Clarke has to laugh. “How do you find these?”

“Google. It’s not hard. I’m just trying to give some attention to the lesser known holidays. There’s lots going on in December.”

“Looking forward to the next one,” she says, and he ducks his head, looking pleased.

“Cool, I’ll try not to let you down.”

* 

December 21 is, apparently International Dalek Remembrance Day, which Clarke tells Bellamy
she’ll take his word for, and then she wishes him a happy holiday, because she’s going out of town to spend Christmas with her father.

“Where’s he?”

“Washington state. He’s one of the Seattle hipsters.”

“In a good way?”

“I don’t know if I like the hipster thing, but it’ll be good to see him.”

He nods. “Cool, have fun. I’ll see you–”

“I’m back at work on the 29th,” she supplies, trying not to smile too much. He totally wants to know when she’ll be back. “Getting up a New Year’s Eve display on the 30th.”

“Heh. Then I’ll see you then.”

It feels oddly weighty, the last holiday display. She and Bellamy have definitely been seeing more of each other, since November, and Clarke doesn’t want that to stop. And, obviously, she can still go to get coffee and flirt with him when he comes in to look at books, but she’d like something more permanent.

Something like a date.

Bellamy comes by on December 29 and gives her a giant coffee mug covered in paint splotches, which is cute, and makes her feel better about having bought him a book on typography.

“I thought you could use it for your window lettering.”

He laughs. “Room for improvement, huh?”

“There’s always room for improvement, Bellamy,” she says, prim.

“Always,” he agrees. “Thanks.”

He shows up after she does the next morning, but, as always, he finishes his window before she finishes hers, and she emerges from her art haze to find that his right window says, *December 31: Make Up Your Mind Day*, while his right has a bunch of suggestions for things to make up your mind about.

The third one is, *Ask out the cute blonde girl you like.*

“I might take half an hour to flirt today,” she tells Roan.

“Fair enough,” he says. “Happy new year.”

Miller isn’t around when she gets to the store, which doesn’t feel like a coincidence, and Bellamy has his arms crossed over his chest, his expression vaguely homicidal.

He melts into nervousness within about half a second of seeing her. “Nice display.”

“You too. Some of the decisions seem a little specific.”

“I figure they might help someone. Like horoscopes.”
“Is asking someone out really making up your mind? Isn’t your mind already made up?” She bites her lip. “Mine is.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely.”

He nods. “Cool. So, my sister’s having a party tomorrow. Trying to seduce her neighbor. I figured I could piggyback. If you don’t have plans.”

“Getting drunk with my roommate. As long as he can come—”

“Absolutely.”

“Good. He thinks Miller’s hot, he’ll owe me.” She swallows. “Were you going to wait to kiss me until midnight? Some grand gesture?”

“I was. Should I not?”

“Definitely not,” she says, and he grins, comes out from behind the counter and leans down.

“Does this mean I win the war on Christmas?” he murmurs, after kiss that makes her toe curl.

“I don’t know about the war on Christmas, but I think we’re winning something.”

He laughs. “Me too, yeah,” he agrees, and kisses her again.

*

In January, she starts coming early so she can do paintings for his windows too.

“Come on,” she says, smiling at his confused expression. “What are girlfriends for?”
The first time Bellamy Blake meets Clarke Griffin, he has his arm inside a wildebeest.

It’s with good reason, obviously; he’s not actually a vet, but he’s a trained professional and he was around, and all of them have had to do this kind of thing, one time or another. The baby is breech, and someone has to help. He’s someone.

“That’s Bellamy with his hands in the gnu,” says Murphy. Murphy always calls them gnus and always says the g. Because he is an asshole. “This is the new vet, she can probably help you out.”

“Honestly, he seems to have it under control,” says Clarke. Bellamy does notice she’s cute, at that point, he can’t help it, but it’s not really that relevant. Not when, again, he has his hands inside an animal and is pulling another, smaller animal out of it. That’s really his top priority.

“Really?” Murphy asks. “You got this?”

“Sorry, can you not deliver a breech calf?” he asks. “It’s not my first one.”

“Really?” Clarke asks, squatting down next to him to monitor the process.

“We had a breech giraffe a few years ago, that was fun.”

They chat about that, surprisingly easy and casual considering they’re also getting the baby out while it happens, and Bellamy naively assumes that the next time he sees her, it will be less weird.

It doesn’t seem that unrealistic.

* 

“I’m fine,” Bellamy says, before he’s actually seen the person who came in. “This isn’t a crisis.”

“You literally have a snake attached to your hand,” says Clarke, sitting down next to him.

“Yeah, but not a venomous one,” he says.

“That’s the important thing.” She reaches for the snake carefully; it honestly doesn’t seem much happier than Bellamy does about the whole thing, but it doesn’t know how to get out of the situation. “Do you really not know how to dislodge a snake?”

“I remembered there was a trick but not what is was, so I figured I should wait for backup.”

She slides the snake forward gently. “The trick is that the fangs are curved, so you want to push the mouth forward and unhook them. If you try to pull it off, you’ll rip up your skin.”

The snake slides off, and Clarke inspects it while Bellamy examines his own wound.
"The bleeding won’t be as bad, but you’re going to bruise pretty badly. How did it happen?"

"Problem with the feeding schedule. I thought she wasn’t going to be hungry, but she really wanted something."

"So I should get her something to eat before she turns on me."

"Pretty much, yeah."

"Are you all set? Sorry, animals don’t care about bedside manner."

He smiles. “I’m good. Thanks for the assist.”

"No problem. Hope the hand gets better.”

He waves, and then winces, and then, once she’s gone, puts his head down on the table.

Then he gets some antiseptic and bandages. He’s not an idiot.

*

"We have got to stop meeting like this,” says Clarke.

“I wouldn’t mind, yeah.” He squints down at her. “Don’t tell me you’re a relationship counselor.”

It’s common knowledge among the zoo staff that one of the peacocks is in love with Bellamy. No one, including Bellamy, knows how it happened, but there are a number of peafowl that are allowed to roam the grounds freely, and one of them is very attached to him. The visitors love it, of course, because whenever he passes they get to see the tail display, but animals aren’t great with consent, and occasionally the peacock gets kind of pushy.

Which is why Bellamy is currently sitting on top of one of the staff golf carts. It’s not like he can’t outrun a horny peacock, but he would rather not have to. And he doesn’t want to accidentally hurt him.

“Just passing by. This is Romeo?”

“That’s one of his nicknames. We’re supposed to have a vote to choose one eventually.”

“But you’re busy."

“It doesn’t happen that often,” he says. “Just when he sees me and he’s—“

“Horny,” Clarke supplies. “Have you tried not running?”

He frowns. “What?”

“I’m just spitballing here, but you don’t know what he’d do if he actually caught you, right? Like, does he even realize you’re sexually incompatible?”

“Is It your professional opinion that I should fuck the peacock?” he demands. She looks serious.

“Professional makes it sound like I had a class on what to do if a peacock is stalking you,” Clarke says. “This is just curiosity.”

“I guess not,” he admits. “I’m trying to teach him about consent.”
“Yeah, that seems to be going great.” To his surprise, she climbs up next to him on the roof. “I don’t actually know what you do here.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, when I met you, you were delivering a wildebeest. Then you were feeding a snake, and now you’re trying to avoid a peacock. I don’t know what animals you actually work with. Reptiles?”

“Mammals. But I’ve been with the zoo since I was—“ He actually has to work to remember. “I was sixteen when I started volunteering, I think. My mom had a shitty boyfriend and I wanted to get out of the house. So I’ve worked pretty much everywhere. I used to do snake presentations, so—“

“So you really should have remembered what to do with a snake bite,” she teases.

“It had been years!” he protests, laughing. “And I never got bitten before.”

“How’s the hand, anyway?”

He holds it up for her inspection. “Mostly bruised, like you said. Fine.”

“Cool.” She leans over the edge of the roof to inspect the peacock. “At least you get a good show.”

“Yeah, he’s really into me.”

“What do you think that’s called? Like, do animals have an equivalent of furries?”

He chokes on the air. “Wow. I can’t believe I never thought about that.”

“Yeah, that was like my first question.”

“Before asking if I’d tried fucking it.”

“Not actually fucking it,” she protests. “But you aren’t sexually compatible. Maybe he’d give up.”

“How does peacock sex even work?” he asks. “What would he do?”

“Not sure. I’m mammals too, so I’m not great on bird reproduction.”

Which is how he ends up on the roof of a car googling peacock mating habits with his cute new coworker while Romeo squawks at them.

All in all, it’s not a bad afternoon.

* 

They’re friends after that because they can’t not be friends after that, which at least means Clarke actually starts seeing him when he’s not in a compromising position with an animal.

It also means his vague attraction to her turns into a full blown crush, but that’s fine. He hasn’t had a crush in a while, but as he remembers how it works: they’re annoying and then they blow over.

It’s still a relief the first time he gets called to help Clarke in a compromising situation. It feels like some karmic balance. He’s not the only one with this problem.

The call comes over the walkies, when he’s on his way to check on the otters. He’s even passing
by the vet station, so when Clarke asks, “Can I get assistance to the vet station?” he’s probably the best person to respond.

“On my way,” he says, and when he opens the door, he finds Clarke on a chair, glaring at her file cabinet.

“Hi,” he says.

Her face clears with some relief. “Hey, Bellamy.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I was trying to examine one of the red pandas and I guess the sedation hadn’t actually kicked in all the way yet. She woke up enough to freak out and get onto the closet, and now she’s asleep and I can’t reach her.”

“Huh. That’s not as bad as I was hoping.” When she frowns, he shrugs one shoulder. “Come on, you keep seeing me when I’m trying to deal with way worse stuff than this.”

She steps off the chair and lets him take over. The red panda is in the very back corner, curled up in a ball, apparently asleep, but he knows better than to trust that.

“Do we have gloves?” he asks Clarke, and between the two of them, they get the red panda off the closet and back onto the exam table without ever waking her all the way up.

“It’s not going to take long, can you stick around?” Clarke asks. “Or do you need to be somewhere?”

He checks his watch. “I wanted to make sure the otters were still good with the new pups, but it’s not pressing. I can hang out.”

“Thanks.” She works in silence for a moment before she finally says, “You know, I never really thought that was you dealing with way worse stuff. I know it was all weird, but–everyone gets into weird positions with the animals. It happens. But you’re good at it.”

“Just what I always wanted,” he grumbles, and she laughs.

“Seriously, I’m complimenting you. I’ve seen a lot of shit, but you’re always calm and cool and smart about it. You don’t panic, and you put the animals first. You had a snake attached to your hand and you were just waiting around for someone else to come help you. Plenty of people panic and do something stupid.” She laughs. “You’re being nice to the peacock that has a crush on you.”

“And that’s weird?”

“Not weird, but it’s usually not so–” She searches for the word. “Universal. Someone might be fine with pulling a calf out, but they don’t like snakes. They love their animals but don’t always get other ones, or they’re not always as good with them.” She shrugs. “I guess I get that it’s embarrassing, but I never thought you should be embarrassed about it. If that makes sense.”

“So, it would have been embarrassing if I was mean to the peacock.”

“I wouldn’t have liked you as much.”

He watches her sidelong as she works, trying to figure out how to phrase what he wants to ask. Flirting with coworkers is always kind of dicey, but he thinks they have been flirting. He’s pretty
decent at reading signals. Even if people are a lot more subtle than peacocks.

“How much do you like me, exactly?”

She flashes him a smile. “I’d definitely fight the peacock for you.”

“Really? He looks scrappy.”

“Yeah, but I think I could take him. Also, I think I’m more your type. I hope.”

“Definitely more my type.” It’s his turn to smile. “So, we could get dinner sometime and talk weirdest animal stories?”

“Love to,” she says, and he doesn’t even care that he steps in elephant shit later.

It’s a fucking great day.

*

“I don’t want you to be jealous,” Clarke says, when Bellamy finds her two months later, on top of a golf cart with a peacock watching her.

“Is that the same peacock?” he asks.

“I’m not sure. I don’t spend a ton of time with them. He’s your boyfriend, shouldn’t you know?”

He climbs up onto the roof with her, and the peacock squawks at them. “I must be a really shitty boyfriend.”

“The worst, definitely. I know you can’t tell me apart from other blonde girls.”

“Nope. Did you try just fucking him?”

She elbows him. “You were right. It’s not that appealing. Even if I could figure out how it would work. It’s easy to tell someone else to try to fuck the peacock, but I don’t want to put my money where my mouth was.”

“Thank god. So is the plan just sitting up here until he loses interest and decides you’re not going to mate with him?”

“I tried telling him I’m taken, but apparently he doesn’t care.” She puts her head on his shoulder. “So, yeah, that’s the plan. Unless you figured out a better way to deal with it at some point and didn’t tell me.”

“Nope. It’s not our fault we’re so appealing to reverse-furries.” He kisses her hair. “I don’t have anywhere to be right now. We can wait, right?”

“Yeah,” says Clarke, settling in. “This is fine.”
Cops and Robbers Everywhere

Chapter Summary

Fill for grrtyorkes! Prompt: Bellarke super villain/super hero au where Bellamy is the villain and Clarke is the hero

Bioshock ranks about second or third on the list of Boston-area superheroes Bellamy respects, which is why, when she lands next to him one night while he’s on a stakeout in Dorchester, he doesn’t immediately pick a fight.

“Isn’t your company in Brighton?” he asks instead. “Please tell me you didn’t come all the way out here to bust me. Are you on the BPD payroll now?”

She doesn’t even crack a smile. “No. I came all the way out here to ask for your help.”

That’s a surprise, and from the pointed way Bioshock is looking forward, watching the intersection and not him, she feels about as weird about it as he does.

Bellamy and Bioshock are, nominally, not really on the same side. Bioshock is a corporate super, on the payroll of, last he heard, Polaris, a fairly new tech company with a lot of expensive equipment just waiting to be stolen. This makes Bioshock, at least in common parlance, a hero, someone who has registered her real name and powers with an agency, and who offers her services to anyone who wants to pay her to protect their goods from, well–

From people like him.

“You know we’re not on the same side, right?” he asks. “Isn’t this what Ark is supposed to do for you? Don’t you guys have a union?”

“Umbra,” she says, and it’s not as if they know each other, not as if they’re friends, but something in her tone makes him sit up and take notice. “You think I’d be here if I thought I had a better choice?”

It’s hard to be offended, when he knows she’s right. He can think of a few reasons he might go to a corporate for help, and if he did, he’d know what he was asking. Bioshock must too.

“Okay,” he says. “So, you want my help. What’s up?”

“You know I’m working for Polaris now, right?”

“That was what I heard, yeah.”

“My roommate is too. Not as a super, just as a regular employee. And I’m worried about her.”

“Worried about her how?”

“She hasn’t been acting like herself. She’s been spending a lot of time at work, which–she’s always been a workaholic. But not like this. And everything Ark told me about the job has been true, so–if there’s something going on, I think Ark knows about it.”
He lets out an actual *cackle*. “Holy shit, are you going rogue?”

But she’s serious. “Not yet. Not until I have more information.”

“So where do I come in?”

“You can get information I can’t. You’re unaligned, and I know you break into corporations and get stuff to sell. If you can steal tech, you can steal information.”

“And you can’t?”

“I’m a guard. I can give you information, but if they catch me inside, I’m fucked.”

That’s true too. Corporates going rogue is a big deal; Ark knows everything about her, and if they knew she turned against them, they’d blast her real identity everywhere. She has protection Bellamy doesn’t have, but only as long as she does as she’s told.

“So you want me to get fucked instead.”

“Better you than me,” she teases, but it actually lands as a joke. “It’s not like your powers aren’t more suited to espionage than mine.”

“True.” He looks at her, the slick profile that gives almost nothing away. Like most corporates, her costume is top of the line, military grade protection. Even through all the layers of disguise, he thinks she looks tired. “Why should I trust you?”

She must have been expecting the question, because there’s no hesitation. She leans forward, pulling off her cowl and exposing her face. She’s pretty, but unfamiliar, not that that’s surprising. This city is full of people he doesn’t know. He could have walked by her a hundred times and he probably still wouldn’t know her. “My name is Clarke Griffin,” she says. “I’ll give you my address too, if you want.”

It takes him a moment to recover from the shock. “Why do you trust me?”

“I did my research. Will you do it?”

It could still be a trap, but, honestly, it feels like a lot of work to trap him. Especially from Ark, whose companies Bellamy rarely hassles. Even Tempest probably doesn’t care enough to run a long con on him. They have to have better things to do with their time.

“I want some more proof of identity. Not your address, something that links you to the name.”

“I’m on Facebook and I work at the MFA. I’m doing tours tomorrow from noon to five.”

“Okay. If I’m in, I’ll meet you back here tomorrow. Same bat time, same bat channel.”

She nods, pulls her cowl back on. “Thank you.”

“I haven’t agreed yet.”

“I know. But thank you anyway.”

And then she’s gone.

He goes to the MFA the next day and walks past Bioshock in the galleries. She’s at the head of a tour, with a name tag reading *Clarke* on her chest.
So that’s that. They’re doing this.

* 

“So, what am I looking for, exactly?”

Bellamy’s superpower is pretty awesome, if he does say so himself. Like most powers, it started manifesting when he was in high school, and he found he could just blend into and through things. He can’t just hide in shadows, he can melt into walls.

Like Bioshock said, he’s really good at espionage.

Her voice crackles back through the communicator. “My roommate’s name is Raven Reyes.”

“Is she here?” he asks.

“Right now? No, she should be at home.”

“Where does she think you are?”

“She knows what I do.”

“Wow.”

“Does no one know about you?”

“No one I’m not related to.”

“Is that hard?”

“If I wanted people to know who I was, I’d be a corporate. If your roommate isn’t here, why do I care about her name?”

“Because I think whatever she’s working on is doing something bad to her. She started off telling me all about it, and now every time I ask she says she’ll tell me when it’s ready.”

“Ominous.”

“Yeah. I might just be paranoid, but–”

“Better safe than sorry.”

“Yeah. Her project is called ALIE, A-L-I-E.”

“How’s she acting different? Just not talking about it?”

“Not just that. She’s–she was in an accident a few years ago. Her leg. She’s been living with chronic pain, and now she’s just–not. Which would be fine if I thought she was–it feels like she was replaced by an alien that doesn’t understand what pain is.”

“So, creepy as fuck?”

“Pretty much.” She sighs. “I know I sound like an asshole.”

“You don’t. You sound worried.”

“Worried that my friend isn’t in constant pain.”
Bellamy melts through a wall into a room with a bunch of files, which is a good start. He’s not much of a hacker, but he’s found most places keep at least some hard copies. “She would have told you if she was getting treatment, right?”

“Yeah. All she says is that it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“Yeah,” he says, pulling open the A drawer and scanning for ALIE. “That’s creepy as fuck.”

Bioshock snorts. “Thanks for the validation.”

“Any time.” He pauses, but they’re sort of friends now. After a fashion. “What are you going to do? If you’re right about all this. Polaris is dirty, Ark is in on it. What’s the plan?”

“Figure out how to get Raven out, and then–she’s good with computers. I’m pretty sure she could make us new identities.”

“So you’d leave?”

There’s a pause. “My mom’s a corporate too. I registered with Ark before I really knew what it meant. I’m not saying I regret it, but–I didn’t really think about what it would mean.”

The ALIE file is thick, and if Bellamy takes it someone might find out. “I’ve got something for you, but it’s on paper. You think we can make copies and bring it back tonight?”

“I’m imagining you going into a Kinkos in costume. It’s cute.”

“I was just going to go to the library, they tend to have less security. How long are you on patrol here? Can I leave and come back?”

“Yeah, I can stick around.”

The room has a window, which means he can just slide through the wall and out of the building. “Doesn’t this suck with your day job?” he asks. “Late nights?”

“Can you afford to not have a day job?”

“I work from home,” he lies. “And I don’t have a night job, remember? I just do what I want.”

“Brag about it. I see you,” she adds.

“Huh, didn’t know you were on this side of the building.” He finds her, floating in the sky. “Are you strong enough to carry me?”

“Nope.”

“Then I’ll see you soon.”

He takes his bike over to the library and makes copies the old-fashioned way, with the ancient copy machine that doesn’t keep any records. It’s too late by the time he’s getting back to Polaris, but Bioshock is still there, sitting on the roof, waiting. He gives her the copy and returns the file, and suddenly realizes that this might be it.

He might have done all she needs him to do.

“Thank you,” she says.
“Sure.” He looks her up and down. “Can I trust you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I want to see how this goes,” he admits. “But I don’t know if I want to give you my number.” That makes her laugh. “You know where to find me.”

“Just until you break your roommate out of this and drop off the map.”

“I’ll leave you a note.”

“You might need help,” he says.

“And you want to help me?”

Before this, Bellamy knew a few things about Bioshock. She’s only ever worked with Ark, not Tempest or any of the right-wing, conservative super agencies. When she talks about super affairs, she’s fair and thoughtful. She’s put some villains behind bars, but they’ve been ones he considers bad, the ones who hurt people, not just independent thieves like him.

And she came to him, and she trusted him. That means something too.

“I do, yeah.”

“Then it kind of sounds like you trust me,” she says, and he has to smile.

“I guess so. So, uh, I’m Bellamy. If you roommate’s home, do you want to come back to my place to look at that?”

She smiles. “That would be great, yeah.”

* 

It’s not exactly an easy project, but it turns out the two of them are a good team. Clarke brings in a rogue corporate she knows named Monty, who fills the very important role of actually knowing something about technology, and between Clarke’s access to Polaris, Bellamy’s access to everything, and Monty’s hacking abilities, they manage to figure out what Polaris was trying to do (some kind of creepy mind control), how to get Raven out of it (incomprehensible technology), and how to get them all to somewhere new (Bellamy’s friend Miller’s place in Seattle) with new identities.

Which is actually kind of awkward.

“How did you get involved in this again?” Raven asks him. She’s still a little hazy, in the memories. “Like—where did you come from?”

“I actually don’t know,” he admits, looking to Clarke. “Why did you ask me?”

Her neck goes a little pink, but her expression stays neutral. “I found a list of villains and picked one who’d never killed anyone or made any decisions I disagreed with.”

“Romantic,” says Raven, and Clarke’s neck goes pinker. “What was your code name again?”

“Umbra,” Monty supplies.
“Oh,” says Raven. “Now I’ve got it.”

Bellamy wants to press, but there’s no way Clarke’s going to talk about it with everyone else around. So he waits until Monty and Raven go off to do their own thing before settling next to her. “So, why did you really pick me?”

“Hm?”

“Clarke,” he says, nudging her shoulder. “Come on.”

She catches her lip in her teeth, looking over at him with a somewhat shy smile. “I liked you.”

“Liked me?”

“Fair fights, the few times we had them. Good statements, when you made public statements. Great ass,” she admits, and he laughs.

“You liked me,” he teases, and she glares.

“Shut up.”

He leans closer, feeling a smile growing on his face. He’d been hoping, honestly. “Do you still like me?”

In lieu of answering, she fists her hand in his shirt, pulling him in, and he’s still smiling when she kisses him.

“You’re my favorite super,” she tells him, and he bumps his nose against hers.

“Right back at you.”
Artistic Visions

Chapter Summary

Fill for bloodthirstyminx! Prompt: Bellarke with theatre actor/wardrobe-makeup crew member. Crew member goes to the actor's home every week to apply long-lasting temporary tattoos.

In general, people don’t get into theater if they can’t deal with long hours and weird requirements. Bellamy remembers clearly the first time he was on stage, how he felt so self-conscious about saying his lines, about actually throwing himself into the role, but he loved it, and it was so easy to just do it. He can’t imagine doing anything else.

Still, sometimes things still take him by surprise.

“She needs to come to my apartment?” he asks.

“She doesn’t have to,” says Miller, with a shrug. “I just figured it would be easier for you. You don’t want to have to come down here on your day off to get a fake tattoo applied, do you?”

“I don’t really want to do anything on my day off. Where does the makeup woman live?”

“A few blocks from you. She doesn’t mind.”

“Do you actually know that or are you assuming she’d argue with you if she did?”

“Clearly you haven’t met Clarke yet. She definitely would. Look, it’s a few hours once a week, and it’s going to look awesome. I’m pretty sure you’re going to want to get it done for real after this.”

“I’m pretty sure I don’t want a full chest dragon tattoo. I like my chest as is.” He sighs. “This is a key part of your artistic vision?”

“Definitely.”

“And if I don’t take my shirt off and show off the tattoo the whole play falls apart?”

“Definitely.”

He doesn’t actually mind, but he considers giving Miller shit to be a vital part of his job, so he makes a show of thinking it over. “Fine, we can do the tattoo at my place. Mondays at two?”

“Yeah. Should take a couple hours. Shouldn’t be too much trouble, as long as you and Clarke don’t kill each other.”

He frowns. “You aren’t actually worried about that, are you?”

“Not that worried.” He claps Bellamy on the shoulder. “You’ll be fine.”

* 

Clarke Griffin shows up at 1:58 on Monday, and as soon as introductions are done, she’s all
business, looking around his apartment with narrowed eyes.

“Is there a problem?” he asks, mild. His apartment is great, but he didn’t really clean that much or anything. He didn’t think he needed to.

“Just trying to figure out where I’ve got the best light. And you’ll be most comfortable. It’s going to be a while.”

“I heard, yeah. Sorry about—“ He waves his hand. “I assume you have better things to do.”

“And yet here we are.” She smiles. “I don’t mind. It’s my job. Thanks for hosting.”

“It’s fine.” He rubs the back of his neck. “Do you want something to eat? Drink?”

“I brought water.” Her smile is a little tight. “You don’t actually have to stress about my comfort. Just find a pillow for your stool, take off your shirt, and don’t yell at me when I rearrange your lights.”

It all sounds fair enough. “Deal.”

Between the two of them, they get his lights set up to Clarke’s approval, and he sheds his shirt while Clarke gets her stuff ready. It feels a little intimate, but he knows better than to let that feeling really take hold; theater is one of those businesses where intimacy means something different. This is work.

Weird work, but still.

“How much did Miller tell you about the process?”

“Basically nothing. Just that you’d come over once a week and do the tattoo.”

Clarke nods, more like she’s agreeing with herself than with him. “It’s pretty simple. Monday, I put down the base ink. It should last the week, as long as you don’t scrub it really hard in the shower. Water’s fine, but don’t get too crazy. I’m doing your makeup for shows, so I’ll check it then and make sure nothing needs touching up too. Monday before I show, you can wash yourself as hard as you want, but I’ve got some remover to get it off clean and reapply, so you don’t have to worry if you don’t get it all off.”

“That’s really the best way to do it? Not just touching it up again?”

“You can usually tell when that happens, yeah. It’s better to just go again from scratch. Faster, too.”

“You’re the expert. Just tell me what to do.”

“As little as possible, honestly.”

“No problem,” he says, and thinks he means it.

It’s not like he’s bad at staying still, but he is bad at doing absolutely nothing. His attention wanders, and then he’ll forget what he’s supposed to be doing and start slumping or yawning, and then he’ll feel bad, and then it’s this weird vicious cycle.

So after about fifteen minutes of application, he asks, “Is talking okay?”

“Talking?”
“I don’t have anything to focus on. I might fall asleep. I can monologue if you need to concentrate.”

She laughs. “Run lines?”

“Never hurts.”

“I can talk and work if you want an actual conversation.”

“Did you design the tattoo?”

“Yeah. I did some of the set design too. Miller and I are old friends, I always like working with him.”

“And you still call him Miller?”

“Everyone else did, so I got used to it, yeah. This might tickle,” she adds. “How did you get into acting?”

The conversation reminds him of nothing so much as small talk when he’s getting a haircut. Clarke already knows what he does, but they chat about general backgrounds, how long they’ve lived in the city, significant others, siblings. Clarke is three years younger than he is, a print artist as well as a makeup one, single, and bisexual. As Miller said, she only lives a few blocks away, and her roommate is Raven Reyes, whom Bellamy knows from other shows, even if she’s not working on this one.

“Kind of amazing we didn’t meet sooner,” Bellamy observes, and Clarke hums her agreement.

“I’ve seen some of your shows.”

That surprises him. “Yeah?”

“I live with Raven, remember? I try to see everything she works on.”

“That makes sense. I assume I’ve seen some of your makeup.”

“And set design, probably.” She pulls back, looking him over. It makes him feel only a little self conscious; he looks good without a shirt and he knows it. “Do you wax?”

“Sorry?”

“Your chest. Do you wax it, or do you not need to? I was assuming not because I definitely saw some hair there, but—”

“Yeah, no one’s ever asked me to wax my chest.”

She nods. “Cool, that makes life easier. Like I said, don’t scrub your chest hard when you shower, be kind of careful, and don’t put your shirt back on for—” She looks at her phone, thoughtful. “Give it til like 4:30? Assuming you won’t get too cold.”

“I’m probably fine, yeah.”

“Okay, then—I’ll see you opening night. Did I give you my number?”

“No.”
She pulls a business card out of her wallet and hands it over. “If you manage to fuck it up before I see you, just give me a call. But it’s pretty resilient, you should be fine.”

“Thanks.” He offers her a smile. “It looks really badass, by the way. Good job.”

She returns the expression. “Nothing but the best for Miller’s vision. See you in a few days.”

They don’t get much of a chance to talk when Clarke’s doing his show makeup, which isn’t really surprising; show nights are always a zoo, and especially opening week, when everything still feels half like a dress rehearsal and half like an actual tire fire. Clarke verifies that his tattoo is in good shape, gives him the rest of his makeup and wardrobe, and tells him to break a leg, and that’s about as much as his brain can process, anyway.

On Monday, she asks, “So, how did Miller pick this play?”

She’s cleaning off the old tattoo, which doesn’t hurt or anything, but is less comfortable than having the new one applied. The stuff she’s using to remove it is kind of cold and wet, and she’s having to rub to get it off, which is weird.

Miller better appreciate this.

“I don’t know, why?”

“It’s–interesting.”

Bellamy snorts. “You mean it’s fucking ridiculous.”

“It’s fucking ridiculous. You’re a singing vampire gangster. And don’t get me wrong, you’re awesome at it, but–”

“I think Miller’s trying to single-handedly make theater weird again,” he says. “It’s a limited run, local playwright–”

“It’s Murphy,” says Clarke, with the same flat tone everyone who has ever met John Murphy uses to talk about him.

“Support local artists, Clarke.”

“It’s fun,” she says. “And I’m glad it’s happening. I’m just kind of amazed he got funding.”

“Yeah, we’re all surprised about that.”

She finishes up with the tattoo removal and pulls back, eyeing him critically. “Do you mind taking a shower?”

“Now?”

“Yeah, it would be good to get the residue off. Also, I’m not trying to stare at your nipples, but they’re right there and apparently you’re cold.”

He can’t help a snort of laughter. “So, you want my nipples to stop being distracting?”

“If it’s not too much trouble, yeah.”
“Yeah, that shouldn’t be hard. Just wash my chest off?”

“And get warm, yeah.”

It feels a little weird showering with a virtual stranger in his home, but it’s just the setting that’s throwing him off. It’s not like he hasn’t done this at the gym or even the theater sometimes. And it is nice to warm up and get the weird gunk off his body.

That becomes their routine, as the show goes on. Bellamy keeps expecting them to get canceled before finishing the planned end of their run, because, as Clarke pointed out, the whole thing is fucking ridiculous, but apparently it’s the fun kind of ridiculous. People are looking for random escapism through singing vampire gangsters.

For which Bellamy is grateful, because he likes the show. He likes his co-stars, he likes the crew, he likes his role, he even likes his stupid tattoo and the way he feels he hasn’t worn a shirt in months.

Mostly, though, he really, really likes Clarke.

They end up talking a lot, once they’ve got their groove down. She reads a lot, especially comic books, which are kind of a blind spot for him, and she likes hearing about video games he’s playing and new projects he’s auditioning for.

She’s smart and funny and gorgeous, basically, and the last thing he wants is for this show to wrap and he doesn’t see her again until they happen to be working on the same thing. But they’re still coworkers, and he doesn’t want to ask her out now, when the last few weeks of the show will be awkward if she says no.

But he really, really wants to ask her out.

It’s two weeks before close, their usual Monday appointment, when Clarke observes, “That girl who came to the show last night was cute.”

“Which one? There were a lot of girls there. We’re definitely appealing to women age eighteen to thirty-five.”

She flicks his left pectoral. “Gee, I wonder why. I meant the girl who came to see you. Is that why you’re single?”

It takes Bellamy a second, because Clarke’s making it sound like he brought a date, and he doesn’t have anyone like–

He starts to laugh. “Definitely not.”

“No?”

“My little sister,” he says. “She was in town for the weekend.”

“Oh.”

“I’d offer to give you her number, but straight, not local, and taken.”

“Yeah, I wasn’t really thinking about her for myself.”

“Just me?”
There’s a pause, and then she says, “I honestly can’t believe you’re single, I’m still waiting for the catch.”

“Catch?”

“Hot, smart, talented actor with surprisingly little ego. What’s wrong with you?”

He grins. “I’m hoping nothing.”

“Yeah, me too.”

He catches her wrist on his chest and tugs a little, and she grins, moving in to settle between his legs on the stool. When he leans in, she closes the distance, and the kiss turns from soft and hesitant to hot and deep in seconds as neither of them pulls away. His hands map her back and hers drop from his chest to his waist, letting her press closer.

“I deserve a medal for not doing this sooner,” she mutters, and he laughs.

“Really? I wish you had.”

“I’m a professional, I can’t hook up with every hot shirtless actor I meet.”

“You don’t have to hook up with all of them, just me.”

“Just you,” she agrees, and kisses him again.

* Miller’s the one to call them out the next week, and Bellamy can’t even pretend they don’t deserve it.

“I was wondering where the rest of your tattoo was,” he says, and Bellamy frowns.

“What?”

Miller pokes his side, a spot he can see, but just barely. His dragon appears to be missing a claw.

“Huh.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s it on Clarke’s arm.”

Bellamy glances over and sure enough, there’s a small wedge of black ink on Clarke’s bicep. She did sleep over for the first time last night; they’re probably lucky he only lost that.

“Guess it wasn’t so bad,” Miller says, clapping him on the back. “Having to hang out with her.”

“No,” he agrees, unable to keep a stupid smile off his face. “It’s been awesome.”
Indra’s always found there’s something oddly soothing about assigning tutorial partners. She knows there are professors who don’t put much thought into the whole thing, who just check the times their students request and assign them at random, but that’s never been her preferred method. In a regular class, she doesn’t have much control over the dynamics; in the tutorials, she can try to create interesting interactions and experiences, and she enjoys thinking about which students would work well together, and it gives her a sense of control and order in the world, to find those matches.

Not that she knows everyone in every class very often, of course, but still. She can do her best.

During the first class, she had the students fill out some basic information. It’s nothing fancy, just their schedules and a little about why they decided to take the class, enough to go on for the ones she doesn’t already know, to get an idea of how they like to work and learn.

The first of the schedules for this class is Bellamy Blake’s, because he submitted it via email before the first class, and while Indra already knows Bellamy fairly well, she still reads over his answers, just to see what he says.

As usual, he’s realistic and honest, an intelligent boy who understands his own strengths and weaknesses. His schedule is less open than most of the students’, but he’s indicated where he would probably be able to adjust his shifts if it’s absolutely necessary. For anyone else, she might be suspicious, but she understands his circumstances, and she knows the restrictions are genuine. He wants to make this class work, and she wants to make sure it works for him.

He is not, precisely, her favorite; she doesn’t have favorites. But he’s one of the favorites she doesn’t have.

She looks over the rest of the students’ papers, arrayed on the desk, and Clarke Griffin’s snaps her eye. Like Bellamy, Indra’s had Clarke in classes before, and like Bellamy, she liked her. She hasn’t had as much experience with Clarke, but she’s only a sophomore, and she doesn’t have the notable background that Bellamy does. Still, she’s an intelligent, opinionated girl who won’t let Bellamy walk all over her, even if he’s right.

She checks their preferred meeting times, smiles when she sees there’s no conflict.

One pairing down, four to go.

Bellamy and Clarke being her first pair to actually meet is a coincidence of scheduling, but Indra will admit they’re the ones she’s most excited to see in action. Most of the other students are either unknown or unremarkable, and she’s sure they’ll do fine with the material, but she’s not expecting them to be particularly interesting.

When she opens the door she finds them already waiting outside the office, Bellamy slumped low
with his legs stretched out and Clarke bolt upright, as if she’s trying to show Bellamy how he should be sitting. Her smile comes easily.

“Bellamy, Clarke,” she says, with a nod. “Come in.”

In the office, she gestures to the seats she has for them, and Bellamy offers Clarke the armchair, and she refuses for the wooden one, apparently out of some strange spite. Which is an unexpected dynamic, but, ultimately, none of Indra’s business. If there was a problem with the pairing that required her intervention, one of them would have told her.

Still, once they’re both settled, she asks, “Any issues with the assignment? Any questions?”

“Nope,” says Bellamy.

“No,” says Clarke.

“Good. We’ll start with Clarke reading her paper, and then Bellamy, you can read your response. Good?”

Again, neither has objections, and Indra nods for Clarke to start.

The paper is solid, if a little safe; Clarke’s not a classics major and took some time last semester getting confident with the material, and this class seems to be no exception. Indra’s neither surprised nor disappointed, but Bellamy’s like a shark smelling blood, pushing back against every error and issue.

Still, as she expected, Clarke doesn’t give an inch, and Indra gets to sit back and watch as the two of them fight their way through the translation. There are a few times where she wonders if she shouldn’t step in, but neither of them really seems to be dominating, and they don’t seem to be taking it personally. Clarke’s getting more assertive by the minute, and Bellamy seems as excited about it as he is annoyed.

In the end, her only contribution to the discussion is, “Times’s up in five minutes, so the two of you might want to come to some conclusions.”

Clarke looks as if she’s coming out of a daze, and Bellamy’s neck colors in embarrassment. But by the time Clarke glances over at him, the color has faded, and he’s his normal self again. “I’m pretty happy with this translation,” she offers.

“Yeah, I think it’s good. I still don’t think the piece is as optimistic as you do—” he adds, because he’s unable to help himself, apparently.

Clarke rolls her eyes. “Death of the author. We can agree on the words without agreeing what they mean.”

“Yeah, but—”

Indra holds up her hand. “I think if you start going again, I’m going to be late for my next class. Good work, you two,” she adds. “I thought you’d work well together.”

The last thing she sees as they leave is their twin slack-jawed expressions, and she smiles to herself.

She does love tutorials.
She runs into Bellamy two weeks later, at the library, and he apologizes.

“For what?”

“I got kind of—loud,” he says, delicate. “Last class.”

“Every class,” she says, mild. “Do you apologize to Clarke about this?”

He shrugs one shoulder, with a kind of careful, deliberate casualness that makes Indra smile. “Clarke knows what she’s doing.”

“So, I’m not to blame and deserve an apology?”

“Not your fault we get along like oil and water,” he says, his voice a little wry.

“I might have seen it coming.”

He laughs. “In that case, I’m not sorry. You deserved this.”

“I think the two of you are doing very well.”

“I think if I get murdered, you’ll know who did it.”

“I assume I’ll be an eyewitness. Did the two of you know each other before this class?” she can’t help asking. “Or is this entirely based on Latin disagreements?”

Immediately, he turns a little sheepish, rubbing the back of his neck as if she’s caught him at something. “Uh, we met at a party a few days before our class. She definitely didn’t like me, but—honestly, I have no idea what I did to upset her.”

“You could be more tactful in your criticism.”

“She already hated me, so why bother? Besides, I think she likes tactless criticism.”

“So, you have nothing to apologize for.”

He flashes her a grin. “I wouldn’t go that far.”

She smiles back. “No. Maybe not quite that far.

The strangest thing is that she can see the changes in them, week to week. They still fight over every word and letter, still seem ready to strangle each other during every discussion, but it starts to be different, after the sessions end. Instead of stormsing out without looking at each other, they’ll wait and leave together, chatting about other things, Bellamy holding the door for Clarke, smiling down at her with warm eyes.

In some ways, it’s more unnerving than when they didn’t get along, but nice, too. She knows it’s hard for Bellamy to make friends, given his home situation, and she’s glad to see that they seem to be realizing that disagreeing this passionately about Latin translation is probably a sign they should be friends, not enemies.

And then their final papers roll around, and she realizes that it might have gone farther than she
realized. It’s not as if she was really expecting them to fight about the concluding paper, not really. It didn’t feel like even they could turn that into an altercation.

But what she wasn’t expecting was a profound sense of gratitude, and even something like tenderness. Clarke focuses more on the works, on themes and connections between them that she came to appreciate, and Bellamy almost sounds as if he’s picking up where she left off, running with the same ideas, but talking about them through the act of translation, how interpreting the words brought new meaning, how they put their own meaning into it.

“Did the two of you work together on this one?” she asks. It hadn’t ever occurred to her that they might, but it wasn’t as if she said they couldn’t. She just wasn’t expecting it.

Bellamy ducks his head, looking at Clarke with a slight flush creeping up his neck. “Nah, I guess we’re just on the same page.”

“Yeah,” says Clarke, smiling back at him.

At least they’re not high school students. She probably would have caught them necking before class if they had been.

“Well, the two of you did an excellent job this semester,” she says. “And with no actual bloodshed, I believe?”

“Maybe one time,” Bellamy starts, and Clarke elbows him. “All your scars are on the inside.”

“What about this one?” he asks, pointing to his lip.

“That one wasn’t my fault.”

Indra has to roll her eyes. “Much as I enjoy spending time with you both, I do have other things to do. If I tell you you’re getting As, will you leave?”

“We’d probably leave even if you didn’t,” Bellamy says. “But I am expecting an A now.”

As always, he holds the door for Clarke as they leave, and Indra smiles. She might have really done some good there.

* 

The next time she sees both of them together, it’s at the classics department holiday party the next year. Bellamy’s leaning in close, and Clarke is laughing, and even if she’d never met them before, it would be obvious they were together.

For all of ten seconds, she hesitates, but there’s no reason for her not to say hello. They’re her students, she likes them.

Clarke spots her first, straightens up like she’s been caught out at something. “Hi, Indra.”

“I almost didn’t recognize the two of you with no one throwing books,” she says.

“No one throwing books yet,” says Bellamy. “Give it time.”

Indra takes a sip of her drink, smiling into the glass. “So, Clarke, have you decided to major in
classics, or are you here for another reason?"

“I’m in art,” she says. “I’m just here with Bellamy.”

It’s not a surprise, of course, but it’s still more than a little gratifying. “I’ve never fancied myself a matchmaker,” she says, mild, and Bellamy smiles.

“Maybe you should think about it. You’ve got great instincts.”

“Apparently so. Although, as far as I know, this is my only success story. I don’t believe any of my other tutorial partners have ever ended up dating.”

“Maybe if you really put your mind to it,” Clarke says. “Quit the professor business and go full time.” She glances back over her shoulder at Bellamy. “I probably wouldn’t have given him a second chance if you didn’t make me talk to him every week.”

“Yell at me every week,” he teases, and Clarke rolls her eyes.

“You yelled back.”

“Were the two of you actually together during my class?” she asks. “I never was sure.”

“No, not until after,” Bellamy says. “But still—we really do owe you one.”

“Happy to be of service,” she says, smiling herself. “I wish all my classes were that exciting.”

*

As is her custom, she only accepts Clarke’s Facebook friend request after she’s graduated, and life updates pass by on her wall without leaving much of an impression. It’s nice to see her finding a new job and posting occasional pictures of herself and Bellamy, but Indra doesn’t pay much attention. Mostly, she considers Facebook a way to see pictures of her distant relatives, not to keep track of old students.

Still, when Clarke updates her relationship status to engaged and adds, “Yes, Bellamy proposed, and no, he’s still not on Facebook,” Indra, for the first time in her life, uses the heart reaction to a status.

After all that, they’ve probably earned it.
The first time Bellamy thinks about going into Flower Hour, it’s the week *The Force Awakens* comes out, when the sign is, for once, not names that will never be his, and is instead something that might apply. But *If your favorite Star Wars character is LEIA, come inside for a free flower!* must go up on a weekend, because he didn’t see it and there’s no way they just didn’t feature her as a potential favorite. He refuses to believe Leia was just skipped.

Most days, he checks the sign out of idle curiosity. He knows, with absolute certainty, that he will never walk past and find that his name is on the sign, but he still finds it kind of fun to what they have put up. There’s generally some cool letting and decoration, and it’s not like it’s hard to see the sign. It’s just this idle thing. He doesn’t expect to ever interact with it, not unless they do another “if your favorite X is Y” kind of deal because, again, Bellamy is never going to make it onto whatever random name generator they’re using for this. And he doesn’t ever plan on needing flowers, so, yeah. Just a weird diversion.

But then, one morning in February, he’s going to school early to do retests, and he sees a cute girl in a knitted beanie doing touch-ups on the sign, which has been on a Hamilton theme all week. And, okay, he’s not completely shallow, but he was already curious, so if he can strike up a conversation with a cute girl and find out more about the sign, that’s definitely a win.

Unfortunately, he doesn’t actually have a plan for the conversation, which is how, once he gets back to the store after work and finds the same cute girl behind the register, he ends up saying, “I have a complaint about your sign.”

She cocks her head, frowning a little. “Which one? I have a lot of signs.”

“The one outside. *If your name is Angelica—*”

“That was my first guess.” She straightens up, becoming visibly more professional as he watches. “What’s the complaint?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I like the Hamilton theme. But you know how much those signs suck for people who don’t have common names? Or, even worse, people who have common names, but don’t have common names in the US.”

She thinks this over for a second. “My name is Clarke. With an e at the end. So I get some of that. Not the non-US names, but still. Did you have a suggestion, or do you just like complaining?”

It’s a valid question. “I do like complaining. How do you pick the names?” he asks, mostly to make conversation. “I know it’s not Hamilton every week.”

“How long has this been building?”

“You’re on the way to the train station.” She seems more annoyed than upset, so it feels fairly safe to add, “And I named my little sister and then spent my entire childhood getting blamed for how
she could never find anything with her name on it at souvenir shops.”

“What’s her name?”

“Octavia.”

“Oh, wow, yeah. That one never hit my radar, honestly.”

“I bet you’re out of Bort license plates too,” he says without thinking, but she gets the reference and laughs. Which is nice. Clarke-with-an-e is getting cuter by the minute, and she might not even find his attempts to make conversation completely awful. Weird names apparently isn’t as terrible a conversation starter as he thought.

“I don’t think there’s any natural way I can use Octavia for my giveaway without looking like I’m specifically targeting your sister. Is she local? Is she cute? Would she appreciate it?”

He makes a mental note that she seems to be interested in women, which doesn’t mean she can’t be interested in him, but he shouldn’t assume she is. Not that he’s really expecting it to go anywhere anyway, but it’s a good thing to keep in mind. “She’s got a boyfriend, so I don’t think there’s much point in you trying to lure her in with a free flower. But if they ever break up, I’ll let you know.”

“So your outrage is theoretical,” she says, and he nearly laughs.

“You haven’t hit my name yet either. I doubt you’re going to.”

“What is it?”

“That would be telling.”

She gives him a somewhat patronizing smile. “That’s exactly what it would be, yeah. The general response to asking is telling.”

The normal, logical thing to do would be to just tell her. She’d probably put his name up, if she has any control over the whole thing, which would be kind of cool. He wasn’t lying; he never has seen his name anywhere.

But they’ve been teasing each other, so it feels a lot more right to say, “If you find it, I’ll be sure to get my flower. But, like I said, there’s no way.”

“Well, thanks for that useful feedback, then,” says Clarke-with-an-e. “I’m looking forward to continuing to not putting your name up on my sign.”

“Me too,” he says. “Definitely the highlight of my day.”

He isn’t really expecting anything special on Monday, the start of a new theme week at best, but when he passes by late after his department meeting on Monday, he sees the name, written in the usual clear, bold hand is Rumpelstiltskin, and it feels like that has to be personal.

There’s certainly no harm in stopping by to check.

Clarke is behind the counter, looking a little bored, but she perks up at the sight of him, straightening up and grinning as if she’s been waiting. “Did I get it?” she asks.

“So close.”

“Getting warmer?”
Much closer than any of the Schuyler sisters. Did you get anyone?” he can’t help asking. He’s sure most of her names get at least a few hits a day, but sacrificing a whole day of it to a joke seems ill-advised. Even the Hamilton names were pretty common, except for maybe Angelica and Peggy.

“For what?” she asks, confused.

“I guess any of it,” he admits. “It’s a cute gimmick, but I’m wondering how much it works.”

She leans in close, a smile lurking around her lips. “Want to know the secret?”

He mirrors the movement. “Sure.”

“It can’t fail. It creates business because it’s cute and people like coming in to talk about it,” she says, which makes him feel a little less special. Apparently he’s not the only one. “I don’t check IDs or anything; it’s worth a few free flowers.” But then she adds, “Okay, I’d check yours,” and he’s back to feeling special.

He snorts. “Hey, I haven’t been lying to you. I’m telling you things aren’t my name.”

“I’ll still want proof.”

“Yeah, okay. If you ever find my name, I’ll give you proof. Seriously, how many Rumpelstiltskins?”

“Eleven. It was a good day for me. They all thought it was hilarious. The sign is great for foot traffic.”

“Glad it’s working for you,” he says, and before he knows it, he’s a regular. He goes in once a week, chats to Clarke, finds out what the most popular names were for the week, and, when she asks, starts giving her hints about his own name.

Which is actually really fucking difficult, as it turns out. He’s never put much thought into the name Bellamy before, and now he feels as if he has to learn absolutely everything about it, which mostly just teaches him that, to the extent that Bellamy is a first name, it’s usually a woman’s first name, and Clarke is definitely never going to figure it out.

If she didn’t seem to be the most stubborn person in the entire universe, he’d consider just telling her, but he thinks if he did, she’d just be pissed at him for not giving her the chance to guess herself. Still, with the information she has—his year of birth, the etymology of the last name Bellamy, and his ethnic background—he thinks she could go for thirty years without even coming close to figuring it out.

So it’s probably good that she gets a little help.

It’s a fairly unremarkable day, just a random Sunday in March. In theory, he knew that Clarke closed early on Sundays, because he’s seen her hours in the window, but it’s not the kind of thing that he considers relevant to his life. He still hasn’t even interacted with Clarke outside of the shop, after hours, or over the weekend, and he has no idea how to start. It seems weird to ask someone out when, after five months, she still doesn’t even know his name.

So he was not expecting to run into her at the park, especially not with Miller.

Miller only knows about Clarke because alcohol exists and Bellamy has been lamenting a little about how there is this smart, gorgeous, funny girl he’s definitely into, but does not know how to interact with further. Miller’s response to the situation is always, “I really can’t tell you anything
about how to flirt with women.”

Which makes him a deeply unfortunate witness for their first non-store interaction.

It is, at least, in part Bellamy’s own fault. He’s the one who throws the frisbee in deliberately the wrong direction, and he’s the one who sees it hit the water.

They both run over to survey the damage, but Bellamy gets there first; he has to admit, he’s kind of proud.

“I got it really far, right?” he calls over his shoulder, and Miller glares.

“You’re a fucking asshole, Blake!”

“Takes one to know one, Miller,” he shoots back.

Miller catches up to him at the lake shore and shakes his head. “Dude. What the fuck.”

“It was an accident,” he lies.

Miller scowls at him. “I’m not getting it.”

“You want me to get it? I’d rather just give it up for dead. Buried at sea. Viking-style.”

“It’s my frisbee.”

“I’ll buy you a new one. It’s fucking fifty degrees. That water would give my hypothermia. You’d miss my junk if it froze off.”

In theory, he knew that other people were around, and he even noticed there was a person on the bench. He’d just sort of assumed that he didn’t know them and that they weren’t paying attention. No one is supposed to care about his shit-talking.

But then he hears Clarke says, “You’d have to stay in pretty long to get hypothermia.”

He jumps and turns, hoping against hope that he’s wrong, that he won’t actually see her there, but of course there she is, sitting on a bench with a sketchpad, smiling smugly in his general direction.

Miller loves it, of course. “Thanks for the medical advice, bench girl. See? It’s fine.”

“That’s Clarke,” he says, and adds, “She doesn’t know my name,” because that should clear it up. And prevent Miller from calling him Bellamy, as a bonus.

“Wow,” she teases. “I always wondered how you’d introduce me. That was even more awkward than I thought it would be.”

He focuses on her because he knows if he looks at Miller, he will probably just throw himself in the lake. He knew the whole Clarke thing was weird, but it was so much easier to pretend it wasn’t before anyone else was witnessing it.

So he gives her a sheepish smile and says, “Hi. Sorry about–everything about this.”

“Dude,” says Miller.

“Shut up. She runs that flower shop by the train station,” he adds, mostly so Clarke won’t think he’s been talking about her.
But this is Miller, so of course that just makes it worse. “Oh, you know he’s obsessed with your signs, right?”

Clarke grins. “Yeah, I was getting that impression.”

There’s nothing to do but try to get the conversation back on track. “So, uh, what are you doing here?”

“The correct line is Do you come here often?” says Miller.

“Go jump in the lake for your frisbee and leave us alone,” he says, glaring, and Miller actually listens. At least to the extent that he leaves, even if he doesn’t jump in the lake. So apparently his massive crush on Clarke is just as massive and obvious as he thought, and probably just as hopeless, given Miller is trying to help, for once “Sorry,” he says, rubbing the back of his neck. “I guess I just—I didn’t think you lived around here.”

He’s not sure what he’s apologizing for, except for his entire life, but Clarke doesn’t call him out on it. “Why would I ever live close to my work? Makes no sense.”

“Assume I’m really bad at thinking through basically every interaction I’ve ever had with you.”

“I got that impression too. I’m drawing and pretending it’s warmer than it is,” she adds, scooting over on the bench in clear invitation, and he joins her.

“Yeah, we were playing frisbee and pretending it’s warmer than it is.”

“Until you threw the frisbee in the lake.”

“By accident,” he protests. That’s his story and he’s sticking to it. “Miller’s the one who didn’t catch it.”

She grins. “Clearly entirely his fault. I don’t think your junk would actually freeze off, by the way. You’d come out relatively unharmed, with all your, uh. Vital organs.”

He’s pretty sure his entire body flushes, including all of his vital organs. “I’m still sorry, by the way.”

“I’m not. It was funny.”

“I guess that’s about the best I could hope for. What are you drawing?” he adds.

“Nothing special. Just some sketches.”

“They’re really good,” he says, truthfully. “Not that I didn’t—you do the signs, and those are good, so I knew you were good.”

“You know you don’t actually have to feel weird, right?” she teases. “I’m happy to see you.”

“Yeah?”

“If I didn’t like talking to you, I definitely wouldn’t encourage you. I would have just told you I didn’t care what your name was and told you to leave.”

“That seems like bad customer service.”

“Okay, not in those exact words.” She drums her fingers on her sketchpad. “I definitely scared
away the guy who gave me the idea for the *if your name is* sign.”

“Really?”

“He was a douchebag! Just a douchebag with a good idea. In his honor, the featured name will never be Chad. So if that was your name—”

“Definitely not Chad, no.”

She hums, noncommittal, like she doesn’t totally believe him, which he doesn’t understand until he passes the store on Monday and sees her sign: *If your name is BLAKE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, come inside for a free flower!*

Miller did call him Blake, now that Bellamy thinks of it. He doesn’t always, but whenever they’re doing anything even vaguely resembling a sport, Miller switches into jock mode. But she couldn’t think *that’s* his name. It’s so normal.

He’d been booking it to make it before she closed, and from the way her whole face lights up when she sees him, she must not have been expecting him to show up.

“I should have said, the play is kicking into high gear, so I’m going to be scarce this week,” he explains. “Probably the whole month. Play then spring break. I’m going to be a mess until April.”

“So you’re not just running away because I finally figured out your name.”

She sounds so smug, he feels bad correcting her. “Yeah, uh–that’s my last name. Sorry.”

There’s a pause as she thinks this over, finally settling on, “So, your first name is some obscure French last name, and your last name is–Blake.”

“Yup.”

“Wow.” She cocks her head. “You ever consider switching them?”

“I like my name.” He wets his lips. “You know, last name is really pretty good. That basically counts as–”

“Nope. I got a taste of power. I’m going to figure out the first name.”

“You know, I honestly believe you. Even if I’m not sure Miller calling me Blake counts as figuring it out,” he can’t help teasing. She’s so competitive, it’s impossible not to bait her.

“You didn’t tell me. So it counts. Blake,” she adds, thoughtful. “Something Blake.”

“Something Blake,” he confirms. “Getting closer and closer.”

She waits until the play is over before she does a French last names theme week, which is so hilarious he can’t help stopping by on a Saturday, for the first time ever, just to see what she throws up. It’s busier than it usually is when he comes in, not shockingly, and Clarke doesn’t even notice him until he’s been browsing for ten minutes.

“Your name isn’t actually Mercier, is it?”

“No. But you know I don’t always come by on weekends, right? You could get it and we’d never know.”
“I was going to tell you on Monday.”

“I feel like it doesn’t count if I don’t see it. What’s tomorrow?”

“Lefevre.”

“I can confirm none of those are my name. Have you gotten any Merciers? Are people still coming in?”

“I’ve mostly gotten last names, and I’ll give flowers for last names.” She leans on the counter. “Almost recovered from the play?”

“Almost. Just in time for spring break.”

“Which is a bad thing.”

“It’s going to be fun, we’re going to Italy. But I’m going to want to murder the kids after about six hours.”

She hums, thoughtful. “I’d probably put up with a bunch of kids if I got to go to Italy.”

“Yeah, that’s basically what I’m telling myself.” He sighs. “I know this is pointless to say, but if you ever want me to just tell you my name, I will.”

“I can just call you Mr. Blake, right? That’s part of your name. It’s close enough.”

“That’s what students call me, please don’t.”

She laughs. “I’m going to get it. I keep telling you.”

“You do keep telling me.” He wets his lips. “So, I’m here, I want to relax. Anything I can do?”

“Your idea of relaxing is asking me if I have work for you?”

“I hear a lot of people use gardening to relax,” he says, with a shrug. “If there’s anything you need—”

To his relief, she looks pleased, not weirded out. “I think I can find you something, Mr. Blake.”

He very nearly screws up and says, Call me Bellamy, but he remembers at the last moment. Somehow, he doesn’t seem to have fucked this relationship up yet. There’s no reason to start now.

On Friday, she asks if he’ll be in on Saturday again, and he tells her, regretfully, that he’s got to get ready for the trip.

“Oh,” she says. “Well, have fun. I’ll see you when you get back?”

“Yeah,” he says. “Have a good week.”

“You too.”

He does, of course. He complains to his sister non-stop about everything, but that’s how he and his sister prefer to communicate, and he wishes he’d asked for Clarke’s number so he could send her pictures and tell her stories, just so he could talk to her.

His crush might be bigger than he thought, and he already thought it was pretty big.
When he gets back, he for once has nothing to do after school, so he can actually go right over to Clarke’s and say hi. It’s hard not to feel like he’s maybe making too big a deal of it, missed her more than their relationship really warrants, and then he sees the sign: *If your name is BELLAMY BRADBURY BLAKE, come inside for a free flower!*

He takes a picture, just for posterity, and heads inside to see Clarke rearranging rows of potted flowers. She perks up at the sound of the bell, breaks into a brilliant smile and, yeah.

He definitely has a shot.

“Were you stalking me while I was gone?” he teases, leaning against the wall next to her.

“Yup,” she says, unrepentant. “Did you know Bellamy doesn’t make the top one thousand last names in France? I was never going to figure it out.”

“Nope. I did try to warn you.” He frowns. “How did you?” Now that he thinks about it, it is kind of creepy. Maybe she tracked down Miller.

“Found your sister.”

That probably should have been his first guess. “So, actual stalking. Nice. I guess did give you her name.”

“I just put it on the sign. For three days,” she admits.

“I think it would have been easier to just ask me.”

“Don’t tell me you weren’t really excited to see your name on that board.”

He’s going to make the picture his new facebook profile picture, probably, so he can’t deny that. “Yeah, okay, I was. Is it weird if I say I missed you?” he asks, looking her up and down. Her hair’s kind of frizzing out and she looks tired, but gorgeous. “When I was gone.”

“I put out a beacon for your sister,” she points out. “I think it’s pretty safe to say I missed you too.”

“Awesome. Can I get a free flower, or do you need to see my ID first?”

“ID, definitely.”

He hands it over without complaint, watches her check it. “So, yeah. I’m Bellamy. Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, Bellamy.”

He swallows hard, but—she’s not going to mind. She can say no. “So, this might be too soon, since we just introduced ourselves, but I was wondering if you wanted to get dinner with me sometime.”

She smiles, bright and beautiful. “Yeah?”

“Maybe Friday. If you’re free.”

“I’m free, yeah. Dinner would be great.”

It is great, and she comes home with him after, which is even better, and the next year, on their anniversary, the sign’s out again: *If your name is BELLAMY, come in for a free flower!*
“I’m probably going to be your only taker for that one,” he tells her, leaning down for a quick kiss.

“That’s okay,” she says. “I figure it never gets old, seeing your name on the sign.”

She does it every year for their anniversary, and she’s right. It never does get old.
Jasper’s take is, of course, that Monty should just suck it up and ask, because that is Jasper’s dating philosophy: you miss 100% of the shots you don’t take. Which is, of course, completely true, but Monty doesn’t find that a motivation in the same way Jasper does.

“It’s not like this isn’t good,” he tells Jasper, after what feels like the thousandth round of I like him/so tell him that. “You’re coming at it from a different perspective.”

“Yes,” says Jasper. “A competent one.”

“You ask out girls at, like, dances and in the dining hall,” Monty goes on, ignoring him. “You’re in a low-risk, high-reward position. If girls turn you down, you just have to deal with a rejection.”

“Which sucks,” says Jasper.

“But you don’t have emotional investment!”

“This sounds a lot like a friendzone thing.”

“It does not,” says Monty, scowling. “If there is such a thing as a friendzone, and the jury is still out, I’m already there! And I like it there. It’s a good place. The problem isn’t getting knocked into the friendzone, it’s getting knocked out of it. I don’t want to make it weird.”

“Look, dude, I say this with love, but if you never make it weird, you’re never going to make it work.” He pauses. “Wow, that was deep. I should put that on an inspirational poster or something, right?”

“I think making it weird should never be your goal in dating. Like—there’s a fine line between making it weird and making it gross and uncomfortable. And you’ve definitely crossed it once or twice.”

That sobered him up. “I know. I’ve been a dick before. But you’ve learned from my mistakes! And you know Nate pretty well now, right? That means you know how to talk to him. It doesn’t have to be a big deal. Just, like—hey, you want to get dinner sometime?”

“Just like that,” Monty repeats, dubious.

“What you’re afraid of,” says Jasper, with a disconcerting amount of wisdom, “is Nate finding out that you have a giant fucking thing for him. And that’s legit! It’s really weird to tell someone you’re, like, in love with them. It’s zero to sixty in no time flat, and that’s weird. But dinner isn’t I think about marrying you someday. It’s just dinner! It’s not a big deal.”

“Huh,” says Monty. “That’s actually good advice.”
“Dude, don’t act so surprised. I think about dating literally all the time. Look, just *try*, okay?”

“Try,” Monty agrees. “I can try.”

It feels like a very minimal commitment. Like Jasper said, he’s not asking Nate to marry him or anything. All he’s doing is agreeing to maybe attempt to ask the guy he likes out on a date. He’s not even saying he’ll do it, just that he’ll try to do it.

It’s not a big deal.

*

“*Hey, do you want to get dinner?*” he mutters, in the shower. “*Hey, do you want to get dinner?* No, fuck, too vague. If I just say *dinner* it’s like, let’s go to the dining hall. *Hey, do you want to go out to dinner?* That’s probably better. But he might still think—”

“*Wanna fuck,*” supplies someone, apparently on their way into the other stall. “Direct and to the point, dude. Don’t overthink it.”

He doesn’t recognize the voice, but it’s still valid feedback.

“Thanks,” he says. “I’ll try that one out.”

“Good luck, bro. You’re gonna nail this. And then *nail this.*”

Monty sticks his head under the faucet, washing the shampoo out of his hair. It seems awfully optimistic, but the support is nice.

“Yeah,” he says. “I’m working on it.”

*

Monty sees Nate three times a week this semester, which is less than last semester, but it’s better interaction. Last semester, Monty was helping out on a play Nate was in, which meant that they saw each other a lot, but didn’t actually get to interact. Now, they’re in the same lit class, which is a lot better. Not only do they have the regular class time, but neither of them has other friends in the class, which means they talk about assignments and homework, and on Wednesday and Friday they don’t have other things to do after class, so they’ll often grab lunch together. When they’re at parties together, they hang out, and Nate’s friend Bellamy and Raven’s friend Clarke are working on their own flirtation, which means that they end up at parties together a lot.

Like Jasper said, at this point, Monty knows him pretty well, but Monty’s right too. There’s an easiness to their current relationship that Monty doesn’t want to jeopardize that with feelings.

Ideally, there would just be some kind of easy slide into dating, but at heart, he knows that Jasper is right. At some point, if he wants to make out with Nate Miller, he’s going to have to do something drastic, like mention it.

For now, though, he takes the seat next to Nate in class on Friday and says, “Hey, any exciting weekend plans?”

“You going to tell Raven so she can tell Clarke?”

“Sorry, am I not supposed to? Are you not trying to set them up?”

“Not trying, just not getting in the way. But we don’t actually have any plans. I was going to ask
you if you had anything going on that we could piggyback on.”

“Not so far.” It’s a good opportunity, so he says, “We could probably come up with something, right? Like, how hard can it be to make two people who are obviously into each other hang out?”

“You’d be amazed,” says Nate. “You like bowling?”

“Bowling?”

He shrugs. “I haven’t been in a while. Bellamy’s stupid competitive, so is Clarke, I assume Raven’s down.” The pause feels deliberate. “Does she have a boyfriend?”

“No.” He wets his lips. “Are you interested? I thought Bellamy said–”

“Oh, yeah, no, I’m gay. She’s all yours.”

“Not that either,” says Monty. “I mean, she’s not mine. And I don’t want her to be mine. She’s awesome, don’t get me wrong, but–Raven is currently single and unattached and I don’t want her attached to me. It sounds like I’m protesting too much now, right?”

“Definitely like something is happening,” says Nate, amused.

In theory, this is a good time to say something like, I’m not into her, I’m into you. In practice, he says, “My best friend Jasper had a thing for her freshman year and she shot him down, and then we found out she had a secret boyfriend no one knew about who cheated on her with Clarke and now I just kind of try to make no assumptions about her love life and distance myself from it as much as humanly possible.”

“Wow. That’s–something.”

“Anyway, yeah. Everyone’s single, why?”

“Just trying to figure out if we should be doing additional matchmaking.”

“I think probably not. If we bring Jasper too, that’s pretty normal, right? Six people going bowling. Bellamy and Clarke aren’t going to notice we’re setting them up.”

Nate rolls his eyes. “I’m pretty sure it would take an actual physical blow to the head to get them to notice, yeah. But that would be fun. Do you have my number?”

“No.”

“Okay, let’s do that after class. We can figure out a time to meet.”

“Cool,” says Monty, trying not to look too giddy. It’s not an actual date, obviously. But it’s a lot better than he was expecting.

* 

Me: Want to come bowling tonight?
Say yes

Jasper: If I don’t show up will it just be you and Nate?

Me: No
You and Raven can heckle as me and Clarke fail to flirt
Jasper: Yeah, that’s not new
You should at least find a girl who wants to date me so I can heckle with her
Like you heckle with Nate
That’s called being a friend

Me: I’ll pay for your shoes

Jasper: Good enough

* 

The interaction sets the new, somewhat disconcerting template for their interactions over the next few weeks. Monty keeps coming up with vague plans to ask Nate out, and then, before he can, Nate will ask if he and his friends have plans, and it inevitably morphs into a group outing. Which is, obviously, better than nothing, but it’s still not really what he’s trying to do. For the most part, he can take comfort in the fact that Clarke and Bellamy aren’t dating either, so it’s not like he’s alone in his incompetence, but that only helps so much. And he feels as if it might help, for them to get it together first. Then dating would become a conversation starter, and maybe he’d be better prepared for it than he was when it was about his hypothetical interest in Raven.

Anything is possible.

Instead, the next time it comes up, they’re at a party, and Jasper is actually being mildly successful at hitting on a girl, which is enough to disconcert everyone. No offense to Jasper, but Monty’s not actually sure if this has ever happened before.

Nate apparently has the same question.

“What’s his success rate look like?”

“Who, Jasper?”

“Yeah. I feel like every time we’re out, he’s flirting with someone new.”

“That’s about right, yeah.” Monty takes a sip of his drink. “He says you miss all the shots you don’t take, so if you like someone, you should let them know. He did a lot of pining in high school, I think it convinced him that life is short and he should just—“ He waves vaguely. “Find out and move on.”

“So he gets shot down every time he goes out?”

“Pretty much. But he’s not that invested. It’s a real improvement, honestly. He was kind of a capital-n nice guy in high school. Now he’s a flirt and he’s happy. Sometimes he gets laid, sometimes he doesn’t, but he’s started to think of every rejection as a learning experience.”

“Huh.” He shakes his head, laughing. “Yeah, no. I can’t imagine that.”

“Yeah, me neither. I’m definitely a crusher. As in I get crushes, not some weird slang I just made up that describes my dating technique.”

Nate snorts. “Thanks for clearing that up.” He nudges Monty with his elbow. “So, you have a crush?”

So that was a massive miscalculation, because now he’s said that, and Nate knows it, which means that Jasper’s method will not work, because if Monty ever asks him out, he’ll know Monty has a
crush on him. It can no longer be casual.

Any time he can upload his consciousness into an unfeeling cyborg body, he definitely will. He’s so ready.

“I just get crushes,” he splutters. “Sometimes.”

Nate smirks. “Uh huh. Definitely not hiding anything right now.”

“Definitely not,” he agrees. “What about you?”

“Crusher,” says Nate. “Not that I can’t flirt, but—I never end up in relationships unless I already like the guy, you know?”

“I never end up in relationships no matter what,” says Monty. “But I know in theory, yes. That is how I assume I’d be, if I ever dated anyone.”

“You’ll have to let me know when you find out,” he says.

Monty takes another very long drink and tries not to panic. “Yeah. I’ll keep you posted.”

* 

If he were a competent human, Monty would probably leverage Jasper starting to date the girl from the party into the same kind of conversation he was planning to try to have about Clarke and Bellamy potentially dating, but since he fucked up and told Miller he get crushes and has crushes and everything is terrible, he doesn’t really know what to do.

“Ask. Him. Out,” says Jasper. “I don’t even care at this point, just, like—do it. You guys have been flirting for weeks, he likes you, he keeps coming up with excuses to see you. Who cares if he knows you’re into him? You want that. Because then you’d have a boyfriend. I’m just saying.”

“Feedback accepted. I’ll stop complaining to you and just suffer alone.”

“Or ask him out.”

“Yeah, I like mine better. I’m going to stick with that.”

Jasper shakes his head. “Have fun dying alone.”

“Can’t wait.”

*

On Friday, Raven has plans and Jasper has a date, which means that it’s just Monty, Nate, Clarke, and Bellamy, watching a movie in Nate and Bellamy’s room. If Jasper knew about it, he’d tell Monty that this is a double date and golden opportunity for Monty to make a move, but since he’s still not telling Jasper about these things anymore, he’s suffering alone.

Still, when Nate opens the door and there’s no one else there, Monty is very tempted to call in some backup.

“Am I early?” he asks, frowning.

“Uh, no.” Nate rubs the back of his neck. “Bellamy and Clarke ditched us.”
“Oh my god, are they actually dating? Is that happening?”

“They’re, uh—they’re actually trying to set us up,” he admits. “At least, that’s the story Bellamy gave Clarke. We had a bet going.”

Monty blinks a few times. “A bet?”

“Which of us managed to make a move first. So Bellamy won and set me up at the same time, which is, like, next level. That’s probably the most competent thing he’s ever done.” He rubs the back of his neck, clearly flustered. “You can leave,” he adds. “If you’re not interested in a date.”

He’s still trying to recover; it’s not going great. “Wait, what?”

“I like you,” says Nate. “I’ve been trying to figure out how to ask you out for weeks, but I didn’t—”

“You kept wanting to hang out as a group!” says Monty. “I was going to try to ask you out but then every time you wanted to do something with everyone and I didn’t want you to think I didn’t want to hang out so—”

Nate’s laughing, which Monty’s never actually seen before, and that’s awesome. And it is kind of funny.

“So do you want to get pizza and watch a movie and maybe make out?”

“Honestly, at this point, I kind of want to start with making out and go from there. No offense.”

“None taken,” says Nate, and pulls him in.

* 

**Me:** You might have had a point about open communication  
Talking definitely works as a first step to dating  

**Jasper:** I keep telling you, I’m a genius  
Congrats, right?

**Me:** Definitely  
Life is good
Bellamy doesn’t really know how he ends up with a job at Fantasy Costco.

There is, for certain, some kind of interview process. The experience of it exists in his mind, but hazy, as if it happened in a dream. In all honesty, he would believe it really did happen in a dream, if anyone told him that. It seems more plausible that Garfield the Deals Warlock comes to people in their sleep and asks if they want to work for him than it does that he advertises in the paper or something.

Regardless of how he ends up there, Bellamy does, for the most part, like his job. It’s retail, but there are fewer customers than at his previous jobs, and the customers aren’t nicer, but he at least develops more personal relationships with them. And, of course, his boss is a giant wierdo, but, again, that’s fairly standard for retail.

And, of course, he’s on the moon, which puts him in a good position to, perhaps, find a better, cooler job.

Which is why he asks Clarke, about two months into his employment, “How would I get a job at the Bureau?”

Clarke is a fairly low-level Bureau of Balance employee, something like his equivalent, in her own organization. It’s just that being a low-level employee at the Bureau of Balance involves going out into the world and finding dangerous artifacts to help save the world, and being a low-level employee at Fantasy Costco involves cleaning up vomit in the aisles. Which he assumed there wouldn’t be much of, because all of their customers are professional adults, but apparently that’s not as much of a help as he hoped it would be.

So, again, a new job might be nice.

“I ran into a Grand Relic and didn’t die,” she says. “I think it’s company policy to hire anyone who does that. Why?”

“I wouldn’t mind a change in careers,” he admits, and immediately looks around to see if Garfield is going to appear out of nowhere and murder him for disloyalty. Which is another reason he wants to leave. He actually is disloyal, and Garfield actually is terrifying. “I already drank the Voidfish juice, and that’s half the battle, right?”

She smiles. “I guess. I think interacting with a relic is a lot more of the battle.”

“And you do that?”

“As little as possible. I just do research.”

“I could do research,” he says. “I could probably interact with relics.”
She looks amused, and he knows exactly why. He doesn’t know a ton about Bureau business, but he hears stories. He knows how many Bureau employees have gone rogue, how many faces he doesn’t see anymore because relics have tempted them.

That might be the real reason he wants out of here. He doesn’t want to wait around for one of the people he likes to go missing or go evil while he’s restocking artifacts.

“What makes you think that?” she asks. “Not saying you’re wrong,” she adds. “Just curious.”

“I interact with a lot of weird shit,” he points out, which is not actually untrue. “I know relics are on another level, but that’s why I’m asking about training. I could get better at it.”

“You really want to do that?”

“Is there a reason you think I shouldn’t?”

She shrugs, but it’s not convincing as a casual motion, and something like lead settles in the pit of his stomach. She doesn’t want him to do this. It doesn’t mean he can’t, but he sort of assumed she’d be supportive.

“I figured Fantasy Costco wasn’t a bad gig, but now that I’m thinking about it, I’m not surprised you want out. You’re one of the only employees other than Garfield I’ve ever seen more than once.”

“Yeah, that’s the other thing. We’re losing employees and never getting them back, so I’m worried there’s some kind of arcane portal in the back where Garfield’s sacrificing people or something. Feels like the kind of job I should get out of before they want me gone.”

“Better to quit than to be sacrificed to the arcane portal in the back, yeah.” She worries her lip, but her expression is steady, and he can’t make up his mind what the problem is. “You might as well ask the director. I don’t know how they hire for any other positions, but like you said, you drank the Voidfish juice, you already live here, I don’t see why the Bureau wouldn’t want you.”

“That’s what I was thinking.” He finishes his beer and waves at Gina for another. “But you think I shouldn’t,” he adds. It’s obviously true, and he might as well get the most information possible.

“I didn’t say that,” she protests. “Just—it’s dangerous. You know that, right?”

“It’s all dangerous,” he says. “And you do it.”

“Maybe we should both quit. Start a new business in Faerun.”

There’s levity in her voice, but like everything else she’s said, it doesn’t quite land, and he takes a second to consider her. She’s always tired, but it seems worse than normal tonight, and she’s gotten more and more weighed down as they’ve been talking.

“You want to?” he asks.

“No, not really. Just a bad day.”

“You could have told me.”

Her smile feels a little stronger this time. “I would have eventually. I was just—decompressing.”

“So this was the wrong day to ask about quitting my job and coming over to yours, huh?”
That makes her actually laugh, soft but real. “It’s not that I don’t want you around. But it’s nice to have someone who feels safe.”

“If I was in the Bureau, we could keep each other safe,” he points out. “A lot better than you can keep me safe if Garfield goes rogue.”

“That’s true. I think you should do it,” she adds. “Just—be careful, okay?”

“I haven’t even gotten a job yet.”

“Be careful all the time with everything,” she says, and he smiles.

“Always am. So, tell me about your bad day,” he says, and it never gets to the point where he feels like he gets it. But by the end of the night, she’s relaxed again, smiling and easy, and when they say goodbye, she thanks him.

“You should talk to the director,” she adds. “It would be nice to have you around more.”

“I will,” he promises. “Get some rest, Clarke. I hope tomorrow goes better.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

* 

Miller hits Fantasy Costco the next day, which means Bellamy not only has a chance to get a second opinion on his potential career change, but can try to figure out what exactly is wrong with Clarke.

“How’s life at the Bureau?” he asks. He’s ostensibly showing Miller the new arrivals, but that’s mostly so that Garfield won’t think they’re not busy. As a regulator, Miller’s away from headquarters more than Clarke, and he and Bellamy have to be a little more creative in their hanging out.

“Fucking bad week,” he says.

“Yeah?”

“One of the seekers went rogue.”

“Shit. No wonder Clarke was in such a shitty mood.” Something occurs to him. “You weren’t with him, were you?”

“No. Seekers work alone. Regulators monitor reclaimers, when we do it.”

“Seems kind of stupid, if seekers are going rogue.”

“They’re supposed to be able to deal with—”

He and Miller both realize what he said at the same time and wince, but it’s too late to change it. Garfield appears out of nowhere, his usual leer in place, directed at Miller. “Did someone say deal?” he asks, and Bellamy flees.

It stays with him for the rest of the day, though. It’s not just that seekers are, apparently, going rogue, which he used to primarily associate with reclaimers and regulators, it’s that they’re considered to not need help. Almost everyone in the Bureau has teams, but seekers do their work alone, on behalf of distant allies.
Once his shift ends, he goes to the Bureau and asks to meet with the director, and to his surprise, she agrees.

“From Fantasy Costco, yes?” she asks, surveying him with mild curiosity. “How may I help you?”

“I want to partner with Clarke Griffin,” he says. “As a seeker.”

“I see. Seekers don’t have partners, usually.”

“Yeah, that seems weird to me. They’re in danger, the same as everyone else. Apparently you had someone go rogue yesterday—” She winces, and he presses the advantage. “I assume you don’t want the same thing to happen to Clarke. I don’t either.”

That gets her attention in a new way, and she looks him over again, as if she’s seeing him for the first time. “So, you want to protect your friend.”

“I want to help,” he says. “I know whatever you’re doing here is hard and important, and I’d rather be doing it than stocking fantasy utili-kilts in bulk.”

“When you put it like that, the logic is inescapable,” says the director, dry. “Have you talked to the other interested parties?” At his blank look, she sighs. “Clarke and Garfield the Deals Warlock.”

“Is that an official part of his name?”

“No one knows and everyone is afraid to ask. Feel free to update me if you find out. Assuming there are no objections from anyone else, I have none.”

“That’s it?” he asks, wary. “That’s your entire application process?”

“I do review all hires on the moon. If you weren’t Bureau material, you wouldn’t be working at Fantasy Costco.”

“So you’re saying Garfield the Deals Warlock is Bureau material?”

There’s a brief pause while she considers this, and then she recovers. “Okay, good talk, keep me posted.”

Bellamy just grins. “Yeah, good talk.”

*  
He’s been to Clarke’s room once before, when the two of them got too drunk and she decided he couldn’t be trusted to make his way back to his own place. So, even though he was, again, very drunk, he finds his way back there once he’s done with the director without too much trouble.

Clarke opens the door looking a little frazzled, softer than he’s used to, with her hair in soft waves. She’s wearing pajamas, even though it’s not that late, and he has to smile.

“Hi.”

“Hi. What are you doing here?”

“Coming to see you, obviously. I asked the director if you could have a partner.”

She frowns. “You want to be my partner?”
It’s tempting to try to deflect the question, to tell her that’s not it, but it is the heart of it, isn’t it? It would be stupid to lie about it.

“Yeah. I didn’t know what I’d do, but—I don’t know why seekers don’t have people looking out for them. It seems like that would be useful.” He rubs the back of his neck. “I don’t know if you know this, but I worry about you. When you’re off the base. I’d feel better if I knew someone was looking out for you. If I was looking out for you. But if you don’t want—”

Her laughter is soft. “Do you know why I didn’t want you to join up?”

“Because you were having a shitty day and you were in a shitty mood?”

“Close. I liked not having to worry about you. And I liked knowing you were here when I got back. I didn’t want you to be off on Faerun when I was gone. It would have sucked.”

Bellamy takes a step closer, and Clarke raises her hands to tug him down by the front of his shirt, the kiss warm and perfect, except for the way he can’t stop smiling.

“So you do want a partner,” he murmurs.

“A partner sounds perfect.”

“Great, because I need backup, like, tomorrow.”

“Backup for what?”

“I have to quit my old job.”

She laughs against his neck. “Don’t tell me you’re scared of Garfield the Deals Warlock.”

“Don’t tell me you’re not.”

“I definitely am.” She pulls him down for another kiss. “But we’re a team now, right?”

“As soon as I quit, yeah.”

She tugs him toward the bed. “Great. Let’s do that tomorrow.”

He grins. “Tomorrow sounds perfect.”

* 

“You’re quitting?” Garfield asks. He honestly sounds more confused than hurt, which is honestly a huge relief. “But why? Fantasy Costco is where dreams come to come true! Where will you go?”

He glances over his shoulder at Clarke. “I think my dream actually did come true. So I’m going to go to the Bureau and find a new one.”

“How touching. I will need some of your blood before you leave.”

It probably says bad things about him that this strikes him as relatively benign, as requests go.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

“Okay, well, uh—thanks for the job. It was really—something.”
“Good luck on your next adventure. I’m sure I’ll see you again soon.’

It sounds vaguely like a threat, but there’s nothing to say but, “Thanks. Looking forward to it.”

Because, really. He can’t wait.
Fill for flowerclarkes! Prompt: Harry Potter au where both Bellamy and Clarke independently discover the room of requirement and then all of a sudden start running into each other there and getting angry because this is supposed to be /my/ room and what do you mean I'm not using it right I can use it however I want to

Obviously, Bellamy is happy to be a prefect. It’s a huge honor, and he thinks he’s good at it. For all he knows he can be a little intimidating, he’s always been good with kids, and the younger students know that he’s someone they can trust, that they can come to for advice and help, when they need it.

It’s just that they think they need help a lot. Every time he’s in the Hufflepuff common room, he’s constantly besieged, being asked for homework help, to mediate disputes, what he’s reading, what he’s doing, if he wants to play chess, and even if he deals with them, it feels constant.

As problems to have go, it’s a good one, but sometimes he does just want time to himself.

The library is a little better, but he still thinks of it as more of a social space. It’s where he can do work with his friends from other houses, and he still has plenty of people coming up to ask him for help.

What he wants, by two months into his fifth year, is to just have a place where he can breathe. And, maybe, play video games. The ban on technology is still newly lifted, and even though Hufflepuff has the highest concentration of muggles and muggleborns, his Nintendo Switch is still something of a novelty.

He’s not looking for the Room of Requirement, when he finds it. He’s heard rumors about it, of course, but mostly as a place to hide things, not a place to hide people. But the door appears when he’s thinking how much he needs a break from everything, and he knows it wasn’t there before, so it must be a place for him to get away.

It’s clear, when he goes in, that he’s not the only one to use the room for this purpose. There are half-finished projects lying around, things that are less hidden and more private. There’s definitely some porn, which makes sense even if he has no interest in investigating it, and a bed, and a couch.

Most importantly for his purposes, it has a television and a place to plug his Switch in, so he flips the cushion on the couch, puts his feet up, and settles in for a few hours of real, honest-to-god privacy.

What a concept.

*  

Going to the room becomes a part of his routine. He doesn’t do it often, both because he wants to be available for the kids who want to talk to him and because he doesn’t want to hog the space. The room seems pretty good about not appearing when people are in there and really need to
be alone, or at least that’s his interpretation. There have been times when he passes by and the door refuses to appear, and once he monitored it after that and saw Gina and Raven leaving after, straightening their robes. But other times, he’s been in there and had other people come in, so apparently the room considers solitude to be his preference, not his need. And, to be fair, he’s never been upset about having the company. Miller and Monty came in once, clearly looking to hook up, but they were happy to play some games with him, and he left after to give them some alone time. And the other people he’s in there are mostly people he likes, ones who are looking for solitude of their own and don’t bother him.

After about a month, Clarke Griffin shows up, and that’s—different.

It’s not, precisely, that he dislikes Clarke. He learned early on that Slytherin was full of pureblooded bigots, but Miller is a Slytherin, and they made friends fast, so he was more wary of them than outright hostile. He and Clarke clashed in a fairly natural way, but it was a clash of personalities, not of ideals. They’re just the kind of people who liked to bicker, and they still like to bicker.

They’re not really good at being friendly, though.

Clarke takes a second to take him in. He’s on the couch with a bag of chocolate frogs, playing *Breath of the Wild*. It’s what he’s done basically every time he’s come in here, except sometimes he has different snacks.

“Really?” she finally asks.

“What?”

She flops down next to him on the couch, putting her feet up with a huff. “You need a special room to play video games?”

“I need a special room to get some alone time. The first years really want to tell me how to kill moblins, and they suck at it.”

“How are you supposed to kill moblins?”

“Wait until they’re asleep and rain death from above.” He glances at her, frowning. “What do you do in here?”

She bristles. “Why should I tell you?”

“Because if you don’t, you can’t do it. I don’t mind sharing, but I’m not leaving just so you can do some unidentified thing.”

“What if I want privacy?” she asks, in a pointed way, and he tries very hard to not think about Clarke coming in here for some alone time.

“I just got here, so give me an hour and then it’s all yours.”

She thinks it over, then says, “I’m working on a project.”

“That’s it?”

“All you’re doing is playing video games, is that supposed to be better?”

“Not better. I’m just surprised you’re being so sketchy about a project.”
She huffs. “It’s a Slytherin thing.”

“You’re not making this make any more sense.”

“Secret santa,” she finally says. “We’re doing a house secret santa and the point is half coming up with something that your giftee will like and half figuring out who got you and what the gift is. So I’m making mine somewhere there aren’t any Slytherins.”

“That’s actually kind of cute.”

“Way better than video games,” she teases, and he kicks her foot.

“Shut up.”

*

When he gets back from winter break, Bellamy actually finds himself rethinking his use of the room of requirement. In part, it’s that he assumes Clarke won’t be there, now that her project is done, and she’d become something of a perk, so if she’s gone, he’ll have a lot less fun. She was coming in at the same time he was every week, and they weren’t exactly hanging out, but it was close. She made fun of him for needing a place to hide from the Hufflepuffs and he threatened to tell the Slytherins what she was working on.

Fun, by their standards.

But he also has to admit it doesn’t really feel needed like it used to. The first and second years have settled in and made their own friends, so they’re coming to him less, and he could probably just stay in the common room.

He doesn’t want to, but he could.

This is, presumably, why he can’t get the door to appear, though. Because he doesn’t need a place to be alone right now, not really.

Honestly, what he needs is a place where he can hang out with Clarke, but—

The door, obediently, materializes in the wall, and when he opens it, Clarke is already there, sitting on the couch with her legs tucked under her.

He can’t help his grin. “Hey, how was your break?”

She moves her books so there’s room for him to put his stuff down. “Okay. How about yours?”

“Kind of awkward. My sister is really bitter that I got magic powers and she didn’t so every time I go home she’s angry at me for like a solid week. So I barely have time for her to get over before I’m coming back.”

“I guess that would be weird for muggle families.”

“I can’t decide if it’s would be worse if she was a squib. They’re probably both tough.”

“Is she your only sibling?”

“Yeah. What about you, any siblings?”

“No, just me.”
“But you’re halfblood, right?”

“Yeah. I think my parents wanted more kids, but it wasn’t in the cards.”

They chat about families, and it’s only when they’re getting ready to leave and he remembers how he got the room to open that he realizes he doesn’t know what she was doing.

“What did you need in here, anyway?”

“Oh, one of the first years is sick, I didn’t want to catch anything.”

He snorts. “I’m sure there are other places you can go to not get sick, Clarke.”

“I was here, the door appeared, so I must have needed it. QED.”

“QED,” he agrees. “So I’m not going to see you here next week?”

“Not unless I need it for something.”

“Cool. I guess we’ll find out.”

*

“Did you know technology still doesn’t work in the Slytherin common room?” she asks him next week, when he finally remembers to actually ask what she’s doing. They spent about an hour talking about movies, somehow. He’s still not sure how.

“So, let me get this straight—“

“Queer,” says Clarke.

“What?”

“You’re not straight, right? I’m not either. So we’re getting it queer.”

He laughs. “Okay, yeah, let me get this queer. You made fun of me for needing a special room to play video games, but here you are dicking around on your phone.”

“Your Switch works in your common room, you don’t need a special place for it.”

“Your phone works in the library.”

“So does your Switch. Where is it, by the way? Did you beat the game?”

“I can actually play in the common room now,” he says without thinking. “It’s quieted down.”

She nudges his shoulder. “So what are you doing here?”

The answer is, of course, looking for her, but he can’t say that. “Games are fine, but I still can’t really concentrate on homework in the common room, so—”

“So, you’re such a giant nerd that you come to the room of requirement to do homework.”

“The homework needs to get done, Clarke.”

She smirks over her shoulder. “But it didn’t.”
“And you barely looked at your phone.”

“Well, I didn’t have that much to do.” She bites the corner of her mouth. “But I’ll probably want to do the same thing next week, so—”

He nearly sags with the relief of it. “So I’ll see you then.”

*

By the third meeting, Bellamy’s sort of forgotten about the logistics of what I need a place to see Clarke might be. She’s usually there before him, and he figured that it wasn’t a big deal. Even if she wasn’t there, he could still have a place to meet her.

So when he goes over early because he actually wants to get some work done, he’s not expecting it to make any difference. She’ll show up when she shows up. No big deal.

Instead, when he opens the door, Clarke just kind of—appears, in her pajamas, looking confused and disoriented.

“Bellamy?”

“Hey,” he says, slow. “I, uh—came early.”

“What am I doing here?”

“I guess I needed you,” he offers, because he’s not sure what the fuck else to say. He spontaneously summoned her. There’s no other explanation.

To his relief, she laughs. “Wow, that’s actually really smooth. Seriously, what have you been coming here for?”

“I needed somewhere to spend time with you.”

“Really?”

“That’s how I get the door to show up, yeah.”

She bites her lip, grinning. “I just ask for somewhere to hook up.”

“And then you never use it.”

“I haven’t used it yet,” she corrects, tugging him in. “What were you doing here early?”

“Nothing this important,” he says, and kisses her.

*

Next week, they go to the room together, which Bellamy has to admit is a lot more efficient.

“So, is this an acceptable use of the room of requirement?” he teases, kissing her jaw. “Or do we need to play video games too?”

“This is all I’ve been wanting to do with the room of requirement for weeks,” she says. It’s not like they haven’t made out other places, but he’ll admit that he’s been looking forward to being here. It feels like their place. “But I wouldn’t mind playing video games after we hook up.”
Fill for exvern! Prompt: We're best friends and have been dating for over a month now but you won't kiss me so should we just break up and just be friends? But turns out you didn't know we were dating.

Clarke doesn’t claim to be good at dating. Prior to her senior year, she had had exactly one boyfriend, and it was Finn, and it went so badly that she thinks it was probably actually worse than having no experience at all. It set her back, in terms of competence.

Which makes the prospect of dating Bellamy very, very daunting.

For one thing, it’s Bellamy, and if anyone told her last year that she would be thinking about dating him, she would have laughed in their faces. But they were both working at the mall over the summer, and she got to actually talk to him, instead of just kneejerk bickering, and not only is he now one of her best friends, she really likes him, and she thinks he likes her too, and he’d probably be a pretty great boyfriend.

All she has to do is figure out how to ask.

“Don’t overthink it,” Raven advises.

“Have you met me?”

“Just saying, he’s crazy about you. It’s not going to be hard.”

“I should just ask him to the dance, right? That’s easy.”

“That means you have to go to the dance, but sure.”

Clarke has to smile. “You’re going to the dance.”

“I’m helping Monty DJ, that’s different. You’ll be at the dance, which is not actually romantic.”

“It’s contextually romantic. If I ask him to come to the dance with me, I’m asking him out. Right?”

“That does sound like a date, yeah. But you could ask him to go to a movie. Dinner, maybe. Tell him you want to hang out and then jump him when he shows up.”

“I’m thinking that’s second, third, and fourth dates.”

“That means you’re waiting a while to jump him, but sure. Go with that.”

“I’m okay with going slow,” she admits. “I want to do it right.”

She and Raven had very different reactions to the Finn thing: Clarke turned in on herself and Raven fucked Bellamy on the rebound. Even if Clarke didn’t want to deal how Raven did, she understood it, and she knows Raven feels the same way about Clarke’s coping mechanisms.
So Raven puts her hand on Clarke’s shoulder, squeezes once. “Then I think you should ask him to the dance.”

Clarke smiles. “Okay, yeah. I will.”

*

She finds Bellamy in the library during their free period, because Bellamy is, at heart, Hermione: when in doubt, go to the library.

“Hey,” he says, giving her a smile. “What’s up?”

She takes a deep breath. “Are you going to the dance tomorrow?”

“I wasn’t planning to, why?”

“I thought—I was hoping you’d want to come with me.”

He frowns a little. “You’re going?”

“I thought we could go together. Just—see how it goes.”

For a second, he just frowns at her, but then his expression shifts, goes soft, and he gets it. “Yeah, okay. Do you want me to pick you up?”

She lets out a soft, relieved laugh, ducking her head. “That would be great.”

“Cool,” he says. “It’s a date.”

*

As Raven predicted, the dance itself isn’t great. She and Monty do their best with the music, but they’re fighting an uphill battle. It’s mostly just awkward, and Clarke will admit that there are about a thousand places she’d rather be.

Bellamy looks even more miserable, but he seems to have decided his lack of interest in the venue isn’t going to stop him being a good date. He sticks to her side except when he’s grabbing them food, makes jokes about how awkward it is, does his best to make sure she’s having fun.

Which is also an uphill battle.

“Maybe one dance and then we can go do something else?” she suggests.

He snorts. “I tried to warn you.”

“You did. But I wanted—it felt like a good gesture.”

“Yeah, I get that.”

“Okay, so—” Like he’s listening in on them, Monty starts up a slow song, and she offers Bellamy her hand. “One dance?”

“I’m a shitty dancer.”

“I don’t mind.”

It’s by far the best part of the event. Bellamy dressed up a little, made sure he looked nice and he’s
smiling and close, and he likes her. *Romantic* is, like Raven said, a stretch, but she’ll settle for nice.

“So, what do you want to do now?” he asks.

“I could go for a burrito,” she decides. “Want to go to Ana’s?”

“That sounds great.”

They split a burrito, and when Clarke nudges his foot under the booth, he nudges back, smiling.

* 

She doesn’t mean to follow Raven’s date template exactly, but in her defense, Bellamy starts it, because he asks her to the movies on Friday.

It’s honestly a little bit of a relief. The past week hasn’t been *bad*, by any means; obviously, she’s mostly seen Bellamy at school, but there’s been a lot of physical contact, her cuddling into his side at lunch and his putting his arm around her, a little more casual footsie, but she feels like she’s been making all the first moves.

“Yeah, that would be fun,” she says. “What’s out right now?”

“I haven’t seen *Coco* yet.”

It’s not exactly a date movie, but Clarke hasn’t seen it either, and she really wants to, which seems more important. It’s not like they need to go to a romance for it to be a good night out. She’d honestly rather see a movie they’re both into. *Coco* sounds like a great first date movie for the two of them.

“Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Cool. We can grab something to eat first? I’ll pick you up at like six.”

“Perfect.”

When she tells her mother, Abby frowns a little. “Do we need to talk about this?”

“Talk about what?”

“I know Bellamy isn’t your first boyfriend, but–is there anything you need? I want you to be safe and happy.”

Clarke feels her neck heat. “We already had the talk, I still remember it. And we’re not–we’re taking it slow, okay? I really like him, I’m not–he’s a really good guy.”

“I’m not worried about that. I like Bellamy. I’m just–if there’s anything you need to talk about, I’m here. And I’d like you home by midnight.”

As conversations go, it’s relatively painless, and Clarke knows she should be grateful for it, but mostly it feels kind of awkward. Like her mother is watching them or something.

“I’m supposed to be home by midnight,” she tells Bellamy, sliding into the passenger seat.

“I told Octavia ten, it’s not a very long movie.” He flashes her a smile. “So, where are we eating?”

They do the mall food court; he pays for dinner and popcorn, she pays for the movie and soda.
Every now and then, her attention wanders to the fact that they’re on a date, and she wonders if she should try to take his hand or something, but it’s in his lap, and she feels awkward.

Dating really does suck. Even when she’s dating Bellamy, it’s stressful.

“I had a really good time tonight,” she offers, in the car outside her house, and he smiles.

“Yeah, me too. Thanks for coming with me.”

“It’s not a hardship,” she teases.

“Hey, you didn’t always like hanging out with me.”

They make eye contact for a long, heavy moment, and Clarke wants to lean in so badly, to kiss him like she’s been dreaming about, but he clears his throat, looks away.

“So, uh–see you tomorrow? We’re doing video games at Miller’s, right?”

“Yeah,” she says, biting back on her disappointment. She _wanted_ slow. Slow is good.

Despite her best efforts, he must be able to tell something is off, because he reaches over to brush her hair off her forehead, a warm, sweet gesture that really does wonders for her mood.

“Goodnight, Clarke.”

“Goodnight.”

“Did you have fun?” her mother asks, clearly surprised to see her. “I expected you home later.”

“He has his sister to look after,” she says. “But yeah. I had fun.”

* *

A month later, it’s less fun.

“I should just break up with him, right?” she asks, face down on the table.

Raven snorts. “Yeah, that’s the way to deal with the situation. Your relationship is moving too slowly, so instead of telling your boyfriend you want to get laid, you should just dump him. God forbid you have a conversation.”

“It’s not _just_ that,” Clarke protests. “He’s not—I feel like he’s not really that into it. I’m always making the first move. Maybe I’m misreading things. He probably just didn’t want to hurt my feelings.”

“Yeah, maybe. I’m just saying, I’d ask him what he wanted before I skipped right to breaking up. You say he’s not into you, but I’m the one who sees the two of you together. Every time you kiss his cheek he looks like he’s going to die of happiness. If he doesn’t want to date you, obviously you guys should break up. I just think there’s maybe something else going on.”

“Maybe.” She sighs. “I’ll talk to him before I break up with him.”

“That’s all I’m asking.”

* *

She really is meaning to, but it’s _so hard_, to have an actual conversation. Because being with
Bellamy is about ninety percent good, if not more. There’s cuddling and warmth and she knows how much he likes her, and if not for the fact that he and Raven had hooked up, she’d think he just wasn’t interested in sex at all. Which she could live with, probably.

But they should talk about that too. She knows that’s the real solution, but when he invites her over to watch a movie “or something” on Saturday, it seems a lot easier to climb into his lap to kiss him.

As always, she’s never claimed to be good at this.

He doesn’t push her away, but he doesn’t respond either; he’s frozen, and that’s almost worse, this perfect boy she adores going cold and still under her.

“Clarke—” he starts, when she pulls away, back into her own space.

“You could have just said no,” she says, making herself angry instead of hurt. “When I asked you out.”

He blinks rapidly, as if he’s waking up. “You asked me out?” he asks. He sounds genuinely confused, like the idea had never occurred to him.

Which is ridiculous.

“We’ve been dating for a month!”

He drops back onto the couch with a groan, rubbing his face. “Holy shit. That’s—we have?”

“You didn’t know?”

“Fuck, I didn’t know what was happening. We were dating?”

“I guess not,” she says, gathering her knees to her chest. “I thought—”

“I’m so fucking into you,” he says. “It’s been—fuck. I thought you wanted to hook up, and I couldn’t just—when did we start dating? Why didn’t I know?”

“The dance last month,” she says, feeling herself start to smile. “Go back to how into me you are.”

He slides his hand into her hair, tugs her up, and kisses her, the kiss she’s been wanting, all warmth and affection. She melts into his arms, kissing back, and it’s so, so perfect.

“I thought you wanted to get back into dating,” he says. “When you asked me to the dance, I thought you just wanted backup. I wasn’t going to say no, but—” His laugh is less amusement and more disbelief. “Fuck, you were asking me out. And then I asked if you wanted to see a movie and—”

“And it was a nice second date.”

“Fuck,” he says, and tugs her closer, kisses her again, longer and deeper, and before she knows it she’s on her back with him on top of her, which is basically exactly where she wanted to be. “I can’t believe I could have been doing this for a month.”

“A lot longer than a month.”

He grins. “Okay, I can’t believe you thought I didn’t want to do that for a month. Can I make it up to you?”
She tangles her fingers in his hair, pulls him back in. “Please,” she says, and he does.

* 

“So, I was thinking we could go on a date tonight,” Bellamy says, on Friday. “Dinner, a movie, we make out after. Completely traditional and unambiguous.”

They’ve hung out after school three days this week, made out a lot, and Clarke had to buy better concealer to hide the hickey he left on her shoulder. Raven has been the smuggest person alive, for which Clarke can’t blame her. But she’s never been so sure she has a boyfriend, and a great one at that.

“So, you’re saying you want to date me? I didn’t get that. I just want to make sure we’re all on the same page.”

He leans in and kisses her. “That’s what I’m saying, yeah. You interested?”

Sometimes, Clarke thinks she’s not really suited to being a foster parent.

It’s not like she’s bad at it, in most ways. She’s responsible, a good provider, and she knows that Madi is happy, which is obviously the most important thing. If nothing else, Madi is better off with her than she was before, and that’s not nothing.

But Clarke isn’t always the best role model, which is why she’s spending her morning in small claims court, scowling at everything. On the one hand, she might have—very slightly—overreacted to Katie F.’s mom at the soccer game a few weeks ago; on the other, she doesn’t think that it was really so bad that she deserves to get sued for it.

Madi thought it was hilarious, but not in a way she wanted to emulate. So at least there’s that.

She’s on her phone, texting Wells about how unfair it is while he just copy/pastes the same reply—*in her defense, you nearly bit her*—when Bellamy sits down next to her and says, “So, what are you in for?”

Bellamy is one of those people Clarke likes and always wants to see more of. Part of that is completely shallow; he’s probably the single most attractive guy she’s ever met in her entire life, and she’s never against more eye candy in her life. But he’s also smart and funny and if she had time these days to have crushes, she’d probably have one on him.

Instead, between work and Madi, she sees Bellamy maybe once every two months, when she drags herself out to socialize with her larger friend group.

So at least small claims court has one thing going for it.

“I might have gotten in a fight at one of Madi’s soccer games.”

Bellamy lets out an actual cackle. “Holy shit, of course you did. What happened?”

“Her kid fouled Madi and didn’t get a red card, she said Madi started it, the ref and her mom sided with her, and I might have gotten—carried away.”

“You don’t say.” He shakes his head, smiling. “She’s seriously suing you?”

“I’m still getting used to soccer mom culture. I think it was supposed to be an empty threat to show me she was serious, and I told her to go ahead, so then she had to or else she’d lose credibility in front of the other moms.”

“Yeah, that all checks out. I was wondering how you’d do with other parents.”
Bellamy teaches high school, at the school where Madi will be next year, no less, so of course he has a lot of opinions on parents. The fact that he’s always told her she seems to be doing a good job has been a comfort to her, honestly.

“It’s been mixed.”

“Clearly.”

She elbows him. “Shut up. What are you doing here?”

“Remember that sketchy guy I decided to rent my spare bedroom to?”

“The one who always smelled like weed and never seemed to be home? Don’t tell me that went wrong.”

“Yeah, we’re all shocked. He broke his lease, so I’m looking forward to finding out if he actually shows up. I’m not convinced it was even worth it to bring to court, but it’s summer vacation, what else am I doing?”

“So, you’re bored enough to go to small claims court?”

“Everyone needs a hobby.” He shifts a little, leaning forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “So, how’s Madi doing? Aside from getting fouled in soccer.”

“Good, I think. She’s looking forward to starting high school in the fall, but I think less because she thinks it’s going to be good and more because she was ready to be done with middle school.”

“Yeah, I don’t blame her. Middle school sucks. She’s coming to Arcadia, right?”

“She is. I assume you won’t have her for a couple years.”

“Yeah, not until she’s a junior.” He clears his throat. “But I’ll look out for her, obviously.”

“Obviously. How is your summer going? I feel like I haven’t seen you in weeks.”

“You haven’t,” he says, grinning. “I get it, you’re busy. But we miss you.”

“I miss you guys too. Madi wants to have a cookout soon, so look forward to that.”

“You’re sounding sarcastic, but that sounds awesome.” He clears his throat, like he’s about to say something else, but the clerk calls, “Blake vs. Murphy,” before he can.

“Sounds like you’re up.”

“Sounds like.” He stands and stretches. “Good to see you, good luck with getting sued.”

“Good luck suing. Talk to you soon?”

“Definitely.”

She watches him go, feeling a little hopeful in spite of herself. When she decided to take Madi in, he’d had a boyfriend, and she had sort of assumed that he’d never be a romantic option. The two of them broke up, but she had Madi after that, and she didn’t see much of him. She did think they might have been flirting, and that was definitely an encouraging interaction. If she asks him out, he might say yes, and that’s something to be excited about.
A boyfriend would be nice.

Given she’s in small claims court, the good mood can’t and won’t last, but she’s not expecting it to shrivel up and die quite as quickly as it does. But that’s how the world works: one nice chance encounter with a guy she likes turns quickly into a less chance and much less nice encounter with the woman who’s suing her.

“I didn’t think you’d show up,” says Mrs. Fuller.

She has a first name, Clarke knows that. Clarke’s heard it, even–Melissa or Rebecca or something, an ordinary name that her friends shorten to Mel or Becky.

Clarke has been told to call her Mrs. Fuller, which means that Clarke will call her Mrs. Fuller until the day she dies. Which is, perhaps, another reason for her to not be a parent.

But Mrs. Fuller started it.

“Well, I wanted to make sure we resolved the issue,” says Clarke, bright. “And this was how you wanted to resolve it. I’m just trying to be accommodating.” Killing with kindness isn’t exactly her forte, but it seems worth a shot. “How’s the *emotional distress*?” she adds.

She’s only human.

Mrs. Fuller huffs and calls someone to complain about what a hassle the whole thing is—like it wasn’t her idea to sue Clarke for not even *actually* biting her in the middle of a fight she started—while Clarke googles *what to do when you’re in small claims court*. Which she already researched extensively, but every little bit helps.

As she expected, the mediator is less than impressed with the case. *Emotional distress* is one of those things that’s tricky to prove, and while Clarke was the one who escalated, she was far from the only participant. The fact that no official charges of assault were pressed also helps, and the moderator definitely tells Mrs. Fuller to let it go.

Which she doesn’t, so Clarke has to spend an additional ten minutes in front of a judge, who tells them they should maybe just avoid each other at soccer games from now on and dismisses the case.

It would be the perfect ending if, as they were walking out, Mrs. Fuller didn’t say, “Maybe if your *child* wasn’t such a bad seed, you wouldn’t need to be brawling.”

This, Clarke knows, is the root cause of her problems as a parent, the issue that will keep her from ever getting along with women like Mrs. Fuller. It’s not that she doesn’t fit in; she knows she does. She’s an upper-class white woman from a good family, and if these women knew her as Abby Griffin’s daughter, they’d like her. But they know her as the woman who got her orphan foster child into their school district, into their children’s honors courses and social circles. There’s already a strong culture of *my child is the most precious and no one else’s matters as much* with zero awareness that *everyone* feels that way about their children, but Madi’s position as an outsider makes her more of a target for ire.

These people think Clarke’s daughter doesn’t matter, and that is, ultimately, going to be why she’ll never stop fighting with them.

“What was that?” she asks, mostly to give Mrs. Fuller a chance to reconsider the statement.

“If your girl hadn’t been so close to Katie then maybe Katie wouldn’t have accidentally hit her.
This is a common problem for less experienced players, and since it’s her first season—”

“My daughter,” says Clarke. “Madi is my daughter.”

“I didn’t think that was even finalized.”

“And?”

“And I didn’t want to get ahead of myself. I doubt she’ll last much longer.”

It devolves pretty rapidly from there. On a base logic level, Clarke knows that getting into a fistfight in a small claims court where it’s just been decided that she doesn’t have to pay for pissing this woman off is incredibly stupid, but on a much baser, instinctual level, this woman is saying bad things about her daughter, and Clarke hates her.

So it’s a really good thing Bellamy is still around to help out.

She doesn’t know it’s him at first, just a firm hand on her arm disconnected from any individual person, and she half-whirls to yell at him before she realizes what’s happening. Bellamy’s not actually looking at her, his eyes fixed on Mrs. Fuller, but he’s allied with Clarke even as he’s also holding her back.

“Hey, Mrs. Fuller, right?” he asks, and she frowns.

“Mr. Blake?”

“Nice to see you, hope Aaron and Katie are doing well. I just need to grab Clarke, sorry. We had a lunch date when we were done here.” He turns his attention to her, concern written all over his face, although she doubts anyone else would be able to tell. “You ready?”

It is, in all ways, a better choice than trying to fight this woman. “Yeah, all set.”

Bellamy shifts his hand to her lower back, guiding her out, and not to be shallow or anything, but she’s seen Mr. Fuller, and Bellamy is about fifty thousand times hotter than he is, so she’s hoping Mrs. Fuller is feeling really jealous right now.

“I didn’t know she had another kid,” Bellamy remarks, once they’re alone. “That’s something to look forward to.”

“The kid honestly isn’t that bad,” Clarke says. “Most of them aren’t. I assume they’ll grow up shitty but for now their parents are still trying to teach them to do as they say, not as they do.”

“That’s something.” He clears his throat. “I’d say sorry for stepping in there, but I figure you’re happy you didn’t get arrested for assaulting someone in a courthouse.”

“Yeah, appreciated.” She glances at him sidelong. “Did your case really take that long?”

“No, we were done pretty quickly. I was waiting for you.”

She has to smile. “You were worried I was going to start throwing punches?”

“That too. I did want to ask if you wanted to grab lunch, though.”

“Yeah?”

He huffs a laugh. “I know you’re busy, but, uh—I’ve been missing you, honestly. I was thinking we
could try to see more of each other.”

“Like a lunch date?”

“For a start. Or it can just be a lunch date,” he adds. “Doesn’t have to go anywhere.”

“That seems like kind of a waste.” She sways closer into his side, and when he drops his hand from her back to his side, she takes it. “I’m kind of busy these days, but if you don’t mind a weird schedule and a kid—”

“I can live with a weird schedule and a kid. Maybe just try not to get sued during the school year,” he teases. “I can’t actually come bail you out every time.”

“One time!”

“So far. I know these parents, remember? I doubt this is going to be an isolated incident.”

It’s true, and depressing, and not what Clarke wants to be thinking about right this minute, when she’s holding hands with a cute guy she likes, on her way to a date, with the promise of more dates to come.

So she just knocks their shoulders together. “What I’m hearing is that you think I need backup.”

“Definitely.”

“And you’re volunteering.”

He grins. “It would be my pleasure, yeah.”

* *

“How was court?” Madi asks when she gets home.

“Good. I didn’t have to pay any money, that was cool. And I think I got a boyfriend.”

“You found a boyfriend at small claims court?”

“It’s Bellamy, so I already knew him. He just became my boyfriend at small claims court.”

“You know you’re like the opposite of a role model, right?”

“I know. You know that too, right?”

“For sure.”

Clarke grins, leans over to kiss the top of her head. “So we’re good, right?”

Madi smiles. “Yeah, we’re awesome.”

Clarke has to agree.
The problem with knowing that Bellamy is her internet penpal is that now, Clarke has to live with it.

On one level, it wasn’t actually surprising; if she’d thought about it, she would have known Bellamy and August had a lot in common, the same general age, one younger sister, parents out of the picture, intelligent with dry, somewhat dark senses of humor. But there are thousands of people like that in the world. She can’t be blamed for not thinking there might actually only be one of them.

Monty is the one who found out, in that Monty was the person she brought for backup because, in general, it’s dangerous to meet strangers from the internet, especially when you have exchanged almost no demographic information. August could have been almost anyone, and while Clarke definitely wanted to meet him, she also didn’t want to get stabbed.

So Monty went in first, told Clarke it was her hot coworker she definitely didn’t have a thing for, and left.

And then Clarke went in, trying to figure out what to say, and ended up in an argument with him, because that’s how they roll, and never at any point did she say, “I’m Aeris,” and he never asked, because of course it wouldn’t be her.

He emailed this morning and she still hasn’t looked at it. What’s she supposed to say, after all? He’s going to ask why she wasn’t there, except that she was, and they talked, and he doesn’t know any of that.

She puts her head down on the counter, groaning, but she only manages it for about ten seconds before there’s a sound next to her, and she looks up to see a cup from her favorite coffee shop, and Bellamy behind it.

“Hey, sorry I was a dick last night,” he says, with a small smile. “You didn’t deserve that.”

Her stomach drops, guilt flooding her system. In some sense, it’s true, but the whole thing is kind of her fault. She’s the one who stood him up, and just because he doesn’t know it was her doesn’t mean she didn’t deserve the brunt of his irritation.

“You’re fine,” she says. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“Still.”

“Thanks for the coffee.” She takes a sip, can’t help asking, “Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?”

“You look kind of tired.”
It’s not actually a lie, and he must know it, because his face screws up with displeasure. “Thanks.”

“Sorry for expressing concern.”

“It was a shitty night.” He leans on the counter next to her, and Clarke takes a sip of the coffee, not letting herself look at him. He’s always been attractive, obviously, and while she hasn’t always liked him, precisely, she has always been drawn to him, on some level. He’s interesting. “Did you ever hear about my girlfriend who lives in Canada?” he asks, pulling her out of her thoughts.

“Your girlfriend who lives in Canada?”

“That’s what Miller calls her.” He sighs. “It’s just–she’s this girl I know online. She moved to town a few months ago, and we finally decided to meet up last night. She didn’t show, so–I was in a shitty mood, and I took it out on you.”

“She didn’t show?” Clarke finds herself asking.

“No. I guess I don’t blame her.”

“Yeah? Why not?”

“I’m a strange guy she met on the internet. If she was my sister, I would have told her to never meet up with me. Especially since she doesn’t really know anything about me. I could have told her my name, linked her to my Facebook. But I didn’t.”

“Just because you’re not blaming her it doesn’t mean you have to blame yourself,” Clarke tells him. “If she didn’t ask–”

“Yeah.” He straightens up, running his hand through his hair. “Anyway, uh, sorry. I didn’t mean to unload on you. Just–sorry I was a dick last night.”

“You’re a dick all the time,” she says, nudging his shoulder, hoping to regain some equilibrium, get back to something like their usual dynamic. “Seriously, Bellamy. I appreciate it, but you’re the one who had a bad night, you don’t have to try to make me feel better. I’m fine.”

“Taking care of other people is how I make myself feel better.”

“Yeah? So what do you do if there’s no one around to take care of?” He frowns, and she takes another sip of coffee. “Would you have bought yourself coffee, or just felt shitty?”

“Hot chocolate and still felt shitty,” he says, with a wry smile. “I have a sweet tooth.”

“Really?”

“When I’m in a bad mood, yeah.”

She lets herself reach over and squeeze his shoulder, just a quick touch. “I’m really sorry about your girlfriend who lives in Canada. She was probably just nervous. Or didn’t know what to say.”

“Yeah, I get that. It’s not like I don’t–I was nervous all fucking day yesterday.”

“Now that you mention it, I noticed,” she teases.

“Thanks, that makes me feel so much better.” He clears his throat. “We should probably get moving, get the store open, right?”
“Yeah, sounds right. I’m sure she’ll get in touch soon,” she adds, and at least she really is sure. “Maybe she saw how hot you are and got intimidated.”

He snorts. “Yeah, that must be it.”

*

On her lunch break, she finally reads her email. The message from August is about what she expected, a charitable interpretation of her blowing him off, a couple suggestions of why she might not have showed up.

_I got cold feet, I'm sorry_, she writes, and then erases it and replaces it with, _Had to work late, didn’t have your cellphone_. She stares at it for another minute and then finally settles on, _I just couldn’t. I’m so sorry._

Then she buys Bellamy a hot chocolate and a brownie and goes back to work.

*

The next few days are more than a little surreal. Bellamy has, not unreasonably, decided she’s a sympathetic audience for his concerns about his internet friend, which puts her in the unfortunate position of trying to talk him through how best to deal with his crush on her.

It really shouldn’t be hard, either. After all, not only is she in a uniquely excellent position to tell Bellamy exactly how Aeris feels about him, the fact is that she returns his feelings. Before she’d known August was Bellamy, she’d already liked both of them in their own ways, and their being the same person is the best news she’s had in years.

Except, of course, that she knows about it and he doesn’t.

“You could just tell him,” says Monty. “And, honestly, you really should. Like, I get not doing it at first, but the longer you go, the more awkward it’s going to be. Just–tell him you panicked, you didn’t know what to say, but you like him and you want to make out.”

“What if he doesn’t want to make out with me?” She’d like to say the question hasn’t been bothering her, but, honestly, that’s total bullshit. She’s been thinking about it basically non-stop.

“He definitely does. Like, I would be money on that. I’m pretty sure it’s going to be just as good news for him as it was for you, okay? You’re a great outcome here.”

“Except I’ve been lying to him.”


“That doesn’t make me feel better.”

“It should. Look, you’re not some supervillain sitting on your ice throne plotting ways to make his life miserable. You’re just–as confused as he is. So figure out how to tell him and tell him. Because it sounds like this could be really good.”

Clarke puts her head on his shoulder. “You think I’d have an ice throne?”

Monty laughs. “Yeah. It would be fucking badass.”

*
If you’re willing, I want to try the whole meeting up thing again, she emails August two days later. I promise I’ll show this time.

As she hoped he would, Bellamy tells her about it at work the next day.

“You’re going to give her another chance?”

“I’m pretty sure I’d regret it if I didn’t.”

“What if she bails on you again?”

“Then I’ll give up on her, I guess. I can take a hint.”

Clarke leans on the counter, watching him restock. “How did you two meet?”

“Book forum,” he says. “I know I’m a nerd, you don’t have to tell me. I don’t know why I didn’t just give her my name. I’ve always gone by August online, ever since I was a kid. I like Roman emperors, I thought it sounded cool. And every time I think about telling her something about myself, I second-guess it.”

“So you’re just going to find out everything at once?”

“I always just jump right into the deep end of the pool too.”

She worries her lip. “Can I walk you over?”

“To meet her?”

“Yeah. So you’ve got someone around if she doesn’t show up again.”

His smile goes warm, and Clarke goes all fuzzy inside. He’s so close to being hers, somehow. She just has to nail the landing. “You don’t have to.”

“I want to.”

“Then, yeah. You’re welcome.”

She gets changed after they close, as she usually does, and Bellamy does something of a double-take when he sees her.

“I don’t think I’ve seen you in that top before,” he says, when she cocks her head.

“You like it?”

“Yeah, it’s nice. Very blue.”

“As opposed to all my other slightly blue tops.”

“I’m nervous, shut up.” He holds the door open for her. “Terra is wearing blue.”

“It’s a good color. So, where are you guys meeting?”

“Marco’s, just a few blocks away. You don’t have to come far.”

“How else are you going to know it’s her? Or do you just have to talk to every girl there in a blue top?”
“She’s going to have a copy of the first book we talked about.”

“Which is?”

“Arcadia.”

“The Stoppard play?”

“Yeah.”

“Anything else?”

“How much do you think she needs?”

“Just trying to figure it out.”

“She said she’d have the book and a flower on the table. Aeris is a flower girl from a video game, so it’s thematic, I guess.”

“But you don’t have any Roman emperor stuff?”

“I’m supposed to find her.”

They’re at Marco’s, so Clarke makes herself exhale. “Find her with this book,” she says, pulling her copy out of her bag, “and this flower, right?”

He stares at her, jaw agape. “Clarke,” he starts, but she doesn’t let him go on.

“I saw you and I didn’t know what to do,” she admits in a rush. “I sent Monty in first and he told me you were there and–fuck, I’m sorry. I was trying to figure out what to say and it was so much easier to pick a fight because I thought you’d be disappointed and–”

He cups her face and leans in to kiss her, and the relief of it is so profound it feels like a living thing.

“So you just let me complain to you about you for a week?” he asks, but he’s smiling.

“You started it.”

“I did.” She can see him swallow. “I saw you come in and I really thought it was you for a second. And then I told myself it wasn’t and I was being an idiot and I picked a fight with you.”

She laughs. “That’s one way to deal with that situation, yeah.”

“Like you did any better.”

“I didn’t.” She twines her fingers in his hair, tugging him back in to kiss him again. “I’m really glad it was you. I’m sorry I didn’t just–I couldn’t figure out what to say.”

“I’m pretty sure I’m in love with you,” he says. “And I’m really glad there’s only one of you.”

“Me too.” She leans in for one more kiss. “So, are you ready to finally get dinner with me?”

He laughs, bumps his nose against hers. “I thought you’d never ask.”
“I found a new partner for you.”

Bellamy frowns, looking at his phone to verify that the caller really is Raven, like he didn’t see the first time and doesn’t recognize her voice.

“A business partner?”

He can practically hear her rolling her eyes, and he can’t deny that he deserves it. “No, dumbass.”

“A skating partner? Seriously?”

“What’s so unbelievable about that? I’m the one who got benched, not you.”

In theory, it’s true, but in practice, the end of Raven’s career was the end of Bellamy’s too. He could have found another partner, maybe, but he felt as if that had been his shot, and he’d let her down. They both fucked up, but she’s the one who paid for it.

It was easy to quit after that. It would have been so much harder to stay.

“I retired.”

“Haven’t you ever seen a sports movie? I’m telling you to come out of retirement for one last game. Or, you know, one last Olympics.”

“How did you get involved in—whatever you want me to get involved in?”

“You know Clarke?”

“Griffin?”

“Yeah.”

Bellamy’s only met Clarke Griffin once, at the last Olympics. They literally ran into each other, got in a fight, and left annoyed with each other. From what he can tell, that’s kind of the norm for Clarke. She’s one of those athletes who’s so focused on the game that she doesn’t really see anything else.

“What about her?”

“She wants to get into figure skating.”

He actually chokes on his shock, splutters and flails until he can manage, “What?”

“You heard she had to quit hockey?”
“I don’t really keep up.”

“She took a bad hit, lost her peripheral vision. But she still wants an Olympic medal.”

“And she just assumes she can get one figure skating?” he asks, scowling. “Like it’s just like hockey?”

“Aren’t you coaching hockey right now?” Raven asks, unimpressed. “Ice is ice.”

“You never told me how you got involved. Or why you want me involved.”

“Clarke can be—“ She thinks over the word she wants, and Bellamy can supply a few of his own. She was a good player, but not exactly popular. “Abrasive. And she needs to learn the basics. You’re a teacher and you’re not going to let her scare you off. Her parents are paying,” she adds. “Room and board and a stipend. So it’s not like you’re going to burn cash chasing some stupid dream.”

“Her parents are.”

“Trust me, they can afford it. Come on,” she adds, in a tone he recognizes from years of working together. “I know you still want it.”

He closes his eyes, leaning back into the sofa. It’s not as if he’s unhappy here. He teaches skating at the family rink, coaches too. It’s a much smaller life than being a professional athlete, but not a bad one.

“How much is the stipend?” he asks, and Raven takes it for the agreement that it is.

*  

The first thing Clarke says when she sees him is “Seriously?” so they’re clearly off to a good start.

“That was my reaction, yeah. You want to be a figure skater?”

She huffs. “I want to be a hockey player, but apparently that’s not in the cards.”

“Do you even know anything about figure skating? Because it’s definitely harder for the girl, traditionally. You’re going to have a lot to do.”

“I did figure skating for a few years, before we decided hockey was a better fit. Plus, you know. My mom.”

That one’s fair. Abby Griffin only ever got silver in figure skating, and Bellamy’s sure a few years for her was a lot more intense than whatever he was doing at that age. It took a while for anyone to notice how good he was; Clarke was being groomed for it since she was a kid.

“So what’s your issue with me?” he asks. “You want an Olympic skater, I’m an Olympic skater. I’m the one who’s supposed to teach a hockey player how to do a triple axle.”

“That’s Raven’s job, not yours.”

“I’m assuming you’re going to need all the help you can get. If you want to get to the Olympics.”

She scowls, but it’s reflexive, and once she’s had a second to collect herself, her face smooths out. “I thought you were retired.”
“I was. But I want to see how bad you are at this.”

The scowl is back in full force, like he thought it would be. If he and Clarke aren’t going to like each other—and he can’t imagine they will—then they might as well use spite as a motivator to do well. He’s going to be the best fucking skater in the world, if for no other reason than he’s not going to let her blame him if shit goes wrong.

“You want to see?” she demands. “Then get on the fucking ice, Blake.”

She doesn’t have to tell him twice.

* 

What Bellamy forgot, partly because it had been a while since he had a new partner and partly because he’s pretty good at denial, is that getting close to people he skates with is basically inevitable. He and Clarke fight it as hard as they can, sniping at each other non-stop, Bellamy making fun of Clarke when she forgets about her toe pick, Clarke blowing up every time he so much as fumbles, but they’re still a team, and teams need to work together. They start joking around a little, talking about favorite books and movies, how they started skating.

He’s starting to like her, and then they have the most catastrophically bad practice they’ve had since they started all this, ending with Bellamy fumbling and dropping her, and the ensuing screaming match ends with her saying, “Maybe I just don’t want to end up like Raven!”

It’s too far, and all three of them know it. Bellamy’s looking right at her, which means he gets to see the change in her face, the second of anger that turns immediately into horror, and she’s turning away from him, looking to Raven, stammering apologies, and Bellamy’s suddenly unable to be there. If they try to get him to stay, he doesn’t hear it, and he doesn’t listen.

Deep down, when he’s honest, Bellamy knows Raven’s injury wasn’t his fault, or hers, or anyone’s, really. Things go wrong in skating, like they do in all sports. They’d done the move well a thousand times and fumbled it a thousand more, and this was the time they fumbled it badly, where everything went wrong and it left Raven’s leg permanently damaged. If he’d done things differently, it wouldn’t have happened, but deep down he knows it’s like chaos theory. If the ice had been different, if she’d been at another angle, if she’d landed better, that all would have changed things too. His own failure was a factor, but it was only one thing, and if he was the only one responsible, it wouldn’t have been so bad an injury as it was.

Clarke finds him sitting in the locker room, staring at his hands. He doesn’t know how long it’s been, but he realizes he’s cold and needs to change.

“I’m so sorry,” she says. “I’m an asshole.”

“I did drop you.”

“Bellamy,” she says, sharp, and he looks up at her. It seems like she might have been crying. “That was unfair to both of you. You didn’t do anything wrong, and Raven doesn’t deserve to be treated like a cautionary tale.”

“You were pissed, I get it,” he says, and she shakes her head.

“I tried to pull that with my dad when I was a teenager. I lost my temper, said something shitty, said I was just mad and didn’t mean it. And he told me that the things you say when you’re mad don’t just come out of nowhere. They’re usually the most honest things that you’d never say. But that doesn’t mean—” She sighs. “I used to see athletes get hurt, and I told myself it was–avoidable, I
guess. Like if you do everything right, bad things won’t happen to you. And I know that’s bullshit, I know it’s bullshit. But it’s a lie you tell yourself to feel better. I’m so good, it could never happen to me. But you guys—I used to watch you, you know? Mom’s the one who discovered Raven, and I always liked her. And as shitty as it is, when it happened, I thought, well, if only they’d done it differently.”

“I think that too. Fuck, that’s all I thought, for—”

To his surprise, she reaches over, takes his hand and squeezes it. “Things can go wrong without you doing anything wrong, Bellamy. It’s shitty that I still think things like that, somewhere, and I shouldn’t have said it. But that doesn’t make me right.”

It’s not what he was expecting. “You’re usually not this mature after you yell at me.”

“Usually when I yell at you, you deserve it. That was uncalled for and wrong. I’m an asshole for saying it.”

“And a lot of other reasons,” he teases, and she smiles.

“That too.”

“You talked to Raven?”

“Yeah. It’s been a tough day, we were going to go get drunk. You want to come?”

“Isn’t your body a temple or something?”

She stands and offers her hand, and he takes it. “Plenty of temples accept alcohol as offerings. And I don’t drink much these days, so my tolerance is shot. It won’t even take much.”

He feels himself smile, unexpectedly. Friendship was inevitable, and apparently Clarke owning her mistake and apologizing wholeheartedly was the last step.

“Cool,” he says. “I’m in.”

At the bar, he wraps his arm around Raven while Clarke is in the bathroom, drawing her in and kissing her temple. They hashed the whole thing out a thousand times, after it happened, but he figures there’s no harm in checking in. “You good?”

“I’m good. You good?”

“Yeah. I’m still going to get a medal.”

“You and Clarke are going to get one medal and I’m taking the other. You two can share.”

“That seems fair.” He takes a drink of beer. “You really think we’ve got a shot?”

“Honestly? I really do.”

* 

**Clarke**: I can’t believe you abandoned me for this

**Me**: You can’t believe I wanted to spend Christmas with my family instead of yours?

Really?

Do I need to send more baby pictures because I will
Clarke: I’m getting ten billion questions about you
It would be so much easier if you were here to help answer them

Me: Questions about me?
What questions?

Clarke: You came out of retirement to help me cross over into a new sport
And we’re actually good at it
It’s all anyone wants to talk about
Please send more baby pictures
I need a break

Me: Sorry I didn’t know we were so popular

Clarke: You should be
When are you coming back again?

Me: I’ll be there for New Year’s
You miss me?

Clarke: Desperately

“So,” says his sister, sitting down next to him and startling his attention from the phone. “Is that your new partner?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you really know what you’re doing?”

“Almost never.” He takes a sip of his drink. “If you have something to say about Clarke, you can just say it.”

“I know you say you always fall a little bit in love with people you skate with, but I’m thinking you went a little far with this one.”

It’s nothing he hasn’t been thinking. Clarke is difficult, prickly and stubborn, too hard on everyone, driven and focused to a fault, but those aren’t always negatives. She’s passionate and smart and beautiful, and Bellamy misses her too, fiercely.

“What’s wrong with falling in love?” he asks. “You’re married, I’m hoping that means you’re pro-relationship.”

Her eyes narrow. “Is that what you guys have? A relationship? Or do you have a crush on some rich girl who’s never going to talk to you again once the Olympics are over?”

It’s intended to be some kind of huge, life-changing question, and she’s clearly disappointed when he snorts. “I don’t know if she’s interested in dating me,” he says. “But she’s not just going to ditch me. She doesn’t have a lot of friends, but I’m one of them. I don’t know if anything’s going to happen, but—we’re good, O.”

Right on cue, his phone buzzes again, and he looks down to see her text: I really do miss you, though.
“She’s a good partner,” he says. “That’s all I care about.”

For a long moment, Octavia just watches him, and then she sighs. “I don’t want her to hurt you.”

“I know. I don’t think she will.”

Me: I miss you too
I’ll be back before you know it
Here’s a baby picture

He looks back up at Octavia, smiles. “I think we’ll be fine.”

*

When they qualify for the Olympics, he kisses her, not quite on purpose, just a general expression of joy, and she’s the one to wind her arms around his neck, pull him back in, and really kiss him, warm and smiling and perfect.

“That took you long enough,” she murmurs, and he tugs her closer.

“Like you couldn’t have done it first.”

She ducks her head against his neck, and he can feel her grin. He can’t exactly blame her; they are, somehow, fucking miraculously going to the Olympics, and she definitely wants to date him, which is really good news. “I can be kind of an asshole.”

“I can too. I think we can probably make it work.” He kisses her again. “I want to. I’m kind of–”

“Yeah,” she agrees, pulling him back in, and they don’t say anything more until Raven bangs on the door.

“I know you two are celebrating, but save it! We’ve got work to do. You can have sex after you win the gold medal.”

She’s right, of course. And they absolutely do.
The nice thing Clarke has found about *Dancing with the Stars* is that, as a general rule, the less she likes her celebrity partner, the sooner she’ll be eliminated.

It’s not a purposeful thing; she always does her best with every season, she’s way too competitive to not. But it tends to be hard, to work with people she dislikes, as the root cause of her dislike is generally that they won’t fucking *listen to her*. When she goes out early, it’s almost because her stupid celebrity refuses to listen to her or thinks she’s too harsh or the dance is too hard. It’s not like she usually gets to know them on any deep level; they spend a few weeks together in a surreal environment, and then she never sees them again.

Finn Collins, though. Finn Collins is new.

“You could just break one of his legs,” Bellamy suggests. They’re getting drinks and Bellamy is mocking her because while Ontari is something of a nightmare, she’s at least an *expected* kind of nightmare. She’s a controlling former actress who wants this to reboot her career and thinks Bellamy is there to serve her, not teach her. It sucks, but they’ve all dealt with that before. “Like, casually.”

Clarke snorts. “What’s the casual way to break someone’s legs? Ski mask and a tire iron?”

“I was thinking you just trip and fall and get him with your knee as you go down, but if you’ve got a ski mask and a tire iron–”

She elbows him. “ Seriously, I’m worried that if he gets to the final he’s going to propose or something. Just to get audience votes.”

“That is how he got famous, right? Deciding he was going to marry a woman he barely knew?”

“If he tries to give me a rose I actually will break one of his legs,” she grumbles, and Bellamy laughs.

Finn’s not the first “star” to make it on the program because of his experience in reality TV, but Clarke will admit she finds him one of the least impressive. He went on *The Bachelor* despite, apparently, having a serious girlfriend, and he was somehow hoping that she wouldn’t find out because she hated reality TV, and that he’d be able to dump her cleanly if it went well.

Instead, it all blew up in his face, as he deserved, and by three months after his engagement at the end of the show, he was single and slightly infamous, which is, admittedly, the sweet spot for people who want to continue to appear on reality TV. He’s hosted some specials, been on some morning shows, and now seems to be known mostly as a pleasant, generic attractive white guy, like they didn’t have enough of those on TV already.

“If it makes you feel better, he’s not actually a good dancer, so he should get weeded out pretty soon,” Bellamy points out, practical as always. “He’s been scraping by on charm and luck. I’m just
glad the charm stopped working on you.”

She makes a face. “It wasn’t working, I was being polite.”

“Because you didn’t know anything about him.”

“I’m still being polite.”

“I’m just saying, before I told you to google him, you actually kind of liked him.”

Clarke grins and nudges him. “So you were trying to save me?”

“Friends don’t let friends date former Bachelor contestants, Clarke.”

“Especially not ones who cheated on their real girlfriends. He would have lost me pretty soon anyway. He’s just so—”

“Finn?” Bellamy supplies.

“Pretty much. How’s Ontari doing? I feel like you aren’t complaining as much.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to cut into your time,” he teases, and she elbows him again. He ducks his head, laughing, and Clarke finds herself smiling too. He’s in a good mood today, a rarity, and it’s nice to see him so relaxed. “Honestly, she’s fine. Don’t get me wrong, she hates me, thinks she knows better than I do, and if she could just be her own teacher and partner, she’d be fucking thrilled. But the judges keep praising all the stuff I say they will, so she’s coming around. And I’d take unnecessary asshole hostility over someone trying to hit on me every time.”

“So, my life is terrible and makes you feel better about yours?”

He raises his glass. “Appreciated.”

She shakes her head, smiling. “Happy to help.”

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As with so many things, the Finn situation gets worse before it gets better. He’s one of those people who, as he gains experience and confidence, also gains opinions, and while that can be a good thing, his opinions are bad, and he should feel bad.

“He thinks we need to put more Bachelor stuff into the routine,” she tells Bellamy, a week later.

“I told you he wanted to give you a rose. I tried to warn you.”

“He used the word synergy.”

That makes him wince. “Jesus, really?”

“Synergy, I swear to god. He thinks the cross-promotional synergy will really help his brand.”

“If that’s an actual quote, I might break his leg.”

“It is.” She puts her head on his shoulder with a sigh. “I never thought basic competence would be this annoying.”

“Yeah, it’s a real burden.” He pauses, thinking something over. “Did he say what he thinks his
brand is? Because asshole from The Bachelor is a pretty competitive field.”

“That’s why he wants to add dancing. None of the others are dancers.”

“I’ve seen him dance, he isn’t either.”

Clarke smiles. “Doesn’t that reflect on me? I’m the one who’s supposed to be teaching him.”

“You’re doing your best with what you have to work with.”

“Ontari is actually good.”

“She’s nominally a singer, so I guess she should be.”

“Nominally, you’re such a snob.”

“I just think when you autotune that much you should lose some of the credit for your musical skills,” he grumbles. Bellamy googles everyone who signs up for the show extensively, which is how he knows things like who Finn is and what Ontari’s music sounds like. Clarke’s experience tends to be more scattershot, with some people she recognizes and some she wouldn’t know were stars unless someone told her. Which doesn’t bother her, but she’s pretty sure Bellamy is still embarrassed about his first season, when they had Roan Churchill on the show and everyone else was star struck and Bellamy mistook him for a new PA.

So now he’s an expert.

“But she does actually have rhythm and some taste.”

“Let’s not get carried away. I’m still rooting for Monty.”

“Me too,” Clarke admits. Usually she roots for her own star, and then Bellamy’s, but since both of theirs suck, they had to find other people. Monty’s kind of quiet and dorky, famous as a cartoonist of all things, and everyone expected him to fail out basically immediately, but the guy can move. It’s kind of awesome.

“So, what does Finn do with the rose in this hypothetical dance?” he asks. “How bad is it?”

“It’s in his mouth.”

“For your disco week number?” Bellamy asks, sounding dubious.

“Don’t tell me you’re against disco roses.”

“At this point I think it’s safe to say I’m against Finn,” he grumbles. “I don’t really want you to get knocked out, but—yeah, if he could got horribly injured and you had to get a new partner, I could live with that.”

“Still working on how to break his legs and make it look like an accident. But if I figure out how, I’ll let you know.”

“If you need an alibi, just ask.”

She grins, kisses his cheek. “Yeah, I know.”
Clarke and Bellamy have been professionals on the show for six seasons together, but they’ve never actually danced together. It’s not something Clarke thinks about, not something she felt like she was missing in her life. She knows Bellamy is a great dancer, one of the best she’s ever seen, and she’s always thought it would be fun, but she hasn’t danced with plenty of people.

It comes up primarily because Bellamy and Ontari somehow get eliminated before she and Finn do, which is just absurd. It’s not like Clarke likes Ontari–quite the opposite–but she was without a doubt a much better dancer than Finn is, and she definitely should have stayed longer.

On the bright side, Bellamy is no longer the competition, but he’s still her friend, so he’s just hanging around offering commentary on their moves. It’s kind of cheating, probably, but it’s not like he isn’t offering commentary on other people’s routines. She’s just his favorite, and he hates Finn, so he’s doing it extra for them.

“This is impossible!” Finn finally says, in exasperation. “No one could do this!”

“That’s just bullshit,” Bellamy says, mild. “Just because you can’t doesn’t mean it’s impossible.”

“Yeah? Then you do it.”

It’s an incredibly stupid thing to say, and Finn realizes it maybe a second after he says it, but it’s too late.

“Sure,” says Bellamy. He glances at his friend Miller, who’s behind the camera today. “Assuming that’s cool.”

“I don’t give a shit,” says Miller. “They might not use the footage but go for it.”

“Clarke?” he asks, and Clarke finds that she really, really wants to.

It’s a surprise, but it shouldn’t be.

“It would probably be good to get a demonstration in. You know it?”

“Yeah, I know it.” His eyes sweep over her, just once, like he’s checking in, and then he offers his hand.

She’ll be the first person to admit the whole thing works a lot better with Bellamy than it does with Finn. It’s less that sexual attraction is required for dance–it definitely isn’t–and more that comfort with the partner helps.

But it’s also a little bit that it’s a sexy song, and a sexy dance, and given her choice between dirty dancing with Finn and dirty dancing with Bellamy, Bellamy wins every time.

The speed was what was tripping Finn up, mostly, and some of the more complicated footwork, but of course Bellamy doesn’t struggle with that. He’s light on his feet, his movements sure, and his eyes never leave hers. It’s close and hot and intimate and like no other dancing has ever been, like no other partner has ever been. Her whole life, nothing has ever been like this.

By the time they’re done, everyone is staring at them, and Clarke’s wondering if she’s allowed to drag him off somewhere and fuck him now, or if she’s required to wait until later.

Judging from his expression, he’s wondering the same thing, but he makes up his mind first. “See?” he says, to no one in particular. “Anyone can do it.”
“Yeah, that’s the lesson we learned there,” says Miller, dry.

Finn, on the other hand, is just sort of gaping at them; Clarke offers him a sunny smile. “I don’t think it’s the choreography,” she says, and that makes him close his mouth.

“No,” he says, at last. “Probably not.”

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Bellamy is waiting for her when she leaves the showers after, looking like an anxious kid after his first school dance, of all things.

“Hi,” she says.

“Hi. I thought I could, uh–I thought we should talk.”

“Talk?” she asks, amused. “You want to talk?”

“What’s wrong with talking?”

“Nothing. But it seems kind of unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary,” he repeats, but there’s a smile lurking around his mouth.

“Was some part of what happened there unclear?” she asks, trailing her fingers up his chest.

“I hope not,” he says, and leans down to kiss her.

So they’re definitely on the same page.

*  

When she and Finn get eliminated that week, she assumes that it’s partly because they included some of the footage of her and Bellamy practicing together, and nothing she and Finn did came even close to being that good.

Bellamy assumes so too, because he greets her with a kiss and, “See? We got rid of him.”

“I don’t know if that counts.”

“He’s gone and we’re together,” he points out. “That sounds like winning to me.”

It’s hard to argue with that logic, and she cuddles into his arms, warm and perfectly content, despite the loss. “Yeah,” she says. “When you put it like that.”
Bellamy doesn’t have any particularly deep reason for liking the girl from the writing workshop, but then again, it’s not as if he really needs one. She’s smart and honest and cute, and he’d like to get to know her better. And while there have been times in his life where he wouldn’t have had the confidence to just flirt with a pretty girl he’d only met once, he’s a senior in college, and she seemed receptive, and it’s very low-stakes flirting.

At least, he thinks it is, until he has to skip out on doing it again on Thursday, like he planned.

“You have to stop doing this, O,” he tells his sister, only partially because he’s annoyed about his life.

Her arms are crossed over her chest in the passenger seat, all defiance. “You didn’t have to come.”

It’s true, so he ignores it. “Do you have any idea how good we have it right now?”

“God, Bell, spare me your in my day, we walked uphill both ways to school bullshit. Yeah, I know. It doesn’t mean that everything is perfect now. Just because Tre is cool doesn’t mean Mom and I suddenly have no issues.” She slumps further down in the seat, like she’s trying to sink out of sight of passing cars. “You didn’t have to come,” she says again.

“Yeah, that’s why you called me. I wouldn’t come.”

“Maybe part of getting over being an overprotective asshole is learning to say no.”

“That sounds fake.” He sighs. “Look, you know I don’t—I get it. Mom’s not always easy to live with. Especially for you. But you’re almost done. Can’t you survive another four months?”

“It’s not like I try to pick fights with her. We just don’t get along. It sucks that we’re related, but—”

“It’s not always going to be like this,” he says. “Mom and I didn’t always get along either. Once you go off to school—”

“Once I go off to school, you’ll be there,” she teases, and he grins.

“And you can fight with me instead.”

“That’s the plan.”

She sighs. “Seriously, I didn’t interrupt anything, did I?”

He thinks of the cute writing tutor, Clarke, who almost certainly doesn’t remember he exists, and if she does probably just figures he doesn’t need any more help with his paper. Which, to be fair, he doesn’t really think he does. It’s pretty great. But he would have appreciated her validation on that
“Nah,” he says. “Nothing important.”

* 

“So, this Monty guy is who again?” Bellamy asks on Saturday. The writing workshop is almost entirely out of his mind, and he’s looking forward to some drinking and debauchery.

“From my philosophy class. But we saw him at that queer thing last semester too, so I think he likes guys. I think we’re flirting.”

He grins. “If you can’t tell–”

“Fuck you, you never know what’s happening.”

“I do when I’m flirting with girls. Ever since I started dating guys, girls feel like easy mode. They’re statistically way more likely to fuck me.”

Miller snorts and passes him a joint. “If you’re saying shit like that, you’re not high enough.”

He inclines his head. “Can’t argue with that.”

By the time Monty shows up, he’s pleasantly warm, buzzed on pot and alcohol, loose and a little horny with, sadly, no prospect of getting laid and no real energy to find one. At least, not until Monty comes with Clarke, from the writing workshop, and his life suddenly gets way better.

It helps that the first thing she witnesses is him totally crushing Miller at Mario Kart.

Miller just rolls his eyes, like he’s not the sorest loser in the world. “Whatever, I’m getting more beer. You want anything?”

“Yeah, I–” He’s pretty sure they both notice the newcomers at the same time: Clarke, just as cute as he remembers, in another low-cut top that makes him feel like a very shallow person, and a vaguely familiar Asian kid who’s focused on Miller. “Clarke!” he says, grinning. “Hey! You want in on this? Miller’s leaving.”

She hesitates for a second, apparently checking if her friend needs backup, but after a bit of shuffling Clarke ends up next to him on the couch, snuggled into his side because Murphy is the kind of asshole who never makes room. But Clarke doesn’t seem to mind snuggling, so he puts his arm around her, smiles.

She smiles back. “Hi.”

“Hey.”

“Was that Nate?” she asks, looking for where Miller and her friend have disappeared to.

As always, it takes him a second to pull up Miller’s actual name, and another second thanks to the illicit substances. “Nathan Miller, yeah. Monty?”

“Yup.”

“Awesome. So, is it weird if I apologize for not showing up on Thursday?” he adds, with another smile.
Clarke grins. “I just assumed your paper still sucked and you were too embarrassed to show me.”

“Good guess, but no. I was actually really happy with how it turned out. You helped a lot.”

Murphy reaches across the couch to swat his head. “Dude, you gonna play or flirt? Pick your character.”

Clarke doesn’t look uncomfortable, so he says, “Flirt. Unless you want to play,” he adds, offering her the controller.

“Are you going to be offended if I say yes?”

“Nope. Go ahead.”

He honestly thinks it’s going pretty well, until Raven shows up. Not that Raven showing up is generally a bad thing—Raven is one of his favorite people—but Clarke gets immediately awkward, and gets even worse once Murphy mentions that he and Raven slept together. It’s not something that embarrasses him, not something he considers anything to not tell people. But Clarke and Raven are friends, and he can acknowledge that it’s weird to find out the guy you’re currently flirting with fucked a friend of yours.

“Should I not be hitting on her?” he asks Raven, once Clarke is gone. “I thought she was–”

“No, you’re fine. Don’t worry about it.”

He worries his lip. “Can I go after her?”

“I’m not going to stop you,” she says, but when he glares at her, she repents. “It looked like she liked you, I doubt she’s going to be pissed. Just–” She huffs. “Whatever. Go have fun.”

It’s not the most encouraging statement in the world, but if Raven wasn’t here, he’d definitely be following, so he might as well follow his instincts. He frets; that’s how he is.

It isn’t hard to find her, even though she’s not actually in the kitchen. He can see her hair in the back. She doesn’t look up when he opens the door, but she also doesn’t tense when he clears his throat, so it evens out.

“Sorry, I just wanted to check on you, but I’ll leave,” he offers. The last thing he wants is for her to think he can’t take a hint. “I–

“It’s okay,” she says, and it sounds like she really means it.

“So,” he says, joining her looking out over the yard and realizing he’s not sure what to say. “Uh, I can stop hitting on you. But if it’s about Raven, it was one time, three years ago. She’s awesome,” he adds. “Don’t get me wrong, but–”

She shakes her head. “I’m not supposed to be looking for anything.”

It’s an odd statement, and one he’s not really sure how to interpret. But it’s much closer to a no than it is to a yes, which means there’s only one response. “Okay. That’s cool. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

But she shifts, leans into his side, and he does like her. More than he expected. She’s gorgeous and smart and kind of hilarious when she’s playing video games, and he’d really like to see what she looks like naked.
“I would have told you to stop,” she tells him. “Raven just reminded me that—I’m not looking. Monty definitely texted her to come make fun of me.”

“So—okay.” He lets out a breath. Honesty is the best policy, and it’s not like she hasn’t noticed he’s hitting on her. She clearly has. “I think you’re awesome, I like you, I want to make out, or be friends. Or make out and be friends. Thoughts?”

After a long pause, she asks, “This is your house, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So, you have a room?”

His heart rate picks up. “Yeah.”

“Want to show me?”

It’s such a relief that he actually laughs. Apparently he really, really wants to fuck her. “Definitely, come on.”

“So I’m not looking to date right now,” she tells him, as he leads her in, and it’s not a surprise, but it is a disappointment.

“Yeah,” he says. “I got that. But making out is on the table, right?”

She doesn’t bother with a response, just pulls him down, and he goes, willingly, happily, even. It’s not exactly what he was hoping for, but he’ll take it.

* *

“So, uh, your friend Clarke.”

Raven doesn’t look impressed. “Yeah, I know, you like her, she’s awesome, you want to date her, but she said some fucking bullshit about how it’s not you it’s her or whatever and now you’re heartbroken. Jesus fucking Christ, it’s like I’m the only smart character in a fucking Shakespearean tragedy.” She pauses. “Except maybe you. But, fuck, this is ridiculous.”

He sits down next to her. “Yeah, something like that, but maybe dial everything back a couple notches. I’m just curious. She said she’s not dating right now, I don’t want to mess with that. But I had fun and I like her. Does she do casual, or should I just back off?”

Raven considers him, and he looks back, steady. As far as he’s concerned, he’s good here. He’s been upfront, honest, and respectful. He and Clarke had pretty awesome sex, which she seemed to enjoy, and he’d like to do it more, but he doesn’t want to push. Asking Raven is probably kind of weird, but—he really likes Clarke.

“I don’t think you should back off,” she says. “Just—be careful. She thinks she doesn’t like dating, but I’m pretty sure she’s fine with it. And she definitely likes you, so just—” She shrugs. “Whatever you’re doing? It’s working. Hang out, be cool, make out with her if she wants. I’d never tell you to hit on a girl who’s not interested, but I’m pretty sure you’re not doing anything she doesn’t want you to. If she says you’re good, you are. Just check in, be honest, and—she’s worth it.”

He has to smile. “Yeah?”

“You’re not bad either. I’m rooting for you guys.”
He ducks his head. “Cool. Me too.”

*

Continuing to do what he’s doing really isn’t that hard. He stops by the writing workshop during her shifts and hangs out. He finds out about her dating history, the exes who did numbers on her, and shares his own past. It’s one of those odd things that comes with liking a new person, his investment strangely out-of-proportion to how well he actually knows her. But everything he learns makes him like her more, makes him want to get to know her better. He’s doing his best to not get too carried away, but he really does like her. He really does want this to go somewhere good.

He’s halfway through a rant about Murphy, who texted *hey which of our plates do you like the least*, which is really not something Bellamy ever wants to answer, when Clarke says, out of nowhere, “I’m going to be in Chicago next year too.”

It’s not actually news to him. “Yeah, I heard from Miller. Monty mentioned it.”

She frowns, as if the fact that he knew this already is a personal slight. “That was my excuse for not dating. Replacing I’m busy with school.”

He really tries, but he can’t actually figure out what the fuck she’s talking about. “Now you lost me.”

“Getting into a relationship with less than two months of school left just seemed stupid to me,” she says, with a little laugh. “Not much future. I told everyone how stupid it was.”

He shrugs. “It doesn’t need much future to be fun. But, sure. That makes sense.”

“But we’re going to be in the same place,” she says.

He doesn’t let himself get his hopes up. “Yeah.”

“So, um.” She looks down, tucking her hair behind her ear, and the hope surges in spite of his best efforts. “You want to get dinner sometime?”

They’re alone, in private, and no one else is paying attention to them at all. Its just a big moment for him, and he lets himself lean in and kiss her. “Yeah. I’d really like that.”

“Cool. Sorry I’m–” She smiles. “I guess this could have been a lot easier, right? It’s not like you weren’t–”

He leans in for another kiss, not quite able to get enough. “Don’t apologize. I don’t mind. But I have no idea when we can get dinner. I’m kind of busy this week.”

“What about now?”

“I already had dinner.”

“Assume dinner is symbolic. Can I come home with you?” Her eyes sweep over him, hot and dark, and somehow it hadn’t even occurred to him that he’d also be getting laid in this scenario. “Not to be shallow, but I haven’t stopped thinking about last time.”

“Neither have I.” He captures her mouth for a much hotter kiss. “When are you done here?”

She bites her lip. “No one’s going to know if I leave early.”
“No?”

“No?”

“Definitely not.” She offers her hand. “Want to get out of here?”

“Absolutely.”

* 

A week later, Octavia texts while he and Clarke are making out. He misses the first notification, but the second gets his attention, and he turns his attention to it, frowning. “Shit.”

Clarke blinks like she’s coming out of a haze. “What? Everything okay?”

He sighs. “It’s my sister. Let me just–”

She pecks his jaw. “Sure.”

The text is standard, *I can’t wait to get the fuck out of this house, seriously*, and he stares at it for what feels like a long time, but can’t be more than a few seconds, really.

Clarke wraps her arms around him, rests her chin on his shoulder. “Do you need to go? I get it if you do.”

**Me:** On a date, sorry
Turning off my phone
Good luck with that

**O:** Holy shit
Must be the best date ever

**Me:** Yup
Bye, O

As promised, he turns the phone off and pulls Clarke back into his lap.

“Best date ever?” she teases, clearly pleased, and he kisses her again, long and slow.

“Yeah,” he says. “No contest.”
To say Bellamy does not deal well with his sister’s deciding to become a Dog is something of a massive understatement. The best he can say for it is that it’s better than her becoming a rusher, which he was also worried about, but that’s not nearly as much of a comfort as he’d like. He wasn’t really expecting her to follow in his footsteps, but he was at least hoping she’d get out of the lower city and go somewhere safer.

“You won’t let her get hurt, right?” he asks Raven, and Raven regards him, cool.

“You know I can’t make promises like that.”

“I know you can come close.”

“I can come close,” she agrees. “You know I don’t mess with Dogs if I can help it, Bellamy. And I can tell my people that Puppy Blake is off limits, but in the heat of a fight–”

“I know.” He sighs. “I’m not asking you to assign her a bodyguard. Just–”

“To do what I can.”

“Whatsoever you can, exactly. Mithros,” he adds, putting his face down on the table between them. “She could have done something else. Anything else.”

“This is your sister we’re talking about,” Raven points out, not unreasonably. “She was never going to just marry and become a housewife. If you’re really worried,” she adds, “you should be talking to her training Dogs, not to me.”

His smile is tight and a little grim. “Trust me,” he says. “I’ll be talking to them too.”

It is, admittedly, a bit of a relief when Octavia gets her assignment, and he finds she’ll be working with Griffin and Jaha. They’re not the oldest or most venerated Dogs in the city, but he thinks they’re probably the best fit for his sister. He can’t imagine her working with any of the old pros, not without rebelling in under a week. She knows and respects Griffin and Jaha, and they’re well-liked and reasonable. They’re not going to be taking her into any exceptional danger.

Or so he assumes.

She tries to cancel breakfast with him after her fourth morning as a Puppy, which is as obvious and unambiguous a warning sign as he’s seen. So he picks up something on his way to her place in the lower city and brings it over to her, and when she opens the door, the whole side of her face is a bruise.

“Great Mother Goddess, O, what happened?”

“I’m a Puppy,” she says, as if this on its own is a sufficient explanation. Which, in her defense,
probably is.

But still. “It hasn’t even been a week.”

“I’m sorry. The next time there’s a fight, I’ll let the rushers know I’m new and they should go easy on me.”

“O–”

“Leave it alone, Bell,” she says, firm, and does. There’s nothing else for him to say to her.

But her training Dogs could still use a reminder of what their job is.

He can’t say he knows any of the lower city Dogs particularly well, but he does recognize Griffin when he sees her in the kennel. She’s a few years younger than he is, with finer features than he would have expected, up close.

She he can’t help but note, doesn’t seem to have any bruises on her face. Which is probably why his temper flares; what’s a responsible Dog like her doing letting her Puppy take the most blows?

“What happened to my sister?” he demands.

“Excuse me,” she says to the man she’s talking to, and takes another second before she turns his attention to him, voice dripping with polite sweetness. “May I help you?”

“Griffin, right?” he asks.

“Yes. How can I help you?” she asks again, pointed.

“My sister is hurt.”

She doesn’t even blink. “Do you know who did it?”

“Octavia is my sister,” he tells her, through gritted teeth. “You got her hurt.”

She looks him over again, reassessing him through the lens of his sister’s relationship to the both of them. “Puppies get hurt, Master Blake,” she says, cool as ever.

He makes a face. “Bellamy.”

“Master Bellamy.”

She’s clearly not purposefully baiting him, but he feels antagonized all the same. “Just Bellamy. Bellamy Blake. I’m no one’s master.”

“Fine, Bellamy. Yes, your sister was hurt yesterday. Yes, I’m sorry for it. I’m her training Dog, it’s my job to keep her safe. We cannot be everywhere. And I’m sure your sister wouldn’t thank you for coming down here and fighting her battles for her,” she adds. Which means she’s at least already got a good sense of Octavia. “She knew what she was getting into, joining the Guard.”

He’s not sure what he was expecting, but that wasn’t it. “It hasn’t even been a week,” he finally says.

She shrugs. “I don’t decide what nights will be eventful. If I did, there would be many fewer of them.”
He feels himself smiling a little, despite his best efforts. She’s a Dog, and she was a Puppy once. It’s no surprise she’s no happier with whatever happened the previous night than he is.

So he nods, and she turns her attention back to the healer she was talking to, and Bellamy takes his leave.

And when, the next week, his sister falls asleep in her breakfast, he thinks very hard about not going back to the kennel, because he knows Griffin isn’t going to say anything that will make him feel better.

Still, it’s like a disease. He can’t help himself.

“Did you know my sister fell asleep in her porridge this morning?”

Griffin doesn’t even look at him. “How would I ever know that?”

“You’re working her too hard.”

“Yes.”

He frowns. “Yes?”

“Puppies work too hard and for too little pay, and grow into Dogs who do the same. This is the work, Bellamy,” she adds. “The work she chose. What are you expecting me to say?”

It’s an answer he’s still looking for. What he’d like most, of course, is for her to tell him that his sister isn’t cut out to be a Dog, that she should give up on this and do something else. But he’s not expecting that. Even if Octavia were the worst Puppy in the city, which he knows she’s not, it’s rare for Puppies to be outright dismissed. They don’t make it to Dog because they quit or die, not because they’re deemed unworthy.

“I’m expecting you to care,” he finally says, and her smile is tight.

“I already care. But your concern is noted.”

It becomes a habit of his, to show up and tell Guardswoman Griffin about his concerns for his sister. It is, he knows, neither right not particularly fair, but he can’t help it. He’s worried, and she’s available, which means he’s going to complain to her as much as he can.

Which is about three weeks, until she tells O about it, and O tells him, in no uncertain terms, that if she ever goes to her training Dogs on her behalf again, she will end him and everything he cares about, and she will not think twice about it.

It’s less that he’s afraid of her, honestly, and more that he knows she’s right. This isn’t his business, and it’s inappropriate of him to act like he has any say in his sister’s work.

So he stops going, and he starts, to his surprise, missing Guardswoman Griffin.

It’s not a strong feeling, just something absent, at the corner of his awareness. He liked her, liked that she was intelligent and no-nonsense and honest. It wasn’t any deep, profound connection, but it made him feel better, reminding himself that someone like her was looking out for his sister, and now he doesn’t have that comfort anymore.

Not until Guardswoman Griffin wanders into his store one morning, at least.

He’s talking to Mistress Allen about the dresses she wants made for her daughters, explaining that,
as always, he’s not a miracle worker and delicate details take time, when he hears Guardswoman Griffin’s voice, flustered and a little hesitant. “I was just–” she’s saying, as Roma smiles politely.

“I’ve got her, Roma,” he says. “Mistress Allen needs to set up payment, you can help her with that.” He offers Griffin a smile. “To what do I owe the honor, Guardswoman? Not official business, I assume,” he adds. She’s out of uniform, looking softer than he’s used to, and he’s trying not to let himself pay too much attention to how he feels about it.

“I’m in the market for a new tailor. I was admiring the dress you have on display.” She makes a face, as if she wasn’t planning to actually say it, and he has to smile.

“Thank you. I’m always glad to have my work appreciated.”

“I wouldn’t have taken you for a tailor.”

“No?”

“My old tailor wasn’t aggressive in the slightest,” she says, a joke, and he relaxes, laughs. That’s a tone he can live with.

“What are you looking for? Don’t tell me you need a new dress for a ball,” he teases, and her she scowls reflexively.

“I haven’t needed a new dress in years. I just need some mending. Not all of us are gifted with needles!” she snaps, defensive, and he feels a little bad for laughing at her, but–she’s so prickly, even when she’s doing something normal, like visiting the tailor.

“The most feared Provost’s Guard in the Lower City and you can’t even mend your own uniforms?”

“I think Indra’s still more feared than I am, even if she’s desk sergeant.”

“Second most feared, then. Let me see it.”

The uniform is mostly good, ripped but salvageably so, but the dresses are, to put it lightly, a disaster. He doesn’t know why she’s even trying to get them mended. “Don’t they pay Dogs?” he asks. “I know Puppies don’t get much, but–”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“The uniform’s fine, easy enough to fix. The dresses—I don’t know how often you wear skirts, but I’d get new ones. I can mend them today and you’ll be back in with new repairs next week. And that’s not because I’m bad with a needle.”

“I hate spending money on clothing. I should just wear my uniform everywhere.”

She sounds so wistful, he has to smile. “And then you’d wear that out and need it repaired. Come to the back and I’ll take your measurements.”

Despite her protests, he talks her into letting him make her some new things, which means not only does he get to talk to her today, but he has the promise of seeing her again, when she comes to pick up her things. And he’d like her to keep coming back, which is probably why he puts so much time into it. After all, it would be beneficial, to have a Dog recommending his work.

That’s the only reason he puts so much work into her uniforms, obviously. So she’ll give him a
good review, nothing more, nothing less.

He’s still telling himself that when she brings his sister to the Court of the Rogue, and still telling himself that when they share life stories. His interest is all in her continued business and her recommendation of his services.

But when he asks her on Sunday if she’d like to eat with him, that has nothing to do with anything except for wanting to spend more time with her. It turns out he likes time with her. He can’t seem to get enough of it, and, to his relief, she doesn’t seem to be opposed to him, either.

Which is why he tells Octavia about it. It seems safer to get it out of the way, before she finds out on her own.

“I’m thinking of courting your Dog,” he says.

“Which of my Dogs?” she asks, without missing a beat.

“Griffin.”

“Do you call her Griffin?”

“No, I know her first name. I’ve been doing some sewing for her.”

“That’s good, she needs someone to do that.”

He frowns. “You’re not upset.”

“Anything that gets your attention off me, honestly. I assume if you have a Dog to woo, you won’t have as much time to tell me I’m ruining my life. Besides, if you’re courting her—”

“Then I can’t tell you to stop being a Dog.”

“Not without being a hypocrite,” she says, bright. “So, Griffin. This isn’t going to make her be nicer to me, is it?”

“I doubt it. If anything, she’ll probably go harder on you, so it doesn’t look like she’s playing favorites. If she actually wants to see me,” he adds, in fairness. “For all I know, I’m barking up the wrong tree.”

“I think if Griffin didn’t want you barking up her tree, you’d know,” says Octavia, not unreasonably. “So—good luck, Bell.”

It’s more encouragement than he was honestly expecting, and he has to smile. “Thanks. Appreciated.”

He’s not expecting his sister to be particularly involved in matters—he certainly doesn’t want her involved in his love life—but she does see Clarke more often than he does, so it’s not actually surprising that she knows Clarke is hurt and he doesn’t.

His stomach still drops when she shows up at his door in the night to say, “Griffin needs someone to take her home.”

“Take her home from what?” he asks, but he’s already on his feet. “What happened?”

“She got hit instead of me this time. She’s fine, just a little woozy,” she adds, before he can panic too much. “She told me not to get you so it wouldn’t ruin your opinion of her, but I assume you’d
be more upset you didn’t find out.”

He pauses in pulling on his shoes. “She cares about my opinion of her?”

Octavia rolls her eyes. “Yes, obviously. Are you coming?”

“Yes,” he says. “Obviously.”

Even though he’s expecting it, it’s still awful when he first sees Clarke, unconscious in the kennel.

“She’s fine,” says the healer, before he can do anything stupid. “Clarke is notoriously hard-headed. You’re doing well, Puppy?” he adds, to Octavia. “No lingering injuries?”

“No,” she says, and Bellamy tells himself it’s the truth. He only has enough mind to worry about one of them at once.

“Then you can leave. Assuming your brother will take Griffin home.”

“I will,” he says. “Thank you.”

It’s later than he usually stays up, and he’s falling asleep when he hears Clarke’s voice, creaky and dry. “You’d best wait until morning to tell me I didn’t take good enough care of the Puppy. I’m not–”

It takes a second for the meaning of her words to sink in, then he starts to laugh. “That wasn’t exactly what I was planning,” he says, looking around for the healer.

He comes at once, doesn’t make Bellamy let go of Clarke’s hand as he checks her over. “You know I’ve told you not to let anyone hit your head anymore. Don’t make me tell you again.”

Clarke frowns. “I had a Puppy to take care of. I am sorry,” she adds, turning her focus back on Bellamy. “I was–”

“Clarke. Octavia’s fine. She came to tell me you needed someone to take you home.”

“I don’t–” she starts, and luckily the healer stops her before he has to step in.

“That’s a great idea, actually,” he says, as if they hadn’t already discussed it. “I don’t like you going back home alone after a healing. You’re always muzzy and hungry and generally belligerent.”

“I’m generally belligerent before healings too. I’m fine. But,” she says, looking at Bellamy with her eyes still a little unfocused. “You could help me find something to eat and take me home if you wanted.”

“If your healer doesn’t mind,” he says, trying not to let the worry in. He’s never seen her so out of sorts. It’s hard to believe she’s really ready to go home yet.

He just waves his hand. “She’s fine. Her skull is thick.”

The eyeroll makes her look more like herself. “Love you too, Green.”

It takes them a little maneuvering to get her upright, and even once she is, she still sags against him. But she also lets her fingers explore his chest a little, which is both funny and alarming.

“You’re a tailor,” she says, as if this knowledge is personally upsetting to her.
Bellamy cocks his head at Green, who shrugs one shoulder. “She’ll perk up as she walks. She’s always awful with healings.”

Clarke, meanwhile, is still touching him. “You can’t possibly be a tailor with so many muscles. Tell me you’re not a rusher who pretends to be a tailor.”

“I’m not a rusher,” he tells her, and gets her out of the kennel, buys her some food, and takes her back to her lodgings, which are only a few blocks from his store.

“This isn’t that far away from where I live.”

She’s a little more awake than she was, but not that much more, and she blinks at him like the words aren’t quite coming together. “Where do you live?”

“Above my shop.”

“That is close,” she says, sounding pleased. “We could be seeing each other much more often.”

“Much more often. Open up the door.”

That, at least, doesn’t give her any trouble, and she even manages a glare over her shoulder. “It’s messy, don’t say anything.”

He smiles. “I won’t. I know you weren’t expecting company.”

The rooms are nice, though, cluttered without feeling messy, as if Clarke’s life just has enough in it that she can’t keep it in order. She tries to clean up a little, but he shakes his head.

“Just eat, Clarke,” he tells her, and by some miracle, she does.

Once they’re done, Clarke looks at him, lip caught in her mouth, not quite nervous, just hesitant. “You could stay. Not for–” She adds, before he can say anything. “Not that I’m feeling well enough to do anything but go to sleep, but it’s late and we may not be in the Lower City but it’s dark out and all manner of Rats are on the street and–”

He kisses her, mostly because he thinks she won’t mind, and the explanations die on her lips as she smiles against his mouth.

He smiles too. “I’ll stay.”

They crawl into bed together, Clarke curling against his chest like she belongs there, and Bellamy kisses her hair and falls asleep warmer and more content than he has been in ages.

He’s the first to wake up, which doesn’t surprise him, and he extricates himself from her carefully, trying not to wake her. She murmurs a little, curls back on herself, and Bellamy watches her for a long moment before he makes himself look away.

Of course, he doesn’t actually want to leave, not if he doesn’t have to, not before she wakes up, so he looks around, spies a spare uniform on her desk, and spends as much as he can of his morning waiting for her to get up.

But she’s a Dog on the night shift, so he has to leave before it happens. He writes her a note, kisses her forehead, and lets himself out into the early morning sunshine.

He even whistles a little as he walks.
When she finally makes it to the shop, he doesn’t notice right away, too absorbed in what he’s working on, but he hears a noise and looks up and suddenly there she is, her hair loose, wearing the dress he made for her.

He stabs himself with the needle, and she just smiles.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t stay longer,” he says, with a smile of his own, and she looks at him for a second and then crosses the room, pulls him down, and kisses him full on the mouth.

So apparently, he has absolutely nothing to be sorry for, which is good. After all, he wouldn’t change a thing.
“So, you hate a lot of people, right?”

Bellamy looks up from his DS to find that Clarke Griffin has seated herself across from him, looking surprisingly at ease given he’s never seen her out here before. As a rule, the only people who come out to the benches behind the gym are cutting class, and he didn’t think she did that.

“Is that a pickup line or what?” he asks, frowning. “Do you have a follow up?”

“Kind of and yes.” She regards him. “Do you hate Ontari?”

“I do, yeah.”

“She hates me too. And you.”

“Glad we’re all on the same page,” he says, even though he doesn’t really hate Clarke. Mostly, he doesn’t really know Clarke that well. Depending on what she’s like, he could go either way.

“And?”

“She bet me that I was too much of a sad nerd to ever land a boyfriend, which is bullshit. And when I told her I could, she told me it had to be you.”

“How did you even get into this conversation?” He doesn’t really get female social dynamics, but even taking that into account, this feels like kind of a lot.

“We’re both on the planning committee for the winter formal. She was telling me all the boring organizational shit I could do the night of because I clearly wouldn’t have a date.”

“So you want me to go to the winter formal with you to spite Ontari?”

“And on a couple other dates beforehand. I want to really sell it.”

She sounds so earnest, he doesn’t know quite what to say. “You want to convince her that this is real?” he finally asks.

“Think of it as She’s All That, except instead of me pretending there is no bet, you’re in on it. Because that’s a way better way to handle that situation.”

“And you don’t think she’s going to be suspicious.”

“Suspicious of what?”

“Obviously, if you guys bet on it, she’s going to be expecting you to try to date me. But isn’t she going to call bullshit if it works this quickly?”
“I’ve got a timeline,” she says, pulling her planner out, and Bellamy finds that he’s smiling in spite of himself. *Timeline* is an understatement; it’s an in-depth schedule for the development of their relationship, down to specific times of day.

“Jesus, how long did this take?”

“Not as long as you think,” she says, with an easy shrug. “We’ve got the dance in two months, that’s a set date. So all I had to figure out was when I could realistically hit on you and how that might develop. We have a limited amount of times of day when we see each other, so—”

“So yeah, this is a totally normal way to live your life.”

She shrugs. “We don’t have to stick to this exact schedule, it’s just one possible version of our relationship.”

“Uh huh.” He shakes his head, letting out a little laugh. “This is—intense. I’m kind of impressed.”

“There’s not much point in a fake relationship if people don’t believe it.” She worries her lip, looking nervous for the first time. “So—will you do it? I know it’s kind of—I’m banking a lot on you hating the same people I hate.”

His eyes flick over the schedule again. The first planned interaction is next Tuesday, but it’s another month of flirtation before they’re actually supposed to be dating. Then they have three weeks of a fake relationship, the winter dance, and a couple weeks of cool down before they break up at the beginning of March.

It’s about three months of his life dedicated to an overly complicated fake-dating scheme, but it’s not like his sex life has been particularly exciting lately. He hasn’t been interested in random hookups, and it doesn’t feel like much of a sacrifice to give up on those. He has functioning hands and doesn’t mind using them.

More than that, he does mostly like her. Not on any profound, meaningful level, but she’s smart and angry and seems to be mostly motivated by ambition and spite, which he has to respect. She’s got a solid plan, and it’s probably not going to be a hardship for him to hang out with her. They can probably find something to talk about.

“You’re not worried about your reputation?” he finally asks.

Clarke cocks her head, apparently not getting it. “What about it?”

“I’m not exactly your mom’s favorite person.”

“You’re not her least favorite person either,” she says, which is actually a little hurtful. Bellamy likes to think of himself as a thorn in the administration’s side, so hearing that Dr. Griffin hates someone else more than him doesn’t really count as good news.

“No?”

Clarke rolls her eyes, clearly amused. “Sorry. She thinks you’re wasting your potential, which means she thinks you have potential. That puts you ahead of people who are barely staying in school.”

“But I’m the person on the honor roll she hates the most, right?”

“Definitely.” She shrugs. “I’m not worried. I’m pretty sure your reputation will suffer more than
mine.”

“How do you figure?”

“Come on, you go out with—” She’s searching for the word. “I’m not exactly popular.”

“Neither am I,” he says. They’re both notorious, he’d say, just for different reasons. Clarke has a reputation for being an uptight nerd, and it doesn’t help that her mother is an administrator and she’s best friends with the principal’s son. But Bellamy isn’t exactly one of the popular kids himself; that’s a role he associates with the kids who play sports and have a billion extracurriculars, a kind of warrior scholar for the new age. Both he and Clarke aren’t quite there yet, Clarke because she’s kind of anti-social and unathletic and Bellamy because he’s combative and too busy with his sister to get that involved in out-of-school activities.

So maybe they’re actually a good match.

“I’m in,” he tells her. “Just make me a copy of that schedule and we’ll be set.”

Clarke doesn’t smile much, which is a shame; the expression really suits her. “Great. Pleasure doing business with you.”

Bellamy wouldn’t actually know where to start with a fake-dating schedule, but he has to admit, Clarke’s is solid. On Tuesday, she sits next to him in calculus and asks him questions throughout, and they chat as they walk to English together. Those are the only two classes they have together in a row, and after a week or so of the two of them being on friendly terms for both of them, people start to take notice.

“Griffin?” Miller asks.

“Do we really call her Griffin?” Bellamy asks, mild. “She’s the only Clarke in school, why would we need to use her last name?”

“To remind ourselves that she’s Dr. Griffin’s kid. You aren’t seriously flirting with a counselor’s daughter, are you?”

“Why not? She’s cute.”

“Her mom’s going to expel you if you ever so much as touch her.”

“Then I could probably sue. I don’t think you can expel someone for dating the wrong person.” He counts three seconds before he adds, “Not that I’m dating her.”

Miller snorts. “Uh huh. Just walking her to class.”

“Does that count if we’re going to the same class? I’m moving in the same direction she is.”

“I give it a week,” Miller says.

“You want to put money on that?”

“No way, you get to control when you date her.”

“If I date her,” he corrects, just to piss Miller off.
Once he’s alone, he pulls out the phone to text Clarke: *We’re fooling my best friend, so I’m doing my job right. He thinks we’ll be dating in a week.*

*Three weeks*, Clarke texts back, almost at once. *Hasn’t he seen the schedule?*

It’s probably a good thing Miller’s not around to see his goofy grin; it wouldn’t help his case.

*

The thing about pretending to get in a relationship with someone is that it’s not actually that different from just *getting in a relationship*. The romance is fake, but they’re still going through all the standard steps of courtship, the two of them trading facts about themselves, learning about each other, growing closer. Like he thought, Clarke is smart and dedicated, simultaneously exactly how he thought she’d be and different and exciting. She’s got more of a sense of humor than he expected, but it’s not really the *funny* humor, mostly just dry remarks about how things suck.

And, obviously, she’s pretty, and when she turns up to their first “date” in a v-neck he nearly trips over his own tongue trying to say hi. It’s not as if he thought she wasn’t attractive, but he’d never put a ton of thought into her breasts specifically, and he has to admit he was really missing out.

So he has a crush. It’s not a big deal. If TV is anything to judge by, it’s normal. People who are pretending to date each other develop feelings all the time. He’s just got to ignore them and get through the end of the relationship. Which, given Clarke’s very detailed plan, shouldn’t be too hard. He doesn’t actually have to put any thought into the whole thing, just spend time with her and hang out. And in another month or so, they’ll break up, and he’ll get over her.

Simple.

Ontari doesn’t approach him about the whole scheme until the winter formal, which is, in retrospect, a warning sign. There’s no reason for her to put off telling him that he’s a bet except that she wants the maximum dramatic impact and humiliation for Clarke.

“You and Clarke Griffin, hm?” she says, sliding up next to him like a snake.

“Me and Clarke Griffin,” he agrees. He and Ontari have never gotten along, so she has no reason to talk to him except to be an asshole. He’s looking forward to it not working at all. “Why?”

“It’s just interesting. I wouldn’t have predicted the two of you as a couple. How did that happen?”

He shrugs. “We’re in a few classes together, got to talking. She’s cool.”

“Just like that.”

“How did you and—whover you’re dating now happen?” he asks. “It’s not that complicated.”

“No, I think it’s very simple. I told Clarke Griffin she’d never be able to trick anyone into going with her to this dance, and a week later, she starts talking to you.”

“And?”

“And if you think she actually likes you, then she’ll beat me. But I’m sure you know better. She just thought you’d be easy.”

This time, his frown is genuine. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I wanted her to try for Dax, but she vetoed him.”
“Good for her,” he says. “Dax is kind of a psycho. So, I was her idea?” he asks. “Did you have a list or what? I don’t even get how this bet worked. Are there stakes? And why? Clarke’s cool, why wouldn’t I go to a dance with her? All she had to do was ask.”

Ontari is looking a lot less confident. “She lied to you. To get a date.”

“I guess she did,” he grants. “That doesn’t make it a bad date. Are we done here? I told her I was getting punch, I should get back.”

“You knew,” she says, flat. “She told you.”

“Not all of it,” he says. “But yeah.”

“Pathetic,” says Ontari.

“I don’t know. Like I said, all she had to do was ask.”

He grabs the drinks and goes back to Clarke, who’s looking surprisingly anxious. Which is also encouraging.

“What did she say?” Clarke asks, and he takes a deliberate sip of his punch before replying.

“She said you picked me. She wanted you to ask Dax and you picked me instead.”

“I didn’t want to deal with Dax.”

“But you wanted to deal with me?”

She shrugs. “I like you. Am I not supposed to deal with you?”

“I’m just saying, you picked me.”

“I picked you,” she agrees. “Is that it?”

He smiles. “I hope not. You want to dance?”

“I guess if we don’t Ontari will think you dumped me.”

“I think I was pretty clear about how much I like you,” he says, and offers his hand.

He’s not much of a dancer, but they go a couple rounds, and then Clarke says, “You know, if we really want to sell it, we should leave.”

“Yeah?”

“From what I’ve heard, you’ve never gone to a dance and not left early so you could hook up.”

“Huh,” he says, frowning. “Really?”

She laughs. “You don’t know?”

“I don’t keep track. But if I’ve got a reputation to uphold, we should go.”

They leave hand-in-hand, and he waits until they’re in the car to ask, “Is there any reason we’re not hooking up?”

She stills in the passenger seat. “You don’t want to,” she says, careful.
“Yeah, that’s not it. I definitely do. And I’m pretty sure you do too. So I’m not sure what’s stopping us.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see her smile. “We’re breaking up in two weeks.”

“Oh not.”

“Oh not,” she agrees. “I guess there’s nothing stopping us from hooking up, then.”

He pulls the car over, turns his attention to her, and when she smiles, he leans in for a kiss, soft and slow until she huffs and yanks him in, and then it’s hot, and he should have done this sooner.

“You picked me,” he murmurs. “You wanted to date me.”

“I did. And it totally worked.”

He laughs, kisses her again. “You didn’t have to work so hard. I would have just said yes.”

She grins, bumps her nose against him, and she’s not really a criminal mastermind or anything, but he doesn’t mind. She’s cute.

“That’s okay,” she says. “You’re worth it.”
Sometimes, just sometimes, Clarke will take a step back and really think about her life, and when she does that, she will admit that her life is, well, weird. Like when her best friend’s little sister’s girlfriend shows up at her foster home out of nowhere with a sob story about her bandmates discovering her secret relationship. That’s not something most people have to deal with, like, ever.

“They kicked you out of the band?” Bellamy asks Niylah. He has his arms crossed over his chest, a deeply unimpressed frown on his face.

“They didn’t kick me out,” she says. “They strongly advised me to reconsider my personal relationships and my future with the band.”

“How is that not kicking you out of the band?”

Niylah shrugs one shoulder. “They haven’t actually kicked me out yet. I’m on probation.”

“Yeah, but–just for dating O?”

“You’re the enemy,” she says, and that’s a large part of the weirdness. They have enemies. Not just rivals, actual enemies, people who are invested enough in their perceived differences that they’re actively trying to sabotage them. And part of her gets it; between album sales and stocks in Griffin Media, there’s a lot of money at stake here.

But at the same time, they are, at heart, having an argument about whose computer has the best graphics card and autotune. It is serious business, but it’s just kind of–ridiculous.

“No one here is your enemy, Niylah,” says Clarke, making her voice gentle. “Just because some of the Sky People live here–”

“Everyone but the mysterious lead singer,” says Niylah. “Or so you claim.”

“She’s got a secret identity,” says Bellamy, with a shrug. “She could be anywhere.”

In a way, the most bizarre thing about Clarke’s life is that no one seems to suspect she’s the band’s lead singer. She’d be offended, if she wasn’t actively incognito, but, seriously, one time Finn said it couldn’t be her because the lead singer was way too much fun.

So her cover is working, but it does kind of suck. She’s a world famous pop sensation, and no one even knows.

“You have a place to stay, right?” Octavia asks Niylah, all concern. She hasn’t dated anyone since Lincoln, and it’s kind of surreal seeing her with someone new. But in a nice way, Clarke likes when her friends are happy.

Niylah nods. “I’ll be fine, don’t worry.”
“If you need a place to stay—“

“Let’s not get carried away,” says Bellamy. When Octavia glares at him, he just shrugs. “Like she said, we’re the enemy. How do we know this isn’t a trap?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Bell.”

Clarke wants to agree with her, but unfortunately, she’s on Bellamy’s side. It’s unfortunate only because, again, this is her life. This could plausibly all be a Grounder scheme to get eyes on the house, and she really wishes she didn’t have to think that.

“If Niylah needs a place to stay, we’ll help her find one,” she says, firm. “But it might not be here. We’re full,” she adds, before Octavia can protest. “Sorry.”

The two of them take off, and Clarke drops her head onto Bellamy’s shoulder. She’d say he’s been invaluable since her father died and left her the foster home, but he was invaluable long before that. The Blakes were some of the first kids Jake took in after he opened up Sky Home, and even if it took them a little while to warm to each other, she and Bellamy have been looking out for each other for almost that long.

“Did you ever think we’d end up like this?” she asks.

“Which part?”

“Any of it.”

“I thought you or I would take over the foster home someday,” he muses. “But the technologically enhanced rockstar thing is definitely a surprise.”

Clarke has to smile. “Yeah, none of us saw that coming. You think Octavia’s going to be okay?”

“She’ll be fine. Niylah too.” He gives her shoulder a squeeze. “You will be too.”

“Who says I’m not fine?”

“All the bags under your eyes.”

“Good thing I’ve got a holographic disguise so none of our fans will ever know.”

He snorts. “Yeah, that’s the good part. I’ve got to go check on dinner. Practice later?”

When he stands, she instantly misses the warmth of him by her side, but she can’t say that. They’re friends.

Friends don’t tell friends they want to snuggle more.

Instead, she just says, “Yeah, see you later,” and watches him go.

*

Before she assumed an alternate persona as a glamorous rock star on the weekend, Clarke was dating Finn Collins and feeling slightly guilty about it. She liked him, but he’d been dating Raven before he started dating her, and even though he broke up with Raven, it never quite sat right with her.

As Bellamy put it, saying I couldn’t be with her when I liked you so much is the kind of thing people is romantic, but is actually kind of a red flag. But Clarke had liked him, and Raven told her
to go for it, and it wasn’t like they were getting married, so she figured she could give it a shot.

But apparently, he likes Princess better than he liked Clarke. Not that he’s alone in that; her alternate persona is a lot more popular than she is. But it’s most awkward with Finn, who decided that, as with Raven and Clarke before, he can’t date Clarke while he feels this way about Princess, and dumped her.

There’s a version of the story with a happy ending, the one where Lois Lane realizes Clark Kent and Superman are the same person and she can have both, but Clarke’s not interested in that story, not when Finn has made it clear how much he prefers the famous version of her. He’s not conflicted; his mind is made up. Hers is too.

“We could get dinner sometime,” he’s telling her, after their show. “I could show you the town.”

“I don’t consume food,” she says. They’re trying out making people think she’s actually some kind of robot, which is kind of fun. “Where’s your girlfriend? What happened to her?”

“Who said anything about a girlfriend?”

“Bellamy.”

It seemed like the simplest solution, after a month of pretending Princess didn’t know a thing about Finn. Bellamy’s part of the band, has seen them together, and knows Finn is or was Clarke’s girlfriend. If they were different people, he would have told Princess about Clarke, and Princess needs an excuse to dislike him.

Finn huffs, rolls his eyes. “He never gets tired of ruining my life.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asks, sounding more like herself than Princess. She reminds herself to smile, giggle. “Bellamy’s great.”

“I used to be dating a friend of his,” he says. “He’s got a thing for her, he’s never forgiven me for dating her. Even though we’re broken up now, the guy can hold a grudge. But they grew up together, they’re like siblings.” He frowns, suddenly. “Wait, you must know Clarke.”

A part of her brain is stuck on the number of stupid things he said back there, but the rest of it recognizes the opening he’s given her for the blessing that it is.

“Oh, you’re Clarke’s ex. And Raven’s! I can’t believe I didn’t make the connection. I’ve heard so much about you.”

The color is draining from his face. “That’s—”

“We’re done here,” she says. “You used your chance with us with Clarke, and you blew it.”

“Princess, please—” he starts, and when she glares, he rethinks what he was going to say. “I’ve never felt this way about anyone.”

“If you’re always finding you’ve never felt about someone else the way you feel about your girlfriends, you should take a break from dating for a while. Think about what you really want. We’re done here,” she says again, and leaves before he can protest further.

She’s on her way to Bellamy when someone else says, “Princess!” and she turns to see Lexa.

Lexa’s another one of those in a different life people. Clarke likes her, likes her intelligence and
ambition, her talent and drive. But they’re rivals, enemies even, and Lexa hates Princess and
doesn’t know Clarke exists, and Clarke would have trouble getting over how Lexa and her band are
literally trying to take money that she wants to help *orphans*. They’re not trying to be cartoon
csupervillains, probably haven’t thought about it in those exact terms, but Clarke can’t forget.

Still, they’re colleagues, sort of. “Lexa. How may I help you?”

“What are you playing at?”

“Music,” she says, after a moment of consideration.

Her scowl deepens. “Your bass player is dating my drummer.”

“I don’t see what that has to do with me.”

“If you’re trying to use this to get information–”

Clarke sighs. She’s tired and grumpy and feels as if she’s dealing with every stupid romantic
problem in the book, with absolutely no romance in her own life. All she wants to do is find
Bellamy, tell him about Finn, and let him know, in case he’s ever wondered, that she’s never
thought of him as a brother.

She assumes Finn is mostly full of shit, but if he’s not, she wouldn’t mind finding out.

“I don’t need information about you. If we’re competing, there’s only one way I want to win: by
being better than you. No tricks, no mind games. Just talent.”

Her mouth tugs up at one side, grudging. “How novel.”

Clarke shrugs. “It seemed easier than that all this subterfuge,” she says. “Don’t kick Niylah out of
the band for getting a girlfriend. That wouldn’t play well.”

“No. Does your bassist like her?”

“She seems to.”

Lexa nods. “Then I’m glad. May the best band win.”

It’s an easy sentiment to return. “May the best band win.”

*

She doesn’t manage to find Bellamy in private until the next morning. He’s in the kitchen at the
house, making breakfast for everyone, and Clarke lets herself just look at him. Dating within the
band is probably, on some level, a bad idea, but she’s not really in the band, is she? And if Bellamy
wants to date her, she’ll want to date *her*, not Princess.

And if he wants to date her, she’d really like to know.

“I got to tell Finn that Princess would never date him,” she says, leaning against the counter next to
him.

“Yeah? Awesome. How?”

“I asked him about his ex-girlfriend, he said it was me, I got to pretend I *didn’t* know he was the
same Finn who broke up with Raven and Clarke and tell him we were through once I figured it
“Yeah, that checks out. Congrats.”

He’s poking at the eggs in a very pointed way, making her smile. She has always wondered, if he might–

It’s hard, to think about making a move on someone who’s so important to her. Without Bellamy, her whole world falls apart. But it’s so much harder to think of never saying anything. Of never knowing.

“I told him you warned me.”

“Yeah, I probably would have.”

“Finn thought you were trying to ruin his life.”

“I’d probably do that too, but I don’t really think he needs the help.”

She bites her lip. “He says you don’t have a chance with me because we’re like brother and sister.”

Finally, Bellamy falters, hand stilling as he moves the pan, but just for a second. “Sounds like a lot of shitty assumptions in there.”

“Yeah, I’m not sure he’s ever been more wrong about anything.”

Another pause, and then he turns off the burner, moves the eggs off the heat, and looks at her. “Wrong about everything?” he asks. He’s wearing his pajamas and his glasses, and he doesn’t look a thing like the guitarist for a wildly popular band.

Then again, she looks even less like their lead singer. But this is them, the real them. This is the way she wants to be loved, quietly, in the morning, with eggs on the stove and no fame or fortune.

This is what she wants.

“Absolutely everything,” she says. “You’re not my brother, and you–”

He moves in before she can finish, pressing her up against the counter, the kiss hot and solid, like he’s afraid the sentence won’t end how he wants it to, and Clarke winds her arms around his neck and pulls him closer, opening his mouth for him, and the soft noise that escapes from the back of his throat is the best thing she’s ever heard.

When Madi interrupts them, she’s on the counter with her legs wrapped around his waist, his mouth pressing messy kisses against her neck, no more words between them but no questions either. Bellamy wouldn’t be doing this if he didn’t love her, and she wouldn’t if she didn’t feel the same.

“So, we’re making our own breakfasts today?” Madi asks, and the two of them jump apart, coming back to themselves. Bellamy stares at her, glasses askew, and when she smiles, he grins.

“If you wait a minute, I’ll finish the eggs,” he tells Madi.

“You looked pretty busy.”

Bellamy glances at her, still smiling, as he goes back to the stove. “Nothing that won’t keep, right?”
Clarke gives Madi’s hair a ruffle as she goes to the coffee pot. “Yeah. I think we’ve got time.”

* 

“I think we’re all wondering, any romance between the two most eligible members of Sky People?” asks the reporter, grinning at Bellamy and Clarke.

Well, Bellamy and Princess. Clarke’s not here. That’s the whole point of the disguise.

“Ever since we found out about Octavia and Niylah from Grounders, I think we’ve been wondering who’s next. And the two of you are clearly very close.”

Bellamy glances at her, and then shrugs. “Don’t get me wrong, Princess is great. But I’ve actually got a girlfriend.”

The reporter looks genuinely surprised. “I haven’t heard anything about it. Who is she? Another musician? Or—”

“No one you’ve heard of,” he says. “No one famous.”

“And what about you, Princess? Any new suitors on the horizon? Boyfriends, girlfriends?”

“No,” she says. “I’m not really looking right now.”

“No?”

Her smile is completely genuine, aside from the way it’s partially holographic. “Nope. I’m all set.”
The thing is, Clarke remembers how her and Bellamy’s breakup went. It was a fucking *nightmare*, the regular stress and awfulness of a relationship ending compounded by the very public nature of their courtship, the whole world being invested in every tiny thing they did. Clarke never minded being a celebrity back then, never minding going on TV to talk about her boyfriend, but they were *kids*. She didn’t know any better.

Breaking up with Bellamy Blake and watching the world care, seeing reactions and think pieces and people she’d never met on twitter saying they’d always seen it coming, that she was never good enough for him, that she probably cheated, a thousand other things—that was the first time she really felt grown up. She grew armor. When people asked about her personal life, she smiled, laughed, said she wasn’t seeing anyone right now, and moved on. She didn’t talk about the relationships she had; she kept quiet, so her joy and pain were her own.

If she ever got serious enough with someone, she told herself, then she’d talk about it. When she was really invested, ready to get married, perhaps. When it was unavoidable. And the fact that they never felt felt that important might have been part of why some of her relationships ended.

But at least they ended quietly, and no one went to the press, and that’s what she counts as a successful relationship, these days. As long as it’s less of a trainwreck than Bellamy was, she’s happy.

And then she gets the call to do *Lirael*, and there’s Bellamy again, and old habits apparently die hard. Because all she has to do is look at him, and it’s over.

She didn’t learn a thing.

*  

The first time they see each other, Clarke can’t help feeling awkward. It’s been ten years since the first movie, longer than most studios like to wait for sequels, but not as long as the time gap in the real books. Clarke is a little young to pass as the mother of a teenager, but Sabriel was supposed to be young when the children were born, and she’s not in the movie that much anyway, not quite a cameo, but not really a leading role either. Any time they want her back, she’ll come, and be happy. She loved the role.

But it’s been almost that long since she saw Bellamy, and part of her doesn’t know what to do with him in her life again. She’s kept up with him as best she can, knew he was doing well and seemed happy, but she’s still not ready to be with him. The first sight of him still stops her short.

His hair is longer, and he’s got a patchy beard going that might be for the role and might not. It *does* make him look older, and maybe that’s what they were looking for, but it also makes him look *different*, a physical reminder of all the years they’ve been apart.
For a second, she thinks about ducking out of sight before he turns all the way, but it’s only for a second. They’re working on a movie together, playing a married couple. She’s not going to be able to avoid him, and putting off talking to him won’t help.

Besides, she did like him. Loved him, even. And they crashed and burned pretty spectacularly, but a lot of that was a function of being kids in the public sphere. She was nineteen when they broke up; she’s more mature now. Smarter. She can deal with this.

So when he sees her, she raises her hand, smiles. “Hey.”

He blinks at her, surprised; he’s wearing his glasses, which he never used to do in public, and his eyes soften as he takes her in. “Hey. Long time no see.”

“I was avoiding you for like five years,” she says, and he takes it for the joke it is, ducks his head on a laugh.

“Yeah? What about the other four and a half years?”

“You never come to awards shows, when was I going to see you?”

“Yeah, that’s on me.” He wets his lips. “I feel like I apologized at least once, but–”

“Stop,” she says, holding up her hand. “We were both stupid kids. You broke my heart, I broke yours, neither of us dealt with it well. So we’re even, right? No hard feelings? We can still work together.”

“Definitely,” he says. But when he smiles again, her heard flips over, and when he says, “It’s good to see you again, Clarke,” some part of her melts.

She didn’t want to break up with Bellamy before. It just happened anyway.

“Yeah,” she says. “You too.”

* 

It’s about a week before they’re making out in her trailer. Clarke’s not quite sure how it happens, except that they’re hanging out together most of the time, and, again, she never stopped liking the things she liked about him before. He’s just as attractive and intelligent and easy to talk to as he always has been, and when he looks at her, she still feels like the only person in the world.

When she asks him if he wants to get a drink in her trailer, she knows what she’s really asking, and when he says yes, she thinks he knows what he’s agreeing to. She’s the one to move in closer, he’s the one to cup her jaw in his hand, and the kiss is mutual, familiar and new all at once, the scrape of his beard enough to remind her that he’s not the same boy she used to love.

“Clarke,” he says, soft, between kisses, and it doesn’t feel like a question, but she wants to give an explanation anyway. She feels like she has to say something.

“Just–” she starts, but just this once feels like a waste. “It doesn’t have to be a big deal,” she says instead, and he lets out a shuddering breath.

“Yeah,” he says, and kisses her again.

* 

They’re only filming for three weeks, which means they don’t have that long together, and within a
few days, Clarke’s making sure to see him every day, trying to get as much time with him as possible, and she’s already dreading when she stops seeing him again.

It’s not just that the sex is amazing, although it is. Spending time with him is just as good as it used to be, and she think they’ve grown up to have even more in common. Bellamy will make a dry comment, and she’ll be the only one who acknowledges it, the two of them catching each others’ eyes and grinning. They have a lot in common, and if not for what happened before, she’d ask hi if he wanted something more serious.

But she can’t quite get over that, so he’s the one to say, two days before their filming wraps, “It could be a big deal.”

The statement doesn’t really follow from anything; they’re in bed at his hotel room, naked and sated, Clarke curled against his bare chest with one of his arms wrapped around her, his thumb absentely stroking her shoulder. She’d been thinking about falling asleep, but the rumble of his voice is more interesting.

“What?” she asks.

He clears his throat. “This. Us. I know last time was–I was way too young to like you as much as I did. I didn’t know what the fuck to do with myself.”

She smiles, presses a kiss against the smooth skin above his heart. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

“So–we could try again, right? Not picking up where we left off, but–”

This time, she props herself up so she can kiss his lips. “Something new,” she says, and he smiles.

“Something new.”

*

It doesn’t feel like it should be hard to not talk about dating Bellamy again. After all, every instinct she has is telling her to be careful, to be cautious. This nearly broke her, the last time it went wrong, and just because it hasn’t gone wrong yet, it doesn’t mean it won’t. There’s no reason to think he’ll last longer than anyone else she’s dated.

But she’s happy. It’s been a long time, since she’s been this happy, and she doesn’t want to tell the world, but she wants to tell people, and that’s dangerous, because the more people who know, the better chance there is that it will get out. Her people would want to leak it, probably; getting back together with Bellamy would be great PR.

It doesn’t help that he agreed to keep it quiet, when she mentioned it. It doesn’t hurt, exactly, she doesn’t think he’s embarrassed, but it feels as if they’re both admitting they don’t expect it to last.

And she doesn’t expect that. But she wants it to.

“You never talk about who you’re dating,” she observes. They’re on his couch, him playing video games and her reading scripts, and it feels comfortable and lived in in a way it never did the last time. They don’t go to events or parties together, but they spend their weekends in one apartment or the other, the kind of casual, lowkey relationship they never had before. It was easy to always be on when they dated the first time, going to every party together, always in the spotlight, and she thought he wanted that. Thought they both did.

Now, she’s not so sure.
“Right now I’m dating this actress,” he says, absent. “Cute, kind of bossy, but–”

She swats his shoulder. “I meant before. When we were dating, we were out every night, and then you just–stopped.”

“So did you.”

“Yeah, but I know why I stopped.”

“Why?”

“Because our very public breakup sucked and I never wanted to do that again?”

“I never liked it that much to begin with,” he admits. “If that was what I had to do to date you, I’d do it, but–sometimes it felt like you just liked the attention.”

The sting is old and easy to ignore. “Sometimes it felt like you just liked parties.”

He actually laughs. “So, a couple teenagers sucked at communicating. That’s news.”

“You were twenty.”

“Yeah, so old and wise.” He kisses her hair. “I just liked you, Clarke. I wanted to do what would make you happy, which was stupid, because if I wasn’t happy too, it wouldn’t last.”

“I grew up in Hollywood. My understanding of relationships involves them being very public.”

“But you learned your lesson with me?”

“I thought I did. It’s possible there’s something about dating you that makes me want to tell everyone.”

He laughs, leans down to kiss her hair. “So, you want to brag about me?”

“What’s not to brag about?”

“We can go to more parties if you want,” he offers, but his voice is slightly off.

“That’s not what I mean. Just–it’s weird for me. I’ve been keeping relationships quiet for ten years because of you, and now I’m back with you and all I want to do is call all my friends and gossip.”

He laughs, and the tension leaves his body all at once. “You can do that.”

“I don’t trust all my friends.”

“That sounds like an issue with your friends.”

“Do yours know?”

“Just the ones I trust,” he teases, and she elbows him. “Really, though. I don’t have a ton of close friends. I told Miller we got back together, he was–worried.”

“Yeah?”

“You broke my heart last time.”

“You broke mine too.”
He smiles, tugs her close. “So we’re even. I don’t mind if you want to tell people, Clarke. Just—I’m not interested in being part of Hollywood’s next it couple.”

“I’m not either. But—I really like you,” she admits. It feels like failure, somehow. Ten years spent trying to get over the heartbreak Bellamy Blake, and in two months, she’s right back where she started.

“I really like you too,” he says. “I think we can do better this time.”

She cuddles closer. “Yeah. So far, so good.”

*

She starts wearing her engagement ring on the press tour for Abhorsen. It wasn’t particularly hard to wait that long; Bellamy proposed in a fairly casual way after the movie wrapped, and she wore the ring at home and among friends, not terribly concerned if word got out. But when the press tour rolls around, it feels like time to announce it. They’re not planning to hide the wedding or anything, so it’s bound to come up.

It’s the third reporter who says, “I can’t help noticing the ring.”

“Amazingly, you’re the first one to say that,” says Bellamy.

She smiles. “You’ve been waiting too?”

“We had a bet,” Clarke says.

“So your co-stars knew?”

“Not all of them.” She wets her lips, takes Bellamy’s hand. It’s going to be catastrophic if they break up, but it’s not public scrutiny that makes breaking up with Bellamy bad. It’s being in love with him. “It’s his ring,” she tells the reporter, “so he knew. Everyone else?” She shrugs, smiles. “It’s none of their business.”
Bellamy knows he and his sister haven’t exactly been close recently. Both of them have had a rough time year, and instead of supporting each other like he wishes they had, they sniped and bickered and picked at each others’ open wounds. It’s been at least six months since the two of them spoke, if not longer, and that’s on him as much as her.

Still, he can’t believe that her life has changed this much.

Of course, it takes him a while to get around to being able to wonder about his sister’s fiancee, because she’s in a coma, and said fiancee is also the doctor who’s treating her, so it doesn’t occur to him that it’s weird she’s around until later.

“At least she’s not alone,” his mother says, and he squeezes her shoulder.

“I know. You can go home, I’ve got her.”

“And her fiancée.”

His mother hasn’t been very healthy, these last few years, and she’s looking thinner and more worn than the last time he saw her, but still. He didn’t think she was this far gone. “Lincoln passed away,” he says, careful, and Mom rolls her eyes.

“Yes, I’m aware. The doctor. Did you not get introduced?”

He takes a second, trying to remember. Obviously, he met some of her doctors, but he was a lot more focused on Octavia’s condition than he was on anything else.

“I guess not. She’s engaged?” he adds. “Did you know about this?”

“No, but she’s always been impulsive.”

He rubs his face. “And you think she impulsively got engaged to her doctor right before she went into a coma? Where is this guy?”

Mom smirks. “It’s a woman, Bellamy, don’t be heteronormative.”

“I taught you that word, don’t use it against me. And O’s straight.”

“Isn’t sexuality fluid?”

He knew he’d come to regret telling her things. “Just point me to the doctor, okay?”

The doctor’s name is, apparently, Dr. Clarke Griffin, and when he asks for her at reception, he’s told she’s a resident, not a full doctor, and will be back shortly.

He’s not sure why he cares that she’s a resident. It doesn’t make it any less weird that she’s
claiming to be engaged to his previously exclusively heterosexual sister. He’s just trying to gather all the information he can.

When a cute blonde woman leans across the desk and gets directed to him, he straightens, stands up and offers his hand. “Dr. Griffin?” He assumes he can still call a resident doctor.

“How can I help you?” she asks.

“Apparently you’re engaged to my sister.”

She doesn’t miss a beat. “If you’re Octavia Blake’s brother then yes, I am. Sorry we didn’t get introduced earlier, it’s been a busy day. Is there something I can help you with?”

His jaw works, trying to come up with a good way to ask her what the fuck she’s playing at. Because there’s just no way. His sister did not, in the last six months, go through a complete reassessment of her sexuality and get engaged. It’s just not possible.

But it would be weird to come out and say that.

“Just wondering how the two of you met,” he says, and she gives him an unimpressed look. “I’m not allowed to want to get to know my sister’s fiancee?”

“I’m at work. And your sister’s in a coma. I assume you have better things to worry about than our relationship right now.”

“I can worry about more than one thing at once.”

She huffs like he’s ruining her day, which he might be. He’s been assuming she’s lying, but if she’s not, this sucks for her too. “Look,” he says, careful. “I just want to get to know you. If we’re going to be family.”

That works a little better. “I’m done at six. We could grab something to eat after that.”

“Perfect,” he says. “You know where to find me.”

*

To his surprise, she insists on meeting outside of the hospital, which makes sense when her opening gambit at the restaurant is, “I’m not engaged to your sister, I’m committing insurance fraud.”

“Uh–what?”

She pokes at her soda, scowling. “Not in a bad way,” she says. “Good insurance fraud. I’m not trying to con her or anything. She lives in my building and has really shitty coverage. If she had an inpatient visit with her plan, she’d go into debt to pay for it.”

“I told her her deductible was too fucking high,” he mutters, and Dr. Griffin finally cracks a smile.

“I’m sorry I lied to you, I wasn’t really–your mom overheard me telling one of my colleagues, and she seemed really excited, and I didn’t really want to get into it. Not when I was–”

“Committing insurance fraud.”

She shrugs one shoulder. “Pretty much. And then your mom wanted to talk about it. She really, really wanted me to know she was cool with our relationship.”
“Yeah, that’s my fault. I came out to her in college and she didn’t even know what bisexuality was so I spent a while trying to explain to her.”

She takes another sip of her soda. “Were you coming out as bisexual or just generally educating her as part of coming out as something else?”

“Coming out as bisexual.”

“Cool, me too. But your sister is straight?”

“As far as I know. We haven’t talked much lately, so I figured she might have decided she was into women and gotten a fiancee, but last time we talked she was pretty firmly straight.”

“Yeah, we talked a couple times, it sounded like she wasn’t that close to her family. I was kind of hoping no one was going to show up and call me out on it.”

“We’re still her family,” he says, gruff. “Thanks for–whatever you did with the insurance fraud. Thanks.”

“Should I tell your mom?” she asks.

“Probably not yet. Just–keep it simple.”

Dr. Griffin smiles. “Nothing says simple like a fake relationship for insurance benefits.”

“How does that even work, anyway? I didn’t think being engaged was enough to get you on someone’s insurance.”

“I’m just pulling some strings with billing. It’s not exactly insurance fraud, more billing fraud.”

“Is that less illegal?”

“I think it’s harder to trace,” she says, bright, and Bellamy snorts.

“As long as you’re okay with it.”

She makes a show of thinking it over. “Yeah,” she finally says. “I’m feeling pretty good.”

* 

It’s an incredibly surreal few days. His sister isn’t in any danger, which helps a lot; everyone seems confident she’s going to wake up and be fine. But his mother is excited about a relationship that he knows to be completely fraudulent, and she’s talking about wedding plans and shit and he wants to tell her it’s not real, but it’s not really his lie to expose.

And then there’s Clarke.

She tells him to call her that the first time he says Dr. Griffin, and then adds, “We’re going to be family,” and the whole thing really is kind of a problem. Because Clarke is–cool. She’s smart and sharp and gorgeous, and even if she’s not assigned to Octavia’s case (because it’s a theoretical conflict of interest), she’s around a lot, because she’s theoretically his sister’s fiancee and an interested party.

And Bellamy might also be an interested party. Just a little. In Clarke.

Which is stupid for a whole host of reasons. As soon as this is done, he’s never going to see her
again, and once his mom finds out the truth she might sue or something, to say nothing of Octavia, and she probably isn’t interested in him and—yeah.

The whole thing is really fucking stupid, and he’d like to turn it off.

Instead, he learns Clarke’s schedule in that easy, unconscious way that he picks up on things, starts bringing her meals when he learns she forgets to eat, checking in on her in her breaks, walking to the train with her after her shifts. If they were in high school, he’d be carrying her books to class for her. That’s where he’s at.

So, of course, she calls him out.

“My coworker thinks we’re involved in some real soap-opera stuff.”

“We kind of are,” he muses. “You’re pretending to be in a relationship with my sister who’s in a coma for financial gain. That’s pretty much as soap opera as you can get without anyone having an evil twin.” He pauses for effect. “You don’t, right?”

“Not as far as you know. That’s a sweeps week reveal.”

“No offense, but I hope she’s out by sweeps week. Whenever that is.”

Her smile is all warmth and compassion, and it really does help. “I think she’ll be out in a few days. A week at the most.”

“I hope so.” He clears his throat. “So, what soap-opera stuff was your coworker talking about? I assume they don’t know you’re faking the engagement.”

“She doesn’t.” She clears her throat. “She thinks my fiancee’s brother has a thing for me.”

There’s not much safe to say to that, so he settles on, “Oh.”

“Yeah. I kind of thought she might be right.”

That helps. “She definitely was.”

“Cool. Are you doing anything right now?”

He grins. “Whatever you want me to.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.”

*  

Clarke texts him when Octavia wakes up, and by the time he gets there, it’s already kind of a mess.

“She must have lost some of her memory,” his mother is saying, while Clarke looks kind of vaguely uncomfortable about gaslighting Octavia about their relationship and the doctor clearly wants to kick everyone out but hasn’t yet, possibly because she is also invested in the weird soap opera that’s happening right now.

“Hi,” he says. “You guys look like you’ve got everything under control here, let me take Mom to get some coffee. You want anything, Clarke?”

“Bell?” Octavia asks, vague, and a lump rises in his throat. He lets himself take a second to cross the room, find her hand and squeeze it.
“Hey, I’ll be back soon. But it’s pretty crowded in here, I figured you could use a break.”

“Thanks for coming,” she says, and he smiles.

“Wouldn’t be anywhere else.”

Clarke offers him a tight smile as he passes, and he smiles back, takes his mother’s arm and guides her out of the room and to the cafeteria.

“They’re not really engaged,” he murmurs, and to his surprise, she rolls her eyes.

“No, of course not.”

“You knew?”

“I know my son,” she says, firm. “You would never flirt with your sister’s fiancee. And you were.”

He laughs. “I was, yeah. But you were telling O—“

“I assumed you had a good reason for keeping it up. I didn’t want her to spoil it. We can fill her in later.”

He puts his arm around her shoulders and squeezes. “Then, uh, sorry I didn’t tell you. With everything else going on—“

“It’s fine.” There’s a twinkle in her eye. “As long as one of my children ends up marrying a doctor.”

“Yeah, uh, let’s not get carried away,” he says, choking on his snort of laughter. “But we can see how it goes.”

By the time they get back to Octavia’s room, the doctor has cleared out, and it’s just Clarke, sitting by her bed only slightly awkwardly. He assumes she didn’t want O to be left alone, which makes her a pretty good insurance-fraud fiancee, in his book.

She gives up her seat to his mother as soon as she sees them.

“I have to get back to work,” she offers. “I have rounds. But—“

“Did you guys get a chance to talk?” he asks.

“Yeah, all set. You?”

“Yeah, I think everyone’s on the same page.”

He can tell she wants to kiss him, and he wants it too, but instead she just nods, smiles. “Okay, cool. I’ll be back when I can. I’m so glad you’re awake, babe.”

Octavia returns the smile. “Me too.”

He takes a seat on the other side of Octavia from his mother, and she turns her smile on him.

“How are you feeling?” he asks. She’s happy to see him; it’s more of a relief than he’d like.

“Betrayed. I can’t believe you tried to steal my fiancee while I was in a coma.”

His bark of laughter is so sharp and sudden that his mother jumps. “Hey, she let me steal her.”
“She did.” She settles back in the bed, eyes sliding shut. “It’s probably for the best. It never would have worked between us.”

“Yeah,” he agrees, squeezing her hand. “This is definitely the best-case scenario.”
The One Thing I Can't Get Enough Of

Chapter Summary

Fill for talldecafappuccino! Prompt: Bellarke Dirty Dancing AU

Honestly, the last thing Bellamy ever wants is guests actually getting involved with the staff's lives. Guests are guests and staff are staff, and he knows that even if it looks like some of them are cool, decent people, they're literally tourists. They're here for the summer, and then they'll be gone. More than that, their interest can turn into disdain at the drop of a hat. He can make nice, flirt, even enjoy their company, but at the end of the day, they're not his friends.

Unfortunately, not everyone got this memo about Clarke Griffin.

He gets why, of course. Clarke is around their age, cute and blonde and clearly bored, stuck with her parents and a bunch of their rich friends for an entire summer. He'd be desperate for human interaction too. And he doesn't mind being nice to her.

But when O brings her to the weekly staff party, that's a little much.

“What the hell is this?” he hisses at her.

Octavia rolls her eyes. “A party. You know, for a professional dancer, you’re surprisingly bad at identifying parties.”

“Not that. You brought a guest?”

"Not a guest, Clarke."

"Who is a guest."

"Don't be a dick."

It's a common request from his sister, but he has to admit he seems to be on the wrong side of history with this one. Clarke's already fitting in without any real effort; Monty gave her a drink, and she's chatting easily with Raven and Gina, who seem happy to have her there.

"If I'm not a dick, I have to come up with something else to do."

"Clarke's fine."

"She is."

It's not even a lie; he likes Clarke. She's in his dance class and is competent, if a little too serious and self-conscious to really be good. But that's kind of endearing, really. She thinks so hard about getting the steps right that she can't just move. And while she's rich and clearly privileged, everyone here is rich and privileged. Clarke is, at least, young enough to be fairly liberal, and there's the possibility that she'll learn and change. The older folks are pretty much set in their ways.

"So relax. She's not going to tell on us. I think she's even going to cover for me."
His eyes cut to her, sharp. "Cover for you?"

"Help me get to Planned Parenthood."

He's been trying not to think about his sister's pregnancy. It's not that he disapproves, exactly. He'd be a hypocrite if he objected to her being sexually active, and birth control failure can happen to anyone. But he doesn't like actually thinking about it, because it really is going to be a mess. They're in a conservative state with a conservative boss, and O's actually crossing state lines to get around stupid abortion laws, which might get her fired, if anyone finds out. But she'd get fired if she had the baby without being married too, probably, and they wouldn't be able to prove that was why, so it's not like that would be a better option even if she wanted a kid, which she doesn't.

None of which means Clarke should be involved.

"That's your plan?"

"Like you've got a better one."

"I'm working on it."

"Well, while you're working on it, I'm getting more and more pregnant, so can you try to be nice? I want her to like us."

He huffs. "I'm not being mean. I'm just not talking to her right now. It's not like she's trying to get my attention. She seems fine with Raven and Gina."

"Yeah, but if she does."

There's something in her tone that makes him look at her sharply. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing." When he doesn't let up, she sighs. "I said you'd give her some private dance lessons, okay? She wants to get better! It's not like it's hard. You do this for a living."

"You do too."

"I don't lead. Come on, Bell. Go ask her to dance."

"I'm not going to seduce a girl into giving you a ride to Planned Parenthood, O."

"I never said you were!"

"Uh huh."

"I'm just saying, we can show her a good time. Remind her we're people, not props. And dancing is fun, you know? She's too tense, she needs to unwind."

"I'll talk to her," he finally says, grudging, and Octavia grins like she's won. Which, to be fair, she probably has. Because once he remembers that Clarke is a real person too, he's going to lose that protective distance, and talking to her will definitely do that.

But he's not going to ask her to dance.

* 

"So, here's what I don't get," Clarke says, two weeks later, after he and O have finished demonstrating their competition piece for the rest of the staff.
"Just one thing?" he teases. Since that first party he has, admittedly, grown to like Clarke. Part of that is that she is helping Octavia, and helping her a lot. Her mother is a doctor, which means she's fluent in things like hospitals and insurance, and she helped O get an appointment and make sure all her stuff is in order.

He still wishes she didn't have to be involved, but if they're going to have a guest helping them out, Clarke probably isn't a bad one.

"Shut up," she says, without heat. "Isn't it weird to dance like that with your sister?"

He shrugs, takes a long gulp of water. "It's not--it can be romantic, yeah. Sometimes dancing is foreplay. But it's a sport, too. A performance. I get that people always think siblings dancing together is creepy, but we both learned from our mom, so we have similar styles and work well together. I'm not saying I've never slept with a dance partner, but it's the exception, not the rule. At least for professional dancing."

"I guess that makes sense. I guess I still don't get it, you know?"

"No, that really wasn't clear enough for me to figure out."

"You're such a dick," she says, but it's fond. "I get dancing as a kind of--pattern, I guess? Or a puzzle. Do all the steps right and it looks good. But I don't understand the appeal."

"Yeah, that's because it's not a puzzle. You do the steps because it lets you move with the person. It's not about figuring out a puzzle, it's about flowing with another person. No wonder you're so bad at it."

"I'm getting better!"

"You are. Honestly, that tells me a lot about why you're bad. You're worrying too much about doing the right thing, you need to just relax."

"Relax," she says, dubious, like it's a word in an unfamiliar foreign language, something that she's heard before but never understood.

It's a bad idea and he knows it. Dancing with Clarke here, trying to teach her to loosen up--it's a terrible plan. It's going to erode the last of the wall he has up between his life and her, and he needs that wall.

But he wants to dance with her. Really dance.

"Come on," he says, offering his hand. "We can try it."

Clarke takes his hand without hesitation, lets him pull her out onto the dance floor. He gets a few looks, half smug, half confused, like everyone's just been waiting for him to give up and dance with her and they don't know why it took so long, so he hates them all. But then he's got Clarke in his arms, closer and more intimate than usual, and all other thoughts fall out of his head.

He swallows hard. "Okay, so--just move."

"You haven't even told me what we're doing."

"You're following my lead. You don't have steps, just--flow."

"You keep saying that word like it means something to me," she grumbles.
"Feel what I'm doing, listen to the music, and follow your instincts. You do have them, I promise."

"Oh good."

It takes a few tries, but Clarke does get it, figures out how to turn off her brain and just move, and it's just as good and as bad as he thought it would be. They feel like a unit, natural and easy, moving together so smoothly he can't quite believe it, and all he wants to do is dance with her forever, or at least until the sexual frustration gets to be too much and he can drag her off somewhere.

"Was that okay?" Clarke asks, breathless and flushed and gorgeous, and Bellamy swallows hard.

"Yeah," he says. "I think you've got it."

* 

"So, I think I should take Clarke to the competition this weekend," he tells his sister, when he can't put it off any longer.

"This better not be because you think I'm so weak after the abortion," she says, mild. "But if it's because you want to have victory sex with Clarke, I can live with that."

"I know you're fine. I'm not banking on victory sex either. But I think we'd have a better chance."

Octavia considers him. "You know she likes you, right? You didn't miss that."

"No," he admits. He's good at detecting interest from guests, and Clarke wasn't really a surprise. He's a young, attractive guy who was touching her a lot. Crushes are natural.

But he does think it's gone deeper than that. They have a lot in common, despite all the things they don't have in common, and he likes talking to her. If it wasn't just for the summer and she wasn't still a guest, he'd think it could really go somewhere.

"And you like her," says Octavia.

"It doesn't matter. We'll have a fun summer fling and then it's over. That has nothing to do with the competition."

"You know it doesn't have to be like that, right?" she asks, sizing him up. "You have a phone. You could stay in touch."

"I appreciate your dedication to romance, but I've got this. All I want to know is if you don't mind if I take her to the competition instead."

"I don't mind. I'll bring Lincoln, we'll have fun. Maybe even beat you and your rookie partner," she teases, and he laughs.

"Yeah, I'm giving you guys the edge."

"That's definitely why."

The next step is asking Clarke, and as confused by the suggestion as he expected her to be.

"Me?"

"Yeah."
"You want me to do a dance competition?"

He shrugs. "Why not?"

"About a million reasons. I'm inexperienced, I'm too cerebral--"

"You're not. I mean, you are inexperienced, but you're getting really good. And--" He clears his throat. "There's nothing wrong with dancing with my sister. But it's not bad to have a partner with more--"

He trails off as she smirks, as aware as he is that he doesn't have a safe way to get out of this.

"More what?" she finally prompts.

"Chemistry."

"And we have more chemistry."

"It would be hard for you to have less chemistry with anyone than my sister," he says, gruff, but she's not letting him off the hook that easily.

"You like dancing with me."

"I do."

"And you think we could win."

"I think we've got a shot."

She takes a step in. "And you want to make out."

It's pointless to deny it. "Yeah."

"Okay," she says. "I'll do it."

And then she kisses him, and they forget about logistics for a while.

* 

Bellamy ends the summer with a decent amount of prize money from getting first place in the dance contest, Clarke Griffin's number and email address, and a list of schools with dance programs in the Boston area.

"I'm not saying you have to go to school," Clarke says, during their very long goodbye. He's having trouble letting go of her. "Just, you know. It's an option. You're really good, you could probably get a teaching position."

"You're biased."

"I can be biased and objective."

He grins. "You really can't, those are incompatible."

She leans in for what is, by his count, her third last kiss. "I'm just saying. I wouldn't lie to you just because I--" She trips over the word, and Bellamy's heart stutters.

He thinks he might love her too.
"I'll let you know," he says, and when he manages to move to the city six months later, she's there to meet him, throwing her arms around him and kissing him in the middle of the train station.

"Hi," he says, grinning as he rests his forehead on hers. "I thought I could try city life."

"Good. I think you're going to like it."

"Yeah. Me too."
It’s always nice, in a kind of weird way, when Clarke sees someone she knows, but doesn’t know very well, at a protest.

She likes to assume that most of the people in her life, even the passing acquaintances, are at least against the Trump administration, and that many of them are opposed enough to be taking direct action, but it’s always nice to have those feelings confirmed.

And it is, admittedly, especially nice to have those feelings confirmed with someone she is lowkey crushing on.

Not that it’s surprising, really, that Bellamy Blake is a revolutionary. He’s not white and not straight, both of which are good indicators on their own, let alone together, and he’s always struck her as the kind of person who stands up for what he believes in.

He’s also a trainer at her gym and stupidly ripped, which is probably why she becomes aware of him in the middle of a fight, punching some guy who’s trying to hassle a couple kids who don’t even seem to be involved in the whole thing, just passing through.

She doesn’t see him, specifically, right away; she’s making her way over to the altercation, trying to figure out what’s going on and if she can break it up, when she sees one guy throw a punch, and another guy punching back, and by the time she realizes that one of the guys on her side is Bellamy, it’s too late for her to do much except help get the girls out of danger.

“Hey, Blake, I’ve got the kids!” she says, sees his eyes flick over to her for just a second, just long enough to see who she is and what she’s doing before he turns his attention back to the fight.

“Thanks, doc,” he says, moving to shield them, still ready to keep fighting. The girls are probably high-school aged, wearing Hillary Clinton shirts but not, apparently, actually involved in the rally, and Clarke checks them both over while listening to the fight with one ear. It’s growing, of course; these things always do.

“What were you guys doing down here?” she asks one of the girls.

“Just walking,” she says. “We heard there was stuff happening, so we wore the shirts, but we’re just going to the movies.”

“Bullies always pick on people they think won’t fight back. They wanted to hassle someone and you guys were there. I’m sorry,” she adds.

The girl shrugs, pragmatic. “We knew it might happen. And it’s not like they did anything to us. They called us names and then your friend showed up to walk with us.”

“Do you think he’s okay?” the other girl adds. “He got hit.”
“Trust me, I’m checking on him after I check on you. But he should be fine. He’s pretty tough.”

“Will you thank him for us?” the first girl adds. “He was really nice.”

“I definitely will. Where are you guys going?”

The movie theater is in sight of where they are, but Clarke walks them anyway, just to be safe. She’s not much of a fighter, but she’s older and knows how to look intimidating enough that no one hassles them again.

Once they’re inside, she head back where she came from, planning to go check on the fight, try to find Bellamy, but he finds her first, falling into step with her.

“Cover for me? Cops broke it up, but I don’t really want to talk to them, so—”

She slides her arm into his, leans her head against his shoulder. “Couple going on a movie date?”

“Perfect. Hi, by the way. Nice to see you.”

“You too. Those girls said to thank you. How are you doing?”

“I’ve been better. Did you seriously come to a rally with a first-aid kit?”

“I worked in an ER every summer during college. I might as well use it. Did you come to punch a Nazi?”

“I’m always hoping, but it’s never actually worked out before.” He puts his face in her hair as a couple cops pass, she assumes to hide the damage she hasn’t gotten a chance on check yet. But it’s also a little bit nice, if she’s honest. She needs more cuddling in her life.

Once they’re in the clear, she holds the door open for him. “Come on, they might have a family bathroom.”

“I think they’ll think we’re trying to hook up.”

“Yeah, I like them bloody and achy.”

“Adrenaline is an aphrodisiac for some people.” He wets his lips, looking around. “There’s a chair, I can sit in a chair, right? They aren’t going to kick me out.”

“We can always buy tickets to something if they make us. Here, sit down.”

She gets him settled, facing away from the windows in case anyone is seriously trying to find him, and gets her first good look at him. His hair is always kind of messy, but it’s obviously not deliberate now, going every which way and like someone was pulling it, and his eye is already starting to blacken. There’s a little blood on his lip, but nothing too bad.

He’s also wearing a tight pansexual pride shirt that makes his arms look even larger than normal, but she probably shouldn’t think about that until she’s got him cleaned up.

“So, this was your first time punching a Nazi, right?”

“Not for lack of trying. Not that I come to these to pick a fight,” he adds. “But I know I actually can win the fight, and not everyone can.”

“Yeah. That’s why I bring the first aid kit and water bottles. I can be a warm body, and if anything
bad happens, I can help out. Was anyone else fighting on our side, or just you?”

“A couple others. I think they’re fine. I was in the middle.”

“You got off pretty light.”

“You haven’t looked at my hand yet.”

She winces. “Fuck, I forgot. Split knuckles?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure.”

“You want me to do the face first or straight to the hand?”

“I think the hand is bleeding more.”

“Okay.” She unties the flannel from around her waist and puts it on his lap, making him smile.

“I’m not sure my jeans are more worth protecting than your shirt.”

“They’re nice jeans,” she says, absent. “Jesus, Bellamy.”

“That bad?”

Her fingers trace over the jagged cuts. “You really got him in the teeth.”

“He was harassing a couple of high-school kids,” he says, gruff. “Just because they were away from the pack. He deserved to get his teeth knocked in.”

“I’m not going to argue with you. Just—sucks for your hand.”

“Worth it.”

She gets antiseptic out of her first-aid kit, starts to clean out the cuts. He winces, but doesn’t say anything. “Have you noticed how punching Nazis was completely socially acceptable right up until it started being something we thought we needed to do again?” she asks, to distract him. “They were the safest fictional targets in the world, and now that we have assholes in swastikas demonstrating in the street, suddenly everyone wants to remind us that violence isn’t the answer.”

“Depends on the question,” says Bellamy. “It’s not like I really wanted to spend 2017 worried about losing basic rights and fighting fascists, but here we are.”

“Here we are.”

He clears his throat, watching her work on his hand. “Have you had to do this a lot? Treat people?”

“It’s mostly giving them water and stuff. A lot of kids are really upset and want to do something, so they just come out here pissed and don’t bring supplies.”

His laugh is soft. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that.”

“If I was as ripped as you, I’d be thinking more about punching people too. A good revolution uses everyone where they’re most effective. We have different skill sets.”

“Well, I appreciate yours right now. I would have just waited until the protest was over and probably gotten an infection.”
She makes a face. “Yeah, whenever you cut yourself on someone else’s body, you should clean it out right away. You don’t know where that guy’s been.”

“Thank goodness. I’ll be sure to bring my own antiseptic next time.”

Her first impulse is to suggest that they just come to the next one together, but it feels like a little much. They still aren’t really friends, just friendly acquaintances, bonding over some old-fashioned Nazi punching. She’d like to leverage the whole thing into seeing him more, but it feels a little–weird. This is more important than her romantic entanglements.

“If you’re planning to punch people you should be prepared, yeah.” She gets her gauze out and starts wrapping his fingers, which is bad only because she’s going to stop having an excuse to touch his hands soon. He has really nice hands. But they’re set now. “Okay,” she says. “You’re good.”

“Thanks. Are you going back out there? The protest isn’t over yet.”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“We should probably stick together,” he says. “In case anyone needs medical attention or an ass kicking.”

She bites her lip on her grin. “Yeah, that sounds right.”

It’s fairly uneventful after that, which Clarke can’t really bring herself to mind. They yell a lot and cheer a lot and she identifies some kids who need to sit down and take a break, and Bellamy keeps them near the counter protestors in case anyone tries to start anything else, but the police are out now and no one really wants to get arrested unless it’s absolutely necessary.

“At least you got to punch one Nazi,” she tells him as the crowd starts to disperse, and he smiles.

“Nightmares come true.”

“That’s the 2017 mood, yeah.”

“Where are you heading?”

“Home.”

“I was hoping for a couple more details. On the train?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too.”

As they walk to the station, they establish they live in the same neighborhood, which isn’t really a surprise, given that’s where the gym is, but she wasn’t sure. She doesn’t live that close to work; he might not have either.

They’re two stops away when Bellamy says, “So, uh, I feel like I owe you.”

“For what?”

He holds up his bandaged hand. “Medical attention.”

“I don’t mind. I finally got to put my first-aid skills to the test.”
His mouth twists in a smile. “I can’t tell if you’re shooting me down preemptively or not.”

“Shooting you down?”

“I’m trying to leverage protests and Nazi fighting into a dinner date. If that’s something you’d be interested in.”

“Oh, wow. Yeah I didn’t get that. You should keep going, I wasn’t trying to shoot you down. Just be nice.”

He laughs. “Awesome. Do you want to get dinner with me?”

“That would be great, yeah.”

*

The next protest that rolls around, they go together, with a backpack full of supplies, and Clarke’s the one to punch someone this time.

“Good energy,” Bellamy says, cleaning out her cut. “Not great technique. You’re lucky you didn’t break your thumb. Did no one ever teach you how to throw a punch?”

“I thought it was one of those things you learned by doing.”

He snorts. “Yeah, no. There’s definitely a right way to punch someone. We can work on it.”

“Yeah?”

“If the current administration is going to keep on making us fight Nazis, we might as well be good at it, right?”

She has to smile. “That’s the goal, yeah. You’re not great at the medical side either.”

“So we should probably stick together. We make a pretty good team.”

She leans in for a quick kiss. “Yeah. That’s what I was thinking.”
Nate is not really convinced about moving in with Monty Green.

On paper, it’s a great idea. Bellamy and Clarke are moving in together, leaving both Nate and Monty without roommates. They have a lot in common and get along, so the two of them were a natural fit. They’re not that close, but they see each other socially and like each other, and finding roommates is a pain. The whole thing checks out, and Nate gets why everyone else is on board.

Really, the only reason Nate isn’t on board is that he likes Monty. In a more than friendly way. And moving in with a guy for whom he has romantic feelings seems like a terrible idea. He can think of roughly ten thousand things that could go wrong, from walking in on Monty in a state of undress to Monty getting a significant other and Nate having to witness them rubbing their noses together and talking about how much they love each other.

The whole thing really is a minefield, but he can’t say that, and he has no other objections, which means that he is, apparently, moving in with Monty Green.

It’s going to suck.

Monty gets them off to a terrible start, too. He and Nate are meeting for coffee and to talk about moving in, and his opening gambit is, horrifically, “So, your place or mine?”

Nate was drinking, and he promptly chokes on it. “What?”

Monty looks stupidly pleased with himself, like he was trying to give Nate a heart attack. “Where are we moving? Your place or mine?”

“Oh, uh. I don’t know. Bellamy and Clarke are getting a whole new place, right?”

“Yeah, they’re downsizing since they don’t need two rooms. So I assume we’ll keep one place and leave the other. I made up a spreadsheet with information about our place,” he adds, turning his laptop so Nate can see it, and it’s honestly fucking unfair, that the guy is this hot and this cute at the same time. “I didn’t have your information, so we still need to fill that in, but I figure that’s the easiest way? Unless you have a strong preference.”

“No, not really. I’d rather not have to move,” he adds, in the interest of full disclosure. “But I figure you don’t want to either, so that’s not a deciding factor.”

“Yeah, if it comes to that we can flip a coin.” He straightens up. “So, do you know the square footage of your apartment off the top of your head, or do you need to look that up?”

“Who knows that off the top of their head?” Nate asks, and Monty shakes his head, like Nate has personally failed him.
“Fine, we’ll figure it out.”

After about a half an hour, they’ve discovered that Monty and Clarke’s apartment is both objectively better than Nate and Bellamy’s and also still financially realistic for them to keep, and there’s really no arguing with cold hard facts. Nate flops back in his chair with a sigh.

“So, I’m moving in with you.”

“Unless you have other objections.”

*You’re cute*, he thinks, but all he says is, “Nope. The math checks out.”

“Cool. So, we can do moving details over email? I assume it depends on when Clarke moves out and stuff. But it shouldn’t be too hard.”

“Said like the guy who doesn’t have to move,” Nate grumbles.

Monty grins. “Just like that.” And then, horribly, his smile softens, making Nate’s stomach twist. “Seriously, I’m looking forward to living with you.”

He would be a monster if he did anything except smile back. “Yeah, me too.”

*

“Still hate your life?” Bellamy asks, when he gets back.

“Fuck you, this is your fault.”

“That good, huh?”

“You’re moving in with the girl you’re in love with and deserting me to–”

“Live with a guy you have a thing for. Yeah, I’m a monster. Seriously,” he adds. “You’re going to be fine.”

“You can’t make me,” Nate mutters, and Bellamy, wisely, doesn’t argue.

*

Of course, living with Monty is fine. It takes some getting used to, obviously, the same way new housing situations always do. Bellamy had a long list of quirks, which Nate eventually got used to, and now he just has to readjust to Monty’s new quirks. He keeps weird hours and sometimes doesn’t remember to control his volume when he yells at the TV, but those are eccentricities that Nate doesn’t mind. Honestly, they’re kind of bonuses. Shit like that is why he likes Monty in the first place.

If there’s a problem, it’s with Monty’s mild narcolepsy.

Okay, Nate knows it’s not really narcolepsy. He is aware that that’s a diagnosable thing and Monty doesn’t have it, as far as he knows. He’s just a napper. Like, a chronic napper. He can and will fall asleep at the drop of a hat, and this is something Nate has to deal with. Monty, curled up on the couch or with his head down on the kitchen table, sometimes actually on the floor, sleeping in a sunbeam like a fucking cat.

“Seriously,” he says, the first time that one happens. “Is this an actual medical condition? Have you checked?”
“Nope, just a lifestyle choice,” says Monty, stretching so his shirt shows off a few inches of firm stomach. “Sorry, I know it’s weird. Clarke had trouble with it too.”

This is an intriguing statement. Nate likes Clarke—he can’t help liking anyone who makes Bellamy so happy—but he can’t really imagine living with her. He feels like she’d be kind of neurotic.

So the next time the four of them are out, he says, “So, Clarke. Monty’s sleeping thing.”

“Oh wow,” she says. “Already? It took, like, months before he started falling asleep everywhere with me.”

“You helped me come to accept and love myself,” Minty tells her, and Clarke rolls her eyes.

“Oh good. Yeah, it’s weird,” she adds, to Nate. “I don’t know what to tell you.”

“There’s nothing to tell!” says Monty. “I get sleepy. I’m good at power naps. It started in college. I would be in the computer lab coding and just sleep hard for fifteen minutes and feel so much better.”

“And now that’s how you live your life?” Bellamy asks, dubious.

“If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”

“I think passing out on our floor might count as being broke,” Nate says.

“On the floor?” Clarke asks. “Really?”

“On the carpet! It’s very plush.”

“So I’m going to get used to this,” Nate says, and Clarke shakes her head.

“If he’s passing out on the carpet, he might be getting worse.”

“I can stop any time I want to,” says Monty. “I just don’t want to.”

Nate tries not to smile, but it’s ridiculous. And just a little cute.

“Well,” he says. “As long as you can stop.”

* 

It doesn’t become a problem, not really, until Monty starts falling asleep on him.

It’s the natural next step, so he’s not sure why he’s so surprised, except that Monty falling asleep on him is the kind of thing he is incapable, on any level, of really thinking about, so he probably just blocked it out of his mind. It was easier to not let himself consider that he might be Monty’s next horizontal surface.

Not that it’s exactly like that, of course. It’s not as if Monty comes into his bedroom and falls asleep on top of him. But Nate’s been really into Horizon Zero Dawn, and Monty’s been watching him play, giving him advice and offering commentary. It’s a great way to spend his evenings with only a little romantic frustration, because he’s too focused on the game to really have time to think about how much he likes Monty.

Moving in together has done absolutely nothing to kill his crush, which doesn’t even make sense;
surely one of Monty’s bizarre personal habits should have been a deal breaker.

He notices Monty getting quieter as the evening progresses, but he assumes, foolishly, that Monty will fall asleep the other way. There’s a whole half of the couch Nate isn’t on. He can use that part.

Instead, he slumps onto Nate’s side, and Nate’s entire brain shorts out for a long moment. It’s not like it’s *that* intimate. Monty’s asleep on his shoulder. He’ll probably drool.

So he fishes out his phone and texts Clarke: *Did he ever fall asleep ON you*

Unless she’s getting laid, Clarke basically always texts back instantly, which is one of those things Nate was happier not knowing. Luckily, the dots appear almost immediately, so at least he’s not thinking about how Bellamy is having sex while he’s trying not to freak out about Monty.

**Clarke:** Nope
Bellamy and I talked about it
We think this might be personal

**Me:** tf does that mean

**Clarke:** It seems like he’s really comfortable with you

**Me:** Bellamy told you

**Clarke:** Bellamy didn’t have to tell me
You guys are really obvious

**Me:** Both of us?

**Clarke:** He’s the one who’s sleeping on you
Bellamy wants a pic btw

Nate holds the phone up, lining up the shot carefully. He does it in Snapchat, so he can try a couple versions, and saves the one with no caption for himself.

Then he adds *tfw your roommate thinks you’re a pillow* and sends it to Clarke and Monty.

**Me:** Tell Bellamy to get on Snapchat if he wants pics

**Clarke:** He says he’ll get on Snapchat in hell
Which autocorrected back to he’ll like fifteen times
You guys are cute

**Nate:** Yeah we are

*You make a good pillow*, Monty texts the next morning, while Nate is on the train to work, and he does his best not to smile.

* Once Monty has fallen asleep on something without incident, it gets added to his rotation, and Nate is no exception. Suddenly, Monty is drifting off on him all the time, during movies, after work, one time just in the middle of the afternoon while Nate was reading. He puts his head in Nate’s lap and
sighs contentedly and is dead to the world for twenty minutes while Nate quietly freaks out.

Bellamy and Clarke remain convinced this is a sign Monty wants to date him, but Nate can’t get there. It just makes no sense to him. He wants to date Monty and overthinks every single interaction; Monty just passes out like it’s nothing. There’s no way he could just fall asleep on Monty. He’s tried, even. When Monty falls asleep on him, he’ll sometimes try to lean back into it, to drift off himself, but he’s not wired like that. He’s never been good at taking naps, even when he’s not trying to cuddle with his crush and his brain won’t just shut up and let him enjoy it.

Which leaves him back almost exactly where he started, except his unrequited crush on Monty just gets worse and worse, as he knew it would. He didn’t see all of this coming—there’s no way he could have predicted the sleeping situation—but the basic outline is as he knew it would be. He likes Monty, and Monty is around all the time, which makes him like Monty more, and it’s a vicious crush cycle he knew would end up making him miserable.

But it’s the good kind of misery. The kind he doesn’t actually want to give up. But at the same time, he knows the whole thing is building to a breaking point. It’s inevitable, because that’s how feelings work. If they don’t go away, they have to come out. And there is still some small, stubborn part of him that hopes. Monty likes guys; Monty likes him. He might not have a huge, embarrassing crush like Nate does, but that doesn’t mean he might not be interested in trying something out.

This would probably be a good way to present the issue, and Nate wishes he’d gone with it.

Instead, Monty wakes up from a nap in his lap one Saturday afternoon and smiles at him, all warm and sleepy, and Nate jumps up like he’s been scalded to keep from kissing him.

Monty frowns, adjusts his glasses, cocks his head. “Uh, everything–”

“You have to stop doing that.”

The frown deepens. “Stop doing what?”

“I don’t care if you sleep on the floor, but you can’t sleep on me.”

“Oh,” he says, and now he looks hurt, and fuck Nate’s entire life. “Sorry, I didn’t know it bothered you.”

Nate lets out a breath. “That’s not—it’s not what you’re thinking.” Monty cocks his head, there’s no getting out of it. “I like you, okay? Like—like you. It’s not a big deal, but I need you to not—”

“No, it’s a big deal,” Monty says, but there’s a grin growing on his face, and the tension in Nate’s chest slowly uncoils. “We really can’t just breeze past that, that’s—”

“You’re going to need to tell me if it’s good news before you go any farther.”

“Great news,” says Monty, and then they’re kissing, and Nate’s brain finally shuts the fuck up.

* 

“This is weird,” Nate remarks, that night.

“What’s weird?”

“You’re falling asleep on me in a bed. Like a normal person.”
“I sleep in a bed every night,” Monty says, curling himself around Nate. It’s possibly stupid to move as quickly as they are, but it’s not like this hasn’t been building for both of them. Monty’s liked him too, this whole time.

It’s pretty awesome.

“I’m just saying, this is a new one for me.”

“Whatever,” says Monty, closing his eyes. “You’ll get used to it.”

“I guess I will,” he agrees.

Honestly, he can’t wait.
Not to brag, but Monty is a supernatural magnet.

This isn’t a self-assessment; his mother took him to a magi when he was a kid and had him checked. She thought he might be a supernatural being himself, given how much trouble he got into, but the magi looked him over, did a few tests, and said that he was a human, just one with an abnormally strong spiritual energy that would draw in supernatural entities.

People used to be jealous about it, especially when he was a kid. They’d go on a hike for school, and Monty would be swarmed by pixies and spirits. He’d go swimming and get hippocamps and undines butting up against his legs, wanting to make friends. From the outside, he gets why it seems cool; most people go their whole lives without getting to pet a unicorn, and Monty just takes it for granted that he can do it basically whenever he wants.

But there are downsides, too. He has to be careful to not get dragged into the woods or under the water, to make sure nothing does him any harm in its enthusiasm. And he knows he’s, well, appealing. Even to rational supernatural creatures. Every time someone is hitting on him, he has to ask if they’re human, and if they’re not, he dutifully explains that he’s a magnet, and they’re drawn to him because of some odd coincidence of genetics.

By the time he’s out of college, he’s mostly used to it. It’s something he has to deal with, a serious but not fatal condition that requires monitoring and planning, but doesn’t impact his life about 90% of the time. His apartment is full of magical pets who have adopted him, but his landlord is cool with it, and every time he goes to a bar a vampire or a werewolf or a siren will hit on him, but once he explains what’s going on they either lose interest or don’t care and want to hook up anyway, and either outcome works for Monty. He does have more weird sidequests in his life than he thinks most people do, but that’s cool too. If a random supernatural creature wants his help to reunite it with its owner or find its way back to his family, he’s down. It’s nice to have projects.

So when the dog starts following him, he doesn’t really think anything of it. He doesn’t even notice at first; Clarke has to point it out.

“There’s a dog trying to get your attention.”

“Just a regular dog?”

She frowns. “As opposed to?”

“I don’t know, a grim or a kitsune or a werewolf.”

He can see her thinking, and he assumes she’s trying to remember where they are in the lunar cycle. She’s in medical school to become a magi, so she needs to care about these things. Monty does his best, but he always loses track.

“Definitely not a werewolf, wrong time of month. It just looks like a dog to me.”
Monty glances back himself. The dog is mid-to-large, retriever- or lab-sized, with a dark, shaggy coat and no collar.

“It has to be something,” he says, frowning.

Clarke smiles. “There’s no way a dog is just following you?”

“Based on everything I have ever experienced? No. There’s no way a normal dog is following me. That’s some kind of magic dog, we just have to figure out what kind.”

“We?” she asks, which is valid. He likes Clarke, considers her a friend, but she lives next door to him and they walk home together when they’re on the same bus. It’s not really the kind of friendship that involves a lot of working together on projects. He doesn’t actually expect her to provide backup.

“Me and my existing menagerie,” he says. “I’ll barely even notice one more.”

Clarke smiles. “You know, I used to think it would be cool if animals liked me.”

“It is cool,” Monty insists, offering his hand for the dog to sniff. “But it’s kind of a pain too.”

“Well, let me know if you need any help.”

“I thought you weren’t part of this we,” he teases, and she smiles, leaning down to scratch the dog’s ears as his tail starts to wag even harder.

“Maybe a little involved,” she says, and Monty smiles.

“Yeah, it’s hard to resist a face like that. I’ll let you know how it goes.”

*  

How it goes turns out to be kind of weirdly. Monty has a system worked out for this shit; he’s practically a professional. But this dog is different. For one thing, he does seem to be just a dog, by all physical indications, but Monty can’t actually believe that. For one thing, the dog is smart. Like, sapient levels of smart. Smarter than some humans Monty has met, and smart in a different way. He doesn’t act like most of the animals Monty has met.

Also, he really likes Clarke. Not that there’s anything wrong with really liking Clarke, but he seems to like Clarke better than Monty which, if not for everything else, would make him suspect he’s just a regular dog.

Clarke’s the one to finally hit on it. “What about transformation?”

The dog’s tail starts thumping, and he pulls his head out of her lap to look at her with beseeching eyes.

“Transformation?”

“Yeah, like–what if he’s a human who got turned into a dog.” He barks, and she laughs. “I think I might have gotten it.”

Monty frowns. “I don’t know if humans who get turned into animals actually like me very much. Not, like–they don’t dislike me, but I don’t know if the magnetism works on them. And he definitely was following me.”
“Us,” Clarke corrects, not unreasonably.

“You think the dog has a thing for you?”

Clarke grins. “You’re not the only special person in the world, Monty.” She scratches the dog’s ears. “I actually know someone who might be able to help, though.”

The dog’s tail is wagging again, and Monty feels his frown deepen.

“I’ve never actually not been the special one before. Is this what it feels like for you all the time?”

“You’re one of the little people now,” she says, and asks the dog, “Do you want to take a walk?”

He does, at least at first. He’s happy to follow them to campus, even seems excited about it, but as soon as Clarke tries to get him into the Crafting Studies building, he won’t go.

Or, more accurately, he seems like he can’t go, like despite his best efforts, he’s just not able to go any closer.

Defeated, he whines at Clarke, and she strokes his ears, soothing. “Can you go in there?” she asks. “Look for Bellamy Blake or Nathan Miller. Their offices are on the second floor. Miller’s probably a better bet, but Bellamy will know where to find him if you can’t.”

“Bellamy Blake, Nathan Miller,” he says, and the dog whines again.

“I know, I’ll stay with you,” Clarke tells him, and he lets out a sigh that does more than anything else to convince Monty he’s a transformed human. It’s a very human sigh.

He hits Bellamy Blake’s office first, but the door is closed, and the mailslot on the front is overflowing. Someone has written, “If found return to Nathan Miller, room 205,” so apparently Clarke’s instincts are good. They’re probably dating.

The door to room 205 is open, and the guy behind the desk is—hot. There is no other word for it, short black hair, neat beard, tapping a pen against the corner of his mouth like he’s thinking hard.

He also feels odd, in a way Monty has never felt before, some weird churning in the pit of his stomach. It’s not bad, just different.

It’s also not important right now; he knocks on the frame of the door, and the guy looks up, smiles, and, yeah. Very hot.

“Hi, are you Nathan Miller?”

“That’s me, yeah. How can I help you?”

“I’m a friend of Clarke Griffin’s, she thought you might be able to help us? We found this dog and—”

“Jesus, thank god. I should have looked for Clarke. Of course he went to her, fucking dumbass.”

Monty opens and closes his mouth, and then settles on, “Did you turn your boyfriend into a dog?” He’s not an expert on witchcraft, but it would explain basically everything.

“My best friend. I was going to change him back, but he had too much magical energy.” At Monty’s frown, he says, “I’m a supernatural repulsor. Usually not a big deal, but transformations involve a lot of magical energy, and it’s all focused on him, so he changed and then got knocked
out of the building. And went to find Clarke, I guess.”

“Or me,” says Monty. “I’m a magnet, magical stuff tends to find me. I just happen to know Clarke.”

“Lucky us. Please tell me he wasn’t using the excuse to lick her.”

“No,” says Monty. “If you’re a repulsor, how did you turn him into a dog?”

“He turned himself into a dog, I was there to try to keep it under control. Tamp down on all the magic. Which didn’t work. Fucking dumbass,” he says again, like it’s a treasured nickname. “I’m going to kill him.”

He’s been looking through a cabinet, and now he comes up with a vial of green liquid and offers it to Monty as if he’s supposed to know what it is.

“I’m a computer scientist,” he says. “I honestly have no idea what’s happening. I don’t know much about transformations.”

Miller snorts. “Sorry. Just have him drink that, it should sort him out. Sorry I can’t come with you, but—”

“Repulsor.” He’s heard of them before, but never met one. Then again, he’s never met another magnet either. As powers go, both are pretty uncommon.

“Yeah. It shouldn’t take long for the potion to work, and then he can come here and let me yell at him.”

“That sounds really appealing for him.”

Miller snorts. “Good call.” He checks his watch. “It’s almost quitting time. You know Murphy’s?”

It’s a campus bar; Monty doesn’t work at the university, but he’s close enough that most of his friends do, and he knows most of the hangouts. “Yeah.”

“Meet me there?”

Honestly, this isn’t even one of the weirder things he’s had to do as a magnet. All he has to do is give a dog a vial of medicine. Bellamy probably won’t even fight him.

Plus, the hot guy wants to see him at a bar. There’s no way he’s saying no to that.

“Yeah,” he says. “I’ll probably need a drink.”

*  

Clarke and Bellamy are sitting on a bench outside the building, Bellamy’s head in Clarke’s lap, but as soon as he sees Monty he jumps up and runs over.

“I assume you know what you need,” he says, shaking the vial.

“Wow, they didn’t even need to come look?” Clarke asks, surprised. “I figured Bellamy wouldn’t be able to stay away.”

“Yeah, uh–he can’t. Miller says this is him.”
Clarke stares, and the dog looks remarkably guilty, so, yeah. There is going to be some weirdness here. But they should get everyone back to being a human before they sort that out.

“Bellamy?” she asks.

“Is he going to be naked after he takes this? Should we go inside? Miller’s a repulsor, that’s why he can’t get in the building.”

“Seriously, Bellamy, what the fuck,” Clarke says, which is not helpful.

“Look, the hot repulsor warlock said we’d get a drink when this was done, so can we figure it out?” he prompts, and that, at least, distracts her.

“Oh my god, of course Miller is your type. I can’t believe I didn’t think of that. Bellamy, are you going to be naked? Bark once for yes, twice for no.” He barks twice, so she nods. “Okay, cool, we’ll go back to our place. You can borrow something of Monty’s. And he can get changed for his date.”

“He didn’t really say it was a date,” Monty protests. He can’t help feeling weird discussing it in front of Bellamy, but he did start it. And Bellamy doesn’t seem to care. “But I guess there’s no harm in dressing like it’s one.”

“That’s the spirit,” says Clarke. “Come on, dick,” she adds, to Bellamy, like *dick* is a petname she uses often. Apparently Bellamy’s just that kind of guy—all about the affectionate trash talk. “You can change back in my bathroom.”

* 

He ends up going to the bar alone. Ostensibly, it’s because Bellamy is afraid of seeing Miller, but Monty suspects it’s more that Bellamy is also really hot and clearly has a thing for Clarke, and was, last time Monty saw, half-naked in Clarke’s living room. He’s assuming Clarke is getting laid, and he’s reporting back to Miller that the potion worked and Bellamy is human again.

Also, ideally he’ll get laid too. At some point.

Miller’s already at Murphy’s when he gets there, sitting at the bar with a beer, and Monty takes a deep breath and joins him, trying to seem—cool. The strange feeling is back in the pit of his stomach, this awareness that he’s hanging out with his polar opposite. Someone who pushes away what he draws in.

“So, I think Clarke and Bellamy are making out.”

“Thank god. If I knew all I had to do to make that happen was turn him into a dog, I would have done it years ago.”

Monty smiles a little. “I feel like I’m missing backstory there.”

“Not good backstory. Sexual tension, pining, and dumbassery, the usual. I’m more curious about you.”

Monty chokes on the air. “Me?”

“Never met a magnet before. I’m curious how we’d fit together.”

It’s so cheesy he has to laugh. “Wow. You’ve had an hour to think about this and that’s the pickup
line you came up with? Really?”

Miller shrugs, but he’s smiling too. “Apparently so.”

“You’re lucky I’m curious too,” says Monty. “Can I buy your next drink and we tell weird power stories until we’re ready to make out?”

“Sounds good to me,” says Miller, and Monty has to say, it really, really is.

Not a lot of people can actually claim to have found their other half, but that’s his story, and he’s sticking to it. Because they really do fit together, almost perfectly.

Like it was meant to be.
Raven is the first one to notice the problem with game night, but it really should have been Monty, because as soon as she lays it out, it’s both obvious and terrifying.

“Sure, you’re chill,” is how she explains it, “but one chill person can’t actually turn the entire tide of an evening.”

“I’m not the only chill person. We don’t have to calm everyone down, just–Clarke,” he says.

Raven snorts. “You wish it was just Clarke. But you’ve got Clarke and Bellamy, so, like, no matter how cool anyone else is, they’re going to fight to the death because they don’t know how to just make out.”

There is no counterargument to this; it is undeniable. “Yeah, so they can just play their own game.”

“You’ve also got Octavia, she’s competitive. And me.”

“You?”

“Sorry, I’m definitely competitive. I want to kick everyone’s ass. Jasper’s a bad loser, Miller’s a wild card, so that just leaves you and Lincoln to be normal humans who aren’t assholes. And that’s not enough to tip the scales.”

“Okay, but this isn’t my first rodeo,” says Monty. “I know how this works.”

“Oh huh.”

“Co-op games,” he says. “Collaboration. Stuff where we’re working together. Which is—”

“So naive,” says Raven. “So optimistic. You think we can’t fight over a cooperative game? We still have to agree on things. We can barely decide on where to order takeout. Cooperative games might be worse than competitive ones.”

It’s a valid point that Monty would prefer not to think about, but game night is in three hours and he needs a plan. “Fuck.”

“Nothing is safe,” Raven says. “There is no good-case scenario here. You’re on damage control. If there are survivors, you win, but I’m not optimistic.”

“And you’re not going to help.”

She pats his shoulder. “Game night is every person for themselves, Monty.”

“Thanks. Helpful. It’s going to be fine,” he adds, because he’s pretty sure that’s a thing. Saying things and hoping that will make them true. “We’ll have fun.”
“Uh huh. Sure we will.”

* 

Monty had exactly one goal with game night: more time with Miller. Not that he doesn’t see Miller roughly twice a month, which is about as much as he sees anyone he doesn’t live or work with. But he doesn’t have a crush on any of his other friends, so he doesn’t consider it a problem. Monty doesn’t tend to need a lot of company; between Jasper and Raven as roommates, he’s mostly set for day-to-day interactions. But he would like a significant other, and he’d like it to be Miller. And without any other ideas to see more of him (aside from something truly drastic, like asking him on a date), he decided to have a board game night, and somehow everyone agreed, and now, he assumes, they are all going to die.

Maybe he shouldn’t date. Maybe he wasn’t made for that. This is a sign.

But it’s too late to change things now, so the only way forward is through. The best he can hope for is a game that does not result in bloodshed.

Me: Raven has pointed out there’s a 95% chance everyone is going to die at game night

Miller: She’s good at math, I’d trust her
Who’s coming again?

Me: You, me, Raven, Jasper, Lincoln, Bellamy, Octavia, Clarke
I’m most worried about Bellamy and Clarke but Octavia is a wild card and Raven says she’s competitive too
So like
We need a non-fatal game

Miller: Can we just lock Bellamy and Clarke in a closet?
Either they kill each other or hook up and either way the rest of us are safe

Me: I figured that would be a last resort

Miller: Well, it’s your funeral
Okay
So, it’s eight people?

Me: Yeah

Miller: Okay
What are you doing?

Me: Right now?

Miller: Yeah
Strategizing would be easier in person, if I can just come over

Me: Oh
Sure
It’s as clean as it’s going to get
Come by whenever

Miller: Cool
Miller doesn’t even bother with greetings, just opens with, “So, I think we need two pods.”

“Two pods?” Monty echoes, feeling lost. Miller is shedding his coat and hat and he’s wearing a tight t-shirt and is in Monty’s apartment, which is a lot to deal with. It’s going to take him a minute to catch up.

“Yeah. Two games, four players each. I think we can’t have Bellamy and Clarke playing together. It’s not safe.”

“That’s probably true.”

“Bellamy and Octavia is risky too. Sibling rivalry. So that means Clarke and O in one pod and Bellamy and Raven in the other.”

“That checks out, yeah. You’ve thought about this a lot.”

“Dude, I’ve played board games with Bellamy and Octavia before. I know how this works.”

“Is it as bad as I think it is?”

“They regress like twenty years, yeah.”

“Okay, so—that’s a good start. Lincoln should be in Octavia’s pod, he’s good with her, and then —”

If he wants to be with Miller, Jasper would have to be their fourth, but he doesn’t really have any reason to suggest it. Everyone thinks of him and Jasper as a matched pair; it would be natural to put them together.

But Miller says, “I should go with Bellamy, I’m good with him too. So that leaves you and Jasper.”

“I’ll go with you guys, Clarke and Octavia sounds like a lot. Jasper can deal with that.”

Miller smirks. “Yeah, that sounds right. Okay, cool, that’s done.”

“Yeah, you came a long way for a pretty short conversation.”

“Not that long. And I figured I could hang out. You have any cool two-player games?”

“I can think of something. And we need to figure out what we’re playing tonight.”

“Yeah, I’m sure we can keep busy,” says Miller, and Monty knows it’s not supposed to sound like a come on, so he doesn’t take it as one.

“Definitely,” he says instead. “Let’s see what we’ve got.”

* 

The plan does work, for the first round of games. Monty, Miller, Raven, and Octavia have a perfectly civil game of Tokaido, and the other table seems to do fine with Above and Below, and then Clarke says, “So, round two?” and Monty looks at Miller with some mild terror.
“Yeah!” says Octavia. “I want to play that witch game.”

“I love the witch game!” says Jasper, and Raven agrees, and suddenly the four of them are on one side with Broom Service and Monty is left with Miller, Bellamy, and Clarke.

Well, the other table might survive this, anyway. They might not all die.

“So, what are we playing?” asks Bellamy.

This is where Monty has some chance to get the whole thing back on track. He can pick a game that won’t involve much opportunity for Bellamy and Clarke to be in direct competition, one where they can’t fuck with each other. Something–

“This one looks cute,” says Clarke, and Monty winces.

“That one’s–”

“That looks fun,” Bellamy adds.

And it is. Underlings of Underwing is a fun, cute game that Clarke will probably enjoy. It has color theory and dragons and Monty really likes it.

It’s just that there’s all this resource management, and Bellamy and Clarke are going to be able to screw each other over, and they probably will, and while that seems to be foreplay for them, it’s incredibly stressful for everyone else who’s going to be interacting with them.

But Miller says, “Sure, I’m in,” which means Monty has no one on his side, and also that if he doesn’t play, he won’t have any reason to interact with Miller, so apparently this is how it’s going to be.

And it’s honestly not as bad as he thought it would be. Which, admittedly, says more about the power of his own imagination than anything, but still. He’s taking any victories he can get at this point. Bellamy and Clarke have developed an incoherent rivalry before the first turn is over, both more focused on attempting to screw the other one over than they are on actually winning, which is both a curse and a blessing.

Really, the biggest problem there is that Monty thinks he might win, and he’s not sure if they’ll let him live through the victory. He would be much happier coming in last.

As it turns out, though, Bellamy and Clarke have fun threatening to murder each other, and as soon as that game is over, they want to play another, and Monty thinks it might actually be okay, until Octavia literally flips the board on Broom Service.

“This is bullshit!”

Monty and Miller exchange a look, and Miller raises one shoulder, like he’s amazed they got this far.

“Don’t be a sore loser, O!” calls Bellamy, and she calls back, “Don’t be a fucking dickface, Bell!”

“Who needs another drink?” Monty asks, and every hand in the room, Blakes aside, goes up.

He nods. “Cool. That’s what I thought.”
“That was actually really fun,” is Miller’s final assessment.

“I think Lincoln has a black eye,” says Raven.

“He’s fine,” says Jasper. “That went really well!”

Miller looks dubious. “I said it was fun, not that it went well. Big difference.”

“Miller’s into trainwrecks,” says Raven.

“Who isn’t?”

Monty’s mostly excited that Miller hasn’t left yet. He had a stressful, bizarre, vaguely traumatizing evening, but now that it’s over and no one actually died, he can look at it with the benefit of hindsight and admit that while it wasn’t as good as he hoped it would be when he first imagined the night, he doesn’t think Lincoln actually got a black eye, and they didn’t play Monopoly, so no relationships were actually ruined forever, and everyone had some amount of fun.

And, again, Miller is still around. That’s the best part of the night.

Raven knows it too, because she yanks Jasper’s arm. “Come on, I want to show you this new video game.”

“You do?” asks Jasper, and then he catches on. “Oh, yeah, you do! What a great idea. Please show me all your video games.”

Monty rubs his face, but Miller just smiles. “Sounds like a good game.”

“Yeah, we got so many details about it.” It’s not hard to smile back, though. “Thanks for all your help. I think we got through that with as little bloodshed as was possible, with this group.”

“No problem.” He clears his throat. “Honestly, it was fun. I’ve been looking for an excuse to hang out with you.”

“Really? Because you don’t need one. Like, we could just hang out. But,” he adds, “in the interest of full disclosure, I did set up game night just so I’d have an excuse to hang out with you.”

“There have got to be safer ways for us to spend time together.”

Monty swallows hard. “Like a date, maybe?”

“A date sounds a lot easier, yeah,” says Miller, and leans in for a kiss.

So, overall, game night is a resounding success. 10/10, would recommend.

But maybe not more than once a month. Just to be safe.
Clarke is used to being cast as the dumb blonde in things, so she’ll admit that *Legally Blonde* is a refreshing change of pace. The role still really isn’t *her*—she’s always been pretty hyper-focused on academics and isn’t particularly great with style or fashion—but that’s why it’s *acting*. She’s not supposed to be playing herself.

Which is why the casting of the male leads is so fucking annoying.

“I told you not to date actors,” is Raven’s questionably valid take.

“You told me that after we found out Finn was cheating on you with me. And before you fucked Bellamy.”

“I fucked him, I didn’t date him.”

“I haven’t done either.”

“And if you never do, you guys will never break up, and you’ll never be awkwardly cast as his love interest years later.”

“Life hack,” says Clarke, putting her head down on the bar. “At least Bellamy’s Emmett. I’d have a lot of trouble acting like dumping him for Finn was a good choice.”

“Yeah, Finn makes a way better fraternity douchebag. You had to know this was a possibility,” she adds. “You and Bellamy went to the audition together.”

“I knew about Bellamy, not Finn.”

Raven shrugs. “The theater world is pretty small, even here. Another good reason to not date actors.”

“Thanks, I’ll go back in time and unfuck Finn.”

“You say that like a joke, but I know you would.”

“Wouldn’t you?”

To her surprise, Raven actually thinks it over. “Probably not. Sucks that this is going to be awkward for you, but I’m better off without him. And so are you.”

“So you’re just telling me I shouldn’t fuck Bellamy.”

That necessitates another pause. “I think if you fuck Bellamy, you should probably make sure it’s for keeps.”
“No one can ever be sure of that.”

“As sure as you can be. And, honestly, I’m pretty sure if you and Bellamy broke up, one of you would leave town and no one would survive, so maybe it’s a moot point.”

Clarke raises her head to glare at Raven. “So, your final advice is that I shouldn’t date actors, but it’s too late to not date Finn, and dating Bellamy is probably a separate issue, so–”

“Don’t fall for any more actors,” she says. “Two is your hard limit.”

“Probably anyone in the business,” she muses. “Lexa wasn’t an actress, but she’s still a minefield.”

“Jesus. Maybe you just shouldn’t date.”

“I haven’t been. I just have a stupid crush on my stupid roommate, and we’re finally in the same show and playing the romantic leads. So–”

“So get on that,” Raven says. “Seriously, you’re already in way too deep, you might as well let life imitate art. Also, you need to get laid and he’s great at it.” She shrugs. “I guess, yeah, without time travel, I’m not sure what to tell you. If you can’t go back in time, not fuck Finn, and not get a crush on Bellamy, you’re basically screwed, so you might as well have fun.”

“Good pep talk.” But it actually does help, because she is going to have fun. She and Bellamy have been in a couple of shows together, but never with roles this large, and never working together so closely. And she likes most of the rest of the cast, Finn aside.

It probably is going to be fun.

“Cheers,” says Raven, and they drink to it.

*

“So, you going to be okay with this?” Bellamy asks. They’re on their way to their first rehearsal, and it’s nice to be walking with him. Their schedules are always a nightmare, and she never feels like she gets as much time with him as she wants. So at least until the end of this show, they get to be on the same nightmare schedule.

“Which part?”

“All of it, I guess. Your ex playing your ex? Me playing your love interest? Murphy being there?”

“I’m looking forward to his interpretation of gay and European,” she teases. “Definitely not going to be offensive.”

“Yeah, that should be fun.” His expression sober. “Really, though.”

“Really? I’m an actress. I’m used to pretending.”

“You’re going to have to pretend too little with Finn and too much with me,” he says, making her smile.

“What’s too much? You’re a way better love interest than Finn would be.” There’s a little color on his neck, and she can’t help teasing him a little more. “No one would ever believe I’d pick him over you, even if he wasn’t a dick. In the show.”

“In the show, sure.” He wets his lips. “I just don’t want things to be weird.”
“So, you’re worried it’s going to be weird, but you don’t want to admit it, so you’re pretending to be worried about me?”

“I know I’m going to be fine,” he says.

“Yeah? Why?”

“Because I’m way more professional than you are, obviously,” he teases, and she rolls her eyes. “Seriously? Because you’re basically nothing like Elle Woods. It’s not going to be hard to remember she’s not you. Emmett’s a lot less of a stretch for me. And Finn’s—”

“Raven’s the one he dumped for another girl, not me. It’s not that similar. And you’re way cooler than Emmett.” She bumps her shoulder against his. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to get confused and fall in love with you.”

It would be impossible, since that ship has already sailed, but Bellamy doesn’t know that, so he just smiles.

“Yeah, that was the real worry.”

“I think we’re going to have fun.” Every time she says it, it feels more true. It’s a fun musical, her friends are there, she’s the lead. This is all good. Finn’s not going to ruin it. It’s been a few years, and the whole thing was definitely worse for Raven than it was for her. And, again, it’s not like he’s her love interest. “Come on, we get to work together again. That’s awesome.”

“It is. But—if it gets weird, let me know.”


“Deal.”

He offers his hand and they shake on it, and he holds the door open for her, and she finds herself smiling.

This is going to be good.

*

Clarke’s last gig was an off-Broadway adaptation of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, which was, she has to say, a mistake on basically every level. The show was a tonal disaster, the cast was mixed at best, and the reviews were merciless. Clarke emerged relatively unscathed because she did her best with the material, but it wasn’t a particularly fun set to be on. There was a lot of resume updating and drinking and hoping the show wouldn’t ruin them.

*Legally Blonde* is a big improvement. Even aside from Bellamy, it’s a much more fun show with a much stronger book. She and Finn have an awkward past, but he starts by apologizing for what happened before, and he has a girlfriend now, which obviously doesn’t mean he can’t hit on her again, but at least this time, he’s being upfront about it. And he doesn’t seem to show any sign of wanting to hit on her. He’s totally professional, which is better than she was expecting, and everyone else is cool.

And then, there’s Bellamy.

Clarke ended up as Bellamy’s roommate basically by chance; she knew him by reputation, had seen him in a few shows. She’d heard he was kind of a dick, but not intolerable, and when she
heard he was looking for someone to move in because his former roommate got married to his boyfriend, she figured she could do worse.

Falling in love with him had been completely unexpected, but impossible to avoid, and she’d thought she was used to it. He’s always been attractive and interesting, and he’s always been good on set too, dedicated and serious, with just enough of a sense of humor about himself to keep him popular. Clarke tends to go a little too far to the other side, but they compliment each other well, the natural leaders of the set, setting the tone for everyone else.

It’s good, great even. She can’t remember the last time she had so much fun, and every day, getting something with Bellamy feels more possible.

Which is probably why she misses the Niylah thing entirely.

She likes Niylah, of course. She’s playing Vivienne and doing a good job, and she’s cool and fun to hang out with. They’re flirty, but Clarke doesn’t quite notice that. She’s found that theater people tend to be flirty, and she’s genuinely not trying to be an asshole with it. They’re all a little flirty, regardless of sexual orientation, but flirting a little with a lesbian she’s not interested is pretty different from flirting with Murphy or Roma. She knows they’re not interested.

So Bellamy’s the one who has to ask, “Anything going on with you and Niylah?” and the question takes her a second to process.

“What do you mean?”

“I think she thinks you’re cute.”

“I am cute,” she says, and he rolls his eyes. “Cute, like–”

“Cute like I think she wants to date you. Or at least, uh, run lines one-on-one.”

She snorts. “You’re thirty-five, Bellamy. You can just say have sex.”

“Maybe she doesn’t like casual hookups. I’m just saying, I think she’s serious. I didn’t think you’d noticed.”

“Raven said I should stop fucking actors,” she says, without thinking.

He doesn’t react. “Any particular reason?”

“It’s worked for her so now she thinks everyone should do it.”

“Guess that makes sense. I’m not saying you should go out with her. Just thought you might be interested. But if you’re done with actors—“

“I never said I was listening to her. Just taking the suggestion under consideration. But I wasn’t really—I thought me and Niylah were just fooling around.”

“I think she was doing the I’m just joking but I’d fuck you if you asked thing.”

“Good to know. I’ll step it back.”

“Probably good, yeah.” He clears his throat, like he’s gearing up for something important. “So, is it just actors, or no dating anyone in theater? How limited are your options here?”

Her heart skips a beat, even though he’s not really saying anything huge. “Like I said, I’m not
actually ruling out actors. Some actors probably make good relationships.”

“And that’s like ninety percent of the people you know.” He nods. “Glad to hear you’re not totally writing us off.”

It doesn’t have to mean anything, but it’s very encouraging. “No,” she agrees. “Definitely not.”

* 

It’s Murphy who suggests the contest, so it’s possible Clarke will owe him forever, but she’d rather not think about that. A life debt to John Murphy is a terrifying prospect.

“You know,” he says, when they’re out celebrating the first week of shows, “Clarke’s good and all, but I don’t think she’s putting her all into that fake orgasm bit.”

“What are you, the director?” Bellamy asks, and Murphy rolls his eyes.

“Don’t be bitter just because you wish you knew what her real orgasms sound like for comparison.”

It’s not the first time someone has implied she and Bellamy are into each other, and it won’t be the last. That’s another important part of cast trash talk.

So she says, “We live together. I’m pretty sure he knows. What’s wrong with my orgasm bit?”

“I just think you could put more into it.”

“There are kids in the audience,” says Bellamy, not unreasonably. “She’s not doing porn.”

“Classy, PG fake orgasm,” she agrees. “Appropriate for all ages. Is there a reason we’re talking about this?”

“I think I could do better. And I want to prove it.”

Clarke laughs. “Of course you do.”

“I just think everyone deserves a chance to try that one out if they want to.”

Clarke holds her hand out. “Go ahead. I won’t stop you.”

Of course, it’s a thing. Murphy starts, but almost everyone wants a chance, and Clarke gets progressively drunker and giddier until she says, “Okay, but I’ve never really put my all into it.”

“No?” asks Harper.

“No. So let me just—“

Everyone whoops, and then she’s standing on a stool, a little unsteadily, belting out the setup lines before switching into the chorus of building ohs. It is, if she does say so herself, a very convincing performance, and she’s rewarded with a chorus of cheers and wolf whistles.

Murphy helps her down, to her surprise, and she looks around for Bellamy only to find he’s nowhere in sight.

Sobering up fast, she checks the bar and the pool table, and then ducks outside to see him leaning against the wall, warm air puffing out of his mouth like cigarette smoke. It’s a very moody,
tortured look.

“Hey, what happened?”

“Nothing. Just not really into that.”

She joins him against the wall, frowning. “Which part?”

“I hate that song.”

“Really? Why?”

He huffs. “It’s annoying.”

“Try again.”

“It’s stupid.”

“The song or the reason?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“I do.”

He sighs. “Murphy was fucking with me. He knows I, uh—Jesus, Clarke, everyone knows I have a thing for you. I knew Niylah was interested because she asked if we were actually together. And I know it’s not like—just because it’s not much of a fake orgasm doesn’t mean it’s not distracting.”

Her jaw drops; she’s too shocked by the admission to actually even get the much more important issue in there. “Wait, you seriously think that song is hot?”

“That’s your takeaway?” he asks.

“Just one of them. Raven told me not to date actors because I was starring in a show with my ex and the guy I like now, and that wouldn’t happen again if I stopped dating actors. So, you know, I have a thing for you too, but seriously, that song just isn’t—“

He laughs, leans down to brush his mouth against hers. They do kiss in the show, but show kissing is always different. This is something new, just the two of them, just his lips and his hand on her jaw and the beating of her own heart.

“I’m into basically every fucking thing you do, but I didn’t need to hear you doing your best orgasm impression.”

“Not when you could just take me home and give me my best orgasm.”

He laughs and leans in to kiss her again. “Yeah. That sounds a lot better.” He rests his forehead on hers. “You think we need to say goodbye?”

She smiles. “I think they’ll figure it out.”

It is, after all, kind of a gimme.
Bellamy didn’t like the Hollywood idea from the beginning.

He gets why it was appealing to Octavia, of course; Octavia’s always had big dreams and ambitions, always talked about making enough money to leave Arcadia and her family home behind. And it wasn’t as if he didn’t understand. Octavia barely knew her father, never got much of an education on the importance of the family estate. Not that Bellamy remembers it that well either, but he liked Octavia’s father, and he loves the house.

But Octavia’s selling it off to some heartless Hollywood producer, and getting married to another one. She’s set, clearly. She doesn’t need him. And he doesn’t need her.

Miller meets him at Penn Station, takes one look at him, and says, “So, booze?”

Bellamy snorts. “Nice to see you too.”

Miller grew up in Arcadia, but unlike Bellamy, he left after high school. The two of them have stayed close, though, and while Miller always said come to New York any time you want, Bellamy knows he wasn’t really expecting it to happen with so little notice.

“You texted me to say you were leaving Arcadia effective immediately and needed a place to crash,” Miller says, confirming his suspicions. “Clearly some shit went down.”

He rubs his face. “Yeah, you know what? Booze sounds great.”

They end up at some dive bar near Miller’s place, and Miller lets him get two drinks in before he says, “So, let me guess, something happened with your sister.”

“She found out about some TV show doing location scouting, looking for a place like ours. They weren’t actually going to look out here, but O called in a favor with–” He waves his hand. He understands the nitty gritty details of how his sister got Indra to get in touch with Lincoln, but it’s not that relevant, to tell the truth. “Some producers. Whatever. It doesn’t matter. She got them up to look at the house and–” He swallows hard. “I thought they liked it. They seemed, uh–they seemed good.”

“She found out about some TV show doing location scouting, looking for a place like ours. They weren’t actually going to look out here, but O called in a favor with–” He waves his hand. He understands the nitty gritty details of how his sister got Indra to get in touch with Lincoln, but it’s not that relevant, to tell the truth. “Some producers. Whatever. It doesn’t matter. She got them up to look at the house and–” He swallows hard. “I thought they liked it. They seemed, uh–they seemed good.”

“Dude,” says Miller, and Bellamy flips him off.

“Yeah, shut up. One of them, Clarke–” He sighs. “We hit it off. I thought she got it, you know? She studied art history, she loved the property, it seemed like she was really into it, by the end.”

“By the end?”

In spite of himself, Bellamy smiles. “You know me. I never get along with anyone I didn’t kind of want to murder at first.”
“Yeah, that sounds right. So, you fell for some Hollywood producer and she screwed you over? Come on, you must have seen that one coming.”

He scrubs his face again. “Yeah, it sounds obvious now. I wasn’t planning to, but–she was cool. I liked her. And O liked Lincoln, and I thought–it seemed like it was going to be good. Like shit was finally going our way, for once.”

“But she screwed you over.”

“She told us she wanted to use the house for the show, and then I heard her on the phone talking about all the changes she needed to make. The exterior isn’t period-appropriate, the servant quarters are–something, I don’t know. They’re planning to redo the whole place, and O is fucking engaged, so–whatever. I’m happy for all of them. It worked out for everyone but me.”

“So you caught a bus to New York without telling anyone where you were going?”

“Who says I didn’t tell anyone?”

“Your sister has my number, she was texting me. Apparently, they’re worried.”

“They’ll be fine,” he says, poking the ice in his cocktail with his straw with more force than is really warranted. “She’s been telling me for years I need to get a life of my own, she should be happy. She finally pushed me out of hers.”

“Come on,” says Miller, mild. “I don’t know what happened, but I know that’s not right. Maybe your sister’s done with the house, I’m not sure, but she doesn’t want you to never talk to you again. She’s worried. You should talk to her.”

He’s been ignoring his sister’s texts, which is admittedly petty, but he’s pissed.

The thing is, the Blake House is Octavia’s. When his mother married her father, Bellamy got the man’s last name, and even his affection, but he was never a part of the family. He left the house to Octavia, and just because Bellamy loved it more than she ever did, that didn’t make it his. And she always seemed to feel like that was a reason he shouldn’t help, that she was imposing on him.

It’s hard to not feel resentful that she just decided to give the place up, without even asking him. To say nothing of Clarke, who said all the right things about how much she loved the house, how perfect it was, lied right to his fucking face as he was starting to–

He keeps on ignoring Clarke’s texts, but he does open up the messages from his sister.

Octavia: Hey where r u??
You’re missing the party
Seriously are you okay???
What the fuck Bell
You left a NOTE
WHO RAISED YOU
WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS
OVERDRAMATIC ASSHOLE
TEXT ME BACK
fucking NEW YORK

It shouldn’t make him smile, but it does. He is kind of an overdramatic asshole, even if he feels justified, in this particular case. He did still leave for New York without telling anyone, in the middle of his sister’s engagement party.
It might not have been his finest moment.

**Me:** new phone who dis

**Octavia:** BELLAMY BRADBURY BLAKE

**Me:** Sorry O
I know it was a dick move
But it’s your life, and you’ve got it sorted out
I’m really happy or you
But I need to do my own thing

**Octavia:** WHY

**Me:** You’re selling the house, so it’s not like I have anything to do there
I’m not saying I’m going to stay in New York for the rest of my life
But I couldn’t be there
I really am sorry

**Octavia:** Someday they will write a definite history of dumbasses
And you will get an entire chapter to yourself
Bellamy Blake: Peak Dumbass

**Me:** Thanks
Always love getting kicked when I’m down
Hope the TV thing goes well
Don’t tell me what they do to the house

He turns off the phone and looks back at Miller; he doesn’t know exactly what his expression looks like, but all Miller does is wordlessly slide him another drink, so it must be pretty bad.

“Thanks,” he says, and Miller shrugs.

“Any time.”

*

He doesn’t really want to live on Miller’s couch for the rest of his life, so he is, at some point, going to have to come up with a plan, a real one, beyond just “get the fuck out of dodge.” He hadn’t trusted his self control if he’d stayed there, but he also can acknowledge he was kind of a diva.

And, okay, storming out on his sister’s engagement party was, to put it mildly, a dick move.

But that just makes it harder to think about going back. He’d be returning to Arcadia with his tail between his legs, admitting he had overreacted, and trying to be an adult about the whole thing.

Which wouldn’t be the worst life choice, but it’s not a choice he’s planning to make. He’s regrouping here and possibly never going back until he’s rich and successful and over it.

Or a better plan that he comes up with in a few days, when he’s feeling a little less righteously indignant.

He’s doing pretty well with wallowing, imposing on Miller’s hospitality, and failing to come up with a clear life plan when Octavia shows up. Which, in retrospect, he should have seen coming.
She knew Miller’s address, and she’s pissed at him.

What he wasn’t expecting was for her to have Clarke with her.

“Tell me what the fuck you think happened,” says Octavia, “but we’re going to figure it out.”

Clarke’s looking awkward and uncomfortable, and he feels a vicious stab of triumph. She should feel bad. She lied to him.

“What’s to figure out? You guys made a deal. Clarke gets to do whatever she wants with the house, and you get to marry Lincoln and stop worrying about it. It’s not our responsibility anymore, right? Just like you wanted.”

“That’s not what happened at all. Holy shit, Bell, I’m not selling, and Clarke’s not doing anything to the site.”

“You sure about that?”

Clarke’s jaw works, but just for a second. He can actually see her working to get her temper under control, and then she says, “Of course she’s sure. What I don’t understand is why you think I’m suddenly the enemy.”

“Because I heard you! I heard you on the phone with whoever your boss is, talking about how the exteriors wouldn’t work and the location was fine but everything else needed to be scrapped. I got it, okay? Loud and clear.”

Clarke opens and closes her mouth a few times, but it’s Octavia who regains her voice first. “Is that true, Clarke?”

“I did say all those things,” she says, slowly. “But not how you think.”

“How many ways are there to say that?”

“I love the house so much we’re changing the show. My boss was trying to tell me it would work, but the period’s wrong. We need to make changes. It’s not hard, at this point, changing the script, moving the time period back a couple decades. But we’re not scrapping the house. The house is perfect.”

It’s always hard, when righteous, justified indignation deflates, and he feels it happening as he watches Clarke.

“You’re rewriting the show to keep the house?” he finally asks.

“It’s a great house.”

“It is.”

“I had no idea you were listening.”

“I wasn’t doing it on purpose. Just passing through and heard you talking.”

Her smile is all fond exasperation. “And you couldn’t have asked me?”

“I thought everything you’d ever said to me was a lie,” he shoots back. “I didn’t really want to hang around so you could lie to me more.”
“If you just come back, I can show you the contracts,” she says. “I’ll be the onsite producer, and you’ll be there to okay everything. Octavia’s putting you in charge.”

“I know you love that house more than I do,” Octavia adds. “And it’s not like I care about staying there. I don’t know why it took me so long to figure out you could take the house and I could be the one to leave, but I thought it was my responsibility.”

“It’s ours,” he says. “But yeah. You can trust me to take care of it.” He swallows hard. “So you’re telling me if I’d waited around for a couple hours, I would have found out I was getting everything I wanted.”

“Like I said, your own chapter in the book of dumbasses.”

“You’re the one who asked Lincoln to fake an engagement because you thought it would set a good example for Bellamy,” Clarke shoots back, and his sister goes red.

“Jesus Christ, O, what?”

“You should be settling down!”

He rubs his face. “How about we both just stop worrying about what the other one is doing and just live our own lives, okay? That sounds a lot easier.”

“Okay. But your life is in Arcadia, right? You’ll come back and stop eating Miller out of house and home?”

“I’m not eating Miller out of anything.” He steals a glance at Clarke, sees she’s smiling a little. “But yeah, I’ll come back.”

*

“So, uh, I’m not ready to propose or anything,” Bellamy tells Clarke, the next time they’re alone. He’s been practicing the speech in his head since they left New York, and it doesn’t exactly feel good, but he’s ready to get it over with. “But I wanted to make sure you knew that you staying here, that’s part of everything I wanted. You still in my life. I didn’t need a role model to know that.”

Her smile is the softest one he’s ever seen from her. “I was pretty sure, yeah. I’m also pretty sure your sister and Lincoln are going to be engaged again in less than a year.”

“Yeah? And what about us?”

She tugs him down for a kiss, soft and sweet. “I think we should see how it goes.”

It’s a year and a half for them, nine months longer than O and Lincoln, but that doesn’t bother Bellamy.

After all, he’s still getting everything he’s ever wanted. The timeline isn’t really that big a deal.
Fill for skepticalbeliever1! Prompt: Bellarke go to the Renaissance festival and Bellamy is struggling with the historical inaccuracies.

“We really have to got to this?” Bellamy grumbles, sticking his hands into his pockets and scowling like he’s on his way to execution.

Clarke rolls her eyes. “We’ve been in the car for an hour. If you didn’t want to come, you should have fought harder against it before we left. There’s nothing else out here, what are we going to do if we don’t go to the ren faire?”

“We could find something.”

“We’re in the middle of nowhere and we already have tickets.” She bumps her shoulder against his. “Come on, how bad could it be?”

“Jesus, don’t say that. Now one of us is going to fucking die. Of something historically inaccurate.”

“Because it would be so much better if we got bubonic plague.”

“At least it would be educational.”

“Seriously, you’re going to have fun. Just pretend it’s not actually supposed to be historical. Because it’s not. It’s like we’re watching—” she starts, and they both realize at the same time that the sentence can’t end well, because Bellamy has never seen a movie he can’t nitpick. He’s pointed out historical inaccuracies in Disney’s Robin Hood, which is about an anthropomorphic fox.

“Not like we’re watching what?” he asks, smirking.

“Never mind, you’re an asshole about everything.”

“Yeah, that’s kind of my deal.” He sighs. “I know it’s not trying to be accurate, I just don’t get the point. Why are you trying to recreate the past if you’re not trying to do it somewhat right?”

“Somewhat?”

“I’m not going to say we should be throwing back to medieval beliefs about gender or whatever, but, like—costuming.”

“Hail and well met!” says the attendant at the gate, and Clarke shows him their tickets before Bellamy can even try to respond to that.

The ren faire wasn’t her idea, any more than it was his. One of his coworkers wanted to thank him for his help on a project, and knowing how much he liked “that historical stuff,” she bought him two tickets to the faire. He was obviously too polite to tell her he wasn’t really into the idea, and once Clarke found out about it, there was no way she was just going to let the tickets go to waste.
She’s never been to a ren faire before, and she’s always wanted to eat one of those giant turkey legs she’s seen in pictures.

Plus, seeing Bellamy getting worked up about stuff is always pretty fun. No one does righteous, semi-legitimate indignation like he does.

“So,” she prompts, once they’re inside, “costuming.”

Bellamy’s distracted, looking around the grounds with wary interest. It’s about what Clarke was expecting, a bunch of buildings made to look olden style, selling weapons and armor and dubiously mystical things.

“This is pretty much what I meant,” he says, with a vague wave of his hand to encompass the entire place. “Why bother doing this if it’s just–half-assed. You put on a costume that looks like your idea of renaissance clothing, but it’s just a costume.”

“God forbid anyone just wear a costume.”

“I just don’t get it. If you’re going to do it, why not do it right?”

“Because doing it right is hard, time consuming, and not cost effective. If people want to get an idea of history, they go to a museum. If people want to put on their favorite corset and talk like they’re on Game of Thrones, they come to a ren faire.”

“Which is why we shouldn’t be here.”

“I don’t know, I could use a new corset.”

Bellamy’s face goes still in exactly the way she was hoping it would, and she has to bite back on her own smile.

As far as Clarke’s concerned, she and Bellamy have been moving toward something, the last few months, although all of their friends would probably say that they’ve been moving toward it for years before this too. But Clarke’s been in other relationships, and so has he, and, well, these things take time.

But now, it finally feels like she’s ready. Maybe all these years really have been leading to her and Bellamy, and she needed every one.

“Did you have an old corset?” he finally asks.

“Back in college, yeah. I think most girls didn’t get through college without wearing a corset at least once.”

“Not sure that’s a universal.”

“It was at my college.”

He shakes his head. “Okay, so things we want to do include getting a corset and–what else? Like you said, we drove for an hour, we might as well the full experience.”

“I want a turkey leg.”

“You know turkeys are native to the Americas, right? But the whole renaissance faire aesthetic is based on our idea of medieval Europe, so it doesn’t make any fucking sense that that’s the stereotypical meal.”
“I still want to eat a giant turkey leg.”

“As long as you know it’s wrong.”

“Don’t worry, I got that. I also want to find something you’ll like.”

“Tell me more about the corset, that sounds promising,” he teases, and she grins.

“We can start there, yeah.”

It’s not actually where they start, though, because there’s a path to follow and they figure they might as well follow it, wandering through the shops, looking at whatever catches their eyes. Bellamy *does* like weaponry, which isn’t really a surprise, and he doesn’t nitpick that as much because it’s more about design than history.

“And you don’t care that the design isn’t historically accurate?” she teases.

He gives a flail a light, experimental shake, holding it with minimal strain of muscle. Clarke doesn’t often remember how built Bellamy is, because his clothes do a decent job of hiding it, but it’s hard to forget when he’s effortlessly lifting heavy shit like this. She could barely even hold the thing up.

“They’re not *inaccurate*,” he says. “They’re modern versions of weapons that were used. This might not be the exact grip they would have used, but it’s not trying to be.”

“Your distinctions don’t make sense to me, but what else is new. Are you going to get one?”

That seems to remind him what he’s actually doing, and he snorts and puts the flail down. “What am I going to do with one of these?”

“Enjoy owning it? It’s not like everything you buy has to be practical.”

“Everything I spend this much money on should be, though. Let’s check out the food.”

They’re selling pizza, which Bellamy finds even weirder than the turkey legs, but he ends up with a decent bowl of stew in a bread bowl, and Clarke gets her turkey leg, which tastes oddly and somewhat disappointingly like bacon, and they look around and judge people’s costumes in low voices.

“Except that guy,” Bellamy says, jerking his head to someone who’s dressed up as Marty McFly. “He’s got the right idea.”

Clarke smiles. “Screw historical accuracy, just have fun? I think everyone but you figured that one out.”

“Shut up.”

After, she gets some mead, and Bellamy gives her trivia about the history of alcohol, which is always appreciated, and they try out axe-throwing (because Bellamy likes axes) and archery (because Clarke used to do it in summer camp), and then she decides she’d better really work on the corset thing. Not that she actually has to *buy* one, but Bellamy at least should see how good she looks in them.

She doesn’t like to brag, but if she did, her breasts would be one of the first things she bragged about.
“So, do you have any advice for historically accurate corsets?” she asks, sorting through a rack. There’s really a lot of variety, it’s awesome. “What should I be looking for?”

“Uh, honestly, I’m not sure I can be academic and objective about corsets.”

“No?”
He shrugs. “Not to be shallow, but–yeah. Corsets really do it for me.”

“So I should just buy the hottest one.”
There’s a pause as he thinks about this. “I guess it depends on what you’re going for. Do you want to use this for a costume someday? Do you just want to have it around? What’s the goal of this corset?”

She has plenty of potential responses to give, but only one of them is particularly accurate. “Trying to do it for you. Front or side lacing?”

Another pause, and he asks, “Am I going to get to take it off you?”

“If you want to.”

“Then front, definitely.”
She pulls one out and holds it up, looking at him for the first time. His eyes are dark and a little unsure as he watches her. “This one good?”

“They’re all good, Clarke.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” She leans up and pecks him on the mouth. “I’m going to go try it on.”

He grabs her wrist and pulls her in for a much longer kiss, and she grins into it.

“Sorry, can I not try it on?” she teases.

“You can now,” he says. “Just–needed to do that first.”

“Before I get in the corset.”

“I didn’t want you thinking it was just that.” He brushes her hair back, still smiling. “I’m not totally shallow.”

“I know. Back in a sec.”

In terms of historical accuracy, she is aware that peasant top, corset, and blue jeans are about as bad as you can get. On the other hand, it’s not like she’s trying to be historically accurate. Even if that would probably be a great way to seduce Bellamy.

It’s not like she needs to put that much effort in. All she actually had to do was ask.

When she comes out of the dressing room, he’s examining some of the doublets they have on display in the deliberate way that suggests he’s trying to look like he isn’t waiting for her, but given his head jerks up at the first sound of the curtain moving, it’s not very convincing. His eyes sweep over her, all open admiration, and she can’t help a small smirk.
“What do you think?”

“Honestly? I really fucking love the ren faire.”

She laughs. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

It still doesn’t feel like it’s enough to count as something just for him, though. Not that he’s not enjoying it—his eyes keep straying down as they walk—but it’s for her too. They’re both really fucking excited about the whole dating thing.

“I’m not actually having a bad time,” he teases, once he’s failed to be impressed by a bunch of leather-bound journals because the paper inside was too modern. “You know me. Nitpicking is a feature, not a bug.”

“Yeah, but—there must be something here for you.”

“Aside from the girl I’m in love with putting on a corset and kissing me?” he asks. “It’s going to be hard to top that.”

“Technically I kissed you before I put on the corset,” she points out, but she’s only halfway paying attention. “Come on,” she says, tugging him.

“Come on where?”

This weapons vendor not only has a great selection, but a great selection of axes specifically, a whole wall of them, lined up as if they’re just waiting for Bellamy to come try them out.

“See? Just for you.”

“You want me to buy an axe?” he asks. He’s clearly going for dubious, but his eyes are tracking over the racks, greedy.

“I want you to spend money on something that will make you happy. Like an axe.”

“I can’t believe your first idea for something to make me happy is an axe and not just another corset for you.”

“You can buy me another corset if you want. I’ll take as many corsets as you want to get me. But the axes are really cool.”

“What are we going to do, mount it in the apartment?”

“Why not? We have room.”

“I can’t believe your ren faire to-do list is turkey leg, weaponry, corset, and seduction.”

“Really? It was kind of a no brainer for me.” She kneels down, looking at the bottom row, eye caught on a shorter axe, dark wood hilt with blue binding. She’s not sure what makes an axe say Bellamy to her, but this one certainly does. “How about this one?”

He takes it from her, tests the heft in his hand, and Clarke can see the immediate desire to own it warring with his own common sense. “Seriously, what am I going to do with this?”

“Think of it as the first piece of your historically accurate ren faire costume for next year.”

“We’re coming back next year?”
“Well, we had fun, right? And I need somewhere to wear my corset.”

He snorts, but he gives the axe one more twirl, and then a smile breaks out on his face. “Fine. But I’m getting drunk next year.”


As anniversary traditions go, going to the ren faire, getting drunk, and spending too much money on historically inaccurate costumes and weaponry might not be the most romantic. But it’s theirs, and Clarke wouldn’t give it up for anything.

Not when it keeps on being absolutely perfect.
Clarke’s assumption was always that, at some point in her life, she’d just know she wanted kids, like some flip would be switched and she’d move from thinking she’d maybe want to reproduce someday to knowing the exact day and time she wanted her firstborn to come.

Okay, not quite *that*, but that was how it felt when she was a kid. Maybe that’s what she thought her biological clock was or something. This odd, internal device that would alert her to her own desire to reproduce.

But that’s not really how it works.

In college, she decided it wasn’t going to happen, mostly because she was with Lexa. Obviously, she knew they still *could* have kids, but Lexa didn’t really seem like the type, and Clarke found she was fine with that. She adjusted to the idea of herself as a person in a serious relationship who wouldn’t have kids of her own. Their friends would have kids, and they’d be the cool aunts who showered them with presents and didn’t have to deal with any of the messy stuff like diapers and tantrums.

Then, she and Lexa broke up and she started dating Niylah, who said she wanted to foster kids, which also sounded okay, if they lasted. But they didn’t, and Clarke settled on being open to children, which feels like the right place for her. She could be a mother, but she’s not sure. Maybe someday, she really will just *know*.

And the whole time that’s all happening, Bellamy was around in the background, an annoyance, then a friend, then the most important person in her entire life.

It’s easy to take it for granted that Bellamy wants children. Part of that is how he grew up, raising his sister, a father before he understood that’s what he was doing. But it’s not just that; he’s always been a caretaker, and it’s one of the things Clarke admires about him. He loves people fiercely and easily, and he feels like the kind of person who should be a father.

Until one New Year’s Eve, Clarke doesn’t consider herself to be a part of her romantic equation. It’s not for lack of wanting it—three years out of college and four years out of the Niylah breakup, she admitted that her feelings for Bellamy had evolved from *I wouldn’t say no* to a full blown crush, and probably the most serious crush of her life—but mostly because she’s never thought he reciprocated. Bellamy likes her, obviously, and she thinks she’s probably one of his closest friends, but she has plenty of close friends she doesn’t want to make out with.

On New Year’s Eve, though, she’s feeling particularly melancholy about it, because Bellamy brought a new girl, Echo, and she can’t help feeling like they’re going to end up dating, even if all he said was that she didn’t have anywhere else to go for the holiday.

So, yeah, Clarke might be sulking on the fire escape with a bottle of champagne. It’s a mood, okay? The world is a garbage fire and the boy she likes doesn’t like her back. It’s a sulking situation.
“This is where you’re hanging out?” Bellamy asks, climbing out the window to join her. “You’re not even wearing a coat.”

“It’s not that cold, because climate change is going to kill us all. Also, alcohol keeps me warm,” she adds, holding up the bottle. “What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you, obviously.” He rests his forearms on the railing next to her. He’s got his sleeves rolled up and the wind tousling his hair; it should be illegal to look like that. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

He holds his hand out for the bottle, takes a generous swig when she gives it. “Yeah, no, try again.”

“Standard end of the year melancholy.”

“That sucks, but this probably isn’t the best way to deal with it.”

“What are you, my dad?”

“I sure hope not.”

She reclaims the champagne. “Where’s Echo?”

“I left her with Murphy. They’re both kind of scary, so I assume they’ll get along. Why?”

“I figured you were going to try to hit on her.”

“Really? Why would I do that?”

“She’s cute. And you brought her.”

He laughs. “Wow. That’s–tenuous.” He nudges her shoulder. “I don’t have to hit on every cute girl I see.”

“You could probably get away with it. If you wanted to.”

“Yeah, but why would I want to? Seriously, what’s wrong?”

“Everyone feels coupled up, and I’m off on my own,” she admits. “And then you show up with a girl who looks like a date and–”

“And isn’t a date. I’m still single.” He clears his throat, and it’s one of those deliberate things. Like he’s gearing up for something. “If I’m paired up with anyone, it’s you.”

It’s true, but not how she wants. She and Bellamy are seen as a package deal, always together, and sometimes Clarke feels as if she let that fool her. As if that’s why she let herself believe he might feel the same way about him.

“By default,” she says, her voice coming out harsh, and he moves a little closer.

“Not to me. Not–I don’t just hang out with you because I don’t have anyone else, Clarke.”

“I know, but you don’t–”

“I came looking for you because I wanted to kiss you at midnight,” he says. “I’ve been wanting to
for years but I decided this year I was really going to do it. And then you disappeared.”

“I came out here to drink and sulk about your new girlfriend,” she says, feeling herself start to smile.

“Wow. Great plan.”

“Yeah. Yours wasn’t great either, though.”

“No?”

“You had to wait to midnight to kiss me.”

He ducks his head, grinning. “Yeah, you’re right. That’s a major flaw right there.”

They miss the countdown, they’re so wrapped up in each other, and Clarke doesn’t mind at all.

Bellamy isn’t the first person she’s dated whom she thought she might spend her whole life with. That happens to her a lot; she doesn’t know how to be casual in relationships. In high school, at least, she got that this wouldn’t be forever, that there was a natural end in sight, but after that, she kind of lost the thread. She didn’t date anyone unless she could see herself being in it for the long haul, and every time a relationship ends, it feels as if she’s failed.

But with Bellamy, at least, she knows what she’s getting into. She feels as if her belief that they’ll last comes from knowing him, and knowing herself. It’s not just optimism and the shine of a new relationship. She thinks they’ve got a real chance.

He proposes to her a year later, on the fire escape at midnight, and she teases him for waiting so long.

“I feel like we should have the kids conversation,” she says, a week later.

He glances at her, surprised. “What about kids?”

“Do you want them?”

“I don’t not want them. Jesus, I don’t know. I’m not against them, but it’s not like—” He huffs. “For some people, it’s a big issue, but it’s not for me. If you said you wanted kids, I’d be good with it. If you said you didn’t, that would be fine too. I want you, Clarke,” he adds. “I love you. If we want a family, great. If we don’t, we still have each other.”

“So, our official stance on kids is basically a shrug emoji?”

“That’s mine. What’s yours?”

“Same, I guess. But I always thought you wanted them.”

“Like I said, I can go either way.”

“Bisexual in every part of your life,” she teases, and he snorts.

“Exactly. If one of us ever has strong feelings, we can talk about it. And it would suck if I suddenly decided I really want kids and you decided you didn’t, but—I don’t think it’s going to be like that. If you want kids, I’ll be their dad. And if you don’t, then I don’t mind. We’ll just spoil O’s kids rotten.”
Which is, really, why she was so sure she and Bellamy would be good together. They really are on the same page.

So they get married, they get a house, they get a couple cats. They have a good life, and Clarke doesn’t just wake up one morning and decide she’s ready for kids. That’s still not how it works.

How it works for her is this: she’s at a hipster boutique store, looking for a present for her office yankee swap, and she sees this pair of baby shoes.

To Clarke, there a visceral appeal to baby shoes. She’s not sure what it is, something about the size and the level of detail, and maybe the fact that they’re so cute and stylish even though the person wearing them will never have any awareness of what they look like. It’s adorable and slightly absurd and if she wanted to keep a weird collection of ordinary objects, she would definitely go with baby shoes. That would totally be her thing. She’d be the weird baby shoes lady.

So it’s not really surprising, that baby shoes catch her eye, because she’s used to that. What she doesn’t expect is the sudden, wonderful thought that if she had a baby, she could buy as many baby shoes as she wanted. Which is, obviously, not a good reason to have a baby. But it’s the first thing that’s ever actually made her think of having a child of her own, of all that would entail. Her and Bellamy buying it clothes, dressing it up. Bellamy would get really into that, she’s sure. She’s never thought of herself as much of a shopper, but she likes getting things for other people, and they could turn the office into a nursery easily. They could paint the walls and put up a crib and have a child, this person who looked like both of them, whom they could love and care for and raise up to live in the shit show that is their planet.

They could be parents.

She doesn’t find anything for the yankee swap, but she buys the shoes, wraps them up, and puts them under the tree with Bellamy’s name on them, because she doesn’t know how to explain it to him. She doesn’t know how to make him feel what she felt, and it feels somehow wrong to just say she’s ready for kids.

It seems like the right gesture. They tend to make big moves at holidays.

Of course, the problem with gestures is that they’re open to interpretation, and Clarke will admit that baby shoes are not exactly an unambiguous message.

Bellamy’s always been good at being, for lack of a better word, cool, so he masks his reaction to the gift pretty well, but he can’t hide that he has no idea how to interpret it, or what he’s supposed to say, and after a few seconds of awkward confusion, Clarke takes pity on him.

She wraps her arms around him, leaning her chin on his shoulder. “They’re symbolic.”

“I figured, yeah. Are they symbolizing that you’re pregnant? Because I sort of figured you would have mentioned that sooner. Or gone to a doctor. Or—yeah, that doesn’t seem right.”

“No, I’m not pregnant. But I’m—I think I want to be. I want to start trying. And I saw these, and they just—I started thinking about the kid we could have and the family we’d make, and all the things we’d get, and all the—” She laughs. “Basically, it was the most materialistic baby fantasy ever, but—it felt real for the first time, I guess. We could have a kid who would need all these things, like tiny baby shoes.”

Bellamy laughs, cranes his neck around to kiss her. “So, the secret of wanting to reproduce is realizing how much shit we’ll have to buy for our new child?”
“How much shit we get to buy. This baby is going to have so many shoes, Bellamy. Assuming you haven’t changed your mind about—it’s still not a deal breaker for me or—”

He kisses her again. “I want to have a baby and buy it so much stuff, Clarke.”

“Yeah?”

“Closet full of baby shoes,” he agrees. “I’m in.”

The pair she buys him that Christmas is the first one, and next Christmas, he gets her another pair, to celebrate the actual pregnancy, and they put them up in the new nursery together, waiting for someone to come and fill them.

It’s going to be great.
Some Old Story About a Boy Who's Just Like Me

Chapter Summary

Fill for shipper-of-people! Prompt: Madi calling the ringkru and Octavia Abby kane indra miller and anyone else you can think of by nicknames/codenames that Clarke called them by in her stories(she rarely used the real names) And the characters reactions to their respective stories that Madi knows by heart and word by word Bellamy has ignored Clarke up till now you decide why and if that changes

It starts with Murphy, but it’s impossible for Bellamy to be upset by that on, because they’re halfway through unloading the ship when Madi says, “Oh, you’re the Rat Prince!” and that’s just hilarious.

Clarke chokes, and Murphy looks vaguely alarmed. “Me?”

“Yeah. In the stories, you were the Rat Prince.”

“Rat Prince,” Murphy repeats, looking at Clarke.

She tries to play it cool, which is not going to work, but that’s kind of been the theme ever since they got back to the ground. Everyone’s trying to be normal, and normal doesn’t exist anymore. After six years, Bellamy doesn’t know how to be on the ground, and Clarke is back from the dead with a child. Normal isn’t a thing.

“I used to tell her stories,” she says. “Fairy tales. Based on our lives.”

“And you called me the Rat Prince?” he asks.

“Why wouldn’t she?” asks Raven. “That sounds right to me. Hey, kid, who was I?”

“Oh, you were easy. She just called you the Raven.”

Raven snorts. “Not much of a nickname.”

“Ravens show up a lot in mythology,” say Clarke, glancing at Bellamy like she’s expecting him to confirm this. When he doesn’t, she looks away again, and her voice gets a little brighter. “It’s a good name for you, why would I change it?”

“I want to hear more about the Rat Prince stories,” says Murphy. “What did he do?”

It’s not really surprising, that Madi has all these things memorized, and it is kind of fun, guessing who’s who. Some people are obvious, like Raven, and Abby, who gets to be the Queen, but some of them take a little more work.

What really strikes him, though, is that he’s not there. None of the characters sound like him, and every time someone guesses one of them is him, they’re wrong. Clarke’s told Madi a thousand stories, and he’s apparently not in any of them. Sometimes he gets a passing reference, but he’s just–Bellamy. No one special.
He doesn’t want it to hurt, it’s not like he wants to be the Rat Prince or anything. But he wants to be someone.

“Everything okay?” Clarke asks, as they walk back to her campground.

He knows it’s not fair to be hurt, not really. It’s not as if Madi doesn’t know him, she clearly does. But he feels locked out in a way that stings. She knows all these people as heroic figures, as legends, and he’s off in his own other world.

So his smile is tight. “Yeah,” he says. “Everything’s fine.”

* *

It gets worse when they get the bunker open. Not in a global sense, of course. They’re all alive, his sister is alive, and they’re going to have the chance to make a new life. It’s everything he wanted, and he’s happy.

It’s just, well, Madi knows everyone in the bunker too.

It’s the kind of thing he wasn’t expecting to find out. He and Clarke have been doing a decent job of avoiding each other, and he knows that’s mostly on him. Clarke has been following his lead, and his lead is being awkward. He doesn’t know what to do with her yet.

But Madi doesn’t share that problem. Madi has become his shadow, this small, quiet person who seems to want nothing more than to follow him everywhere he goes. Which leaves him in charge of introductions, and him in charge of finding out the names Clarke used for everyone she knew, except for him.

Miller’s the first one to actually bring it up, when Madi tells him he was The Thief.

“What about Bellamy?”

Madi frowns. “Bellamy?”

“What’s his nickname?”

“Oh, Bellamy doesn’t have one.”

Miller doesn’t miss his quick scowl, although Madi thankfully does. “No? Murphy used to call him the king.”

“Yeah, but that would be weird,” says Madi. “Abby’s the Queen, and Bellamy’s not married to her.”

“Can’t argue with that logic,” says Bellamy. “Come on, kid, we need to check in at the clinic. They need this stuff.”

“Nice to meet you, Thief!” she says.

Miller smiles. “Nice to meet you, Nightblood.”

He tracks Bellamy down that night, once he’s alone. “Don’t tell me you’re upset about this.”

Bellamy throws back a shot of moonshine. “Upset about what?”

“The nickname thing. I saw your face.”
“It’s weird, right?” he asks. “She told Madi about everyone, and then I’m off in the corner, being—Bellamy.”

“You think that’s a bad thing?”

“I said weird, not bad.”

“Is that why you and Clarke are being weird too?”

It’s odd, that he’s had less trouble coming back to honesty with Miller than Clarke, but Miller is less complicated. It’s not hard to fall back into grunting at each other and occasionally talking about their lives.

“It’s a weird situation. It’s not like—fuck, she’s alive, I still can’t believe it. But it’s been—I thought she was dead for six years, and now she’s alive and—”

“And it’s not the best thing that ever happened to you?”

“Of course it is,” he says, and the answer is so automatic it shocks him a little.

Miller smirks. “See?”

“I never thought it was bad news. But—I spent six years mourning her and she spent six years raising Madi on stories about everyone but me. What am I supposed to do about that?”

“Talk to her,” he says, like it’s so fucking simple. “You don’t want to avoid her for the rest of your life, right? Your options are limited here. Do it or don’t.”

“I can keep putting it off. For a while longer.”

“You know it doesn’t have to mean anything, right?”

“She’s—every story I’d tell would be about her. And I wasn’t even—“

Miller shrugs. “Maybe it hurt too much.”

“Maybe.”

“Only one way to find out,” he says, and that’s, of course, is true, but also the root cause of the problem. Because, if he’s honest, Bellamy doesn’t really want to know.

It’s easier to just let it go.

* 

He puts together a mental list of names, over the next few days, being careful to note how everyone reacts. It’s not like every nickname is flattering, after all; Echo is the Ice Witch, which she likes more than he would have expected, but Indra’s not pleased about being the Forest Spirit. Abby likes being the Queen, but Kane is less sure about being her loyal adviser, even if Madi does tell him they got married in the story too. Octavia never sticks around long enough to find out she’s the Champion, and it’s probably good she doesn’t hear Lincoln was the Healer. Not that she’d mind, but he thinks the wound has finally scabbed over, and he wants it to stay that way.

It’s only after he’s got almost everyone else that it occurs to him to ask, “What about Clarke?”

“Clarke?”
“In the story. Who was she?”

“The hero.”

He snorts. “That was what she called herself? Wow.”

“Mostly, she didn’t call herself anything. Heroes don’t need nicknames. Sometimes she was the princess, but mostly she was just Clarke. Like you.”

“Like me how?” he asks.

Madi’s busy drawing, not even looking at him, apparently not invested in the conversation at all. “You were always just Bellamy. Do you want to hear my favorite Bellamy story?”

His throat feels like one giant lump. “How many Bellamy stories do you know?”

“All of them.”

“I’m not a hero in all of them.”

“No one’s good all the time,” Madi says, and from her tone, he feels sure this is something Clarke has told her a lot. “Being a hero means always trying to do your best.”

“I didn’t always do that either. But tell me your favorite story.”

She looks pleased, as if she’s been waiting for him to ask. “Clarke’s friends are scattered,” she says, which is the start of too many stories, in his opinion. “She made it out of the Mountain, but her friends are still trapped. The Forest Warrior helped her escape, but she was killed before they reached the castle. The Queen stopped her archers from killing her daughter, but she still doesn’t know where so many of her friends are, and the Queen doesn’t want her to go looking.”

*Forest Warrior* must be Anya; he thinks it because he can’t think about the story. He knows where it’s going.

“And then the trumpets blare, because people are coming through the gates, and when she turns, she sees them: Bellamy and his sister, and she’s never seen anything so good in her whole life. She was sure he was dead, and he’s not. And this is my favorite part,” she adds, all excitement.

He has to smile. “Mine too.”

“He doesn’t see her, but she can’t wait. She runs to him and throws her arms around him, and after all she went through in the Mountain, all the terrible things, she thinks, finally, that she’s going to be okay.”

His throat is so tight it almost hurts. “I don’t even do anything in that story.”

“You’re Bellamy,” she says, like this explains everything. “That’s all you have to do.”

*It takes him half an hour to get to Clarke, between getting Madi hanging out with Raven and figuring out where Clarke actually is. She’s in her rover, sketching, and he takes a second before she sees him to just look at her. There’s a part of him that can’t help feeling stupid for ever thinking she didn’t care about him enough, and a larger part of him that just thinks loving people as much as he still loves her is always going to be hard. That he’s never going to know exactly how to do it right.*
But he can try.

“Hey,” he says, climbing up next to her.

She startles, eyes darting over him as if she’s checking for damage, and then looking past him. “Hey. Is everything okay? Where’s Madi?”

“Learning about engine repair from Raven.”

“Oh. What’s up?”

He considers, and finally settles on, “I’m an asshole.”

Her expression falters, like she doesn’t know what to say to that now, and that as much as anything twists his heart up. “Oh?” she finally asks, delicate, and he barks a laugh.

“Fuck, Clarke, I’m so sorry.”

“For what?”

“I didn’t know what to do. Six years I was–I thought you were dead, and you weren’t, and that’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me, and I never–” He huffs. “I couldn’t believe it.”

“It’s okay,” she says, and he shakes his head.

“It’s not. I didn’t know how to be around you again, it was too much, and–”

“Did you figure it out?” she asks, cautious.

“Madi told me a story. About us.”

“Those were her favorites,” she says, a smile playing on her mouth.

“I thought I wasn’t–I didn’t think I was in them,” he admits. “She had nicknames for everyone you’d ever met, and nothing for me. So–”

“So you thought I didn’t talk about you?”

He shrugs. “I never said it was a smart guess.”

“I thought–” He can see her swallow. “It’s been six years. You had everyone else up on the Ark. I figured you probably didn’t need me anymore.”

“Fuck,” he says. “No, Clarke, I–” He runs his hand through his hair. “I never stopped. Six years and I didn’t think I was ever going to see you again, and I never–”

She leans in and kisses him, so short and soft he’d think he imagined it, except none of the kisses he imagined were ever like that. “If we’re being honest,” she says, a light flush on her cheeks. “That’s where I am.”

He laughs and tugs her in and kisses her again, firm and real, relearning the feel of her in his arms, discovering for the first time what it’s like to have this with her, the way her lips curve against his, how her hands can’t stay in one place, the soft, happy sounds she makes when he does something she likes.

“Me too,” he says, when he finally pulls away, voice rough.
She rests her forehead against his, face bright with happiness. “Okay,” she says. “Good.”

* 

When Clarke tells Madi, Madi takes it in, nods, and asks, “Are you going to live happily ever after?”

Clarke glances at him, and he shrugs one shoulder. “I’m not sure anyone ever lives happily ever after,” he admits. “But we’re going to do it for as long as we can.”

Madi nods, apparently satisfied. “Good. I’m going to too.” She curls up against Bellamy, warm and close, and he still doesn’t quite know how to comprehend this, still can’t quite believe that Clarke told this girl so much about him that she loved him before she’d ever met him, but this is, against all odds, his life. “Will you tell me a story?” she adds. “Something new?”

He kisses her hair. “Yeah,” he says. “I think I can come up with something.”
Chapter Summary

Fill for arthichetty! Prompt: Bellarke Soulmates au where all your life, you see black & white, and then when you touch your soulmate, you see colors

To Bellamy, not having a soulmate sometimes feels like knowing the setup for a joke and never hearing the punchline.

Not, admittedly, that he knows he doesn’t have a soulmate. He’s only thirty, and plenty of people find their soulmates at that age or later. It’s just that it seems easier, at this point in his life, to assume that no one is coming along, that he’s going to be one of those people who never gets that.

In some ways, it’s not hard to fake it. He knows that leaves are supposed to be green, and the sky is supposed to be blue. The rug in his apartment is brown, which is the same color as dirt and tree bark and his eyes. Apples are red or sometimes green, and traffic light colors are always in the same order: red at the top, then yellow, then green.

But he’s getting to the age where a lot of people he knows have soulmates, where a world without color is becoming the exception, rather than the norm. He has to fake it now, because if strangers find out he can’t see colors, it changes things. People will feel sorry for him, and that’s even worse than not having a soulmate.

It’s not as if he isn’t happy, honestly. It’s not as if not having a soulmate is this great blight on his life. But he’ll be out with his coworkers, and someone will ask which color was most surprising, when they first saw it, or they’ll try to describe what fall leaves look like, and he just has to nod and smile and hope no one asks him too many specific questions.

His favorite color is blue, and if he never sees it, he still thinks it’s a pretty good favorite color. From what he’s heard.

It’s three weeks after his birthday when Miller finds his soulmate, a cute, geeky kid named Monty, and Bellamy tries not to be too bitter.

“Is it as awesome as everyone says?” he asks.

Miller takes a sip of beer. “Which part, love or color?”

“Color. I’ve been in love before.”

Miller doesn’t call him out on that one; soulmate love is supposed to be unlike anything else, but Miller is still new to it. He and Monty haven’t really had time to do much more than meet each other.

“It’s kind of like looking up the answers at the end of the book,” he decides, his tone thoughtful. “Except you never did any work for the class and the whole thing is basically a mindfuck. Like, you didn’t know enough to have any idea what the answers would even look like.”

That actually does make some sense to him, even if he doesn’t entirely get it. But, like Miller said,
he doesn’t really have the full picture. He doesn’t feel as if he has the capacity to know what he’s missing.

“So, it’s cool?” he asks.

“Yeah. But if I never got it—“ He shrugs. “You’re still good.”

“I am,” he agrees, and can’t help a teasing smirk. “So, what, you think it’s never going to happen for me? Already giving up?”

Miller rolls his eyes. “Who the fuck wants to put up with you their whole life?”

It’s a joke, and he knows it, but it still feels a little like it’s not. Which isn’t Miller’s fault; this is his insecurity.

“That’s the question,” he says, making sure it sounds like a joke too. “Guess we’ll find out.”

* 

Two weeks later, his sister’s soulmate has a show that seems custom-designed to make him feel shittier.

Of course he knows that’s not actually what happened; the world does not revolve around him. The decision had nothing to do with him at all. And it’s honestly a cool idea: Lincoln collaborated with a friend of his who doesn’t have her soulmate yet, and they both produced paintings with the same colors and themes, something like a before-and-after game. Even without being able to see the “real” colors, Bellamy will be able to appreciate the differences in shade and design. It won’t be entirely lost on him.

It’s still tempting to just skip out, but he likes Lincoln, and Octavia will definitely notice if he isn’t there, and will guess why and have opinions about it.

So he’d better just go.

“This is actually going to be cool,” Octavia says, way too brightly. Lincoln is busy with setup, so she’s having dinner with him, Miller, and Monty before they go to the opening event at the gallery.

“As opposed to all Lincoln’s other, shitty art?” Bellamy teases.

She rolls her eyes. “Not that. But it’ll be cool to see what it’s like for you. Everyone else can see the colors, but you have the other perspective.”

“Lucky me.”

“You’re going to find them,” O says, like this is a certainty. “But for now, it’s cool. We’ll get the full experience.”

And Bellamy has to admit, it is cool. The paintings are side-by-side, with detailed breakdowns of what the instructions were and what colors were used next to them, and it’s interesting to see how much better the shades of gray on Clarke Griffin’s paintings look to him than the ones on Lincoln’s do. He’s seen art done by people without soulmates before, but they tend to work in actual grayscale, avoiding colors which they can’t actually distinguish for just this reason.

“Does it work?” he asks his sister. “Clarke Griffin’s stuff.”

“Kind of. It’s not—it feels like what you’d do if you didn’t have enough colors to pick from, I
“guess? Like, the sky is blue, but it doesn’t really look like the right blue.”

“It looks like the right blue to me,” he says. “I like it.”

“Thanks,” says a voice, and Bellamy turns and bumps his shoulder against this unfamiliar girl who’s standing too close, and all at once the world is bursting into what he knows must be color.

It’s as hard to explain as everyone’s always said it was, because he’s trying to put together references he didn’t even entirely know he was missing. The woman’s hair is light, probably blonde, and her skin is pale too, but he has no idea what color her eyes are, or what color her scarf is. Her shirt is gray, which is familiar, but even that shade has these nuances he didn’t know about, these other colors he can’t identify yet.

He looks down, remembering that his shirt is blue, and he does like the shade. That’s a relief.

Then he looks back at the woman, who’s not looking at him anymore either.

“Oh my god, it looks so different.”

He follows her gaze to the paintings on the wall, and she’s right, of course; the pleasing patterns of gray have been replaced by other, unknown colors that are, for reasons he can’t even begin to articulate, less appealing together than the colors he saw before were.

“You’re the artist?” he asks, although he already knows.

“And you’re my soulmate,” she says.

“She’s your what?” asks Octavia. “Bell, you can–”

“You’re losing your alternate perspective on the show, yeah,” he says. “This is my soulmate.”

* * *

Meeting Clarke is almost more surreal than being able to see colors, but the colors make for a much easier topic of conversation. And it’s a good way to get to know her, too, since they’re walking around her art show, looking at her paintings, and she’s regretting everything about her choices.

It’s kind of adorable, honestly.

“Seriously, that’s what green looks like?” she laments, signing at her painting of a flower next to Lincoln’s. “That’s not what I pictured.”

“Could you actually picture them?” he asks, curious. “Like—did you know how to imagine it?”

“Not like this. I guess I kind of—” She laughs, this soft, almost shy sound that makes his heart twist. “I thought a lot about it, I guess? And people try to tell me, other artists, but—I had no idea there would be so many.”

He smiles. “Yeah, I know what you mean. At least we’re in the right place for it.”

“Right place?”

He takes the excuse to move a little closer to her, leaning in so he can point to the card by the pieces. “They’re all labeled so we know what colors they are.”
That makes her laugh again. “Yeah, we’ve got a cheat sheet. And it does help. I can see how this green Lincoln used is in the same color family as mine, but his has more yellow in it.” She shakes her head. “God, it’s so weird. Finally seeing—I’ve studied color theory, I know exactly how it’s supposed to work, that you can mix blue and red to make purple, and I know how it works with black and white and shades of gray, but—this is so much more.”

“So, you want to leave the gallery and go play around with paint mixing, right?” he teases.

“I didn’t say that.”

“Yeah, but you do.”

“Can you tell that because you’re my soulmate?” she asks.

“Or it’s really obvious.” He wets his lips. “I don’t mind, if you want to go. I assume we’re going to see more of each other.”

“Yeah.” It’s her turn to pause, deliberate, lip caught in her teeth. He’s looking forward to learning all of her little quirks. “Or you could come with me.”

“If I leave with you, my little sister is definitely going to think I’m going to get laid,” he says.

“She’s Lincoln’s soulmate, right? He said she was—” She tries to find the right word. “Opinionated.”

“She’s a pain in my ass,” he grumbles, but he knows how fond it sounds.

“Is it bad?” she asks. “If she thinks you’re getting laid. I wasn’t ruling that out.”

His mouth tugs up. “No, neither was I. Let me get my coat.”

Clarke’s studio isn’t far, and she slides her hand into his as they walk, small and warm, and he squeezes her fingers. “Demographic stuff?” he asks.

“Hmm?”

“Where are you from?”

“California. I came up here for school and never left. You?”

“Here. I just never left. How old are you?”

“Twenty-seven. You?”

“I turned thirty last month. I had a kind of minor I’m never going to find my soulmate crisis going on.”

“Yeah?”

“Miller and Monty just met, and O and Lincoln haven’t been together that long either, just about six months. It was starting to feel like I was the last one left who didn’t have mine.”

“But now you do.”

He still can’t quite believe it. He’s walking down the street with a beautiful woman who was meant to be his, and even in the dark, at night, the world is full of so many colors. He can’t believe
there are this many. It doesn’t seem possible.

“Now I do.”

She unlocks the door to the studio, gives him a quick tour, but the main event is the rows of paints, all bright colors in a row. They pull them down and examine them, getting the feeling of pink and turquoise, these things he understood as theory, as words, but not as reality.

“Can you believe every single shade has a name?” she asks, running her fingers over the labels with awe. “And you can mix them all, and they’ll all be different?”

He laughs. “It’s pretty unbelievable, yeah.” And then, he can’t help adding, “You really must be my soulmate.”

“That’s how it works, yeah.”

“No, I meant–don’t get me wrong, you’re awesome, so far. But I always kind of wondered about the colors more. Even if I never found my soulmate, I figured I could fall in love. But I’d never know what this stuff was like, not really. So I’m glad that’s the big draw for you.”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” she says. “You seem pretty great too. But I’m glad you wanted to bail and come play with paint with me.”

Tentatively, he puts his arm around her, and when she leans back into him, he tugs her closer, kisses her hair. She smells light and fresh and a little like the chill of the air, and she’s his, somehow.

The world is new and bright and beautiful, in a way he didn’t even know how to imagine.

“Yeah,” he says. “I wouldn’t be anywhere else.”
Bellamy knew that, sooner or later, the egg problem would arise.

As far as he’s concerned, it’s not a problem, nor should it be; there are more officers in the aerial corps than there are or ever will be dragons, and a few people who aren’t interested in their own commands should be good news.

It’s not, precisely, that he’s unambitious. It’s just that his ambition is not to be bound to a dragon for the rest of his life. Not everyone is suited to that. And if he had to guess, he’d say that the admiralty knows that too, when they bother to think about him. It’s probably why they’ve always had so much trouble with him.

Not that he really expects Clarke to know this. Clarke, after all, never once doubted she wanted a dragon. And he might have felt the same, if he’d come to it how she did. If he’d just been a poor boy with no prospects, or even a titled one with no desire for that life, the corps might have appealed to him. He might have chosen it for himself.

But he was raised to be his sister’s second, and the idea of being the captain of his own beast makes him itch. He hopes it makes Clarke itch too, honestly. He’d like her to not want him to leave either.

And maybe she doesn’t. Just because she suggests him to take the egg, it doesn’t mean she wants him too. But she’s an officer, and she does actually understand how this is supposed to work. There’s protocol to be followed.

So she says, “Looks like you’re getting your own dragon sooner than you thought,” as she should, and he has to decide how to avoid it.

If it was just the two of them, he’d just tell her he doesn’t want it in the first place, but Collins is here too, and the last thing he ever wants is to have a serious conversation about his ambitions and insecurities in front of Collins. He’d rather not have a serious conversation about anything in front of Collins.

So instead, he just pretends there’s nothing to say about it. “Who else can harness it?”

“You’re the most senior—” Clarke starts, and he can practically hear the frown in her voice.

“Miller will get his father’s dragon, he shouldn’t do it.” He cocks his head at Collins, who seems even more wrong-footed than Clarke does. Clarke is thinking, trying to figure it out, but Collins never will. Bellamy’s not sure he’s capable of it. “What about Jaha?”

“Jaha?” he asks, as if it’s his first time hearing the name.

“He’d be a good captain,” Bellamy says, truthfully. He likes Jaha. He’ll be a better captain than Collins is, and deserves it more.
“You’d be a good captain,” Clarke snaps.

It’s much easier to focus on Collins; he doesn’t want to see how indignant she is on his behalf, when he’s not bothered at all. “You think Jaha wants it, Collins?”

“Of course he does, but—”

Given the corps’ reputation, Bellamy would hope they’d be better about ignoring regulations, but apparently not. He’s going to have to do it for them. “Great. Just get the egg, we’ll figure out the rest. Clarke knows how to make a harness. I’ll go see what I can find.”

It doesn’t take Clarke long for him to catch up to him, not that he was expecting it to. As long as Collins doesn’t come, he’ll probably be fine. So long as he doesn’t accidentally blurt out that he’s in love with her or something stupid like that.

It wasn’t something he was expecting, falling in love with Clarke. He hadn’t even expected to like her. And that’s not why he doesn’t want an egg, he decided that long before he met her. But if he was serving with someone he liked less, with Collins or another captain who wasn’t interested in his opinions, he might be tempted.

Still, though. He doesn’t think it’s for him. So he should be able to get through this conversation without saying anything he’ll regret.

Clarke starts off strong. “What was that?” she demands, jabbing her finger against his chest.

“A discussion of who should harness the egg if it’s really that close to hatching,” he says. He’s had years of experience with this with his sister; tepid reactions are something of a specialty.

Her scowl deepens. “It should be you. You’re a great officer. You might not get another chance like this for a long time, right? Maybe never. Why don’t you want it?”

“I’ve never really planned on having a dragon,” he admits.

This is, apparently, the wrong tactic to take. “You didn’t have to plan on it. You can still do it. This is your opportunity. You said yourself, you never know when one’s going to come, or if it will ever come again. If you don’t take this, you may never have a dragon of your own. And I know you were planning to be Octavia’s second-in-command for—well, forever, but—you don’t have to be.”

It’s a very pretty speech, and he appreciates it, but it’s not really the issue at hand. “I’m not going to be. Iskierka would bite my head off. Listen, honestly?” he says, bracing himself for it. “I’ve never wanted a dragon.”

“Never?”

“You’re right,” he says, leading her back to camp. It’s not a story he minds sharing, not with her, but it still makes him feel a little uncomfortable. Everyone in the corps wants a dragon. That’s the dream. “For a long time, I just thought I’d be Octavia’s second. That’s even after our mom died, though, when it would have made more sense for me to be the one getting the dragon. I don’t think I’d be right for a captain,” he admits. It’s his first time saying it out loud. “A captain has to put their dragon first, always. And themselves. And I’ve never been good at either of those.”

“You’d always be thinking about Octavia.”

He doesn’t have to say it. He could let the assumption stand, perfectly reasonable. But Clarke
sounds so sure, as if she knows all the answers, and he can’t just let it go.

It’s not telling her he’s in love with her. It’s just making clear that he’s not going anywhere.

“Not just Octavia.”

It feels safe enough, but Clarke looks at him, curious, and he has to look away.

“I’d worry about you and Lexa too,” he says, and it’s true. But it’s not the same.

“We’d–” Her voice wavers, and she has to try again. “You don’t have to give up on your advancement for us, Bellamy. You don’t have to be my First forever.”

“I don’t have to be. But–” He thinks over the words, trying not to give any more away than he already has. “I like being your First, and I like not having my own dragon. You aren’t going to order me to try for it, are you?”

She shakes her head. “No. If you’re willing to stay with me, I’m not going to send you away. I want you to stay,” she adds, her voice so soft his chest aches.

It’s not impossible, actually. That they might be in the same position.

He smiles. “Good. I want to stay too.”

*

“You know she’s not going to marry you,” says Collins.

As opening bids go, Bellamy’s heard better. “Who?”

“Captain Griffin.”

“Who said she was?”

“You’re giving up on an egg for her.”

“I’m not. Jaha will do well with it, and I’m happy to let him have it.” He looks Collins up and down. They’ve never been friends, or even friendly. Collins is the worst parts of every aristocrat he’s ever met serving in the corps, and most of them don’t have many good parts to begin with. “If you have a point you’d like to make, make it.”

“You don’t understand what you’re doing.”

“In general?”

“With Captain Griffin. Noble ladies—even noble ladies with dragons—can’t be with people like you.”

“And I’m sure she’s capable of telling me that herself. I don’t see how any of this is your business.”

He makes to go, and Collins actually grabs his arm, a shocking contact. “Listen, I’m trying to help you, all right? Your’re throwing away your career for a woman who cannot love you.”

“I’m not. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”
“I do, better than you do.”

Bellamy feels his jaw working, does his best to not let it bother him. “It’s my life, Captain Collins. I understand it better than you do. I had no romantic notions when I told Clarke I didn’t want the egg. I have no interest in taking it, and I have no intention of marrying her. Your concern is appreciated, but unnecessary.”

Collins is silent for a moment, and it occurs to Bellamy for the first time that this might be genuine, that he might truly be worried about this. It could be he really does think he’s helping.

“I hope you never regret your choice,” he finally says, and Bellamy shrugs.

“I feel that way about most of my choices. So far, so good.”

*

He really does think nothing will happen, or nothing as serious as marriage. Such arrangements are common in the corps, the understanding that two people care for and value each other, but without any formal agreement. He finds it fairly likely that he will, at some point, get to bed her, and that he’ll get out with enough of his heart intact to not regret it.

He is happy. Lexa’s injury put a damper on it, but she’s recovering well from her, and he and Clarke have something like a break until she’s better. The crew is enjoying Dover, and he’s enjoying having time to himself. More than that, he’s enjoying certainty. He hasn’t had even a single moment of regretting his choice to turn down the egg. He might, someday, but he can’t bring himself to worry over it now.

Especially not when the captains have to go off to an event, and he gets to remain behind, reading and keeping Lexa company while she asks him a thousand questions about what Clarke’s doing and why. It feels like a very pleasant, survivable future. A much better one than plenty of those he’s imagined.

And then Clarke comes back early.

He’s engrossed in his book, so engrossed he doesn’t even hear her approaching. Not that he thinks this is exactly his fault; he was expecting her to be gone much longer.

Instead, he only becomes aware of her when she asks, “What are you reading?”

He doesn’t jump, but it’s close. Instead, he makes a note of where he is and finds his bookmarker, teases, “You barely lasted two hours. I was sure you’d–”

And then he actually looks at her.

He’s sure the dress looks even better as it’s intended to be seen, by candlelight in some ballroom, when she can curtsy and offer bland pleasantries. But this is how he likes it, a little dirty, next to a dragon. Lady Clarke Griffin, in her purest form. The woman he loves.

So he nods his head and says, “My lady.”

She laughs, but there’s some color on her cheeks too, still visible in the evening light. “If you start that again, I’m going to–”

It’s not really a split second decision; it’s a decision that was made long ago, the first time she fell off the dragon or maybe before that, when she chose him for her First, when she didn’t let him
intimidate her.

He cups her cheek, and when she turns, he kisses her, so he’ll have done it once.

When she smiles, he does it again, really settling in, wanting to learn every inch of her, unsure he’ll ever get enough. He doesn’t have to marry her, but he does have to get this. He needs to know what it’s like.

Her own response is slow, cautious, as if she’s figuring things out. She hasn’t done this much before, if at all, but the enthusiasm more than makes up for her inexperience. She wants to be kissing him, and that’s all that really matters.

At least until he tries to deepen the kiss and she jumps back, laughing.

He might be laughing too, it’s hard to tell. He’s not sure he’s ever been so happy. He doesn’t know how it feels yet. “What?”

“I wasn’t expecting that.”

He snorts. “I think everyone was expecting that.” They were already the most poorly kept secret in the corps, and nothing had even happened yet.

“Not—never mind.” She nods once, as if she’s bracing herself. “Do it again. I’ll do better this time.”

It takes him a second to figure it out; he’d thought she must have had someone. “Wait, have you—God, you’ve never even kissed anyone. What do ladies do with their time?”

“I sketched,” she says, prim. “I’m sure I’ll pick it up.”

“I’m sure.” He kisses her jaw. “I’m going to put my tongue in your mouth. So you’re prepared this time.”

“We shouldn’t—” He doesn’t want to hear the end of that sentence, so he nips her neck, which seems to do the trick. “Lexa is going to wake up and ask questions. We should go inside.”

“You know we aren’t married,” he points out. They’re never going to fool anyone, but plausible deniability is important. If he follows her back to her rooms, there won’t be any question what they are to each other.

“Not married yet.”

It’s so matter-of-fact, how she says it. It’s not as if marriage has been a dream of his, some goal he hoped to achieve. He thought he might marry someone, if it struck their fancy. But once he fell in love with her, he gave up on that. “Yet?”

“Don’t tell me you were planning to have your way with me and leave after,” she teases.

“No, but—” He doesn’t know how to finish the sentence, so he just kisses her again, hot and wet, trying to pour everything into it, love and longing and want and certainty. He’ll marry her tomorrow, if she’ll let him.

She pulls back only reluctantly. “Inside, Bellamy. I don’t want Lexa to wake up and ask what we’re doing.”

That’s a bracing thought. “Fine. Only because I’m worried the dragon will have a lot of invasive questions.”
They hold hands as they go inside, because they don’t have anything to hide. No one’s going to care, if they don’t. And they, apparently, don’t.

It’s an amazing night already, and he hasn’t even gotten any of her clothing off.

“Collins told me I should marry him,” she remarks, casual. “And keep you on the side.”

As suggestions from Collins go, it’s one of the better ones. “You probably should. I assume you disagreed.”

Her fingers squeeze his, as if she’s trying to keep him from going. As if he wants to. “You’re mine. I refuse to pretend you’re not.”

His face dissolves into a soppy smile, but she doesn’t comment on it. She can’t mind. “I’m yours.”

*

The wedding is, somehow, very much how he thought his wedding would be, if he was going to have one. He didn’t think about it much, but he’s been to enough aviator weddings that he thought he’d know what they looked like. It was easy to expect he’d have the same thing for himself, because that was what everyone had. If he was going to be married as an aviator, it seemed likely he’d get it done quickly, and then there would be a party.

One he fell in love with and became engaged to Clarke, he started worrying it would be more complicated than that. Not that he ever thought her parents would embrace the match, but they might have wanted to save what face they could.

But they’re gone for a good year after they get engaged, which means that, according to Clarke, her parents don’t want them to have a wedding near them because it would be obvious that they had, up until this point, been not married.

“So your parents want everyone to think we had the rushed, informal wedding we’re going to have, but we did it years ago?”

“Theyir official story is still that I ran off with an aviator,” she says, with a shrug. “That story involves the two of us being married. Disgraceful, but not as disgraceful as carrying on how we have for the last year.”

He kisses her neck. “Disgrace is excellent. I like it.”

“As do I. I still think we should have the aviator wedding as soon as we’re back. Before we get sent somewhere else.”

“We’d better make sure my sister is around first. She’ll never forgive me if she misses it.”

“What if she’s gone for a year?”

“I didn’t realize we were in a hurry.”

“I’d like to be married to you,” she says, with a soft smile. “I know it’s not—I’m not expecting it to be some colossal change in our lives. We’re already promised to each other in every way that matters. But I do want to be married.”

It turns out to be a moot point; Octavia is there when they get back home, with a fiancé of her own she was planning to marry as soon as he and Clarke returned, so they decide to just have one
ceremony, to make it simpler. It’s quick and perfunctory, but after there’s drinking and dancing, and Bellamy gets to dance with all his favorite people, as well as being married, officially.

No one can say they haven’t done it properly, now. Even if it took a little while.

After, giddy from drink and happiness, they go to find Lexa. She and Costia are napping, but stir as they approach.

“We’re married,” Clarke tells her.

“Were you not already?” she asks. “I thought you had been married.”

“No, we didn’t have anyone to perform the ceremony. But we got it done tonight, and now it’s official.”

“I don’t see why you needed that,” she says, closing her eyes. Sometimes, he really does like dragons. “You already had all the marriage you needed. You know what you mean to each other. Everyone does.”

It’s surprisingly romantic, albeit unintentionally so. Still, for Lexa, that’s pretty good.

Bellamy wraps his arm around Clarke’s shoulders, kisses her hair, perfectly content to be exactly where he is.

“Everyone does. But now it’s proper.”

Lexa yawns. “Then I am happy for you.”

“Thanks,” he says. “I am too.”

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