**Lost and Found**

by **CGYScribble**

**Summary**

Clarke has left the safety of Camp Jaha in an attempt to outrun her demons and put her past behind her. As she finds herself neck deep in a world she is unprepared for, word has spread throughout the clans that Wanheda has disappeared after the fall of Mount Weather. Two groups race to find the missing Skaikru woman, one wishing to protect the Kongeda and its clans whereas the other intends to use Clarke in order to burn it to the ground and rebuild it in her own image.

**Notes**

This is a first draft of a story I plan on editing after completion. When I get near the end of the story, I will make sure everyone knows it is upcoming. Enjoy and please comment!
Troubled Spirit

Chapter Summary

After the victory at Mount Weather, Clarke can no longer cope with the combination of her actions and the betrayal at the hands of the one she trusted most to help overcome the threat contained within the mountain. She decides to leave her people and her responsibilities behind with the hope that the demons will remain as well.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the first chapter of what I hope will become an entertaining slowburn that takes place after the fall of Mount Weather! This is the first run through of the story and it is the first time I've ever attempted anything that will be approaching the 200-250K word range.

I will warn everyone now that significant Clexa moments won't happen until much, much later in the story. Lexa's betrayal stung Clarke hard and she won't forgive and forget easily. As we all know, Clarke is stubborn!

Ok, I get it - enough with the long note!

Thanks to everyone who is giving this fic a shot and I hope you enjoy. If you have any feedback or just want to say "Hi", feel free to do so in the comments.

Now get to the reading and I'll see you all again soon with the next update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Clarke stood frozen in place as her eyes scanned around the dining hall, consuming the finality of her decision at Mount Weather to pull back the lever and snuff out the light in the eyes of its inhabitants.

Mothers, fathers and children she saw not more than fifteen minutes ago on the monitors in the control room, all talking and going on about their lives and oblivious about what was about to happen in their home. What she witnessed now were a people burnt and blistered. Even the children wore the agony of pain that was unexpectedly thrust into their souls and Clarke could see it in each of them.

When the grounders attacked the drop ship, she did not see all the faces. It was not lost on her—the impact of their actions against Anya and her people, but they were there to kill them. It was self defence and they all understood they faced warriors, and warriors were battle-hardened and prepared for what could happen.

This was different.

She knew some of these people and they had helped her protect her people. They were more like her people than the grounders. The memory of what she had done here would be her punishment and
she swore she hold it within herself for the rest of her life.

The lighting in the room was warm which was in contrast to the cold look of the concrete and metal facility. It reminded her of her first interaction with Dante Wallace. He had a kind face with pleasant words which spoke of peace and protection, hiding their facade behind walls and in cages. The rich tapestries that hung in the hall reminded her of the art she drew in her cell while she was on the Arc. Clarke wondered if she was really so different.

She understood they were only trying to escape from their own prison. They were doing what they had to for their people but there was no chance Clarke was going to let her friends and family suffer.

Clarke was unaware of how long she had been standing there. She kept telling herself it was Dante and Cage who brought this down on the mountain, but Clarke all she could see was her hand on the lever.

"I had to..." she mumbled to herself as her emotions began to get the better of her once again. Her eyes were still red from earlier but they began again to fill with water when they rested on Maya.

The last to leave from this room was Jasper. The loss of Maya was clearly evident in the tears that ran freely on his face. Clarke understood he would likely become consumed by hate for what she was forced to do, even if it was currently not present in his eyes.

Not yet, but soon. she thought to herself.

A voice from behind startled her mind from future concerns to the present.

"Clarke, we have to go."

The sound of Bellamy's voice broke the nearly perfect silence of the room. Clarke brought her hands to her face and rubbed her eyes before she turned to face him. When she turned, he studied her and what he saw was the summation of all her decisions since they made it to earth— The 300 Warriors of the drop ship, Finn, Tondc, the betrayal by the Commander.

It was when she realized he was observing her, Clarke took in a deep, steadying breath. She readied the mask she wore when she lifted the gun to Dante's chest and fired. She was not done saving her people.

She saw the sympathy in his eyes. He carried the weight of their actions as well, but it was her plan to kill the people of the mountain. It was her idea to flood the facility with radiation that would destroy a civilization, the innocent alongside the guilty.

Her decision.

Clarke frowned, forcing the thought from her mind. She knew she made the right decision for her people and that gave her renewed strength. Steeling her jaw and forcing her shoulders back, her eyes took on a focus as she turned and headed toward the door and said, "Let's get our people home."

The pair moved quickly through the concrete hallways and metal bulkheads arriving at the large entryway for Mount Weather. Clarke slowed as she approached the large metal door of the entrance and before taking her first step outside she took in a deep breath, exhaling slowly. Bellamy was equally as interested in leaving the mountain and putting this chapter of their lives behind them.

Clarke wondered if she could ever forgive herself for all she had done to bring them to where they are now but deep inside, she knew there was something else she had to before she would feel like she had done all she could.
The duo emerged door and their senses seemed to erupt. The complete stillness within the bunker gave way to the sounds and smells of nature, the vibrant colours of the forest and wild flowers around them made it seem like they entered walked on to another world.

The slight breeze carried with it the voices of their people who celebrated their freedom and reunification with loved ones, there was also the moans from those still injured, who had managed to survive. Seeing her people alive should have comforted Clarke.

The pair surveyed those who sat on the ground or were leaning against trees and it did not take long before Clarke saw her mother with Kane leaning over her. His hands occupied in trying to bandage some of her wounds. She also noticed they had taken some stretchers from the medical facility in Mount Weather.

**Good.** Clarke said to herself. This will help them return to the safety of Camp Jaha much faster.

It was clear on all her people that this place has left more than the physical scars that come with fighting. None more so than on Jasper who sat at the base of a tree and refusing all attempts at consoling from others, including Monty.

Brushing her hair from her face, Clarke straightened her back, lifted her chin and addressed her people, "Everyone," Clarke yelled loudly to gather the attention of her people.

"We must get back to Camp Jaha as quickly as possible. There are still dangers in the forests and our injured need medical attention."

Everyone turned to look at Clarke and although their focus had been on the injured or their loved ones, they understood what Clarke was saying. Some presumed it was due to the Commanders betrayal and worry that grounders might take this opportunity to attack them while they were vulnerable, some because of the animals that might hunt them.

Clarke could not say it aloud but it was the proximity to this place of death that she wanted to escape from, hoping distance would somehow help ease the pain of what she had done.

From her seat on the rocky ground, Abby watched her daughter as she spoke to them all. Her memory picturing the strong blonde girl who at Camp Jaha, freed Emerson and told her mother that she was in charge. She hated that this world forced such tough decisions on her daughter and how it had changed her from the young blonde girl she knew on the Ark.

When Abby looked past Clarke to Bellamy, their eyes met. He saw the concern in her eyes for her daughter. It was only when Kane and Monty began to move Abby on to her stretcher did she stop looking at Bellamy, squeezing her eyes closed in reaction to the pain that coursed through her.

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They left Mount Weather early that morning and the weather had been cooperative which was a relief to the weary Skaikru. Many of them feared a confrontation with the Grounders would occur but Clarke believed that if Lexa and her people were going to attack, they would have been attacked coming from the mountain when their people were tending to the wounded.

They had been hiking for the better part of the morning when Markus approached Clarke. She kept a rigorous pace and never took her eyes off the path in front of her, rifle in her hands as she kept her eyes to the tree line. When he reached her side he glanced over, appraising her.
"Clarke, we need to rest."

"We will rest when we reach the gates of Camp Jaha." she said firmly.

"It doesn't do any good if our people die of exhaustion on the way home."

Clarke stopped and looked up to the sky. The sun was at its highest point in the day and she realized that they had been hiking for more than four hours without a break.

"Fifteen minutes and we continue." It was an order, not a request.

"Thirty. There is a stream near here and we need to refill our canteens." Marcus knew Clarke would not cause harm to her people and when her shoulders dropped, he smiled.

"Thirty minutes." Was the last thing she said. Clarke had yet to look at Marcus when they spoke. Her voice was tired and she looked like she wanted to fall over

"Thirty minutes and you rest as well." he amended. "You are pushing yourself too har..."

Clarke's head quickly swung in his direction and addressed his concern, her eyes were tired but firm.

"I'm fine. Go back and look after everyone. I'm going to make sure the path is clear ahead."

Marcus nodded and held out his canteen to her. "I am sure we will be fine."

He had the same belief Clarke had when they were not attacked by warriors outside of Mount Weather. The path home was likely clear.

He had the same belief Clarke had when they were not attacked by warriors outside of Mount Weather. The path home was likely clear, though, it didn't stop his eyes from carefully watching the environment around them.

Clarke accepted his water and opened the canteen, taking a couple large sips. She couldn't hide that she was thirsty and the cool water rolling over her lips was welcome. She didn't remember the last time she had something to eat or drink. Perhaps it was before, with Lexa. Before she was standing alone.

Clarke knew the breaks were necessary. She was being selfish in forcing her people to march behind her at such a heavy pace. She feared that every time they may stop for rest, her mind would return her back to the memory of the control room, the smoke slowly climbing from the barrel of her gun and Dante with a growing red mark in his chest. She needed to keep moving.

She didn't know who she was anymore. She attempted to reconcile her actions with the safety of her people, but that was always her excuse.

No matter the enemy. No matter the cost.

*Is that all there is to life on the ground?* she wondered.

"Clarke," called Raven, pulling her attention back toward the group.

Clarke was standing 30 feet further down the path when she heard Raven call to her. She turned to see Raven with Lincoln, Octavia, Monty, Bellamy, and Harper. They were on the ground eating some dried meat and sipping water from bottles. Raven waved at her to come over and join them.

Clarke forced a smile and raised her hand in refusal.
She didn't want their thanks or to answer questions about the decisions she was forced to make which was always something that happened when they were together. Before she could turn away from the group, her eyes fell downward and she took a deep breath.

Bellamy saw she was not going to come over and started rise. It was Lincoln who reached forward and placed his hand lightly on Bellamy's shoulder, ceasing his attempt to stand.

"She requires time." he stated simply and calmly.

Bellamy looked back at him and the others who were resting on the ground. Bellamy wanted, no needed to help but when he took another look toward Clarke, her back was now to the group and she was slowly moving down the path.

"Let her have her space, Bell." Octavia added.

Raven continued to watch Clarke as the others began to converse about the events in the Mountain and speculated on what would happen between their people and the Grounders. She cursed her body for being too sore for her being unable to go after Clarke.

Since they left the underground facility, Raven had been watching her. With every step they all took toward Camp Jaha, the further Clarke seemed to be moving away and everyone was just letting it happen.

Clarke wandered further down the path and the conversations behind her had begun to mute in her ears. After deciding she had gone far enough, she fell against a log next to the path that was covered in a soft green moss.

Her mind brought her back to when they crashed on the Earth and they all emerged from the drop ship. They were in awe of the tall green trees, the rick brown dirt beneath their feet and moss that enveloped much of the forest. She looked up to where the sun hid behind large trees and recalled the first time the sun danced through the canopy when the slight breeze coaxed the leaves from remaining still.

Everything looked different.

They had no idea what their future had in store for them. They saw promise and a future on the ground that was limitless in potential. It was their world and nothing could go wrong.

"But it did." she whispered quietly.

The group behind her started to pack up as Marcus gave the order to ready themselves for resuming their journey to Camp Jaha. Clarke did not hear the group until they had begun to walk past her, trapped in her thoughts and unaware until they already walking past her, everyone glancing at her with understanding as she sat with the weight of her actions holding her down.

She stood up slowly from the log she was sitting on and took one last look into the forest around her. Not so long ago all she saw was wonderment when they landed. Now she no longer saw the beauty, only the shadows where those who would do her people harm hid and tried to listen for the possible snapping of a twig announcing they were being watched. The forest did not share its secrets.
The group slowly arrived near the edge of the clearing that led to Camp Jaha. She walked behind them at a slight distance since their last rest stop, stating to Markus it to keep watch for anyone or anything that might be watching them. She knew at some point Lexa would have ordered scouts to watch them.

She was meticulous in the regard of collecting information and Clarke knew her green eyes would not stray long from her or her people.

Throughout the last leg of the journey, her friends would slow their pace and allow Clarke to catch up to them, offering her a drink from their canteen. They tried to speak to her, but Clarke would only accept the water with a nod. She did not speak and offered no optimism for conversation. It wasn't that she didn't want to talk to her friends, it was she had no idea how to talk to them.

Entering the clearing, exhaustion and relief flowed like waves over them all. They had been running on adrenalin and being so close to home, the events and the journey of the last day wore on them all. Relief and anguish seemed to envelop all who made the exhaustive trek back to their home and commotion could be heard at the gates from as far as the tree line.

Once it was found to be their own who were returning, people rushed forth from the open gate and started to help carry the wounded, taking the strain off those who were exhausted.

Water was readily passed around and silent celebration sat in everyone’s eyes for those who were fortunate enough to return. It was only when they reached the gate and took their first steps through that a small sense of relief poured over them.

It was a feeling of safety they had not known in what seemed like ages.

Bellamy stood at the gate watching everyone walk through. He led the group through the clearing and yelled for them to open the gate. He took position at the entrance and waited for the one person he knew would enter last. He knew she couldn't come in until everyone was safe.

As Kane And Abby entered, he reached down and took Abby's hand. They looked at each other and found what comfort they could in hope that the worst was behind them all.

Almost everyone had entered and Raven spoke for the first time since she had left Mount Weather in an almost whisper, "Jasper," causing him to stop and walk over to her. Reaching behind Wick she produced his goggles and extended them toward him, "You almost forgot."

Speaking with a subdued tone, "My goggles, thank you." was all he could reply. He didn't smile, he simply continued into the camp with the rest of the group.

Bellamy turned his head saw Clarke standing about twenty feet from the entrance to the camp. She was talking with Monty and when it seemed like they were done talking, she pulled Monty in for an embrace.

After the hug, Monty stepped back and looked down as he walked away from Clarke, momentarily glancing at Bellamy which caused Bellamy to study him. Something was wrong. Monty pulled his sweater tight to his chest and continued past Bellamy trying his best to avoid his eyes.

He approached Clarke with concern. He could see her hesitation.

"I think we deserve a drink" he remarked, trying to cut the tension he felt build up in his approach to Clarke.

She fought the idea of entering the camp and having that drink with Bellamy and her friends. The
entire journey from the mountain, she argued with herself. She questioned who it was she had become in her mind.

"Have one for me." she suggested.

"Hey. We can get through this." Bellamy said.

"I'm not going in".

Bellamy turned to Clarke and fought with his words. "Clarke, if you need forgiveness, I'll give that to you."

A moment passed as they stared at each other. Clarke fortified herself against his appeal. She didn't know what she wanted, but whatever it was, it was not inside the camp.

"You are forgiven" he continued. Clarke looked at him and her eyes returned to the camp. Bellamy saw his words affected her. He fought harder. "Please come inside."

"Take care of them for me".

Bellamy pleaded with her, "Clarke,"

"Seeing their faces every day, It is just going to remind me of what I did to get them here"

He countered, "What we did. You don't have to do this alone."

Looking back at the people in the camp. The wounded were laying on the ground and people were helping everyone who returned from Mount weather. Turning back to Bellamy, she shook her head, fighting back the memory of Finn, the drop ship, Tondc and Mount Weather; all things that took parts of her and made her into what stood before Camp Jaha.

"I bear it so they don't have to."

"Where are you gonna go?"

"I don't know."

Bellamy fought the tears that were trying to form. She was leaving and he could do nothing to stop her.

Clarke moved forward and kissed him on the cheek and pulled him into a hug that he embraced. Her voice was strained when she spoke, her chin on his shoulder, "May we meet again".

After a moment she pulled back and looked him in the eyes, nodded and walked back to the tree line they had walked from to return to the camp. Bellamy couldn't watch her go. He knew if he did, he would leave with her and he had to stay.

Staring straight forward into the clearing, he stood between the only two things he cared about. Clarke who was moving farther and farther from him, and his sister Octavia who he swore to always protect.

Swallowing hard, he whispered, "May we meet again."
Clarke continued into the forest and found herself running. She ran from the surge of feelings that rumbled forth in her chest and threatened to consume her. Her eyes were red and tears were freely flowing. She didn't know how long she had been running, but it was only when exhaustion forced her to her knees did she stop.

Her grief wanted to consume her the moment she stopped, but Clarke withstood the urge to indulge in her sorrow and forced herself to focus on the here and now. The nights were getting colder and she had to get to shelter.

She decided her first stop would be to the drop ship before they had reached Camp Jaha. There were rations there and fresh water that she made sure were stowed away for emergencies. Clarke figured this was an acceptable one. Once she would gather what she could from there, it would be on to find a safer shelter that would give her privacy.

Clarke stood up from the ground and brushed the dirt off her pants. She glanced around, recognizing some of the tree and realized she had been running in the direction of the drop ship. Wiping her eyes with her fingers, she focused on getting where she needed to go.

Clarke was unaware three figures had been following Skaikru since they had left the Mountain since the grounder army had left. They had been ordered to remain with Skaikru until they were relieved, but knew they should inform Polis of what they had witnessed.

The largest of the three walked out from where he had been watching from and over to one of camouflaged scouts nearest him, giving what sounded like an order.

"Kamp raun emo tri. Ai op Skaikru."

"Sha, Koma." The man replied, making his way over to a tree and climbing up the solid branches to get a better view of the Skaikru camp and the happenings within its walls.

He turned to the other scout and directed him to approach. When he was close, Koma spoke to the smaller man after placing his hand on his shoulder.

"Mafta em op." he ordered, pointing to Clarke who was now out of sight but moving quickly enough to leave a clear trail in the direction she was moving.

"Sha, Fos." was the simple reply, the voice not as stout as the man barking the orders, turned and walked off into the forest after the blonde girl.

Koma waited until he was sure the Skaikru girl was far enough away, he whistled for his horse. It appeared in moments and with a graceful jump, he was atop his horse and quickly moving quickly in the direction of Polis.

As he rode he found himself thinking on the events he witnessed that day. He knew All the clans wished for Maun-de to be beaten but there were few who could truly believe that the day would ever come. Their weapons were too powerful an obstacle to overcome and always had been. It seemed fated they would live in fear of Maunon forever but if Skaikru could defeat Maun-de in less than a day? He was certain that it was a concern for all twelve clans.

Understanding that he would be able to reach Polis by nightfall if he rode hard, he urged his horse on quickly to inform the Commander of what has transpired in her lands.

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"Kamp raun emo tri." - Take the trees.

"Mafta em op." - Follow her.

"Sha, Fos" - Yes, First.

"Maun-de" - Mount Weather

Chapter End Notes

It was my hope to have the next chapter up earlier than tomorrow but ongoing family concerns made it impossible to do so. I'll have the next chapter up on the 14th of July!
Chapter Summary

Lexa returns to Polis with her people from the Mountain, summoning the Kongeda ambassadors to inform them of her actions.

While awaiting word from her birds in the forest, she is in conflict with her decision and attempts to fight against the rising tide of emotions that surges against her.

Chapter Notes

It is Sunday!

Thanks everyone for stopping by and leaving comments & kudos on the first chapter. This is my first FF and it is nice to know people are looking forward to what is to come. Stick around because it will only get better!

I have been looking forward to posting this chapter and putting the finishing touches on the next one. As always, let me know what you think in the comments!

Chapter 2

The room was a flurry of words as the ambassadors of the Kongeda argued among themselves. It was easy to convince most of the representatives that in breaking the treaty with Skaikru, all her people that were imprisoned were set free. The two she did not expect dissension from surprised her. Tenin kom Sangedakru and Arden kom Floukru.

She accepted the deal to free her people with the knowledge that it may cost Skaikru their lives. She had made harder decisions than this one before, her frustration lay in the blue eyes of the one who took the betrayal personally.

She played the scenario over and over in her head but only remembered staring into Clarkes spirit hoping she would understand the decision she had to make for her people.

The mutterings and arguing of the ambassadors in front of her had grown into a raucous state and they had clearly moved from debating to posturing. Having heard enough she twirled the brown-handled dagger in her fingers and stabbed it down forcefully into the arm of her wooden throne.

"Em pleni!" she Lexa, bringing the group to heel.

"I have done what was best for our people. ALL of our people."

Looking into the eyes of the ambassadors who disagreed with her actions and saw she had not convinced them with her words.

"Heda, may I speak?"
"Sha, Tenin kom Sangedakru. Speak."

She stared into his eyes and he swallowed hard, informing him that he choose his next words with care.

"I remain in disagreement with the actions taken at Maun-de. We had an alliance with Skaikru and regardless of why, in allowing one enemy to live we may now have two. Both of these enemies have weapons and technology that has been used to enslave and torture our people."

Lexa lifted her hand signalling she would now address his concern.

"In leaving them to fight with each other, we allow them to weaken themselves." Lexa cut him off. "Our people and their protection will always be my priority. Should one prevail against the other, we have more than enough warriors to able to handle such a situation."

The certainty in her voice muted further objection from the remaining ambassadors. She glanced at Arden but he simply nodded once to his Heda. She could see he had the same mind as Tenin regarding the matter yet he would not press her further.

Lexa decided they had discussed the matter enough. She stood up from her throne and placed her hand over the hilt of her sword, a powerful image reminding them of her authority and continued, "I need not ask permission of this council for matters regarding war."

"I have brought you all here as a courtesy to inform you of the actions I have taken and why I did as I chose to." emphasizing the word chose, reminding them of her authority in these matters.

"Scouts watch Skaikru and Maun-de. If anything happens, we will know immediately as to deal with any possible threats that may arise." Looking around the room into the eyes of each of the ambassadors, she glances at Titus who remained silent at her side.

"Inform me when the scouts arrive with news. Ambassadors, I will let you know if we receive word regarding Skaikru and the Maun-on."

Titus nodded at her order, "Sha, Heda".

She stared straight forward and with a swift stride, walked toward the large doors across the room. She decided she was done with the meeting as nothing further could be gained from staying to hear the ambassadors bicker with one another. Her decision was abrupt and caused the ambassadors to quickly rise from their seats and bow their heads in respect.

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Leaning on the balcony outside her bedroom, Lexa looked over the City of Polis.

The people below were preparing for the evening by taking down their merchandise and closing their shops. She could hear the laughter and smell the fires being lit throughout the city to illuminate the streets as the sun quickly moved to the horizon.

There were times Lexa wished that she could have the life of one of her citizens and never more than after today. Although they had their burdens, they would never know what lengths she would go to in order to ensure their safety and she envied them for those moments when they returned to their homes to be with their families.

Tenin kom Sangedakru and Arden kom Floukru both disagreed with her choice and stated by working with Maunon the repercussions that might befall the Kongeda should either side prevail. An
even greater concern is if they decide to combine their forces but Lexa was certain Clarke would never work with Maun-de against her coalition after what they had done to her people.

Fears of retaliation did come to her mind, but by a single person in particular. She was unsure she could protect herself from anything were it by a particular blonde haired girls hand.

Since returning to Polis, she was constantly confronted with doubt regarding her actions at Maun-de but always affirmed in her mind that her decision was the best for her people.

A knock at her door brought Lexa back to her balcony. She knew who it was. She had not seen Deni all day and she welcomed the distraction from her thoughts.

"Min op." Lexa called out.

The door opened and her servant Deni entered the room. This brunette has been her trusted servant for many years and as she walked in the room, looked immediately toward the balcony expecting Lexa would be trying to clear her mind after a day with the ambassadors.

"Heda," she bowed slightly when Looked back at her. "Have you eaten?"

"No." was her simple reply.

Lexa strode back into her room and had begun to remove her armour. She had been wearing it since returning from the Mountain and as she began to unbuckle the straps on it, the release of tension throughout her stiff body caused a sigh to escape her lips.

Deni then walked toward the round table in the room, one hand holding a plate of bread, dried meat and cheese, the other some hot tea which filled the room with a sweet aroma. Lightly placing the food and tea on the table, she filled a cup and looked at Lexa expectantly.

"You must eat. Heda's strength is the peoples strength."

Deni knew Lexa had not been served food by any of the other servants in the tower and by the growl that originated from the Commander's stomach as the smell of the food touched her senses. She let her lip curl up a bit and Lexa nodded with a smile showing on her face.

"Mochof, Deni." Lexa finished opening the buckles on her coat she was still wearing and laid it on a bench at the end of her bed before making her way over to the table with the food and tea.

"Have any scouts returned to Polis?" Lexa asked.

"No. No one has returned yet."

Lexa frowned at the answer. "I expect to hear from them soon. When they arrive, I want to know immediately. Send for Titus upon their arrival."

As Lexa sipped at her tea, Deni nodded her understanding."I will return to prepare a bath for you after you have eaten."

Lexa sighed as she sipped at her tea. She did not feel an urge to sleep and her mind was clouded. She did not like the feeling of turmoil within her and decided to find clarity the best way she knew how.

"Deni, I am going out and will be gone for a while. Perhaps we can wait for the bath until I return."

"Sha, Heda."
Deni already knew where she was headed. She looked over to the shelf that had bandages and salves for what was to come.

Lexa stood from her seat at the table, grabbed a handful of the meat and moved quickly to and through her bedroom door. The guards were taken by surprise at her pace and caught up with her as she signaled for the lift, joining her at her side. She directed the lift to the main floor and didn’t say another word as she made her way down the stairs of the tower, across the courtyard and toward the warriors training yard.

She entered the building and walked through to the center of the training yard which caught the attention of all the warriors who were done training and preparing to leave for the night. Lexa inspected the weapons that rested on or against the wooden tables, running her fingers seductively over them, her eyes getting hungrier and hungrier by the moment.

She became transfixed on a wooden staff that leaned against the table. It was a battered stick, but a solid one and she picked it up, twirling it in her hands and smiled. The warriors that were watching occasionally glanced at one another with curious eyes. After having decided she had warmed up enough, she glanced around at her warriors and spoke with confidence mixed with a challenge;

"Who of you would like to show me what they can do?"

Not a single warrior would refuse this honour from their Heda. From her right, a challenger moved forward, picking up a staff of his own. In a blur of movement, he swung at her right shoulder. The crack of the wooden staves as she blocked the incoming strike rang like music in her ears.

The warrior reset his position and quickly lunged at her, but she saw it coming and stepped to the side avoiding the blow. Tilting her head and giving an approving nod, Lexa grinned and began to stalk her opponent, her mind occupied with only the warrior before her.

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After three hours of training which went well into the night and well through many of her warriors, Lexa lightly limped as she returned to the tower. The lift took her up to her floor, she made her way to her quarters with more bruises than she cared to count.

The guards opened her door and informed her that Deni was inside.

"Heda," she said with a slight bow and furrowed eyebrows as she saw Lexa limping.

"Your bath is ready for you and I will apply salves for you when you are done eating."

Lexa smiled and had a feeling Deni would be busy trying to make sure she was comfortable after such a long session with her warriors."

Mochof, Deni." was all Lexa said, walking with a slightly more pronounced limp once the door to her room was closed.

She knew Deni was surveying the damage on her body as she undressed for her bath. She also knew she was going to get an earful while she applied the salves to the various bruises and cuts that now resided on her hands and face.

After removing her clothes on her way to the bath, Lexa slowly lowered herself in the basin of hot water which caused her to tilt her head back and sigh. The sparring session partially accomplished her aim to block Clarke from her mind. The cuts on her lip and over her eye were the moments when the blonde fought past the guard.
During her bath, Deni had replaced the partially eaten food from earlier in the night with a proper dinner of stew and bread. The smell reminded Lexa that she had only eaten a small amount of the food from earlier and that she was still quite hungry.

The bath water cooling, she decided she was finished. Standing, her joints cried in frustration and she exited the water. Deni handed her a towel to dry off with and she headed over to the same table from earlier that had her food waiting.

She ate her dinner and though Deni showed her frustration with her eyes, she did not call her out on her rigorous evening of training. Lexa was working something out, and she would remain silent unless it was needed.

After eating most of the food and enjoying a couple cups of tea, Lexa was exhausted. She had barely finished her meal when her eyes began of force themselves closed which prompted Deni to led her over to her bed.

"Perhaps the rest will solve what troubles your mind, Heda." she said and Lexa glanced at Deni.

"Mmmph." she groaned in reply, lifting her shoulders in a shrug while her eyes fought against sleep.

It had quickly become a fight she could win and sleep came quickly. For a moment, Deni stood staring at the Commander. It had been a long time since she had seen her this way.

"Reshop, Heda." she whispered.

Resuming her duties, Deni walked around the room and blowing out most of the candles she had lit before Lexa arrived.

She cleared the remainder of the dinner Lexa did not finish and quietly left the room for the night as the moonlight peeked through the curtains of Lexa's bedroom thanks to a light breeze that blew through the window.

The tired body of the commander lay under her furs, a cold sweat had enveloped her body and her muscles involuntarily twitched due to her rigorous training session from not more than an hour ago. Her sore joints giving her little solace as she slept.

~~

Her dreams returned her to the Mountain, Clarke standing in front of her facing ahead toward the large metal door in the hard rock wall. Feeling unsure about what was happening, Lexa looked at the forest around her and lifted her arms to see herself dressed in her armour once again.

The feeling she had just taken it off lingered in her thoughts and she believed the girl standing in front of her might know what was going on.

She swallowed and asked, "Clarke? What are we doing here?"

Clarke turned around and smiled at her, whispering, "Lexus." causing Lexa's breath to catch in her chest. and her mouth hung slightly open.

Clarke's penetrating eyes gazed upon hers and in that moment felt all her problems lift away replaced with a yearning within her body. Clarke was moving forward and with every step Lexa's heart beat faster.

Clarke suddenly stopped a foot of space between them and she winced. The smile faded from her
face, her eyes telling a story of pain and disbelief to the green ones that stared back at her.

Lexa choked trying to get air into her body as she realized something was terribly wrong. "Clarke?"

She had seen a similar look before. Both on her warriors and on the faces of enemies she laid to rest. Her green eyes opened wide and horror draped across Lexa's face, She didn't know what was happening or what to do.

Clarke gasped "Lexa, why?" and her eyes pleaded for help.

Blood began to trickle from the side of her mouth and after a moment, Clarke glanced down, giving Lexa the ability to look at something other than her blue eyes. Looking down into Lexa's hand, she held her dagger firmly inside Clarke's abdomen.

Lexa's mouth opened and closed, a scream was trapped in her throat.

Withdrawing the dagger slowly, she brought her eyes back up to Clarke's. Clarke started to slowly fall backward. Lexa dropped the dagger she was holding, quickly moving to stop her from falling hard, wrapping her arms around her back.

She laid Clarke on the rocky ground below their feet and, frantically pawed at the wound in her stomach. Tears began to fall from her eyes as she saw the blue light slowly fading from within the girl from the stars. "Clarke, I'm sorry! Stay with me Clarke."

"I never left you." she replied. Clarke coughed and Lexa brought her hand up, wiping the blood from her lips.

"I didn't mean to! Clarke! No. No. No!" Lexa shook with dread as she watched Clarke, her life ebbing away.

She screamed for someone to help her save Clarke but there was nobody to help. There were no Skaikru, no Trikru and no Maunon. Only Clarke, dying in her arms.

"I needed you..." Clarke said causing Lexa to break and tears flooded her eyes.

"I need you!" was all Lexa could reply, her pleading eyes begging Clarke to stay with her.

Clarke raised her hand to Lexa's face and looked apologetically at the crying brunette which only forced the tears to flow faster.

"Ai gonplei, ste odon." Clarke whispered, with forgiving smile on her face just before her eyes closed for the last time. Lexa lifted her body to her and squeezed her body tightly in grief. After a short moment, she tilted her head back, looked up to the stars above and took in a deep breath and...

~~

Lexa awoke with a scream in her bedroom and squeezed one of her pillows tightly in her arms, unaware for several moments it was a dream. As she opened her eyes and realizing she was holding a pillow, she threw it across the room and began to frantically search the immediate area of her bed for Clarke.

Her guards pushed on the door and rushed into the room with their swords drawn, eyes searching for an intruder who somehow managed to get by them.

Lexa was having a panic attack. Just after the guards entered, Deni came running from her quarters
on the floor and into Lexa's room, a knife in her hand. After the guards had made sure that the commander was not in danger, she ordered them out of the room with a fiery glare.

Deni dropped her knife on the floor and moved swiftly to Lexa's bed. She reached out and pulled her into her arms, rubbing her back and repeating "Nou get yu daun." and "Chil au." in her soothing voice. Her concern peaked as Lexa's whole body began to shake in her arms.

"I will call for Titus" Deni said, about to call to the guards.

"No!" Lexa sobbed.

Lexa tried to fight her tears but to no avail. She buried her head in Deni's shoulder and fought against the tide of emotions that cascaded against her by wrapping her arms around her and squeezing as tightly as she could.

It was roughly an hour after Lexa began to regain her composure. She realized she might be hurting Deni by squeezing her so hard. Deni hadn't said anything other than her soothing words to bring Lexa back to the present but she doubted she would even if that were the case.

Deni could tell Lexa had calmed enough so she let go and pulled back, staring into her tear-soaked eyes. She reached forward, offering a cloth in her hand to Lexa.

"Mochof, Deni." Lexa tried to smile but only managed to with her lips. Her eyes and her mind were still elsewhere, 'in the dream' Deni thought.

"Otaim, Heda."

~~

There would be no more sleep for Lexa this night.

She remained on her bed for some time but felt little change in the tightness of her chest. Rather than remain laying restless in her bed, she decided it would be better if her mind was directed to other pursuits than her nightmare.

Walking over to a shelf and grabbing a couple candles, she lit them with one that was already burning in her bedroom. She would usually spar with her warriors but her body still fresh with the scars from training earlier in the day, believed it best she try a more passive way to pass the time.

At this time of the night, the wind was dead-calm and the sounds from the forest could be heard all the way up in the tower. She took a deep, steady breath to calm herself more. She could feel the emotions from earlier just below the surface of her thoughts and focused on the task of clearing her mind.

Lexa set the candles on a small table and was about to sit on the floor when she saw the pillow she threw earlier on the ground in front of her. Reaching forward, she tugged on it and placed it between her and the hard surface. She took in one more deep breath, she placed her hands in her lap and closed her eyes.

She had been that way for some time and although she knew it was still night, she was unaware of how much time had passed. A knock at her door brought her back to her balcony and one of her guards spoke.

"Heda, a scout has arrived with a message regarding Skaikru."
Lexa opened her eyes and glanced over at the candles she brought with her. By her estimation, it had been two hours and she returned her attention to the more pressing matters,

"Bring the scout to the small meeting room immediately. Inform Titus his presence is required."

"Sha, Heda." he replied.

She heard the guard relay the order to the messenger who arrived with the news. She closed her eyes again and tried to find the calm place she was in earlier, but knowing news was waiting for her regarding Skaikru, more specifically Clarke, her mind was cluttered with possibilities of what could have happened.

Lexa pushed herself up from the cushioned floor and blew out the candles on the table. She entered the room and made her way towards her bedroom door curious to hear why the scout had news already.

Moments from grabbing the handle on the door, she realized she was still wearing a thin top and short shorts. She frowned at herself and turned back into her room to change her clothes into something a little more acceptable.

~~

Lexa sat in a solid wooden chair at the head of the table that bore each symbol of her Kongeda. She studied them all, her eyes falling upon the Trikru symbol causing her to smile. Titus stood to her right and though he had been roused from sleep, it could not be seen in his eyes.

She wondered what news she would hear in regard to Skaikru and as always, she thought of Clarke. Maun-de was something that all her people feared and had been victim of for nearly a hundred years.

It only took a moment but the dark thought that her dream was a foreshadow to the news Clarke was dead caused her heart to race but she kept her breathing slow and steady to combat the feeling of panic rising within her. She sat straighter and Titus glanced at her with curious regard.

Moments later, Lexa and Titus both saw shadows move on the floor under the door to the room and Lexa gave her command to Titus.

"Bring him in."

Titus made his way over to the door and pulled the handle. As the scout entered the room, she recognized him as one of Deni's relatives, Koma. Deni never talked about her family often, but when she spoke of Koma she spoke with pride. Lexa watched as he moved to the other end of the table dropped to his knee bowing, waiting for permission from his Heda to speak.

"Heda." He stated, staring at the floor.

"Rise. Tell me your news regarding Skaikru."

"Skaikru attacked the mountain as you predicted. After three hours, they left the mountain with their wounded and did not return. I remained and entered the mountain to see. They all... they had burned alive. All of them dead."

Lexa fought the surprise from overtaking her expression at the news. She glanced up at Titus who himself was having a hard time processing the news.

'Burned' Lexa thought. 'Burned like my 300 warriors I sent to attack the invaders who fell from the
sky. It seems Maun-de underestimated Klark as well.' She smiled at the knowledge the enemy of the twelve clans has been defeated sank in.

Immediately her mind began processing the ramifications of betraying Skaikru and making the deal with the Maunon.

"What of their leader, Klark kom Skaikru?" she questioned.

"Klark kom Skaikru is alive. She was the last to leave the mountain and brought her people back to their village."

Lexa remained stoic but she had to fight harder than ever to work to keep her outward appearance steady. The news filled with relief to hear that Clarke was safe, her heart racing for another reason.

"Koma, thank you for bringing this to Heda's attention as quickly as you have." stated Titus.

"It is my duty." Koma replied. "There is more. After Skaikru returned to their village, Klark kom Skaikru remained outside the walls and never entered. She spoke to some of her people, turned and left in the direction of the first sky ship."

Lexa was perplexed. What was at the drop ship that Clarke needed? Was there a weapon there? Did she intend on getting revenge on her for leaving her to deal with the Maunon herself? Whatever the reason Clark left for the drop ship, Lexa decided would need to know more.

She felt the urge to leave the tower, jump on her horse and ride it straight to where Clarke was heading. Her heart had resumed racing and it was all she could do to remain calm as she pictured the young blonde girl, alone in the forest.

"Thank you, Koma kom Trikru. You have done well." She nodded at him.

"After you rest and eat here in the tower, I want you to discover where Clarke kom Skaikru has traveled to and watch her. She is not to be harmed by anyone. She cannot know she is being observed."

"Sha, Heda." was his curt reply.

He did not expect this hospitality and he was unsure as to what to do next. He had never set foot in the tower and his eyes shifted to Titus.

Titus looked to Lexa and she nodded that they were done. Titus and Koma left the room leaving her alone with her mind spinning in regard to what has just occurred in her lands.

The mountain was defeated, Skaikru is no longer an ally, and with the ability to defeat the Maunon so quickly, the Kongeda will likely see Skaikru as the new threat to the land with technology and resources to defeat them all.

A world of uncertainty opened up before Lexa's eyes as she had spent all her life as Heda working toward peace now the possible agent of its destruction.

Lexa rose from the table and made her way to the lift-her guards close behind her. The lift taking her back to her quarters.

The moment the lift doors closed, her mind focused on a single blonde haired, blue eyed girl who defied all odds and brought down Maun-de. It brought a smile to her face and she was confident that she would cross paths again with Clarke kom Skaikru. She only hoped it would be on peaceful
Kongeda - Coalition

Em Pleni - Enough!

Maunon - Mountain Men

Maun-de - Mount Weather

Ai gonplei, ste odon. - My fight is over.

Nou get yu daun. - Don't worry.

Chil au. - Calm down.

"Otaim, Heda." - Always, Commander.
Camp Jaha sits in a metal jungle amidst among the dark green canopy of trees and rocky foothills that surround the fallen space craft that brought them to the ground. The inhabitants of the fallen Ark and those who remained of the original 100 attempted to resume their regular daily activities within Camp Jaha in an effort to forget the events of recent days.

They had been working hard trying to create a home from the fallen metal ship. Much of it was uninhabitable, but the parts salvaged were a treasure-trove of machinery for Raven who spent every minute possible trying to create some miracle of engineering to make their lives easier on the ground.

Many of the wounded were still in medical and Jackson was handling the situation with relative ease, making sure that everyone was getting enough to eat and drink as well as getting rest. This was particularly difficult with one, Raven Reyes.

Raven felt her time would be better spent in her engineering shop working on ways to make Camp Jaha safer and giving them an edge when the grounders inevitably attack. She was healing fast, and told her she could leave if she could pass a physical.

The test put her through hell, but she decided if she could survive a fall from space and slam into the ground, get shot in the leg, repeatedly cut by an evil bitch of a Commander AND defeat Mount Weather, there wasn't anything Jackson could do to her she couldn't overcome.

His only other difficult patient was Abby, who continually tried to get out of bed to help with patients. Were it not for how her body resisted all attempts to rise from her bed, he believed she would be running all over the room trying to help the other survivors of Mount Weather.

"Abby, we have gone over this." sighed Jackson as he saw her trying to get up once more. "You need to rest and heal. I don't want to see you trying to get out of that bed until I determine your body can handle it."

She frowned but understood Jackson was right.

Her body needed time to rest but she had no interest in staying in medical. Inwardly, she cursed the youthful healing ability of Raven that freed her from medical.
Her attention turned to the familiar scratching of the door hinge that informed her someone was coming into the room. Marcus stepped through the doorway and looked around the room at the survivors, finishing with his look toward Abby.

"Marcus," Jackson called to him, intercepting him before he reached Abby.

"What can I do for you?" he asked Jackson.

Jackson leaned in and spoke quietly to Marcus. Abby was sure they were talking about her but they were just far enough away for her to not overhear the conversation. Her suspicions were confirmed when Marcus looked in her direction, frowned slightly and nodded while placing his hand on Jackson's shoulder.

"I'll try..." he said to Jackson, just loud enough for her to hear. He turned and headed in Abby's direction and locked eyes with her with a slight grin finishing his statement, "...but she is as stubborn as her daughter."

"Very funny, Marcus" Abby smirked then winced, lifting herself up to her elbows.

Marcus moved quickly to her side with worry she may fall backward, pulling her pillows behind her in an attempt to help ease the obvious strain on her back and shoulders.

"Easy, Abby. We can't let you vacation in here too much longer." Marcus teased, trying to lighten the mood.

Abby pursed her lips him and sighed a reply. They both knew there were things she would rather be doing and her eyes searched his for an answer to an unasked question.

"I haven't seen her since we got back." he answered. "I need to know she is doing ok. The last time I saw her she seemed... she seemed so lost."

"I am sure when she can, you will be the first person she comes to see." Marcus stated confidently.

"You saw her. We all did. Something happened to her in Mount Weather and it only got heavier as we made our way home Marcus. She won't be able to handle it on her own. She needs me. She needs us all." Abby stated.

Marcus saw her sharp intake of breath. Not wanting to injure her, he cautiously reached out and pulled her forward from her shoulders so she was sitting up. Seeing she was ok, his arms wrapped around her for a soft embrace, enabling her do the same in reply.

Tears formed in Abby's tired and frustrated eyes. Kane could feel her fight from breaking down and began to rub her back with his hand.

"Bellamy is checking on her and says she is tired, but doing fine. I am sure he is helping her with what they have both been through." offered Kane.

Having not seen Clarke, he had to trust Bellamy knew what he was doing in giving the young blonde woman space.

"I just want to see her and know she is going to be alright." sighed Abby.

"Both of you are healing right now and like you, she needs her rest. She may not be suffering the same physical pain but the stress she put on herself may take even longer than a few days to overcome."
"We have to be there for her." Abby declared as she pulled back, looking into Marcus' eyes. "Can you make sure she knows she can come to me?"

"I will. I believe She will come to us when she can. She has been through so much in such a short amount of time, I doubt any of us could have done what she has been able to do."

Marcus removed his hand from her back and lifted it to Abby's face, wiping a tear from her cheek with his thumb.

"Your daughter is strong, Abby. Stronger than all of us. I have no doubt she will overcome this."

Abby smiled. It was the first smile in many weeks that Marcus had seen on her face that wasn't forced.

"Now. Jackson tells me you need to get some rest, Chancellor." he stated.

Abby looked over at Jackson who turned quickly away from the two of them and started to tend the patient nearest to him.

"He did, did he?" Abby tried to state coldly, yet failing miserably.

"He did," he replied.

Taking on a serious tone, he continued, "Unfortunately, I'm afraid there are some things I need to look into regarding the defenses of the camp. I'd like your permission to try to reinforce the walls and develop a plan in case the Commander decides our living in these lands is no longer in their best interest."

Helping her lay back down on her bed, Abby winced in pain once more. She placed her hand on Marcus' forearm informing him to wait a moment until she could gather her thoughts.

"Do you think they will attack?" she asked.

"I don't believe so, but I would rather be ready if that time comes than be caught unprepared." he suggested.

"Do what you can. Make sure nobody comes in or goes out of camp unless it is a hunting party for food. Maybe then we can find out whether it is safe for us to travel into the forest."

Marcus nodded his understanding and asked, "Should we send someone to try to talk to the Commander regarding our ceasefire?"

"I think we take care of ourselves first. Make sure we can defend ourselves, then we gather the council to determine what our next step will be."

"That sounds like a good start." he said. "Get some rest, Abby. I'll make sure Bellamy informs Clarke that you are looking forward to seeing her as soon as possible."

Marcus rose from her bed, looked at Jackson and nodded. Abby had already closed her eyes and was trying to sleep. The pain persisted, but it was no match for the fatigue in her body which forced her into sleep.
In the dining hall, the food was as bland as it always had been on the Ark. Bellamy sat at the one table furthest from prying eyes and inquiring minds trying to fight the realization that covering for Clarke was something he never should have done.

He was tired and clearly unaware of how long he had been spinning his fork in the grey-green mush that sat cold on his plate while his jaw lay in the cup of his other hand. The angry voice of the dark haired someone stood over him with daggers being directed at him with her eyes.

"Out with it Bel." Raven demanded.

He didn't have to look up to know who it was. His fingertip grip on his fork tightened and he stopped spinning it in his dinner rations.

"Out with what, Raven?" he asked, unconvincingly trying to act casual.

"You know damn well what I am talking about! What is going on with Clarke?"

Heads in the make-shift dinner hall turned in their direction, the privacy he believed he had now shattered. Bellamy glanced up at her then quickly around the room observing all the eyes on them and their ears on their conversation.

"She just wants to be left alone, Raven. Right now, that makes two of us." he snidely remarked.

"I know she isn't in her room Bellamy. There something going on..."

His expression changed to a frown and he looked up at Raven. "Maybe she went out for some air." he said.

"She didn't go out for air." she rebuffed his words.

"How do you know? Maybe she went to go see Abby." he suggested.

"Because I went looking for her when I saw she wasn't in her room. She hasn't been to see Abby, Marcus, Monty, me or anyone else she would after what happened."

"Maybe she is avoiding people on purpose. You ever think of that, Raven?" his voice started to take on an edge. "You know what she had to do to get our people out of there. Maybe she went outside the camp."

"Bullshit, Bellamy. I know there is more to what you are trying to hide. Something is up with you two."

Her persistence was paying off. When she looked at him and could see she was wearing him down. This wasn't going to be as hard as she thought.

"I am going to figure out what is going on. You can have me with you on whatever it is you guys are up to. Is Kane in on it? I can go and ask..." she suggests, starting to rise from the table.

"Raven," he said with a sigh, his shoulders falling forward. "Wait."
Bellamy knew she wouldn't let it go. Raven would work the problem like a puzzle until she had all the answers she needed. He didn't have the energy to play games with her as the opponent. Sitting back down, she was proud of herself. She thought it would take more to get him to talk but the last couple days had been just as hard on him as they had for everyone in the camp.

"All of it." she stated, expectantly.

"She left." he said flatly, his eyes studying her face to get a reading on how she will react to his confession.

"When will she get back?" Raven asked with her brown eyes filling with curiosity mixed with confusion. 'Why would Clarke leave?' she wondered.

Leaning forward, he locked eyes with her and put down his fork. He slid his dinner plate to the edge of the table and rested his arms on the table.

"Raven. She is gone. She left after everyone made it through the gates." He looked into her eyes trying to further emphasize his meaning.

Raven's mouth opened slightly, her eyebrows rolled downward in frustration and her head leaned to the side. She thought back to the trip back to Camp Jaha and the stress that seemed to hang over Clarke like a dark cloud.

Everyone was consumed with the events in and around Mount Weather that nobody recognized how much Clarke had given to all of her people.

Bellamy could see Raven's mind was spinning trying to understand what was happening and why. He didn't speak, watching her play through her mind everything that he himself had over the last couple days since Clarke's departure.

Clarke had gone from crisis to crisis, never having time to come to terms with many of the actions she took to keep her people safe, the trip back from Mount Weather was the first time she had since their first interaction with the Grounders that there was no fight to win, no enemy to defeat.

They were safe. Clarke got them home. There was no fight left for her to move on to and nobody left of her people to save.

Raven's eyes started to glaze over causing Bellamy to reach forward to take her hand. "Rae." he said in the most sincere of tones.

"You just let her go. After all that, you knew and you just let her go?" she growled. She was half angry at Bellamy, half at herself for missing what she should have seen within her friend as she was falling apart in front of them. The tears that flowed from her eyes evidence of her shame.

"It isn't that simple. Rae, you know Clarke. What could I do?" he asked with pleading eyes. He wanted to do more, but he couldn't ask her for more. They had all asked so much of her, he couldn't ask her to stay more than he had.

Swinging her hand and knocking Bellamy's plate off the table, Raven shot up from her seat.

"You could have hit her over her damn blonde head and dragged her in."

Everyone was staring wide-eyed at the outburst from Raven. They were even more surprised to see the tears on her face.
"Rae, sit down for a second." he asked in an almost whisper.

"This is something you should be used to. Watch me walk away Bellamy," she quipped, fighting back her anger and wiping her eyes with her hands as she turned and left.

Raven walked as quickly as she could toward the door and as she approached, Octavia and Lincoln entered. They saw the state Raven was in and stopped in their tracks.

"Rae? What's up?" asked Octavia.

Raven didn't stop, continuing to move as quickly as she could out of the dinner hall but looked at both as she passed them saying,

"You might want to ask your brother that question."

Octavia looked at Lincoln and they exchanged a puzzled look. All the people in the hall were silent but the majority were now looking at Bellamy after Raven had exited.

Octavia easily found her brother as he was the subject of many curious stares and asked Lincoln to get their food and meet her over by Bellamy. Agreeing, he walked toward the counter to get their rations.

Octavia sat in front of Bellamy and sighed, observing her brother trying to hide his face in his hands.

"What did you do this time, big brother?" she inquired.

"O, I messed up." he mumbled behind his hands.

"You are going to let me know what is going on if we are going to get you out of this mess. What did you do, start a war with Trikru?" she laughed, trying to break the tension that was pouring off her brother.

"Worse. Clarke isn't here." he admitted, still not showing his face.

Octavia looked around the dining hall and could not see Clarke.

"So? She is in her room. She is probably pretty stressed out. You said she wanted to be left alone." Octavia replied.

"No, O." He recognized that she was not processing what he is trying to explain. With a sigh, he took his face out of his hands and looked at his sister in the same manner he as he did with Raven. "Clarke is gone. She didn't come in after everyone got back."

Octavia's eyes shot open and she simply stared forward. "Does Abby know?" she asked as Lincoln sat down, sliding her tray in front of her.

"No." he said.

"Mochof." she said to Lincoln.

"Pro." he replied.

Octavia dug her fork into the food on her tray and lifted it toward her mouth. Moments before she started to eat she shrugged and said, "You should have started a war. It would have been less painful than what Abby is going to do to you when she finds out."
As Clarke approached the drop ship, the ground beneath her feet changed from a soft, lush green forest to scarred, burnt soil. This too had been the result of one of her many defining moments since her arrival to the ground.

Slowly walking through the front entrance to of their former camp, the smell of burnt Earth and charred wood gone, the smell was forever burned into her senses. She reached out and ran her hand over a tree stump. The surface of it was as black as coal and dust coated her finger tips as she rubbed them together.

Her mind returned her to when they first landed on the planet, the large metal door opening for the first time. Octavia was the first to step out from the ship while the rest simply stared in awe of the forest. It was so different than the existence they knew in space. The sun touched everything, like fingers from above. Life was everywhere and it danced on all their senses. There were no steel bulkheads here, only trees that reached far into the sky above.

Yet, while everyone ran through the trees laughing and cheering, she fought back that rebellious spirit. She held firmly to the map that led the way to Mount Weather and walked over to a ridge to find the way to their new home.

They needed her.

They were all so naive in their understanding of the world around them and the dangers that sat in the trees observing them. They didn't know it at the time, and neither did she.

It was only after the spear was thrown into Jasper's chest on their trip to Mount Weather that she made her choice to do whatever she had to in order make sure her people survived. She just didn't know the lengths she would be forced to go to in order to give them that safety.

As she paused for a moment to looking around the drop site now, everything had changed.

Wooden walls that they built to protect themselves from the Grounders were half burned or torn down and the remnants of bodies still lay charred on the ground from when they fought against the 300 Lexa sent to kill her and her people. The free spirit they had was gone.

The ferns that once grew were long gone, as was the mossy ground they first walked on. Everything was so different now.

"This is my legacy," she commented as a look of sadness took hold on her face.

Remembering why she was here, Clarke gritted her teeth and shook the thought from her mind. Pulling her pistol from the holster, she walked toward entrance of the drop ship. After taking a moment to listen, she could only hear the now steady drops of light rain that fell from above tap the surfaces around her.

There was nobody here now, but when she entered the ship it was clear someone had been in here recently. Many items that were not bolted to the structure had been removed.
The ship felt strange. Though she had only been on the ground this short a time, the metal walls and the sound of her feet as she walked on the cold floor felt uncomfortable to her. It reminded her of being inside Mount Weather and the thought forced a shiver up her spine that extended all the way to her fingertips.

She climbed the ladder in the middle of the ship, nervous that someone may have been in the up in the second room but relief set in after she peeked through the hatch at the top of the ladder and saw that the room was empty. Nothing remained of the beds or the blankets that were left behind.

Throwing her backpack into the room from the ladder, she ascended the final few rungs and turned the hatch over to keep herself safe while she gathered her things.

The last time she climbed that ladder, she brought Lexa here to try to secure peace for her people with the Grounders. She walked over to where Lincoln lay on the ground, and for a time was dead before they managed to resuscitate him.

She could almost see Lincoln's body and her heart rate increased, feeling the fear and panic set in as she did when they were all in the room. All of their lives in the balance with Lexa giving the nod to Indra to have them all killed.

It was as if they were all there with her again.

'I'm not here for that' she scolded herself. "Now. Where did we put those extra rations?" she asked herself, saying it aloud to try to distract herself.

Walking around the perimeter of the room she kicked at the lower panels on the wall. The first four she tapped all made the same sound. The fifth was different and her eyes lit up with victory as she dropped to her knees and lifted the panel off the wall.

After pulling the ten ration packs from the wall, she stuffed nine of them into her pack and opened the tenth after leaning her back against the cold metal surface of the wall. It did not take her long, but the contents of the pouch were eaten quickly yet her stomach growled for more. She tried to ignore her hunger in order to ration the little food she now had.

She had to take care of herself. She closed her eyes and thought of the bright colours of the forest as she first saw them. Her body relaxed from the barrage of constant hiking she had done over two days and her breath relaxed taking her to sleep.

Outside the drop ship, the wind howled causing the trees to sway heavily until a loud crack was heard of a branch breaking free.

Clarke's eyes flared open, the sudden sound pulling her from sleep. She was unaware of exactly when she fell asleep, and she cursed herself for not leaving the drop ship. The longer she stayed, the better chance they had of following her.

Her heart was racing from the sound outside and she didn't realize how long she held the gun aimed in the direction of the hatch in the floor. Although she could see it was still closed, she didn't trust it. She only had herself now, and she was determined to survive.

She focused on the arm holding the gun. It had begun to shake with fatigue causing her to place the gun on the floor next to her. Before she laid down using her backpack as a pillow. She could hear the rain falling heavily outside.

It would be useless for her to try to travel now. She would get sick from the cold brought on by the wind and the rain because of inadequate shelter. Shelter she currently had which kept her warm and
Clarke accepted that she would be here for the night and was likely safe from people from Camp Jaha finding her. They would avoid going out into the forest out of fear of Trikru, and likely getting sick themselves. She got up and headed over to the hatch, spinning the wheel and deciding to lock herself in for the night.

After laying back down, she pulled her backpack under her head trying to adjust it for the most amount of comfort she could find and listened to the tapping of the rain drops upon the metal exterior of the ship.

Her body was still exhausted from recent days and it wasn't long before the steady rhythm of the rain lulled her back to sleep leaving her last thoughts on her friends back at Camp Jaha, hoping they were still safe.

She Jumped awake again, but this time to the sound of someone clearing their throat. Clarke scrambled for the gun she put on the floor next to her and dug the small flashlight from a pocket of her jacket.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

She clicked her light on and scanned around the room quickly, coming to rest in the direction of the hatch. She gasped in shock and dropped her gun.

The dark brown eyes that looked back at her forced a cry to erupt from Clarke.

"You aren't supposed to be here. You can't be here!"

He sat still across from her while Clarke fought back everything within her that wanted to get up and hold him.

She knew it wasn't him. It couldn't be. He died on the pole in front of Camp Jaha.

"I'm right where I need to be, Princess. Can you say the same?" he asked in an even tone, perhaps with some sympathy mixed in.

"You died. I... I killed you." she dropped her arms to hang limply at her side, the flashlight rolling away but still illuminating the room enough to see Finn who remained on the hatch door.

"You didn't kill me. You saved me."

"Every time I try to help people, people end up dead. You, Tondc, Mount Weather. I just want it to stop." she moaned.

"You saved everyone at Mount Weather." he stated.

"I killed everyone at Mount Weather." she scoffed.

She could see the faces when she closed her eyes, the pain that took their lives would be her burden. She was responsible for killing them all and at the time she had accepted that. It was just another decision she made to save her people. They had to die, or her people would die. There was no other choice.

"Sometimes there is no choice." he said in agreement.

The tears that now fell from her eyes told her she felt she failed both the people who lived in Mount
Weather and hers.

"I did what I had to. We all did." Clarke whispered.

"So what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know!" she yelled, squeezing her eyes tightly.

When Clarke opened her eyes, she was lying with her head still on her backpack. Her eyes were swollen with tears, but she recognized it for what it was. She had dreamed of Finn.

Grimacing and wiping her eyes, she sat up. The rain had stopped falling if the silence was any indication. Waiting for a while as she did when she entered the drop ship, she wanted to make sure she was safe before unlocking and opening the hatch.

This place had nothing for her any more but the ghosts of regrets. She wanted to be free of it as quickly as she could. She collected her things from the floor and threw her backpack over her shoulders. Flipping the hatch open and she slid down the railings on the ladder to the floor below.

With a grunt, her feet touched down and caught a glimpse of morning light as it broke through the entryway. She took out her gun and walked cautiously out of the drop ship. When she made it to the entrance of the drop ship camp, she turned and took one last look.

'I started all started right here' she thought.

Clarke knew that the future wasn't written, but she was determined that her future was going to be different from her past. Flipping the safety off, she squeezed the handle of her gun to reinforce her decision to keep going.

Her feet led her forward and into the forest away from the drop ship, her mind organizing what she needed to do before nightfall. She picked up her pace to try to put as much distance between herself and the drop ship as possible.

After walking for three hours Clarke stopped and removed her backpack. She dropped it to the ground and rubbed her hand over her sore shoulder. This was her second day hiking like this and she was pushing her body hard.

Pulling her water container from the side of her bag. She shook it and the quiet splash inside informed her she was very low on water. She came to the quick realization that water needed to become her number one priority.

Sipping back the remainder of her water, Clarke eyed the rations in her pack.

"Have to save them." she scolded her stomach.

She decided to take a short break and listened to the birds in the forest. She wondered if she was being watched and attempted to scan the trees for signs of Grounders. She was certain Lexa would be keeping tabs on her people, but was she concerned about Clarke? What danger did one girl pose to the Commander?

After roughly fifteen minutes, Clarke decided she probably knew where she was in relation to the river Octavia was attacked at by the water creature. she decided her first stop should be that river in order to fill her bottle and eat a half ration.

She packed her bottle back on her bag and hoisted her pack over her opposite shoulder. As she
began to walk with her back to the sun and toward the river, she did notice that the birds who were quite active moments ago had stopped their singing.

Her suspicions were confirmed that she was indeed being watched by Trikru. She was after all, in their lands. They hadn’t captured or killed her, so perhaps they are just letting her pass through.

Wheels began to spin in Clarke’s mind and she allowed herself a small grin as her steady paced resumed away from where she heard the bird calls, and toward the river to the north.
Lexa takes out her stress on Titus and comes to an understanding of sorts with herself.

"That was the last petitioner?" Lexa asked Titus, who stood to the right of his Commander.

"It was, Heda. Perhaps next time I will screen the less important petitions so you will not have to put up with such trivial matters. I could handle many myself to save you the trouble."

Leaning back in her wooden throne, she knew what she did to Titus today was cruel. There was no reason for her to deal with the majority of the petitions put forward but he stood there, as was his duty. Many were simple requests such as having a road fixed, or the problem of chickens being too loud too early. It had been a long thirteen hours.

She wanted to take her mind off Clarke by dealing with her people's problems, but with every other petitioner who entered, they all wanted to know from their Heda if the rumors were true. Her plan had the exact opposite effect of what she had hoped. Every time she said her name, it was a cut. She felt as though she was suffering death by a thousand cuts and she believed she rightfully deserved them all.

"I like to hear from my people and it had been too long since I made their concerns, no matter how mundane they seem to be, are important to them. That will always make them important to me."

Lexa scolded him.

There were also many who just wished to hear from their Heda that Maun-de had fallen, and that it was safe for their loved ones in the forest. Lexa was quick to make sure they knew Clarke kom Skaikru was responsible for removing the threat of Maun-de. She decided she would have to address this with her people.

Titus suggested withholding that detail could be left out as to benefit Lexa, she frowned at him stating, "If I were to claim victory when I had no hand in it, I have no right to call myself Heda."

"You elevate Klark. Why?" Titus asks. He had stood in place most of the day and the fatigue has made him daring with his words. Lexa let her fingers dance on the hardwood arm of the chair,
running her index finger in tiny circles.

"Klark elevates herself." Lexa's mind flashed back to the brazen blonde girl who showed no fear of the mighty Heda, Commander of the twelve clans. Not even after Gustus threatened to cut her throat before she entered her tent, or the constant aggression from Indra, did Clarke allow her composure falter. Clarke was strong.

"She is special" Lexa added, almost in a whisper.

After a minute of Lexa staring off toward the door in a day dream, she snapped back into herself and looked up to Titus.

"It was a long day and I have no doubt you would like to retire for the evening. Tomorrow I will train with the Natblida at first light."

"Sha, Heda. They will be ready for your arrival."

It took Titus a moment for his sore joints to loosen up for his movement down the steps of the dais but by the time he had made it to the door he seemed fine. He turned and bowed before exiting. Lexa smiled slightly and nodded to him in reply.

Sighing, Lexa decided it was time for her to retire for the evening. Her body still wore the marks of her training the previous night. She also wore her face paint for the petitions. Titus had said it would serve to draw respect from her people, but Lexa wore it to hide her darkened eyes. She had not slept since her nightmare, and she had no interest in revisiting the torment that she believed was awaiting her but sleep pulled at her worn and tired body.

Rising from her throne, she thought back to how Titus looked and she imagined herself much the same. Her back was stiff and she fought from leaning forward. Instead she forced herself upright, pulled her head back and strode down the dais, to the exit and out the door. Outside, Deni was approaching the throne room door.

"Deni," Lexa looked at her, a little surprised.

"Heda," she bowed. "I was coming to tell you I have drawn the bath and will have your meal ready for when you are."

"Mochof, Deni."

Turning, Deni moved to the lift and stepped on. Lexa and her two guards followed and they turned around. Lexa's body fought to slump forward but she refused to grant herself that moment of relaxation.

After a moment, the lift door opened and everyone stepped out. The two guards exited and made their way into Lexa's quarters and when they were happy there was no cause for concern, exited and took up positions outside the door. Lexa strode in, followed by Deni who closed the door behind her.

"Deni, I would like spiced tea tonight" she stated. Make sure there is enough for two."

"Sha, Heda. I will prepare it now." Deni said, bowing and leaving the room for the kitchens.

Lexa walked over to her desk and pulled the handle on the middle drawer to reveal small pieces of paper and some sticks of chalk that were sharpened into writing tools. Taking one of each, she placed them on top of the desk and slid the drawer closed and took a seat in the chair that was in front of her.
Glancing back at the door and at the dark corners of the room which were few, thanks to the candles that burned brightly throughout, she turned back to the paper, picked up the chalk and began to write.

After a short time, she folded the piece of paper in half then rolled it up tightly. It was not a big and she looked up to the shelf in front of her to grab a piece of string to keep the tightly rolled up paper as it now was. She took another glance at her door and decided to stand from her seat, and head toward her balcony.

She savored the cool breeze as she took a deep breath. 'It will not be long before the change of season' she thought to herself, then her mind jumping to the image of a certain blonde haired, blue-eyed girl sitting in the snow, freezing to death.

'I will not let that happen' she told herself. Why was it every time she thought of Clarke, did it end up with her in some sort of trouble?

She frowned at herself and focused on the task she set herself. After she was done, she returned into her room and headed to the adjacent room with the bath.

She slipped her shirt up over her head and scanned her body to observe the damage from the other night. Smiling, she saw most had already started to heal and the pain was only located in a couple places rather than the entirety of her body.

She removed the rest of her clothing and surveyed the remaining damage, but aside from bruises which would heal with time, she was pleased she had so few serious wounds. She did feel bad for some of her warriors, and was certain they would be compensated for the throttling she gave them.

Lexa climbed into the hot bath and closed her eyes, groaning at how comforting the water felt as it enveloped her. She laid back and submerged herself to her neck, letting the feeling of tranquility wash over her. It was so comfortable, that her closed eyes and the soothing heat of the water had lulled her into sleep.

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Lexa woke up to the sound of swords clashing and across from her was Luna. She pressed an attack on Lexa and seemed to be coming in at all angles with her blades. Lexa blocked and blocked but there was no avenue for her to try to take the lead in their deadly dance.

"L... Luna?" Lexa asked.

"You were thinking it would be someone else?" Luna laughed, swinging both her blades at once and knocking one of the two Lexa was holding out of her hands.

"Why. You? I thought you didn't want this!" Lexa challenged her, gathering her wits and focusing on her opponent who had the advantage in their fight.

Luna simply laughed "I guess it is clear I made a mistake in letting you lead. Oh. Mighty. Heda" Luna smirked, her words dripping with sarcasm as she renewed her attack. "A decision I plan on rectifying now!"

Lexa side stepped and brought the hilt of her sword toward the face of Luna, striking hard and giving
a crunch from the cartilage in her nose, drawing blood. Luna had moved past her and spun to face Lexa, shaking her head to re-orient herself.

"What's the matter little Heda? Titus' favourite Natblida finally given in? I thought you were different Lexa. It was why I let you live." Luna mocked her and swung her swords once more with deadly intent.

Dodging and deflecting, Lexa played to her strengths and decided to let Luna wear herself out. Luna was well aware and began to slow the pace of her attack.

"Lexa, Lexa, Lexa. Always letting others do the work for you?"

"I have no idea what you are talking about" stated Lexa, lunging with her sword to provoke an attack from her opponent and catch her off guard.

"Of course you don't." Luna lunged with a sword and Lexa spun so quickly in an attempt to slash down across Luna's back. Luna was prepared and had her second sword come up to block. The metal clang rang out denying Lexa her strike.

With her back still to Lexa, Luna knew she wouldn't attack. Luna turned slowly around, a cocky grin across her face and began to stalk Lexa and moving to her left. Lexa mirrored her movements to keep at distance.

"At least you remember some of what I taught you."

"I've picked up a few new things on my own" Lexa grinned and stepped forward, surprising Luna with her movement. With a flick of her wrist, she sliced the back of Luna's right hand, and blood immediately fell from it, alongside the sword which was now on the ground.

"Not bad. Where was that killer instinct when the people from the Sky needed you?" Luna gave Lexa a cut of her own, only the wound wasn't visible.

"My people are my priority." Lexa said, furious that Luna had wounded her with words, not her swords. Lexa attacked recklessly. Luna took advantage and brought the sword that remained down across the thigh of Lexa. The black blood was evident on this cut, unlike the last.

"You know what is happening is your fault. Clarke in the forest, alone."

"She is not as weak as you think." Their swords ring together again as Luna sweeps her blade. It wasn't an attack, merely carefree movement in their dance.

"You know as well as I do people will be looking for her."

Luna's words hit a nerve. She knew who the people were that she was referring to and it forced a shiver to coarse through her.

"I've taken precautions." Lexa frowned and pressed an attack only to step back after having her attempt stifled. "Klark is not in danger."

"Like her people were when you left them to their possible death at Maun-on? Like Cos..."

Lexa jumped forward and the sound of metal on metal interrupted Luna who realized she had struck a mortal wound.

"That will not happen to Klark. I won't let it happen. Not to her"
So the Lexa I knew is in there after all." Luna pushed back with her sword to create space, smiled, and threw her sword to the side causing Lexa to become confused.

"You still have time, but if you let it rest too long, it will be gone and you'll lose it forever. To be honest, I thought it was already gone." Luna approached Lexa and pulled her into a hug, Lexa dropped her sword and returned the embrace after a moment, closing her eyes and remembering her childhood friend.

Luna turned so she could whisper into Lexa's ear,"They will oppose it so you must prepare yourself."

Pulling back from the hug, Lexa opened her eyes and she was sitting in her tub. Deni sat off to the side and was readying Lexa's spiced tea. Sitting up in her tub, Lexa wore a puzzled look.

"You fell asleep. I'm not surprised the smell of your favourite tea work you up." Deni smiled.

"You have enough for two?" Lexa asked as she stood up out of the water, reaching for a tower from the table.

"Sha, Heda."

"Pour us each one in the other room at the table. I'd like to ask you about what the people are saying about Skaikru and their leader Klark."

With a nod, Deni moved into the central room and prepared the tea at the table, and beside it a tray of meats, cheese and bread for the Lexa to enjoy.

Lexa entered the room wearing a light blue t-shirt and a short pair of shorts. She sat down across from Deni at the table and suggested she enjoy some of the food she brought as Lexa couldn't finish it herself.

"So, what do the people say about Klark and her people?" Lexa asked, her mind trying to focus on the words Deni was saying instead of the a pair of eyes that matched the colour of her shirt.

Her favourite shirt.

"Natblida" - Nightblood

"Maunon" - Mountain men

"Maun-de" - Mount Weather

"Heda" - Commander
Getting Away

Chapter Summary

Abby learns the truth and Clarke tries to break away from the watchful eyes.

Chapter Notes

Is it Sunday already?! Time to put up Chapter 5!

Thanks to everyone who is enjoying the story and leaving me some words below in the comments.

This week I will be posting chapter 6 but likely not until Thursday evening. It will be a busy week at work but afterward I have a week long break for the holidays. I intend to spend much of my free time (aside from spending time with friends and family of course) with my keyboard in front of my and the words flying on to the screen so I hope you can spend some time with me as well.

Bellamy stood next to the bed she was lying in a moment ago, explaining to Abby what he told Raven. Her silence terrified him more than her yelling at him.

There were times where Clarke would glare at him when they argued about how best to take care of the delinquents when they came down from space, but it was clear that she merely wielded a fraction of the fury that her mother could summon in her eyes. If Abby's eyes could throw fire, Bellamy was sure she would have incinerated him where he stood.

Abby bit back the pain in her body as she fought to stand, her mind fueling her urgency with scenarios of her daughter being all alone in the forest for two days. Had the Grounders caught her? Had they imprisoned and tortured her? What if her daughter was dead? All these questions taunted her mind now that she knew her daughter had vanished into the unknown lands around them, putting herself in all kinds of danger.

Bellamy wished she would yell at him rather than utilize silence as her weapon. He had prepared himself to handle the yelling. Her silence was torture. "Abby..." he started to speak in an attempt to cut the tension that filled the room, but was cut off abruptly by the furious mother before him.

"How dare you keep something like this from me! Don't you understand the danger you put her in?" she raged, moving forward and only leaving precious few inches between her and Bellamy. He wanted to step back, but he knew he deserved everything she wanted to inflict on him for keeping this to himself.

Everyone heard Clarke's name and were curious to know what had happened to the girl who saved them from Mount Weather. Whispers were passing between people in medical, reminding Bellamy of his earlier attempt in the dining hall letting Raven know Clarke was gone.
"It is my fault if anything happens to her. I'll find her. I'll bring her back." he offered, eyes begging her for the chance to make amends for failing Clarke when they returned to Camp Jaha.

"You have done enough in doing nothing, Bellamy. You are restricted to camp and your duties in the guard will be restricted. to securing the Ark."

"Chancellor," he pleaded but the look she gave him forced him to avert his eyes to the side. He knew he screwed up, but he wanted the opportunity to make things right.

"You should be happy I am only restricting your duties. Are you going to give me a reason to confine you to quarters or throw you in lock-up?" she yelled, forcing a Bellamy back a step out of fear.

Walking past Bellamy with a noticeable limp, Jackson had been standing silent but observed the interaction between the two. As she tried to leave medical, Jackson attempted to step in front of Abby trying to stop her. "

Abby, you know you can't leave yet. I haven't..."

"I'm fine, Jackson." she growled. "I've got to find my daughter."

Abby continued walking without pause out the door and turned her head to the guard who was posted outside the door. "Where is Marcus?" she asked.

"Not sure, ma'am." the guard said.

Abby furrowed her brows at his response. She raised her hand to the guard and relayed an order, "Give me your radio."

Without a word, he reached to his hip and unclipped the radio from his belt, handing it over to Abby who turned and walked down the grey steel corridor. Raising the radio, she clicked the button on the side of the tech as her feet carried her swiftly to the council chamber located in the center of the Ark.

"Marcus," she stated. She managed to hold back some of the anger that threatened to boil over in her mind and she waited for a reply. A soft hum from the handset informed her that a reply was coming.

"Abby. What can I do for you? Tired of medical already?" Marcus replied with a tone of levity.

"Meet me in the council room." Abby said commandingly.

"Abby?" he inquired curiously.

"Council room. Two minutes."

"On my way." he informed her.

The curt tone of the conversation told Raven all she needed to about the subject Abby wanted to discuss and she felt blood rush to her face. Marcus placed the radio back down in front of Raven who had tiled her head down during the short conversation, trying to avoid the gaze of the man who was standing on the other side of her work table. He looked at her suspiciously, lifting the hand that placed the radio on the table to scratch at his pepper-coloured beard.

"I have a feeling you know more about this than I do." he suggested.

Raven's hand which was usually steady seemed to slip while tightening a screw on one of the projects she was working on, forcing a grunt of frustration. After a moment she looked up at him and
"Clarke didn't come back with us from Mount Weather." A mix of hurt and anger was present in Raven's eyes as she talked to him.

Lifting his eyebrows and his eyes opening in surprise, he was taken aback with the news. Marcus believed Clarke's actions would be something that she could come to terms with over time and with the help of her friends. He was confident in his assessment of Clarke when he told her mother that she would be fine but clearly he had underestimated the struggle that was waging war between her heart and mind.

He glanced at Raven who remained staring at him, knowing beforehand what Abby would intend to do.

"We will be putting a team together to find her," he stated. "I'll make sure you are on it."

Raven was buoyed by the thought of bringing Clarke back, and a small smile formed as the corner of her lips turned upward. She knew Clarke would likely head to the drop ship first, but they would have to be fast.

She put the electrical component she was working on down and the screwdriver alongside it then reached for the radio in front of her. She looked around her workshop then her fingers turned the channel dial on the radio and she clicked the talk button three times. Moments later her radio buzzed three times.

"Are you alone?" Octavia asked in a very quiet tone.

"Yep. Are you?" Raven whispered.

"Lincoln is here." Octavia informed her.

"Ok. Kane just told me they will be sending out a team to look for our princess and yours truly will be going. Are you and Lincoln in?" Raven asked.

"We are. Abby is probably furious with Bellamy right now so I'd think it is safe to say he is out."

"I know a way we can get Bel outside the fence line and he can meet up with us. Leave that to me." Raven said confidently.

"Let us know when." Octavia requested.

"Will do. Keep your radio charged."

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Clarke's body had been challenging her need to constantly be on the move since she left the drop ship and the break earlier did her aching joints no favours. She refused to stop to stretch her limbs, only to continue hiking through the forest. Her mouth had been parched for the last two hours and she could feel exhaustion bearing down on her. It was evident as she climbed the last hill, she found her feet struggling to lift themselves, dragging them through fallen leaves from the trees above. She had to keep pushing herself.
She was beginning to doubt she knew where she was. She had only ever been this way once, on the way to Mount Weather and she was trying to follow the landmarks she saw on the way. A fallen tree, a small clearing. Everything was starting to look the same to her tired soul. "Where are you gonna go?" she heard his voice again and turned quickly in surprise, expecting to see Bellamy. Spinning her on feet, she whipped around ready to tell him to leave her alone and go back to Camp Jaha but as she glanced around, there was nothing but the brown wood of the trees and the green of the forest to greet her eyes.

Clarke sighed loudly and brought her hands up to her face. She first pulled brushed her blonde locks of hair back to rest over her ears, then rubbed her eyes with her hands. She felt exhaustion setting in but knew she was pushing herself too hard. "This is nothing compared to what others have gone through because of me" she mumbled, scolding herself for thinking of Bellamy.

She could not understand how they all did it, walking into camp after all they had been through and going about their lives, pretending like none of it happened to go on living life as they had. She wanted to walk through the gate, to be with her friends, her mother and her people yet the thought of them praising her and ignoring her actions made the bile rise in her throat. No. She could not be celebrated for what she did.

Clarke thought back to after Tondc, the brutal truth of her choices laid to rest in front of her after the missile slammed into the village as they prepared for their assault on Mount Weather that evening. Clarke saw herself laying on the ground after the explosion just after convincing her mother they couldn't remain in the village.

"You knew." Abby spit the accusation. "You knew and you let this happen?"

"We had no choice." Clarke pleaded to her mother, for her to understand.

"So many people. Our people." Abby whispered.

Clarke could remember herself making excuses for allowing so many people to die and then her mother's words that slammed into her chest like the missile moments ago in the village.

"You crossed a line." Abby stared at her like she didn't know her own daughter. "Their blood is on your hands, and even if we win, I'm afraid you won't be able to wash it off this time."

She swayed on her feet, standing there in the forest looking back in the direction of the drop ship yet not focused on one particular object. She was trapped in the daydream, remembering the hurt and shock her mother carried in her eyes at what Clarke had done. That look she couldn't face when they returned to Camp Jaha after she murdered three hundred people.

Her people were put through hell because of her decisions and though she rescued them from Mount Weather, their faces were not ones of relief, but pain. There was no sense of joy like after other successes. There was only pain she believed she caused them. Pain that was forced into their bodies at the tip of a drill and understanding that was etched in their eyes that they may have survived this circumstance but will they survive the next one or the one after that? This line of questioning only strengthened her decision that leaving was in her and her people's best interest. If she wasn't there, she couldn't put them in further danger.

Clarke realized she had been standing there for some time. As a reflex she glanced down at her father's watch on her wrist. She took her opposite hand and rubbed it over the watch, feeling a sense of calm wash over her mind. It was as if Jake was with her when she ran her finger over the polished face of the timepiece and along the length of the leather band that held it to her wrist.
She turned and resumed her trek up the hill she was climbing and it wasn't long before she felt a spike in her heart rate. She remembered the small hill in front of her. She was certain that over this hill she would find the refreshing cool water of a river and as she crested the top, a smile grew on her face.

"Finally." she said aloud, her tired body finding the energy to take her down the hill without falling due to the large steps she was taking.

She waded into the shallow part of the stream and dropped to her knees so the water came up to her thigh, relaxing her aching muscles allowing her to bend forward and dip her dry lips into the cool water.

After taking several small sips and dipping her face in to try to cool herself down, she brought her hands up to her now wet hair and slicked it back as best she could. She grabbed her bottle from her pack and after she filled it up, she moved to sit on the opposite side of the rocky stream so she could see back from where she came.

She tried to sneak glances into the tree line as she produced a ration pack from her bag and set aside a one-half portion for her midday meal before sealing it back up and stowing it in the bag. If she was being followed, she hoped to see how her guests were faring after following her all morning and she was sure they were aware of her suspicions.

Working out her plan many times in her head, she was certain they would stop for water giving her time to separate herself from them. She may have been tired, but she was being deliberately clumsy. At times she had to force herself to try to not make it so obvious that she wanted to be followed.

She ate her lunch at a casual pace and once she was ready, topped off her water bottle in the cold stream allowing her to resume her hike. She slid the bottle back on her bag, lifted it over her shoulder and headed into the forest to resume her hike, appearing to move as slowly as she did on the previous side of the stream.

After a couple minutes, two figures emerged from the tree line as if out of thin air.

They stopped at the edge of the water and both removed containers for water from their belts. They were the same two who had followed Skaikru from Mount Weather. As Koma kneeled down to the stream he motioned for the younger man to give him his container to fill. He did not want Clarke to get too much distance from them.

"Mafta em op, ai op weron em hos op." Koma said in a low voice.

He figured with the many glances Klark kom Skaikru had thrown into the forest in their general direction that she knew she was being followed and was curious to learn what game she intended to play.

One thing he was certain of is that if this young woman was able to bring down Maun-de in less than a day after his people had tried for three generations, he could not underestimate her.

"Sha." the young man returned, standing and handing him his container. He slowly walked across the stream to hide the sound of his crossing. Moments later he soundlessly entered the forest and picked up the trail of the Skaikru girl. It was not as clear as it was before the stream and after fifty meters her tracks had all but vanished.

Clarke waited in the tree as still as she could, the only exception being the pounding in her chest which she was certain could be heard all the way back at Camp Jaha. She fought to keep her breath...
steady and even as she waited, eyes locked on her prey as he tried to find her tracks with little success.

The scout kneeled to the ground for clues as to where she had gone but was having no luck. He walked forward in the hopes he could find her trail once more. A low rustle above in the tree gave away her position and the man turned in surprise to see such blonde hair and blue-eyed fury as Clarke launched herself from a tree, large rock in hand. She brought it crashing down with a grunt of exertion on top the figure below her, both falling to the ground hard.

Her knee struck the ground producing a sharp pain in her knee. She ignored the pain as best she could, scrambling to stand and ready her rock for another swing. Sighing in relief as he remained motionless on the ground, she kicked at him hard with her foot to make sure he wasn’t going to get up and attempting to hear him grunt if he was playing possum.

Her knee voiced it’s pain by sending a shock through her leg. Clarke winced and hoped her knee wasn’t seriously hurt. She leaned over the man and checked to see if he was alive, placing two fingers over his neck. There was a pulse and she determined the wound on his head was not life threatening.

He would survive.

Relieving him of his sword and his knife, Clarke paid careful attention to her foot placement as she walked away. The buried camper where Finn, Wells and she found was not far and if she could avoid leaving a trail she would be safe to stay there for a couple days.

Whoever was following her would likely leave while she hid there and she would use the opportunity to get as far away from Camp Jaha and Lexa's prying eyes as she could. She just needed Lexa’s scouts to think she was heading elsewhere, digging her foot into the ground and starting an obvious track that led back to Camp Jaha.

~~

Koma rose from where he was crouched at the river and listened as carefully as he could to the area. He thought he heard something ahead of him and he quietly placed the water container on the ground next to his feet while drawing his sword from his back with his other hand.

He stealthily crept across the stream staying low and entered the wooded area beyond. It only took him moments to see that his seken, Reko, was laying on the ground next to a large tree and not moving and he cautiously approached him keeping his eyes on both the trees above and the ground around him.

As he stood over Reko, he used his free hand and placed it hand over the fallen boy's mouth, feeling short breaths that warmed his fingers and was troubled by the decision thrust on him.

He knew Klark was as far as her feet would carry her from the area and studied the ground seeing a direction of what appeared to be obvious footprints heading off to the north-west and smirked. He understood the game she was playing and left him with one of two moves. Risk the life of Reko, or take him the days travel back to Tondc to get him help which would result in losing tack of his target.

His decision made, Koma stood and slid his sword back in to his scabbard, reached down and stood Reko up. A groan came from the young man, trying to force his legs under him to carry his own
weight. His eyes fluttered open slightly, stinging from the bright light from the sun that often occurred after an impact to the head and he looked around through foggy eyes.

"Weron Wanheda... kamp raun?" the wounded warrior asked, trying to ignore the feeling of sharp needles stabbing into his brain.

"Ron of." he said, simply,

He had to quickly move to catch Reko as his body fell limp in his arms and back into unconsciousness. Lifting his seken from the ground to carry him, he was aware that both his weapons had been removed by the Skai gada.

"Wanheda." he repeated the word his seken spoke, feeling a tightness in his chest with the meaning of it, and even a slight chill run up his back causing him to shiver.

She chose to spare Reko's life when she could have easily killed him. He had come to believe it as an act of showing she could have killed them but allowed him to live, a message that their life was in her hands.

He wished that was the case. He now had to go explain to Indra why Clarke kom Skaikru was able to slip away from his watchful eyes, let alone why they had come in contact with her when the Commander had explicitly told them not to.

~~

"Mafta em op, ai op weron em hos op." - Follow her, see where she goes.

"Maun-de" - Mount Weather

"Seken" - Second

"Sha" - Yeah/Yes

"Fisa" - Healer

"Weron Wanheda camp raun?" - Where's the commander of death?

"Ron of" - Escaped

"Skai gada" - Sky girl
Chapter Summary

At Camp Jaha, friends prepare to put themselves in harms was once more.

Chapter Notes

Thursday update!

Thank you for stopping by and reading.

Sunday(X-mas Eve!) will be the next update. I hope everyone has a Happy Holiday and you can spend it with your friends and family!

As always, please let me know what you think below in the comments! See you Sunday!

Stepping through the door of engineering and into the open yard of Camp Jaha, Marcus felt a tightness pull at the muscles in his shoulders. He stopped and attempted to alleviate some of the stress by tilting his head back, closing his eyes and taking a deep, lung-filling breath of cool evening air. Fresh air mixed with the scent of pine trees and tall grass that surrounded the camp.

Unfortunately it did not have the desired effect and the tension only grew, rising from his shoulders and into his neck causing his head to tilt the side as he slowly exhaled. When he opened his eyes, he still stood in front of the door, looking around at the people in that area of the camp.

Many stole looks in his direction and he wondered if they knew that Clarke was no longer at the camp. News travels fast in a small camp like theirs just as it did on the Ark. Rather than stand there and give any validation to their concerns by answering with silent eyes, he started walking casually across the camp to the main structure of the remaining Ark to meet Abby in the council room, occasionally smiling a greeting to people as they passed by.

Once inside the building, his feet moved at a quicker pace across the metal floor and toward his destination. In mere moments, he arrived and entered through the open doorway of the council chamber seeing Abby in her seat and across from her, Octavia and Lincoln.

"Close the door Marcus." Abby instructed him. His eyes jumping between the three in the room.

The metal door swung easily on the hinges and the familiar click of the latch fell into place letting them know the door was fully closed. Marcus turned back to the three and appraised Abby. She sat leaning forward in her chair and her forearms rested on the table in front of her. Her body looked tired to his eyes, telling him she should be in medical but her eyes told another story. In them anyone could see there was nothing—not an injury, not a Commander of the 12 clans—that could keep her laying on a medical bed while her daughter was in danger.
"Marcus, she is gone." she said, her voice rose levels higher than when she told him to close the door.

He walked forward and took his seat next to Abby who had tears in her eyes. He reached over and placed his hand, moving it in small circles trying to calm her down.

"Abby. Clarke knows her way around out there. If anyone here will be fine, it would be her." he remarked, trying to console her. She reached over with her hand and took his free hand which sat on the table.

"We have to find her, Marcus." Abby almost begged. "She needs us and we just let her go. I let her go."

"We will send out the guard and they will bring her back. I am sure Octavia and her friends know where she may have gone. We can start with what they know and start from there. We will look for her for as long as it takes." he said, looking from Abby to Octavia and Lincoln expecting their cooperation. After a moment of looking at the two others who had been silent, Octavia spoke first.

"That might not be as easy as we all hope." she said, looking at Marcus then resting her eyes on Abby who seemed to glare at her. As a way to avoid that hard stare from Abby, Octavia turned to look at Lincoln and gave him the floor.

"Before your order to keep those inside the camp from leaving, I left to speak with a friend who lives near Tonde. Shortly after leaving Maun-de..." he paused for a second but quickly resumed speaking avoiding the use of Trigedasleng, "after leaving Mount Weather, the Commander ordered that if any Skaikru warriors travelled into surrounding territories, they were to be caught and held until they it was decided they were not a threat."

Abby and Marcus both sat up upon hearing the news, Marcus removed his hand from Abby's back but she still held his hand. Abby spoke before Marcus had an opportunity.

"Lexa has made us prisoners in our camp? We have to find Clarke and no order from that young girl is going to decide whether or not we have the right to look for her." Abby declared.

"Maybe we should listen to him for a moment Abby." Marcus suggested, "He knows what is going on outside our camp." Lincoln took that as his cue to resume speaking.

"News of Mount Weather has likely reached the ears of the Commander. Her concern of what Skaikru may do next will force her to be cautious with your people."

"She fears we may want revenge." Marcus stated, he knew the answer before he spoke. "In defeating the mountain men, she believes we are now the threat."

"It might not be her, but there will be those in the Commander's coalition who will feel that way. She will do what she believes she must to keep the coalition together. She has done much to secure peace and will not let it fracture easily." Lincoln advised.

"So we are at war with the Commander?" Abby asked, trying to formulate a plan so they can move forward and find Clarke. "If we sent out a force large enough, maybe that would solve the problem."

Marcus turned to look at Abby and saw her searching for any way to justify sending out a force to look for her daughter.

"Abby," he half-whispered. "We can't risk a war with the Commander. We don't have enough food to be able to stay in camp and they could just keep us trapped in here until we starve."
"We don't have enough food to just remain in camp, period." Abby stated. "We have to send people out to hunt. That means guns in the hands of people who go into the forest." Abby glared at Lincoln, "Does the Commander have a problem with us hunting? Or will she take that as an act of war?"

Lincoln winced, feeling her heat behind the words.

"My friend says that they have no intention on stopping hunting parties that are reasonable in number but if numbers of Skaikru increase greater than they have in past hunts, they will do as the Commander orders."

"Prisoners." Abby spit, angry that they were the ones betrayed by the young brunette girl, yet subject to the conditions they now faced by the one who abandoned them. The one who abandoned Clarke.

"There are others, like my friend." he said. "Others who believe that Skaikru have done a great thing in ridding the land of the threat Mount Weather and they are the ones who allow the hunting parties."

"Would these people let us search for Clarke?" Marcus asked, optimism in his voice. "Clarke left which means she likely does not want to be found. Scouts from Polis have been seen in Tondc, but I am sure they are looking for Clarke." Lincoln answered.

"We have to find Clarke and none of this conversation is helping." Abby reminded them. "We have to find a way to bring her back."

"I don't think Clarke is in danger." Lincoln said.

"Clarke doesn't know how to survive off the land." Abby said firmly.

"None of us knew how to when you sent us down here to die." Octavia remarked.

Abby shot her a disapproving look.

"Look," Octavia said flatly, "Clarke walked away from us and I'm sure she will do everything she can to keep us from finding her. It isn't going to help anything to send out the guard to bring her back if she doesn't want to come back."

Rising from her seat and pulling her hand swiftly from Marcus', she leaned over the table and put her glare on the younger Blake.

"What would you have me do, Octavia? The only thing those people respect is strength and we have technology. We can make them respect us." Abby was losing herself to her emotions and Marcus reached up to her shoulder trying to get her to calm down.

"Abby, maybe there is something we can do." Marcus suggested.

"We need to do something, Marcus!" she said, fighting to keep her anger present but the rising feeling of losing her daughter welled up as a pit her stomach as it did when Clarke removed her metal bracelet they used to monitor their health from space.

"We could send a few. Three or four to go and look for her. I don't want to speak for these two, but they would be invaluable out there." he nodded in the direction of Octavia and Lincoln.

"I'm sure Raven and Bellamy would go." Octavia suggested.

Abby thought about this for a moment and looked at Marcus who had begun to scratch at his beard.

"I want Raven here to monitor the radio. Find Monty and I want you on a separate channel. I want to
hear you check in every four hours. As for Bellamy, he won’t be leaving the camp.” Abby stated with anger.

He had kept the secret of her daughter from her and he wouldn't leave the camp again if she had her say. Octavia looked at Abby then at Marcus.

"Bellamy won't be going? I think he could..." Octavia stated, but was interrupted by Marcus, who slightly shook his head at her to stop, his eyes suggested that he was planning something.

"I think it is best the group stay as small as possible. Abby is right. Bellamy should stay here." he said with a knowing look on his face which suggested otherwise.

"Alright." Octavia agreed as she got up from her chair, followed by Lincoln and then Marcus. "We will leave right away. Besides..." Octavia looked at Lincoln and smiled, "we have the best tracker we could ever need in Lincoln."

Lincoln smiled reassuringly at Abby, but he knew that what they were asking of him was something that wasn't going to take his skill, it was going to take luck. Clarke had been gone for days and they will have to move quietly in order to avoid Trikru patrols.

"Get everyone together and meet me in engineering in thirty minutes." Marcus ordered, looking at Octavia.

A nod was all he got in reply and both Lincoln and Octavia rose from their seats and quickly left the room. Marcus turned to look at Abby who was behind her chair and resting her hands against the back of it, her shoulders slumped over. He just watched her for a moment and then she turned to meet his gaze.

"Those kids will do everything they can to find Clarke. If she can be found, they will be the ones to do it." he said, trying to give her confidence in the plan.

"What if the Commander has her already, Marcus? What if these kids get caught? Is this the right thing to do? I don't want them to die because I sent them out there." Abby fired off the words in rapid succession.

Marcus moved over to her and raised his hands to her shoulders and spoke with certainty.

"Abby, I have learnt to trust that these kids can find their way out of just about anything they get themselves into. They have been relying on each other since they came to the ground."

"I just want my daughter to come home and be safe, Marcus."

"Her friends will be the best chance we have at that." he stated confidently.

Abby looked worn down thanks to the stress of finding out her daughter was gone being coupled with the trauma of Mount Weather. Her body was still feeling the effects and Marcus decided that she has had enough for now.

"What do we say you get some rest in your own bed tonight instead of that make-shift bed you were using in medical?" he suggested.

He saw her starting to object to resting but before she could say she wanted to see the kids off and wait by the radio, he spoke again. "I'll make sure the kids are off safe and I will make sure when they radio that you are there for it. Now, time to get some rest, Abby."
The adrenaline of finding out Clarke was missing was fading and she was feeling exhausted. She knew she was fighting the sleep that threatened to consume her recovering body. Relenting, she nodded and let Marcus lead her from the room and walk her back to her quarters.

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The group of Raven, Octavia, Lincoln, Bellamy and Monty were assembled in engineering and were waiting for Marcus to arrive.

Monty was easy to find as he would almost always be near engineering working some tech and trying to get station systems up and running properly. Much to his credit, were it not for him many of the systems from the Ark would still be offline. It was slow work, but he was doing all he could. Even at the expense of sleep.

Octavia found Bellamy laying on his bunk, sulking in his quarters after the incident with Abby.

"O. This is all my fault. I should have convinced her to come back. What are we going to do?" he asked, his face staring at the ceiling above his bed.

"I tell you what you are going to do. You are going to get up off your ass, get out there and find Clarke." she stated, frowning at his defeated posture as he lay on his back.

"We can't leave the camp, O. Abby has put me on guard duty in the Ark." he complained.

"Then you are just going to have to find a way to sneak out to join my search party that is leaving in thirty minutes to find her." she smirked.

Bellamy turned to look at her and threw his legs over the side of his bed, sitting up straight.

"You are going to look for Clarke?" he questioned. "Why would she pick you to go looking for Clarke?"

"Because Lincoln and I are the best chance she has at being brought back here to camp. You are coming so you can talk princess down and convince her to come back."

He pushed himself from his bed and grabbed his black jacket.

"What are we waiting for? Let's go."

Raising her hand to his shoulder to stop him from walking past her, she said, "There is a bit of a problem. You still aren't allowed to leave the Camp. Abby's order."

"We can stow me in the rover before we go." Bellamy suggested.

"There is more you need to know. I'll explain when we get to engineering and I can tell you, Raven and Monty at the same time." Octavia stated, turning to walk from Bellamy's quarters and meet their friends.

Bellamy quickly rushed to catch up with her after closing the door to his quarters. He had put his pistol and his rifle back in the armory after his shift had completed. He struggled to keep up with Octavia who had kept a brisk walking pace. As they exited the living quarter section of what remained of the Ark, the sky above had begun to darken as the sun started to set for the evening.

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Octavia and Lincoln explained the order by Lexa and what could happen if they were to be caught.
Monty seemed the most unpleased at the prospect of being caught by Trikru, knowing what they were capable of, but he swallowed his fears and made sure they knew he was there for Clarke.

Raven cursed her injured leg for rendering her physically incapable of moving as quickly or as quietly as they needed to be while travelling through the forest. She wasn't happy with Abby's decision, but she understood after hearing the consequences of possibly being caught by the grounders.

"Being tied to a tree once was more than enough for me, thanks. I don't need that crazy bitch cutting me any more than she already has." Raven joked, but shivered when she recalled the blade of Lexa's brown-handled knife cutting into her flesh after Gustus tried to destroy their alliance.

Moments later Marcus entered the room, turned and closed the door behind himself. He turned back to the group and read all their expressions. There was uncertainty in regard to what awaited them beyond the gates of Camp Jaha, but there was also courage in their eyes.

"I assume you all know what is going on." he stated, rather than asked.

"They know." Octavia informed him.

"I want you all to come back safe so whatever you do, do not try to fight the grounders. Find Clarke."

He looked at them all and waited for them to nod in understanding. Once they did he resumed, looking at Raven.

"Raven, we need you to make sure we can keep in touch with them. They need two radios, keep one off so that you don't use up both batteries. If we have to come get you all, we need to know where we are going."

"I have two charged up and I have..." Raven got off her stool and limped around the table, walking toward a small shelf that was covered in miscellaneous parts she picked up a small solar pack with some cables attached to it, "...this little toy here that will let you guys charge those radios in the day. Don't lose it because it is the only one I have at the moment." she stated, walking slowly back to the table and placing it next to two hand-held radios on the table in front of them all.

"Great thinking, Raven" Marcus smiled. "Now, we have to assume Lexa has scouts watching he camp so you will all have to find another way out of here. You can't take the Rover so you will have to go through the fence like you always do when you think nobody is watching." Marcus' smile quickly changed into a grin. All of the other eyes in the room glanced nervously at each other.

"That won't be a problem." said Bellamy, his voice laced with seriousness.

"We should wait until dark." offered Lincoln. I'll go first and make sure that we can get out unseen. Once I return, I'll signal everyone when to leave the camp."

Marcus nodded at Lincoln and looked at the group that was sitting around the table.

"What happens if we get caught?" Monty asked, looking at Lincoln.

"We don't." was his stiff reply, "Or we will be made to wish we hadn't." Marcus lifted his hands which caught the attention of the group, and opened his jacket. From within, he produced two hand guns and two clips for each of them from interior pockets.
"These weapons are last resort." he said firmly. "If you use these, it is likely to start a war and I don't want to have to explain how and why it started to Abby. I'm already going to have to explain this, I don't want to be fighting one on two fronts." he smiled, trying to break the tension that had been rising in the room but his smile disappeared when they didn't return it with their own.

'They have been through too much. Too much to ask them to do this' he thought to himself. "I want everyone to know they don't have to..."

"We will find Clarke" Bellamy objected to what he believed was an offer to walk away. "Clarke has always been there for us, we will be there for her."

Bellamy walked up to the table, picked up one of the hand guns, loaded one of the two clips into the pistol and tugged the slide back, loading a bullet into the chamber.

Marcus watched Bellamy expertly load the gun, check to make sure the safety was set on, then slid it into his own jacket. Monty did the same, but with much less expertise, some colour rising in his cheeks as everyone watched him struggle a little with the clip as he inserted it.

"Four hours starts now." Marcus stated as he looked at the digital clock on the wall behind Raven.

Bellamy and Octavia both grabbed a radio, clipping it to their belts leaving Monty to grab the solar charger. He couldn't clip it to his belt as it was too large, so he scanned the room, his eyes landing on a small pack in the corner he grabbed to carry it.

As they all began to file from the room, Marcus called out to them,

"Bring Clarke home."
In Search Of

Chapter Summary

The group goes forth in search of their missing leader, but learn things don't always go to plan.

Chapter Notes

Sunday Update!
Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays everyone!

I'd just like to take this chance to thank everyone for continuing to read this story and leaving kudos and comments.

Writing this for everyone has become something I look forward to every day and I look forward to the upcoming week off from work and I will post two more chapters. One one Tuesday and one on Friday!

I'm done with this note so go and get on with reading what you actually came here for! Enjoy chapter 7!

The three sat impatiently in the dark confines of a small shack at the far side of the camp awaiting Lincoln to signal it was safe to leave the camp and begin their search for Clarke. Raven sat impatiently still in engineering as she waited for their signal to drop the power to the fence so they could start the journey to find Clarke.

Though it was dark in the shack and the look that Octavia wore on her face may have been a model of determination, but concern had worked its way into the edges of her eyes. Lincoln had been gone for the better part of thirty minutes and she tried to ignore the concerned looks that her friends were throwing her way, sure that Lincoln was safe.

After another ten minutes, relief washed over her and she saw him. He signaled from the tree line that it was safe to climb through their improvised exit through the electrified fence. Octavia took a calming breath, lifting the radio and engaged the button to speak.

"Shut it down. We'll let you know when we are through." she told Raven.

Single-file they moved, crouched as they all ran to the small opening in the fence and climbed through. Bellamy separated the cables wider with his hands after a moment of hesitation, allowing them to squeeze through easier. Once they were all safe on the other side and in to the trees, Bellamy nodded to Octavia.

"We are through. Turn it back on." Octavia said, returning the radio back to her belt. As they stepped across the small grass and rock clearing before the trees, Raven's voice came through the speaker.
"Stay safe and find her fast."

Octavia reached down and clicked the power switch on the radio off. It wouldn't do them any good if they were caught because they left one of the radios on and caught a scouting parties attention. As they reached Lincoln's position, they remained in the similar crouched position he had taken.

"We won't have any problems in the forest around the camp, and we will only have to avoid one scouting party on the way to the drop ship." Lincoln informed them.

"You know something we don't?" Bellamy frowned at Lincoln.

"The ones watching this part of the forest are friends. Many who are in the immediate area won't interfere with us finding Clarke, but the farther into the forest we go we will have to be careful. Many of the scouts are from Tondc and harbour ill will for most Skaikru."

"So, we don't get caught. Sounds simple enough." Bellamy remarked.

"We're wasting time." she scolded, glaring at Bellamy.

Lincoln led them off in the direction of the drop ship and Octavia moved quickly to walk behind him, the others falling in line behind them. One by one they moved farther and farther from Camp Jaha, disappearing in the darkness of the forest before them.

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The small group made quick time and approximately four hours into the eight hour trip to the drop ship, Lincoln raised his hand and quickly dropped in a crouch behind a tree, prompting others to mimic his actions. They could only hear their collective breaths until a moment later, the crunch of foliage could be heard not far in the distance.

Ahead of them at approximately fifty meters, a single figure slowly walked forward, travelling perpendicular to their direction. Lincoln's focus moved from the lone figure to the forest from which he came. Moments later, his intuition was rewarded and he made out the form of two men pressed up against trees with bows at the ready, their eyes scanning the forest for intruders.

Octavia drew in an almost inaudible sniffle and Lincoln gave his head the slightest shake in reply to her query. Both Bellamy and Monty picked up on their near-silent conversation and remained crouched, almost laying on the ground to avoid being discovered.

Lincoln and Octavia were communicating between themselves about how many people were ahead of them through small nods or head shakes and Bellamy grew frustrated with being left out of the conversation. He was smart enough to not speak, but one of his boots shifted restlessly beneath him and Lincoln stiffened.

One of the rear scouts froze and turned his masked face in the direction of the group, his bow string drawn back which signaled for the attention of his compatriots. Lincoln, unbeknownst to the rest of the group had his hand on the hilt of his sword and in his other hand a dagger, ready to release the moment a scout caught sight of them.

The lead scout turned his attention on their vicinity and slowly turned in their direction, stepping cautiously forward, eyes straining as he searched for anything out of place.

Everyone's attention but Lincoln's shifted to the right and they saw a rabbit jump from a bush and run in the direction of Camp Jaha. The Trikru scouts all saw the rabbit dart from the bush away from where they stood and the lead scout laughed aloud. The scouts that hid among the trees stepped out
and moved in the direction of the lead scout while lessening the tension his bow string.

"Yu laik fir in kom thompa?" the lead scout asked.

"Shof op, Reigen." the man replied, joining the others to continue their patrol as they teased him for being afraid of the rabbit.

"Strik pauna! Ron we!" they all laughed, walking away from the four and resuming their search for anything or anyone who is unwelcome in their lands.

Lincoln's shoulders eased down and his hand slowly released the grip on his sword. Turning his head he stared at Bellamy and his glare told him his carelessness had almost gotten them discovered. They remained as they were for a while, crouched low and making sure the scouts weren't waiting to see if there were any more surprises in the area before moving on.

Lincoln stood up and the others took his cue to do the same. Monty and Bellamy stood up straight, groaning at their joints which were suffering from stiffness that took hold as they remained perfectly still.

Monty noticed neither Lincoln nor Octavia seemed to suffer from the same affliction and decided that when he got back to Camp Jaha, he would start exercising more. His mind went to Harper and his decision was reinforced by the idea that she too may also enjoy the benefits of a fitter Monty Green.

The second leg of the trip to the drop ship were like the first, arriving as the morning sun began to enter the sky. They kept a fair pace and had not run into any scouts. His friend had been true to his word regarding where and when the patrols would move through the area and they made it to the drop ship.

None of them enjoyed being here, and Lincoln seemed hesitant to even walk into the charred remains of the former Skaikru camp. His memory of this place was dark after having been tortured at the hand of Bellamy Blake and knowing that 300 of his people had been killed. It took everything in his power to not give in to the anger he felt.

Thinking of the girl who was looking at him now, he turned to Octavia and saw in her eyes the sympathy of knowing how hard this must be for him. The fire that threatened to consume him was quickly doused by her calm green eyes. He gave her a slight smile of reassurance, and in his heart he was certain that he would go through it all again if it meant that she would look at him as lovingly as she did at this moment.

"It looks like she has already been here. That or some grounder scavengers took all the rations we put in there." Bellamy stated, his hand on his gun.

"Where do you think she would have gone?" Monty asked.

"Away from Camp Jaha." Bellamy replied quickly.

"I'll see what I can find." Lincoln said, moving to walk the perimeter of the camp in an attempt to find any clue as to what direction the Skaikru leader could have gone.

"See if there is anything in there we might be able to use." Octavia suggested to Monty and Bellamy. Once the two boys turned to enter the drop ship she hurried to follow Lincoln.

"Do you think you will be able to find something?" she asked quietly once she caught up to him.
"Clarke has been working on walking light on her feet and trying not being followed." he stated. "I heard she has spent some time with the Commander in the forest so that is where she probably picked it up. Clarke seems to learn quickly."

Lincoln was impressed with how long it took him to find her trail, and even then had it not been for one particular identifier, he may not have seen her path at all.

"I think she came through this way." he pointed at almost invisible marks on the dirt floor of the forest. "She was being followed." he added, pointing to a set of tracks almost as hidden as Clarke's. "Two men."

"How do you know that is Clarke's track?" Octavia wondered aloud.

He smiled and explained, motioning for Octavia to join him as he kneeled on the ground, pointing at a slight indentation. "Skaikru all have the same shoes with this line in the pattern. It has been many days since your people have been back to the drop ship and these appear to be the most fresh."

Octavia glanced down at her own feet. "Aside from the ones that were leading into the drop ship." he added.

"Remind me to get some new boots when we are allowed in Tondc. That or when you bring me to Polis like you promised." she grinned at him.

"I think the best chance we have of ever being allowed in Polis is to find Clarke. The Commander favours her and hopefully if Clarke doesn't try to kill her for what happened at Maun-de, they will find some way to renegotiate a peace between our people." he stated, optimism laced throughout his words.

"I expect her to help us as well." Octavia added. "It is the least she can do after we find her and bring her back."

Lincoln smiled, but it was difficult to think of how his own people looked at him. His status as "Natona" can be reversed by the Commander, but there would be many who will always view him as such. Lincoln chose to change the subject and discuss his thoughts for the rest of the day.

"We should let Monty and Bellamy rest for a short while. I have a thought as to where Clarke was headed and it will take us the remainder of the day to reach it."

"We can get there today even with the patrols?" Octavia wondered, knowing that Lincoln would make them travel slower now that they were more visible to Trikru patrols.

"Sha. We will have to be careful. The direction she is travelling would take her near a river."

"I think I know what river you are talking about." she said, thinking back to when they first arrived back on Earth not so long ago and her run in with the water snake. 'Has it only been a couple months?' she asked herself, the memory of what happened in the river causing a shiver to ripple through her body.

"We'll give them fifteen minutes." Octavia suggested, to which Lincoln nodded in agreement. The less time they sat in one place, the better their odds were of not being discovered by Lexa's scouts. The drop ship has already been visited multiple times if the tracks in the area were any indication.

The two walked back into the former camp and saw Bellamy and Monty sitting on the ramp of the drop ship eating some rations they had with them when they left Camp Jaha. They offered their pouches to Octavia and Lincoln who accepted, reaching into the bags and pulling out some of the
dried meat.

"Fifteen minutes." Octavia said to which both agreed.

"Figure out where she was going?" Monty asked.

"The river we found when we first arrived. She probably needed water and that is where she would have gone. Lincoln found a couple tracks and we can follow them." Octavia explained.

"What are we going to do if she doesn't want to come back?" Monty inquired. It was a question none of them wanted to ask.

"I'll convince her." Bellamy stated. "It isn't safe out here for her or any of us. If the grounders have taught us anything, it is that we can't trust them and we have to look out for our own."

"Give it up Bel. Nobody here wants to hear one of your speeches here." Octavia glowered at him. "Looks like lunch is over. Let's get moving and stay quiet."

Octavia walked off quickly in the direction of where they saw Clarke's footprint. Monty and Bellamy threw their rations in their backpacks and followed along. Monty just shook his head at Bellamy for causing Octavia to cut their break short. His legs were quite tired and as he hurried to catch up, they took a while to work through the stiffness from the hike they walked nearly non-stop the night before.

Lincoln was unsure what they would do if they came across any Trikru and he believed his best bet would be to try to have any they come across chase him so the remaining three could either continue the search for Clarke or return home to Camp Jaha. Either way, he was certain he would likely end up a prisoner of his people.

They had been fortunate in avoiding patrols, and made it to the hill that led down to the river. Lincoln studied the ground and saw where he believed Clarke had shuffled her feet as if she stopped and turned back to look at something. There was no signs of struggle and Clarke's trail continued over the hill and toward the river which gave him hope that she was aware someone was following her.

He signaled the others to come up the hill but to stay low. Octavia came first, followed by Monty and Bellamy bringing up the rear. Their eyes all scanned around them and when they were a few feet from Lincoln, he motioned for them to stop. He moved slowly to a tree that stood just before the crest of the hill that gave him a vantage of both the river banks.

After spending a considerable amount of time watching the two sides of the river banks and only when he believed it was safe did he signal the others to join him as he walked down the other side of the hill. The sight of water was a relief for the Skaikru search party. Octavia had used hers sparingly, but even her bottle was getting low. Both Monty and Bellamy had finished theirs hours ago and after they filled their bottles, they cupped water and splashed their faces to try to cool themselves down in the afternoon heat.

"Everyone stay calm and don't move." Lincoln stated.

Octavia looked up and couldn't see anything so she decided to follow Lincolns eyes. To the right, her eyes caught sight of a camouflaged man leaning against a tree, perfectly motionless with a bow aimed at Lincoln. Octavia glanced to the left to see three other men emerge from the edge of the trees, one with another bow and two others with swords in hand.

Bellamy started to move his hand to the pistol on his hip and moments before he could draw it to
defend everyone, an arrow lodged itself into his bicep causing him to grunt in pain and drop to a knee.

"Wer'n ya go'ner yu say'en, natrona?" asked a man who walked casually down the hill behind them.

Turning to look at the man, Lincoln kept his hands out to not provoke the men any further, he answered, "We are looking for a missing Skaikru girl."

The man continued down the hill and drew his sword, looking at them all as he walked by them. He stopped in front of Lincoln and spit at his feet. Lincoln did not respond to the provocation, nor did he flinch when the leader of the group lifted his blade to his throat, sliding the cold steel lightly on the skin and drawing blood as he walked behind Lincoln.

"Seinteim em seimbeda sieng kom baga." he laughed, joined by the others in their mockery of the former Trikru brother.

Octavia looked as though she wanted to protest his treatment, but Lincoln's calm eyes gave her strength to remain silent.

Bellamy was grunting with pain as his hand rested over the arrow that was lodged in his arm while Monty stood frozen in place.

Monty had been busy scanning the forest and he was aware there were more out there which gave his a sense of helplessness. Running was not an option for any of them, nor was fighting their way out. They were at the mercy of these grounders.

Octavia felt helpless with being forced to watch their leader cut a thin line with the edge of his blade around Lincoln's neck, unable to protect him. Anger flared in her green eyes and when the grounder leader lifted his eyes from his blade and toward her, he grinned. She realized it wasn't Lincoln that they were trying to provoke, but her. She fought back her need to lunge forward to protect her to the back as she saw his crimson blood slowly start to fall from the wound.

Antagonizing her further, the leader lifted his foot and kicked the back of Lincoln's knee, driving him in to the pebble surface of the river bank with a grunt of pain which caused Octavia to move one of her feet forward. The sound of bow strings being pulled taut forced her to rethink her decision and she stopped moving instantly.

"Your niron isn't as stupid as I thought. I guess we will be taking you all back with us. I'm sure Heda will have something special planned for all of you."

"Beja," Octavia pleaded, but it was too late. The man brought the hilt of his sword down on the back of Lincoln's head, forcing his body to fall limply to the ground. "He told you the truth."

Before the world went dark to Octavia's eyes, she saw four new men charge from the forest, two heading toward Bellamy and two toward Monty.

Two swung their fists at Monty who declared he would go peacefully but his plea fell on deaf ears, the blows forcing him to double over in pain and gasping for air. Bellamy tried to protest as well only to receive the same treatment as Lincoln, a solid blow to his head which seemed to render him unconscious. He fell limply on his side that had the arrow protruding from it.

Octavia was so focused on what was happening in front of her, she did not hear whoever approached her from behind. A solid blow struck her from behind and she fell forward, crashing hard on to the ground.
As she sensed her consciousness ebbing away she managed to say "Lincoln..." as a plea for them to not harm him any further, she closed her eyes and gave in to the darkness that surrounded them all.
Threat From Within

Chapter Summary

Lexa decides her next course of action and Clarke gets in over her head.

Might be a little extra thrown in for good measure.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone enjoyed their Christmas!

This next chapter was a fun one for me and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did when I wrote it!

Thanks again for the comments and the Kudos!
If you like/don't like what you are reading, let me know in the comments!
Constructive feedback is always welcome.

Looking across the table at Deni, Lexa was deep in thought. "Mochof, Deni. You have given me much to consider."

"I'm always here for you." Deni stated, reaching across the table and giving Lexa's hand a soft squeeze in comfort. Lexa broke from her thoughts at the touch, giving a soft smile to the gesture but her mind was clearly resumed spinning with the conversation she just had. Deni rose from her seat and gave a slight bow. "Reshop, Heda", leaving the Commander at the table.

Noticing that Deni was leaving the room, Lexa called out, "Reshop" as Deni nodded as Lexa bid her farewell for the night and watched her slip through the door.

Lexa's finger nails restlessly tapped the table in a frustrated rhythm. She wasn't angry with the world and the events that were occurring around her, she was troubled that they were events that she no longer had control of. Last year at this time, she was in firm control of her Kongeda, the only real threat her people faced was the Maunon.

Yes, Nia was a concern, but her plotting and scheming was always dealt with swiftly and never allowed to pose a serious threat. Discontent amongst the Ambassadors was more their own concern, with them fighting among themselves for her attention in petty attempts to secure power for themselves. her decision to limit Ambassadors time in Polis to two years as their as their clan representatives tempered some of that ambition, though initially met with fierce resistance.

Lexa rose from her chair and picked up her half filled cup of tea. It was cold now but she didn't mind it that way, it always seemed to give it a sweetness that the hot tea did not offer. Lifting the cup to her lips to take a sip, her feet began to move under her and she paced in her room as she normally did when trying to make decisions that impacted her people.
Her thoughts wandered back to the conversation just moments ago. She was surprised that word of Maun-de has spread so fast. It had only fallen two days ago but her people had already begun to sing the praises of Skaikru for destroying the greatest threat they had ever faced. Deni explained that while not the majority, some of Trikru still do not trust Skaikru and fear they will enter Maun-de and demand her people be subservient to their demands or risk being destroyed.

Lexa understood their concerns. There are those among Skaikru such as Bellamy Blake who did not trust nor wish to trust her people. They would suffer the same tyranny under people like him as they have under the last residents of Maun-de.

'I must send a party to Camp Jaha.' she thought to herself. Lexa determined the likelihood of them occupying Maun-de while in negotiations for peace were slim as she could demand they never set foot in there for any reason during the negotiations or it would be seen as an act of war against her people. In return, they could be given lands but it would require agreement from whichever of the twelve clans would be willing to share.

Most importantly she believed that these negotiations must be done quickly and it would be best if Skaikru had their leader to negotiate. Klark might be angry with her, but she will also be predictable. She will want what is best for her people as she always does.

Lexa walked over to the black couch in the corner of the room that was covered in furs and sat down, placing her tea cup on the table in front of her. Lifting her hands to her hair, she started to remove the braids and let it fall loosely over her shoulders.

After completing her hair, she picked up her tea once more and leaned back against the soft furs. She smiled inwardly. She would take control of her lands once more removing any uncertainty among her people, and she would do it one step at a time and Clarke would help her.

Having concerned herself with what she believed to be the most pressing matter for her people, she wondered of Klark. She figured it would not be long before she returned to her people. The leaves had begun to turn with the change of seasons and the colder air rolled down from the hills settling in the valleys which would make hunting for food difficult.

Skaikru had what they called 'packets' that held terrible tasting food, but Klark had sworn to her they "met all the requirements of any food they could find on Earth" but after trying a bite, she informed Klark that "how good food tasted was just as much a requirement as the quality of a food".

That memory created a warm sensation in her chest and it grew until she smiled, remembering how Klark enjoyed eating the rabbit she had caught, forgoing the little silver food package she swore was all she needed, admitting that on occasion the Commander could be right, and talking about a broken clock, refusing to explain what she meant about it being correct twice.

She enjoyed it when Klark treated her as though she was just any other. She had not had many moments where she was treated as an equal, not since her conclave. People listened to her. They took orders from her. People died for her. Nobody, short of Titus could say they have ever challenged her as Klark has, yet he remains respectful of her authority. Even Deni, the closest thing to a friend she could allow herself still understood that she is Heda.

Initially, Lexa did not give a moment of thought to these invaders from the sky. It was only when her three hundred warriors suffered defeat at the hands of some "Tiny and weak yellow-haired branwada" as Anya described, did she commit the name Klark to memory. Defeating her Fos and her 300 warriors was no simple thing. She decided it was time to meet this Klark and her people.

When they first met, the passion she showed in wanting to protect her people forced Lexa to respect
her but what tempered her interest in killing the Skaikru girl and her people was when she gave her Anya's braid. Anya must have respected her enough to tell her of their tradition and that is what saved Klark's life that morning in her tent. Her stubbornness at the drop ship in bringing Lincoln back is what saved it a second time.

The length Klark was willing to go through for her people that day and beyond was a bond Lexa believed they both shared as leaders but Lexa had been groomed for her role, taught about leadership, responsibility and the expectations of her role. Klark had been rejected by her people and sent to die on the ground, then thrust into conflict. Conflict she was able to overcome, but was ill prepared for.

Klark let her emotions rule her decisions and it was too easy to get caught up in them. They ignited passion in all those around her and even the great Heda was threatened by her tide. Indra had warned her, Gustus had warned her and Titus constantly reminded her that her duty to her people must supersede all other desires.

'Maybe life should be about more than just surviving. Don't we deserve better than that?'

The words were burned into her heart. "We". She knew Klark meant their people, but all she remembered she could feel was the increasing rhythm of her heart in her chest, and that "we" could be something more.

Her mind became a scramble of thoughts. Titus reminding her that love is weakness. Costia's sweet laughter when Lexa made a silly joke. Indra warning her that Klark was a threat to all her people. Standing before Klark in her tent and deciding to kiss the girl from the sky, her heart racing in her chest.

Walking away from Maun-de with her people alive and safe. Seeing her people celebrate the release of their people and bringing them home. Seeing the weight of betrayal in the blue eyes of someone who had it within her to destroy her, and wanting it more than anything in her entire life.

"Ungh!" Lexa grunted, throwing her cup across the room and seeing it crash to pieces against the wall.

This time nobody entered her room immediately to see what happened.

Getting up from the couch, Lexa walked over to where her cup hit the wall then down at the pieces as she bent over to pick them up and as she finished picking up the smallest of pieces, a knock was heard at the door followed by a familiar voice.

"Heda?" Deni asked.

"I just dropped a cup." Lexa lied as she carried the broken shards she was holding in a small box by the door. Lexa pulled her door open and saw Deni standing before her. "Inform Titus I wish to speak to the Ambassadors tomorrow morning in the throne room."

"Sha, Heda. Should I summon him for you tonight?" Deni questioned.

"No." Lexa answered. "I will inform them tomorrow of my decisions. I am not to be disturbed for the rest of the night." she declared, the latter being directed at the two large guards who stood next to her doorway."

"As you wish, Heda." Deni looked at both guards as Lexa turned and shut the door, they both nodded their understanding.
"All Heda stated was that wants yourself and the ambassadors to see her in her throne room tomorrow morning" Deni stated to Titus, her hands folded neatly together as she stood in his chambers.

"She must have informed you of her intention for the meeting." Titus stated, knowing the often spoke on any sort of topic.

"Heda doesn't seek my council on how she governs her people." Deni stated flatly. "I bring her meals and offer her my support. Not guidance."

"We both know that is untrue." Titus scoffed. "Lexa..."

Deni frowned at his use of Heda's name.

"Heda," he corrected himself, "often seeks your advice on any number of topics. I only ask you to help me make certain she is doing what is best..."

Deni raised an eyebrow at his argument.

"...for our people."

She glared at him coldly then turned to walk out of the room, having given him the Commander's orders to assemble the ambassadors. She couldn't hear what he said after he closed his door but it seemed like frustration was getting the better of him.

The last two days had been very troubling for Titus. He had to watch his star pupil fall into a world of uncertainty. It was not the world she belonged to and he was certain it had everything to do with Skaikru and their leader Klark.

He threw on his robe over his pants and shirt and exited his quarters to inform the ambassadors they are to be present for the morning meeting. Knowing they would press him on the reason for the meeting, he could only declare that it was Heda who reserves the right to share that information at a time of her choosing.

As he waited for the lift to take him to each of the ambassadors floors to share the order from Lexa, he realized this would be the first time he would be unaware of the reason for a meeting in all the time Lexa had been Commander. She had always relied on his advice but now she kept him in the dark. Her behaviour since returning with her people had been worrisome and he swore he would find out why.

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"The stabbing pain in Clarke's knee that earlier had only stung when she placed her full weight on it was now a consistent reminder that jumping from trees, no matter how successful it had been, was something she would never choose to do again."
She had been moving as quickly as her knee would let her while trying to reduce the impact she had on the ground below. Periodically she would turn and see a clear path from where she walked but for now, she decided it was more important to produce distance over stealth. When her body forced her to move slower she would place more importance on hiding her tracks.

When the pain in her knee became too difficult, she decided it was time to rest and have see how badly she hurt it. She looked around her immediate area and saw a tree with a large bush at the base of it and decided she would use it to hide herself from the dangers of the forest and those who seemed to be looking for her.

She tried to clear her tracks as best as she could and once she decided it was sufficient, she hobbled over to the spot she chose and put her pack next to the tree. She knew there was some swelling, but as she leaned against that tree, she slid herself down to the ground and removed the pressure on her knee. Immediately the injured knee thanked her by simply throbbing rather than sending sharp spikes of pain up and down her leg as it had when she was running through the forest.

She took her gun from her belt and placed it on the ground next to her, easily within reach if she was forced to use it. Unbuckling her belt and unzipping the zipper so she could slide her pants down far enough to inspect her injury, she took a deep breath as she saw the bruising and swelling that was far worse than she hoped to see. Clarke let out with a frustrated sigh and threw her head back in anger resulting in a solid 'thud', forgetting momentarily the tree was behind her.

"Owww" she groaned, slowly letting herself tip over on her side and squeezing her eyes tightly together while she reached to touch the back of her head that made contact with the bark. "More swelling. Great. Just great." she mumbled, the impact point immediately puffing up below her fingers.

Clarke indulged in a moment of self-pity then sat herself back up to resume the inspection of her knee. She adjusted her knee cap and gave it some poking and prodding but determined that even though it was injured, as long as she could find a safe place to stay for a week or two and avoid using it much, she would be able to resume regular activities.

She listened to the forest around her while her eyes scanned for anything she might consider out of place for the better part of thirty minutes. Once she decided it was safe, she retrieved a wrap from her pack for her knee. She carefully and tightly wrapped the cloth around her swollen knee and once she was content with how it was wrapped, she pulled her pant legs back up, zipped up the zipper and buckled the belt once more thinking she could rest a little longer and eat some of one of the rations packs.

Clicking the belt buckle closed as quietly as she could, her attention was drawn to the sound of something crack in the distance but off to the right of the direction she was travelling. 'Looks like I'll eat later' she thought to herself, but she did take her bottle from the pack and take a small sip of the water she collected back at the river. She only had half a bottle left and she didn't know this area so she decided she needed to get to higher ground and find a water source.

Looking up at the tall trees, the thought crossed her mind that she might be able to see if she made it to the top but dashed that notion immediately as she stood and her knee protested.

Clarke threw her pack over her shoulder securing the first strap and then second. She wanted to rest longer but knew nightfall was coming soon. It had been cold in the drop ship the night before, and unless she could find a safe place to rest this night, she would have to start a fire and stay near it for warmth. Fire draws attention.

After picking up her gun and tucking it into her jacket pocket, set herself on task of resuming her
hike. The remainder of the day and made it into the hills and she was thankful she crossed a couple small streams. Clarke determined the both streams were clean enough to drink from after dipping her hand in and drawing some water to her lips. Her body thanked her by renewing her energy after she drank her fill, and each time she refilled her bottle.

A familiar feeling crept over her that there was someone in the woods following her again. This one wasn't as quiet as the one she got the drop on before, but they remained hidden well enough that Clarke couldn't find them. Clarke doubted she would be so lucky as to get the drop on another one of Lexa's scouts.

Her hike lasted a couple more hours through the forest, the sun had hidden itself behind the horizon. The sky above had begun to show the first sign of stars which signalled that the temperature was going to drop quickly. Clarke found a spot that was relatively protected from wind and put her pack down, placing the gun next to it. She set herself to the task of starting a fire to keep herself warm and began to walk around the area to gather dried moss and small branches to get a fire started.

Bending over to pick up a small branch she intended to snap into pieces of kindling, she heard the unmistakable sound of something growling directly ahead of her. When she looked up, she saw the source of the noise and stumbled back, dropping all the wood but the last branch she picked up. Her eyes were wide with fear as she slowly crawled backward in the direction of her pack on her heels and her palms.

Ahead of her, two steel-grey eyes above rows of growling teeth focused their intent on Clarke and moved forward at the same speed as she crawled back. The animal was stalking her. She recognized the animal from classes on the Ark. It was a wolf. There was something about wolves she was forgetting, but as long as she could get to her pack and her gun, she could try to fight it off.

She felt relief in the form of a gun when she felt back and her hand brushed the gun. Moments after Clarke stopped crawling backward, the wolf lunged at her, sinking its teeth in her ankle and forcing a scream from Clarke as it shook it's head violently to try to tear the foot from her body.

Clarke frantically swung the gun around and flicked the safety off, pulling the trigger once as the barrel pointed at the body of the animal. It yelped and limped back in an attempt to escape the pain that appeared in its side. Clarke was still afraid, but at least the animal no longer held her foot in its mouth. A foot she could see that blood had begun to flow freely from.

She attempted to take a few calm breaths to steady her nerves but she didn't have the time. On her left, two more wolves appeared. They were both growling, but not charging. She wondered what was keeping them from charging and when she swung her gun around, they stalked off in opposite directions but continued to stare at her. They could smell the blood dripping from her shoe and that drove their pursuit. They feared the gun, not Clarke she realized.

Clarke fired a shot at the two wolves but missed. They danced around just far enough away that taking a shot at them would be difficult. The pain in her foot continued to throb, much like her knee was. She didn't have many bullets so until they got close enough for her to be sure she could hit them, she decided to use the branch she held with her other hand to keep lull them in. Every time they seemed to want to advance and she drew her gun, they scattered only to return a moment later growling and yelping.

Clarke was growing tired of their game and lifted her gun and closed one eye to aim her shot. She didn't hear it but another wolf had arrived, or had been there the entire time but was waiting. It jumped at her back and sunk its teeth into the shoulder of the arm holding the gun.

An errant shot rang out but this time the wolf on her arm refused to let go out of fear, twisting and
yanking at Clarke and forcing her to drop her gun. She could hear the feet of the other wolves and
their growls getting closer as she swung her fists at the wolf that had hold of her. Her other arm felt a
familiar pinch and the only sounds she could hear was the growls from the wolves and her scream.

Clarke fought as hard as she could to free herself from the wolves but her strength was abandoning
her. It felt as though they had pinned her to the ground and there wasn't anything more she could do.
She knew she had to fight. She just had to get to the gun. They were afraid of the gun.

Lying there, her body was exhausted from days of travel but she also felt a sense of calm wash over
her. She couldn't even feel her knee any more.

She fought the grounders. She fought the mountain men. She fought for her people. She didn't want
to fight any more. She wanted to stop worrying about what danger came next.

Two green eyes appeared above her and they filled her with a calm she hadn't known since her
arrival to the ground. Not since Jake held her in his arms, before the chaos of her being sent to Earth
unfolded. She whispered, "Ai gonplei ste odon", welcoming the peace those words gave her. Even
in the end, Lexa would be with her even if it was only in her mind.

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Walking nearby, a brown-haired young hand heard a gunshot ring out through the forest and
moments later a second. His first instinct was to run, but knowing the Maunon were defeated, he ran
in the direction of the gun shots.

In the darkness he sped over the roots and around the trees with expert balance, gliding in the
direction he heard the sound. As he got closer, the familiar sound caught his ears and his bow was
drawn in seconds with an arrow nocked.

Coming upon the pack, he saw one down, shot in the side and unmoving and four others tearing at a
body on the ground. His arrow was away immediately, killing one and a second and third were away
before they knew what had come upon them as their focus was on their prize. The fourth barely had
time to look in his direction before his arrow plunged into its chest and through its heart due to his
silent footsteps giving no indication until he was almost upon it.

He yanked the animals off the young girl who lay on the ground beneath them aware her lungs were
fighting to keep her alive with shallow breaths.

He was amazed this girl was still alive, but looking at her blood soaked clothes and the pile of twigs
she appeared to be trying to start a fire with, it was not likely she would survive the night if left here.

"You are Skaikru." he said, trying to get her to open her eyes.

Clarke coughed up blood and pain reignited all her senses, sending fire to the very tips of her fingers.

"Wolves..." she groaned.

"They are gone. Where are your people?" the young man asked, leaning over Clarke.

Clarke had to fight to reopen her eyes but when she did she saw a blurry figure above her. She
squinted to try to get the blood out of her eyes because she couldn't lift either of her arms. Through
the blurry haze she saw dark hair and whispered a name. He leaned in closer and when she saw them she managed to force one of her hands off the ground a couple inches. Green eyes. She knew those eyes.

"Lexa..." she pleaded, trying to sit up but falling back to the ground and closing her eyes once again and whispering "Ai gonplei ste odon."

"I've been called a lot of things, but never that one." He answered to the girl who laid still on the ground. "I think we should be on our way." he stated, scooping his arms under Clarke and lifting her from the ground.

Clarke remained unmoving for the trip and when the young man entered the very small clearing in front of his cabin he felt relief wash over him, his arms straining with Clarke remaining motionless. The girls breathing was staggered and he was forced to jog with her in his arms to get her to shelter.

He slid the latch with great difficulty and carried Clarke over to single bed in the corner. Embers remained lit in the fireplace and he quickly threw some wood on it to reignite the fire and heat up the small home.

He turned his focus on the blonde and moved over to her, stripping the torn and blood soaked garments from the girl. He had never seen anything like it. Her arms and legs were victim to countless puncture wounds and cuts from the teeth of the wolves. How she could lay there, still drawing breath after having lost so much blood amazed him, let alone the trauma she suffered.

"Yu gonplei nou ste odon" he said, placing his hand over hers, saying it confidently to provoke her spirit into fighting any chance of giving up.

He got up quickly and scooped a bucket of water from a large basin, carrying it back to the bed and placing it floor. He next rushed to the metal chest at the end of his bed, unlocked it and flipped the lid open, he reached in and pulled out a couple bundles of cloth and a pile red seaweed-like plant, placing them on the end of the bed.

"Now we will see what we can do about all this" he sighed, taking a look at the girl. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to get rid of those to help you." referring to the clothes she wore. They were shredded to pieces and was certain she would not want them if she was by some miracle able to survive the next few days. He could find her new clothes.

Once her clothes were removed, the true extent of the damage was clear. The wolves had been at her for quite some time and this time of the year, they are more aggressive thanks to the colder weather approaching. How she was alive, was anyone's guess. He readied the poultice then wiped her skin clean of the crimson that covered almost every inch of skin she has.

After two hours of work, The young man fell back in one of his two chairs. He was exhausted but he would never complain. Not in front of someone who was in a fight for their life. She was nearly covered from head to toe in fresh cloth in order to keep each poultice in place. He would certainly need more.

"I've done what I can. It is your job to do the rest Skai-gada". Looking at her with concerned eyes regarding her continued shallow breaths. He got up and retrieved one of the blankets he had and laid it over her body.

Having had enough excitement for one night, he flipped the latch on his door and braced it with a stout piece of timber. He grabbed another blanket and laid it on the floor a few feet from the fireplace. He threw another log on the fire to make sure the cabin stayed hot then stole a look at the at
the nearly dead girl in his bed, wondering just before he fell asleep if she would be strong enough to make it through the night.

"Reshop" - Goodnight

"Ai gonplei steodon." - My fight is over.

"Yu gonplei nou ste odon" - Your fight is not over.

"Skai-gada" - Sky-girl

Chapter End Notes

Question time!

Let me know what you think about the Clarke situation. Was it too dark? Was it just enough?
Titus stepped from the lift and turned in the direction of Lexa's quarters. He decided he would ask Lexa her plans and only press her for details if he believed that she was keeping him in the dark.

Unsurprisingly, the door opened and he saw Deni step through the door holding an empty tray, she slid past him, mumbling a greeting but expecting no response in return. She didn't even make eye contact. His gaze followed her down the hall to the lift where she managed to jump in before the doors closed and move downward in the direction toward the kitchen. His attention returned to the reason he was in front of Lexa's door.

"Heda."

"Come in, Titus." was the confident voice from the other side of the door.

Entering the room, Titus saw her getting prepared for the meeting with the ambassadors and how bowed his head, acknowledging her.

"The meeting isn't for another two hours Titus."

"I know. I just wish to be as prepared as possible for what to expect from the ambassadors."

Lexa had begun to walk around her room now, gathering some papers and placing them on her desk next to a small plate of dried meat. She did not pay much attention to the arrival of Titus but this was not unusual, as when Lexa was focused on a task she would always work it through to completion.

"I have no time for games. "Ron ai ridyo op" (Speak True), Lexa sighed in irritation.

"I am wondering why Heda has summoned the ambassadors again."

"I summoned them because I wish to inform them of what my plans are in regard to Skaikru." she stated simply, continuing to move about her room, walking over to a shelf and removing small pieces of parchment and taking them to her desk.
Titus smiled. War focused the commander and he was pleased to see that her focus was on the more important affairs of her people. Lexa continued,

"I am going to invite the leaders of Skaikru to Polis." Lexa said matter-of-factly, taking a seat in her chair. Titus' eyes opened wide and his mouth fell slightly agape.

"Heda," Titus said, displeased. "Skaikru are a threat. Their ways are too different from our own. They will always been a threat."

"If they get to know our people and see our ways, we might be able to find peace, Titus."

"They have been killing out people since they arrived."

Lexa sat silently in her chair and picked up some sharpened coal. Her attention on one of the small pieces of parchment. She expected Titus to be frustrated.

"My plan is to prevent any future casualties on both sides of this conflict."

"How could inviting them here stop those in their clan who want war? They have no real leadership. Not since Klark abandoned her people."

Upon hearing that name, Lexa's head rose from her activity with the parchment.

"Skaikru value survival above all else and we would have do no different in their place. As for leadership, I believe that Marcus kom Skaikru will be the one to lead his people."

"What if Wanheda returns and seeks revenge for her people for what you did to her?" Titus questioned.

The stick of coal in her hand snapped and Titus wanted to step back as a reflex. It was his responsibility to make sure that Heda focused on her responsibilities and he was determined to make sure she saw all angles and he stood fast.

Taking a couple calming breaths, "Then I will deal with that if or when it becomes something I must."

Titus felt comfort in his chest. He could tell she had thought about the possibility and he had expected her to react much with much more anger than the snapping of her writing tool.

"Would you like me to arrange for your message to be delivered to Skaikru?"

"No. I have not finalized my decision about the message I wish to send but I will decide after I speak to the ambassadors. Thank you, Titus."

"Heda."

Lexa lifted her hand in dismissal and Titus turned and left the room after a slight bow. In her other hand, the coal she was using was now in a few pieces. She relaxed her grip and the remnants fell on to the table top.

She took the sharpest out of the pile and quickly finished her writing. Content that she was done, she rolled it up and tied a small string around it tightly to prevent it from unrolling. She reached over to the plate of dried meat and snatched the largest piece. Taking the meat and the rolled up parchment she walked out on her balcony and enjoyed the way the morning sun washed over her. She decided that barring any interruptions, she would spend the rest of the morning before her meeting in
meditation out in the fresh air.

~

"O?" Bellamy asked in a quiet and concerned voice.

"Oooooowww..." she groaned in reply, lifting her hand to her skull which was currently throbbing in pain. She felt herself lying on a cold floor and her body ached all over. Of the group, she was the last to wake up and they had all been concerned that she was hit much harder than they were. "Bel?"

"We're all right here." he assured her.

They all watched Octavia right herself from the laying position she was in moments ago and pressed her palm over her eye in reflex to the pain. That is when she noticed the chain attached to her wrist.

"What. Where are we?" She whispered.

"We are in Tondc." Lincoln offered. "The scouts brought us here."

"What do they want?"

"We don't know. We haven't talked to anyone since we woke up in here." Bellamy stated.

Yanking on the chain attached to her wrist she quipped, "I guess we aren't guests."

Through the bars, they listened as a new voice entered the conversation. All their eyes watched a familiar face walk from one side of their barred cell to the door, accompanied by two large guards.

"You all should be dead, Octavia kom Skaikru. If not for the Commander's protection you would have been killed in the forest before you knew you were being watched." It was not lost on Lincoln that she had been staring at him during the entirety of her comment.

"Indra, please." Octavia pleaded.

"Shof op." Indra glared at the young girl, forcing her to choke on her plea. "As for you, natrona?" her glare turning into a smirk as she looked at Lincoln, "You should not have led these people into our forest. The commander made clear what was to happen to you should you return."

Lincoln looked at Octavia who was now looking back and forth between her former Fos and her love.

Indra looked to the guards that had accompanied her and waved her hand in Lincoln's direction. "Sis em op."(Take him).

"Indra!" Octavia shouted, but it fell on deaf ears. "Please..."

The two guards moved to Lincoln and one stuck him in the jaw with his fist. Lincoln did not fall which drew a grunt from the guard who threw two more punches which forced Lincoln to the stone floor with a grunt. Octavia could see blood beginning to pool where his head lay on the ground and it drew a helpless whimper from her.

The second guard had released the lock from the wall and wrapped Lincoln's chain around his
forearm. After being sure there would be no resistance from Lincoln, the guard who inflicted the damage to Lincoln's face yanked him off the ground and dragged him out of the cell.

Bellamy and Monty had been silent the entire time and after Indra left with the guards and Lincoln in tow, they glanced at Octavia who stared at the door to the room with an angry glare.

"The commander doesn't want us dead?" Monty asked.

"Maybe they want to ransom us." Bellamy suggested.

"We have to get out of here and save Lincoln." Octavia stated. It wasn't a suggestion.

Bellamy lifted his arm with the chain attached. "How are we going to get out of here, O?"

"We break our way out. She said it. They won't kill us because Lexa won't let them." Octavia rose to her feet but staggered slightly when her head began to spin.

"You need to rest, O." Bellamy declared but he could see his suggestion would do no good. Octavia had begun to inspect the chain that was attached to the wall.

"I'll rest when Lincoln is back safe at Camp Jaha." she replied.

Monty coughed, "Maybe this will help?"

The Blake siblings both turned to look at Monty who had a smile on his face as he slid a small knife down his sleeve and caught it in his hand. Octavia sighed.

"They weren't as thorough as they could have been." he smiled and threw the blade in Octavia's direction.

"That's great, but even if we get out of here, where are we going to go and how long do you think it would be before their scouts find us again? We can't make it back to Camp Jaha before they would find us and you heard Indra. They can't kill us." Octavia leaned back against the wall behind her.

"Besides I'm not leaving here without Lincoln," her attention turned to the Indra walked through and she began to yell, "And if they kill Lincoln, they are going to have to kill me! You hear me? You'll have to kill me!"

~~~

"Gyon op gon Heda!"(Rise for your Commander!) Titus called out from his place next to the Lexa's throne which signalled for all of the people in the room to stand. As they rose, they turned their heads in the direction of the large wooden doors that swung upon She chose not to wear her armour or her paint but kept one of her swords on her hip and her favourite wooden-handled dagger on the other.

Lexa walked straight forward in her room exuding greater confidence with each step she took forward, staring at her throne ahead of her and not at the people in the room who stared at her as she walked in. Steps up the dais and moving in front of her throne she turned and nodded at the ambassadors, taking her seat in the ornate wooden chair.

"Beja, set Daun."(Please, sit down.) Titus spoke again.
Lexa took a moment for them all to take their seats and after they appeared comfortable, she addressed them. "Ambassadors, I thank you for joining me on such short notice." Their eyes all lifting to the thrones owner.

"As you know, Maun-de has fallen and Skaikru has returned to their camp. I've brought you all here to inform you of my plan for their people."

Lexa heard some whispers but allowed a moment for them to end.

"With their medical technology and knowing they have worked to help save our people from being Reapers, I believe they would further be useful as allies for all clans. I need not remind everyone that they were able to destroy our greatest enemy."

The Sankru member stood and Lexa nodded at him to speak.

"The people within Maun-de may be dead, but their technology must not have been destroyed. With Skaikru being more like maunon than us, do they not threaten us with the possibility of taking it over?"

Lexa saw a chorus of nods from other ambassadors and smiled.

"I will be inviting the leaders of Skaikru to Polis to discuss terms for another alliance. Each of you will have an opportunity to speak to them and address your concerns."

Seeing Tenin kom Sankru still standing, she questioned asked, "You have more concerns?"

"Many of us..." Tenin looked around at the other ambassadors then back to Lexa, "...have a hard time believing that, Wanheda, wishes to renegotiate for peace so quickly after what happened at Maun-de."

Lexa leaned her elbow on the arm of the throne, and rested her chin on her hand. "You have a question to be answered or do you just want to hear yourself speak, Ambassador?" she asked impatiently.

"What we are all likely wondering is if Skaikru declares war upon our people, who is to stop them from entering Maun-de and resuming the activities of Maunon?"

"This is precisely the reason I wish to invite their leaders here to Polis and discuss a peace between our people. I'm aware that Skaikru is a dangerous enemy, and I am sure they would make far better allies than they would enemies." she replied but noticed he had not taken his seat but not resumed speaking.

"I will assume with your declaration that you have in mind the concerns of your fellow Ambassadors, that you have more to say?" Lexa lifted her head from her hand, crossed her legs and leaned back in her chair.

Tenin seemed a little hesitant but he had to finish what he started. "As a condition of your negotiation with them, they must agree to never take possession of Maun-de."

Lexa's eyebrows raised and her head tilted slightly.

Titus spoke authoritatively, "You do NOT dictate to Heda terms and conditions of treaties that..."

Raising her hand informing Titus to stop speaking, Lexa grins at Tenin and rises from her throne, her hand tapping the hilt of her sword. She wanders down the dais and moves slowly forward as if
pondering his words carefully. Tap. Tenin uncomfortably sat back down unable to even blink as his eyes fell to her finger on her sword. Tap.

"I thank the ambassador of Sankru for his suggestion. When my invitation arrives at the Skaikru camp it will include the condition for peace will be dependent on their guarantee they will not seek to reside in Maun-de, nor attempt to take weapons from it."

"We. We only ask it be considered, Heda." he stammered, turning his gaze to Titus and continuing "I meant no offence." He bowed his head and remained that way.

Lexa spoke again. "They will be invited to arrive in one weeks time. If you have further concerns, feel free to bring them to my attention. I am willing to hear concerns and take them under advisement when discussing the terms with Skaikru."

One of the two large doors into the room opened and a messenger slid in and stood waiting without a sound. Lexa looked back at Titus with a questioning look but was met with an unknowing response.

Having played with an ambassador and informing them of her intentions, she turned back to them all and brought the meeting to a close. "Unless urgency requires it, I will see you all here in one weeks time."

She approached the young man and he raised his hand to give her the letter.

"From Tonde, Heda." he stated.

"Mochof." she said, and dismissed him.

Looking at the letter, she decided to take it somewhere a little less public and dismissed the messenger from the throne room. After a small nod, the messenger disappeared back through the door.

The sound of the ambassadors and their attendants voices began to fill the room. She had no interest in remaining in the room any longer as new concerns had been presented to her in the form of a letter. Lexa scanned the room for Titus and noticed he was held up by some ambassadors and seemed to be hearing their concerns. She decided she would speak to him later and leaned forward, speaking to a guard.

"Inform Titus I wish to discuss matters with him this evening. He may come to my quarters after he has eaten his dinner."

"Sha, Heda." the guard nodded and moved in Titus' direction informing him of Lexa's order. He glanced to where she stood moments then around the room but could see Lexa was no longer in the room.

"Titus, as I was saying..." the ambassador of Delfikru continued.

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Lexa entered her room with the letter in her hand and walked straight over to the couch, twisting as she got to the edge and falling back on the comfortable cushions.

She was happy with how the meeting with the ambassadors went and nothing surprised her, though the outburst by the member of Sankru would not be permitted again. Titus will likely discuss the
matter with the ambassador personally, allowing Lexa to occupy her time with more important issues.

Opening the letter, she began to read Indra's handwriting.

_Heda. I am informing you that Klark kom Skaikru has evaded her scouts. Reko sustained injuries in his pursuit of Klark and Koma was force to bring his Seken to Tondc for a healer. He has returned to try to track her but believes she has learned how to hide her tracks well enough that she will likely not be followed._

_I have sent trackers in many directions and they will find her._

'So Klark evaded her trackers. Impressive, Klark.' she thought to herself.

A small smile rolled across her lips thinking about how Klark had somehow eluded a Fos and his Seken. She taught Klark how to move in the forest so she could better conceal herself from being tracked. She was inwardly proud of how quickly the blonde picked up the skill she showed her. Especially seeing as how she could evade seasoned trackers.

Lexa's pride melted away when it morphed into concern. Especially when her imagination thought of Klark in the forest by herself. She may be capable enough to elude some trackers, but she had never spent time in the forest alone and the longer she remains there, the greater danger she puts herself in. She would have to order more trackers into the Trikru forests to find Klark.

_Our scouting parties have found a Skaikru group near a small river and they have been brought to Tondc for questing. Among the group is Linkon. The Skaikru will remain our prisoners until you send word regarding what we are to do with them. The natrona will be executed in a day's time for his aiding of Skaikru through our lands._

- _Indra_

Lexa sat up on the couch and she dropped the letter. If they harmed or injured the Skaikru prisoners, the likelihood of peace with Skaikru drastically decreased. Having Linkon executed would likely lead to further conflict. Dropping her face into her hands, she tried to hide her frustration. "Why must everything be so difficult?" she sighed into her palms trying to decide what to do until a voice broke the silence.

"Heda".

"Titus." Lexa said, lifting her head rising from her couch as he entered the room.

"You wished to see me?" he asked.

"I had planned on your visit coming later, but now is as good a time as any. Tell the stables to prepare horses. We are going to Tondc."

"Heda?"

"Yes, I am. Now go and prepare. I imagine three, possibly four days will be a suitable amount of time for the trip." Lexa had been moving around the room sorting things and throwing them into bags.

Titus watched her in the flurry of movement and had no idea what was going on.

"We are leaving in thirty minutes Titus." Lexa stopped and addressed him. "We are going to Tondc,
and then you are going to the Skaikru camp. Prepare your things. I will tell you what needs to be done when we reach Tondc."

Titus was completely unaware of what was happening but he was certain it had something to do with the letter than sat on the floor next to the couch Lexa was seated in moments ago. Before she had the change to raise her voice, Titus turned and left her room. As he made his way to his quarters he told a messenger to prepare horses for the journey to Tondc.

Titus found himself both confused and frustrated while he packed his belongings for the journey. Confusion in what was happening in Tondc that required Heda's personal attention and frustration in why he was going to go to the Skaikru camp. He did not trust them and would be happy had they all been killed the day they landed in their metal ship.

Moments after they had all mounted their horses, Lexa ordered them off and kept a stiff pace through the entirety of their ride. She rode with purpose and Titus wished he knew the reason for such a pace. He knew better than to try to ask, his only focus to keep up which was difficult. Lexa rode the horse as though it were the wind itself.
Race to Tondc

Chapter Summary

Lexa hurries to Tondc to prevent a death that could derail any hope for peace with Skaikru.

Chapter Notes

Sunday Update day!

I'd like to welcome new readers to the story and thank everyone who is giving my revision a chance to capture their attention once again.

Here is the revised chapter 10. I hope you all enjoy it.
The next update will be posted on the 18th.

I'd like to thank MAO_32 and Ciastlco again for the insightful comments regarding this fanfic. It certainly gave me a lot to consider in regard to this story. Thank you!

The ground was a littered landscape of yellow and red leaves that were fresh from falling off the forest that surrounded her. The ground was uneven but she urged her horse forward at a breakneck speed, it's hooves keeping a of the horse that carried Lexa toward Tondc. Her memory knew each and every root that reached from the dirt which allowed her to keep herself at her pace and avoid any unwanted entanglements.

Periodically she glanced behind herself and while her guards were able to keep a somewhat steady pace with her, Titus struggled to keep up and had fallen back. His duties in Polis as Flamekeeper kept him busy and she was certain he was not accustomed to riding at such a sustained pace.

She used this time of her ride to Tondc to make some decisions about what message she would send with Titus after she sent him to offer her invitation to Polis. She was certain Titus would deliver her message but nothing more.

Lexa needed them to understand she was genuinely interested in peace and although Indra and Marcus seemed to have developed respect for one another, it was Abby that was her concern. Abby would be the key to peace but it would be very difficult to convince her with either Titus or Indra that she wanted peace.

If she wanted her words to have weight, it couldn't come from anyone else. It would have to come from her. She was going to Camp Jaha.

Quickly, Lexa ducked her head under a low hanging branch and glanced back to see her guards expertly follow her action. Titus managed as well, but with much less precision. Lexa grinned and focused her eyes back to the path ahead. She was enjoying this ride and as she felt the wind in her hair, she felt free in the moment and cleared her mind of the business that awaited her in Tondc.
She looked up through the half-filled trees and the amber sky above was signalling the coming end to another day and her mind wandered as it often did when she looked out over Polis from her balcony. 'I wonder if Klark is looking at the same sky?' she wondered.

Lexa hoped that Clarke was safe. The woods can be dangerous this time of year and she frowned at the knowledge that her being out there, alone, was as a result of her actions. If anything happened to Clarke, she wasn't sure what she would do if she never got to look into what she knew to be perfect blue eyes that could pierce her soul in ways that Costia never could.

Lexa could feel the surge of emotion build in her chest. She had built a wall around her heart for the memory that was Costia, swearing to heed Titus' teachings that "Love is weakness" and never allow it to rule her again. He was never more proud of his star pupil when she swore to make her Kongeda her only focus, swearing off any other interests that did not pertain to those of her people.

At the time, she meant it.

That was before the arrival of the blonde-haired Skaikru girl with the piercingly blue eyes that refused to remain behind the walls she tried to build around her heart, breaking them down moments after she erected them. Lexa smiled, knowing that Clarke was unaware of how much of her she possessed in such a small amount of time and it still caused concern for Lexa.

It was easy for her to get swept up in Clarke's passion. She was so certain. So strong and the way Lexa always felt around her seemed to temper the conflict within her heart. What gave her the ambition to confess her feelings in her tent the day she confessed she wanted Clarke was the promise of what they could have. Lexa wanted Klark consume her with that passion.

Lexa's horse turned left and followed the path, almost throwing Lexa from her saddle as her daydream had taken hold of her. Her guards called out at her but she composed herself quickly and waved off their concern, digging in harder and pushing them all to ride faster the rest of the way.

Lexa wasn't aware, but the sun had almost completely set and stars had begun to make their appearance in the sky above. Clarke had that way with her, taking over of her thoughts until she felt herself losing control and forcing herself to pull back from the precipice that was surrendering completely.

Lexa frowned at herself. If she didn't focus, she might not even make it to Tondc in one piece. She had to stop thinking about Klark, but no matter what she tried, the Skai-gada was with her, for better or worse. When she thought about the last time she saw Clarke, she hoped it wouldn't be the latter. She just wasn't sure how to make that happen.

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Lincoln stood as straight as he could, his tired and battered body was littered with bruises. He remembers being dragged from the cell in front of his friends and Octavia, but the time between being hit by the men Indra ordered to take him from the cell and his wrists bound above his head to the large wooden pole was missing.

He glanced around the village and was met with varied looks from onlookers. Some were of hatred from people who believed he was the traitor who aided in the death of Anya and 300 of their brothers and sisters. The others of were of concern for the man they had come to know as a caring
friend and fellow Trikru warrior, unwilling to believe the lies suggested by his accusers. It did not
matter what any of them believed as their Heda had declared him Natrona.

Fires had been lit to illuminate the area around Lincoln, giving him a menacing look which was only
accentuated by his tattoos and defiant glare. He hadn't spoken a word since he woke up, only
observed those around him. Numbers had begun to grow in the vicinity and he knew what was
coming. He tilted his chin upward and took in a deep breath as murmurs began to spill from the
onlookers.

"Traitor."

"Natrona."

"Betrayer."

He understood the silence from those who he knew believed he was innocent of what he had been
accused of. Had they voiced support for him, they would likely be the subject of similar words and
actions for supporting his actions.

Closing his eyes, he could see a dark haired, green eyed girl staring back at him. She showed no fear
when she walked from that metal drop ship that came crashing down to the Earth. He didn't know
her story, he only saw a fearless girl who demanded respect from Trikru warriors when she fearlessly
brought Nyko before Indra and demanded he be released.

The thought that she would be in a cell while he would receive his punishment for aiding Skaikru
evade Trikru scouts filled him with sorrow. He wished for one more moment of their lips touching,
her hands running over his chest, pressing her body against his with a want he had never known until
this girl, a want that could only be matched by his own for her.

His fantasy was interrupted by the sound of boots walking toward him with purpose. He opened his
eyes and saw Indra walking with intent toward him, flanked by two of her warriors.

"I'm awed someone as weak as you would be awake, natrona." Indra spat out the words and winced
in disgust as she looked at him.

Lincoln remained standing and kept his gaze on Indra, remaining quiet as she spoke.

"Linkon, natrona!" Indra declared loudly so that the those who gathered could hear her proclamation.
"You are guilty of aiding an enemy of Trikru and being complicit in the death of 300 of those who
were once your people."

The words hit him almost as hard as the physical punches from the guards earlier in the day. He felt
remorse for what happened to his people, but they refused to even contemplate the possibility that the
flares which burned one of their villages could have been an accident. He was one of the few who
believed that the flares fired from the strangers were not meant as an attack but that didn't matter
anymore. Not as he waited for his punishment for his actions from that day and beyond.

"Tomorrow at sunrise you will face the consequences for betraying your people and pay the blood
debt you owe to all Trikru!" Indra always glared daggers but he was certain that the glare she offered
now would bring out the fear of a Pauna. "Your death will serve as an example to those who
willingly turn on their own and refuse to respect the generosity of the Commander."

He could see her hand on the hilt of her sword, her knuckles white with rage from the pressure she
squeezed onto it. She wanted nothing more than to plunge her sword into his chest now and be done
with the entire affair but there were protocols. Her rage was only tempered by laws created by the
Indra walked forward, not removing her stare from his eyes. Not even to blink. She leaned in and with a scowl on her face whispered, "She will know you died with honour."

Lincoln's expression changed for the first time and it turned into one of shock then immediately into sadness. His eyes no longer looked into Indra's, instead they fell to the ground as his head fell forward.

Lincoln had seen a future with Octavia. She was the first who had ever been able to draw that vision from his heart and it fed his mind with possibilities of what that future could contain. Octavia would always have a warriors heart, but that had become her way of trying to find her own path.

He knew Octavia was so, so much more.

Lifting his head he looked back at Indra and nodded, his vision moved in the direction of where he knew Octavia was being held.

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Inside their cell, Bellamy, Octavia and Monty could only partially hear Indra through the barred windows that faced the center of town due to the jeers that accompanied her words.

"...blood debt," Octavia winced, understanding what was to come. "...your death," Octavia forcefully squeezed her eyes closed, feeling a knot forming in her chest and futilely attempted to fight back the tears that now ran down her cheeks.

"O. We'll find a way out of this." Bellamy suggested weakly. We haven't made radio contact with Raven so they know by now something has happened. They will come for us. At the very least we need to get word to them."

"Yeah? And how do you suggest we do that, Bell?" Her sadness was quickly replaced by anger, an anger she aimed at Bellamy with her words. "We use Monty’s little knife? Then what? You run out and save Lincoln? You get us all out of here with hundreds of Trikru to chase after us? Tell me, Bellamy, How do we save everyone?"

Bellamy didn't reply, he just looked at his little sister, sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs and her face pressed into knees. He knew he had to do something but he couldn't figure out what.

"Give me the knife." Bellamy said, looking at Monty.

"You know this won't do much." Monty replied, throwing the small blade over at Bellamy's feet so he could drag it back to himself.

"It could get us out of here, maybe cause a distraction." Bellamy suggested, trying to rally courage from his fellow prisoners.

"Octavia knows these people better than we do. If she thinks we don't stand a chance, she is probably right. I don't want to end up with the same..." Monty gulped down his words and looked at Octavia apologetically.
"Look." Bellamy stated. "They were told not to kill us by the Commander herself, so that means if we can get away, we can at least try to get back home. We just have to get horses or move quickly."

"If we kill one of them trying to get away, we are as good as dead." Octavia mumbled. She decided to take what solace she could from Indra's speech to suggest Lincoln still had a chance to survive this for at least the next ten hours. "As for horses? You've never ridden one. You and Monty would be caught before you could figure out how to get up in the saddle."

"I'm the only one trying to come up with something to save your grounder boyfriend." Bellamy said, upset that the two in the room seemed to have given up without trying.

Octavia slowly raised her head and her red-rimmed eyes were filled with loathing. "Maybe if Clarke was here she could pull our assed out of another fire. Oh wait, you let her just fucking walk away and get us in this mess in the first place. Now she is going to get Lincoln killed!"

"That isn't fair, O."

"I was there. I was there JUST like you were."

"Not like I was." Bellamy closed his eyes and took a shaky breath in. "Not like she was."

Bellamy turned his face from Monty and Octavia. He tried to steady his breathing and fought to keep the memory that haunted him away.

His memory of her holding the gun, pointing it at Dante Wallace and the pained look on her face as her eyes filled with tears. Something changed in that moment with Clarke when she pulled that trigger. Her face became resolute and something took over the girl they all knew.

He may have helped her pull the lever that killed the residents of Mount Weather, but he believed he was the one who let her sacrifice what was left of herself in that moment. She understood better than he did what needed to be done and he let her carry that weight and by the time he was able to help her, it was too late.

The group of Skaikru didn't speak another word for the next couple hours and nightfall had clearly settled on Tondc. They all shivered due to the cold air that rolled in through broken windows and settled on the ground around them and into their bones.

None of them spoke after their verbal altercation earlier, and Bellamy realized using the small knife to try to gain freedom was a truly futile endeavour as Octavia reasoned when Monty first informed them of the blade.

Monty perked up from his spot on the floor and strained to hear something he thought he heard through the broken window above him. In moments, the silent night was interrupted with the sound of horses and people talking in low tones.

"Do you hear that?" Monty asked.

"Hear what?" Bellamy started but was quickly shushed by Octavia.

"There is someone outside." Monty whispered.

"Probably just a guard change" Octavia suggested, placing her head on her hands like a pillow and shifting to get comfortable as she lay on her side.

"Skaikru?" Bellamy hoped aloud, sitting up.
"They are speaking grounder. I don't understand. The horses have stopped, though. I think they are all on the ground now." Monty said. He was closest to the window where the voices were coming from. He glanced at Octavia and wished he could trade places.

In moments, keys could be heard and the door slowly opened. A hooded figure walked into the room and glanced at the three who were staring straight at the visitor. Everyone took in a slight breath when the figure pulled back her hood and the Commander of the twelve clans was looking at them and appeared to be deciding what to do with them.

"Breik eim ou." (Release them). Lexa ordered the guard who stood at the door.

"Sha, Heda." he nodded, then proceeded to unlock and open the large metal door. He entered and shot a glare at each of the Skaikru prisoners to make them aware he was ready to incapacitate them if they tried anything while he unlocked the braces on each of their wrists.

For a moment, they all simply watched each other but it was Lexa that broke the silence.

"Are there more Skaikru in my forests?"

"We wouldn't tell you if there were." Bellamy challenged.

"It would make things easier if you told me. It could prevent more of your people from ending up in a cell like this. Or worse." she suggested.

"Where is Lincoln?" Octavia demanded of her.

"Linkon is being taken care of." Lexa answered, but gave very few details which only stoked the fire in Octavia.

"If anything happens to Lincoln, I swear..."

"Let me save you from yourself, Oktavia kom Skaikru. You are alive now because of my order and if you finish that thought aloud, the law states that a threat to kill a Commander is subject to the penalty of death."

Octavia scowled at Lexa but didn't finish her threat.

"It is unfortunate you felt the need to sneak through the forests. I assume you were out in search of Klark?"

"We wouldn't have had to if you didn't abandon her and all our people at Mount Weather." Bellamy said with bite in his tone.

"It helps no one to dwell on the past, and that's not why I am here. You are all being released to go back to your people. You may leave tonight but I suggest leaving tomorrow and you will be given horses to ride as well as a place to sleep that offers much more comfort than a prison cell floor."

"Can we get some food?" Monty asked in an almost whisper which caused Lexa to have to fight back a small smile.

"You will be given food and new clothes if you wish it." Lexa confirmed "Everything you were found with at the river except for your weapons are awaiting you in a house you can get rest in before the morning."

She looked directly at Bellamy and stated "You may keep your knife if you feel more comfortable
with it but I warn you that my protection can't save you if you choose to use it."

Lexa turned and walked over to the guard who freed the three and instructed him to take them to the house that had been prepared for them. He bowed and instructed the three to follow him.

Octavia was the first out of the make-shift prison and she looked at the spot where Lincoln had been chained to. She was met with conflicting emotions. The first wanted to drop her to her knees and release a torrent of tears in fear she would never hold him in her arms again. The other was that Lincoln was waiting for them in the house they were being escorted to and she could wrap her arms around her and feel the security of his around her.

Lexa watched Octavia with understanding.

"Linkon is with a fisa." she said, watching relief take over Octavia's expression. "Once he is able, he will join you." Lexa said to Octavia.

"I want to see him." Octavia stated.

"He said the same about you. I am sure he will not be long and you can enjoy a dinner together."

Both Monty and Bellamy looked curiously at Lexa. They have gone from prisoners to guests in mere moments and were being set free. Even Lincoln was a recipient of her generosity.

"Why are you letting us go?" Bellamy asked.

Lexa didn't answer his question which frustrated him, but he was certain she would want something for her troubles. For the Commander to travel to Tonde and deal with the matter herself? Bellamy couldn't reason why but it didn't stop his mind from trying to work it out.

They left Lexa to follow the guard who was charged with taking them to their quarters. He opened the door to a small home and they walked in.

Octavia shrieked with worry and excitement as her eyes found the only thing she hoped to see. Rushing to stand beside Lincoln who laid on one of the beds, he smiling through the bruises and cuts on his face. She wanted to press her lips to his but decided against it. She put her hand in his and squeezed lightly letting him know they are going to be ok.

Monty and Bellamy saw all their possessions on the single table in the room along with various dried meats, bread, and jugs that they quickly discovered contained water after quickly filling cups and consuming them.

Monty cleared his throat while he looked at Bellamy. He then glanced at Octavia. Bellamy smiled at him with a knowing nod, then glanced at Octavia himself. She had run directly to Lincoln, ignoring the food and the drink on the table. It was clear she cared for him and although he didn't trust any grounder, Lincoln gained some respect from Bellamy on this day. He had no idea the risk he was willing to take in helping them find Clarke.

He filled up a glass with water, he carried it over to Octavia.

"Drink, O." he said.

She looked up and nodded at him as she took the cup, then a few sips. "Thanks."

It was clear her focus wasn't on her own wellbeing. Bellamy walked back over to the table and
grabbed a chair for her to sit in, rather than stand next to Lincoln. He then put some of the meat in a bowl and placed it on the table next to her. As he did, he noticed the cup he filled for her was empty and he filled it after grabbing the pitcher. He smiled when he realized the familiar feeling of taking care of his sister.

"Hey, guys?" Monty asked, trying to get their attention. Bellamy turned in his direction and Octavia did after a second more. "Should we let them know what is going on?"

Bellamy walked over and reached his hand out for the radio. After clicking the power on, he pressed and held the talk button.

"This is Bellamy. Raven, are you there?"

After a moment of silence, there was some static and a voice came back over the handset.

"Jesus, Bellamy. Where have you guys been? Is everything all right?"

It was Raven's voice over the radio and there was definite concern behind her words.

"We're ok. We ran into some trouble but are safe for the moment."

"For the moment? What the hell does that mean?"

"It means we are not in any danger right now. Are Abby and Marcus there?"

"No, but I will go get them. They are going to be pissed you guys haven't been using the radio."

"I'm using it now, Rae."

"I gave you the radios to keep in contact. Not to use when you felt it was convenient. What happened to you guys?"

"Rae. Abby and Kane?"

"Fine. Give me a couple minutes. I will radio when we are all here."

Monty was moving things around on the table and seemed to be looking for something.

"Everything there?" Bellamy asked as he picked up another piece of meat and popped it in his mouth and took a seat waiting to hear back from Raven.

"Everything but our second radio."

"Maybe it got broken at the river and they just left it there."

They both shrugged and went on eating the food sitting on the table as they waited.

"Bellamy?" a voice came through the handset. It was Abby.

"I'm here."

"What happened to all of you?" she asked.

Bellamy looked at everyone in the room and took a deep breath before explaining to Abby what had happened to them after leaving Camp Jaha.
In her residence across Tondc, Lexa sat in her chair with the other small radio handset on the table in front of her. She had listened to Bellamy tell his story to Abby and was impressed with how far they had gotten before being caught. She was less than pleased on their treatment but Indra had sworn that she had not treated them harshly. Though, for Indra she understood that could mean simply more bruises than cuts.

Lexa switched the power off on the radio. Her interest had been peaked with the knowledge that Lincoln had a way to track Clarke. She stood up from her chair she was sitting in and walked over to her bed to sleep for the night. As she crawled under the furs on her bed, the seed of a plan began to sprout in her mind. She yawned and stretched beneath her furs, tired from her ride to Tondc and fell asleep deciding her course of action in the morning before she left to the Skaikru camp.
Emerald Eyes

Chapter Summary

Clarke must accept the help of a stranger who reminds her of someone she wants to forget.

Chapter Notes

Sunday update!

It is a late one but here it is, Chapter 11!

Thanks to everyone for their feedback and I'm glad so many have stuck with and been enjoying my story!

As always, the next update will be on the 25th(Sunday). See you all next week! :)

She felt herself squeezing her eyes tightly together and trying to anchor her attention to the world around her, pulling herself from the blackness of sleep. Inside her head she became acutely aware feel a rhythmic throbbing which matched the similar chorus throughout her body. *At least I am not dead*, she joked to herself.

After a few minutes of trying to convince her mind that the pain was manageable that she realized the comfort of the bed she was occupying. She was no longer outside, but she had no idea how she managed to make her way into such a comfortable place. Clarke began to retrace what had happened and after a moment her eyes shot wide in panic.

It was almost as if she could still feel the wolves eyes on her and the accompanying understanding that she was their prey.

Clarke tried to sit up and though her mind was willing, but her body met the attempt with resistance, only permitting her to lift her head with a stiff grunt from the exertion. Her reward for the effort was a renewed feeling of intense pain, stabbing up the right side of her body from her toes all the way to the tips of her hair. She wasn't sure how that was possible, but Clarke understood that the ground was full of surprises - both kinds.

Her head fell back on the pillow beneath her and she closed her eyes again. This time it was half in frustration and the other half in trying to block out the pain as she did moments ago. This time she tried to focus on things that were around her.

She took in a deep breath and the first thing she focused on was the smell in the room. The smell of a fire that was crackling away in the building she was in. The occasional pop from the wood and how warm it was suggested that wood had been placed in the fire recently. Clarke deduced someone was here, or had been here recently. Likely it was the person who saved her from what she had gotten herself into.
There was another smell that caught her attention. It was some type of stew that tickled her taste buds. When she came to that realization, her mouth watered and she unknowingly licked her parched lips with curiosity as to how it would taste. Clarke had been rationing her food and with the exertion of hiking for nearly two days, she was quickly understanding how famished she had become.

Clarke opened her eyes once more and rather than stand, she decided to turn her head slowly. At first, she felt stiffness in the joint, but no real pain other than the headache that reminded her in thumping intervals that it wasn't going anywhere.

The room wasn't brightly illuminated as the fire from the fireplace across the room was the only source of light. Clarke decided she liked it this way, not because the bright light would likely cause her head to throb to a greater degree, but it made the space feel warmer. After her eyes adjusted to the low level of light, she began to let them roam throughout the space as best she could from her laying position.

The first thing she realized is that it wasn't a very big house. She could see there was a small kitchen to the left of the fireplace that had a counter with various sized containers upon it. Some had lids, others seemed to have cutlery or other utensils related to cooking or eating. Not far from it sat a table with two chairs pushed beneath it.

What interested Clarke more was her bag that sat on top of the table along with what seemed to be all the items she had packed from the drop ship spread out around it. Her heart rate heightened when she tried to see her gun but she couldn't see the silver of the gun from her line of sight.

What fascinated her above all else was the wood frame and how almost every inch of the supporting frame had scrollwork etched in it. From what she could make out, it seemed like vines and flowers were running the length of the solid wood beams throughout the entire cabin.

Clarke realized everything about this place was perfect. The soft light from the hearth that gently lit the small space, the now distracting smell of the food which she did notice hanging near the fire, close enough to keep it warm but far enough to prevent it from burning (yet too far away from where she was for her liking), and the warm bed she currently resided in all combined to give her a sense of comfort she hadn't known in a very, very long time.

It wasn't long after Clarke awoke that the door to the cabin clicked and a lever shifted to unlock the door. As he walked into his cabin the man's eyes immediately glanced over the bundle of cut lumber in his arms, to look at the stranger that was laying in his bed, unmoving as she was when he left earlier.

He watched the rise and fall of the furs on her chest and felt comfort in knowing that she was doing well despite her condition. Her strong breathing was a good sign she was going to survive the injuries. Perhaps then he could find out what brought a single Skaikru girl into the woods by herself at night.

As he placed the wood on the ground next to the door, he turned to see Clarke stir in the bed. Stir referring to being able to turn her head slightly and look at the person making noise at the door. He could see panic registering in her crystal blue eyes. He chose to stand up and turn so she could have a look at him.

"You are awake." he stated, smiling at her condition.

As Clarke watched him, she tried to ascertain whether or not he was a danger. He had saved her life, but she knew nothing of him and her faith in the charity and honour of grounders was fractured to say the least.
He stood roughly six feet tall with dark brown hair that fell to his shoulders. It appeared he had a solid frame to Clarke, strong but not overpoweringly so. He was a young man, a little older but not by much she believed. His jaw-line was sharp, making the slight smirk he wore startlingly disarming to Clarke.

What held her attention most were the two green orbs that looks back into blue. She thought of Lexa, causing her to bite down in anger and her hands curling into fists under the furs. If she could, she would get up from the bed and walk out.

The young man cleared his throat causing Clarke to relax slightly and brought her back to the present.

"You've been sleeping for some time." He said. "I had to give you something for the pain."

"Thank... thank-you." Clarke croaked. Her throat was raw and it pained her to speak.

The man smiled and Clarke watched him make his way over to the kitchen and retrieve a cup. He filled it with water from a pitcher and looked at her for permission to approach her. Clarke nodded which gave cause for a smile on her host.

"I'm going to try to help you sit up." he stated quietly with a hit of an apology mixed in. "This might hurt."

"Ok" was all Clarke could say, awaiting the coming pain she knew would fill her body.

She felt his arm slide under her back beneath the furs and slowly and excruciatingly helped her sit upright and slide back against the headboard of the bed. After making sure she could sit up under her own power, she accepted the cup of water and sipped at it.

"What happened to... there were wolves." Clarke asked, his voice was shaking as she remembered.

He nodded at her.

"There were. They had managed to get you pinned down. You killed one, and I was lucky enough to hear the commotion from where I was. I managed to get rid of the others and hurried you here to try to stop your wounds from bleeding further. You've been asleep for nearly three days now."

"Three days?" Clarke's face gave clear indication of shock. "I can't stay here. I have to go."

"I think your body disagrees. You are recovering, but both your knee and ankle were swollen when I brought you back and any time I tried to touch the wound to clean it while you were awake, you threatened to, I believe the words were 'float me. '"

Clark groaned. It certainly sounded like something she would say. She glanced at her fur covering her leg and pulled it to the side with her usable arm. There were some bandages covering her as well as new clothing that the man had apparently changed her into. She had to fight to stop the spread of red colour from taking over her cheeks. When she couldn't reach the bandages to remove them so she looked at the young man before her.

"Could you?" she asked, slightly embarrassment.

He reached down and removed the bandages from her injured knee and ankle with very steady and delicate hands and when Clarke saw the various bruises and puncture wounds, she understood why it hurt so much.
Her knee was not as swollen as she thought it would be which was a relief, but the amount of bruising told her to be careful trying to put any weight on it. It would take time but she believed it would heal. Her ankle was another story. She remembered twisting it before she fell to the ground, then the horrifying feeling of teeth biting into the sinew in her ankle. At minimum it was broken, at worst she needed surgery to repair the damage that had been done to set the bone properly. The puncture wounds which littered her foot, the similar ones on her leg and on her arms were red but the man had done good work in preventing infection. She could see similar wounds on her shoulder and right arm. Clarke was feeling very thankful he arrived when he did.

He replaced the bandages that he took off with clean ones and once he and Clarke were both satisfied with how they looked, Clarke let all her weight lean back into the headboard again and sighed in frustration. After placing a small wooden table over her lap, he walked toward his small kitchen and said, "I'll make you some tea which will help you relax. In the mean time, I think you should try some of my stew."

He filled a bowl and returned to her side after a minute and placed the bowl on the small table. He handed her a spoon and for a moment, all she did was stare into the stew.

"I'd be dead if you didn't find me."

"Probably," he stated. "But many others would have given themselves to death long before I happened upon you."

Clarke didn't have the heart to tell him she had given up. She did let go and try escape. She wanted to be free from everything.

After a short time, her stomach growled in impatience at the stew that remained untouched in front of her. She dipped the spoon to taste it and before she knew it, the bowl was empty and she was licking the gravy off the spoon.

As she ate, her new friend had set a pot of water above a small stove, got himself a bowl of stew and sat down at the table so he could face the blonde stranger. He was happy she devoured the contents of the bowl he had just given her. She would regain her strength quickly with an appetite like that. All Clarke could think was she couldn't remember the last time she tasted food so good. It was even better than she imagination led her to believe.

"You know, there is more stew." he jokingly pointing to the pot that hung next to the fireplace. "You might try to chew next time."

"I'll be back to eating those in no time..." Clarke joked, her eyes looking at the silver-packaged ration packets that sat on the table next to her pack. ".so I will enjoy as much of this as I can."

He appreciated her compliment but wore a puzzled look on his face. "Those are food?"

"They taste, well, they don't really taste like anything but they have everything the body needs."

"How good food tastes is just as much a requirement as its quality."

Clarke laughed aloud, causing her chest to rise and fall a little too quickly, sending sharp pain through some of the wounds in her shoulder and arm. After a moment of calming herself her laughter turned to chuckling and a slight shake of her head. Her host watched her with curiosity while he retrieved her bowl to get the hungry girl more. Her eyes thanked him for the food as well as the moment of levity.

"You aren't the first person I've met who has said that." Clarke sighed and tilted her head back on the
wood behind it. As quickly as the moment of light-hearted joking lifted her mood, it dissipated just as fast.

"Then that person clearly has their head on right" he smiled, taking her bowl from the table in front of her and walking back over to the pot with the stew.

"I wouldn't say that." Clarke said in an almost whisper.

"Pardon?" he asked as he refilled her bowl and walked it back to her.

"Nothing. I just wanted to say thank-you. This is really good."

He smiled at Clarke as he gave her a second helping. He returned to his seat and continued to eat, watching Clarke as she played with her food. He wasn't sure what changed but whatever it could be, seemed to nearly drown the girl in sorrow.

They spent the next hour in silence, his eyes glanced at her from time to time, trying to decipher the puzzle that presented itself in the form of a blonde stranger who was clearly running from something but he left her to try to work through it.

After the young man cleared and cleaned the dishes they used, he stoked the fire and prepared the tea he promised Clarke earlier. She felt like she was being rude by not talking.

She sat silent and allowed him to place the steaming cup in front of her on the tray and he warned her that it was very hot. Clarke nodded her understanding and before blowing on it to cool it down, took in the smell of the spiced tea with a deep breath.

"You want to ask me a question." Clarke said, not opening her eyes as she sipped the hot drink.

"I do." he replied.

Clarke took a generous sip of the beverage and placed it on the table in front of her, opened her eyes and looked in his direction, waiting for it.

"Do you like the tea?"

Clarke was dumbfounded at the question as it was not what she expected. She wondered if perhaps he wanted to leave well enough alone. That her business like his, is their own and that was one quality about the grounders she liked. They could keep to themselves. Realizing she hadn't answered, she looked at him and smiled.

"I really like it."

She felt both a bit relieved and a bit frustrated. She owed him something for all he had done for her and answers were all she had to give but she was quite happy to not have to answer anything that would force her to share everything.

She looked down into the amber-coloured drink and could feel her body starting to get tired. It wasn't as hot as it was a minute ago and she was able to finish it as Levai finished cleaning up in the kitchen.

"My name is Clarke." she stated. She wasn't sure why she said it, but it was a small payment. A first of what she hoped would be many if she felt she could trust him. She wanted to trust him, but something held her back. She had a good idea of what it was, but she didn't want to speak her name. If she did, she would remember her.
"A pleasure to meet you, Clarke. I'm Levai." he smiled at her as he made his way from the kitchen to a large wooden chest at the foot of the bed.

Clarke hazily watched him withdraw a pillow and an old blanket out of it and tucked them under his arm. He then walked over to the door and placed a metal rod across the back of it, sliding it until it reached across both sides of the wood frame ending with a clicking sound Clarke assumed was a locking mechanism of some sort but her ability to focus had begun to wane.

"What do you say we get some sleep? Levai suggested, taking her empty cup and after making sure it was empty he placing it on the ground with the small wooden table she had been using.

"I'm afraid this might be a little uncomfortable for a minute, Clarke."

Clarke simply yawned and although she tried to help him slide her down under the furs, she felt like putty in his arms, unable to get her muscles to coordinate in any useful manner. It didn't even really hurt which confused her. It should have hurt. Clarke looked at Levai and it dawned on her that he must have put something in her tea to put her to sleep and although she wanted to protest, she could feel sleep trying to pull her into the darkness.

"Reshop, Clarke." he said as he pulled the furs back up over her, his green eyes watching her blue eyes close slowly with care, brushing away stray hair that had fallen over her face. Clarke lifted her good hand to his cheek, mumbling something about emeralds while a tear rolled down her cheek. He looked at her curiously and realized that any question he truly wanted to ask her would have been the wrong one. There seemed to be so much going on in her head that she was being tortured by, he hoped it would start heal along with her body in the coming days and weeks.

Levai laid down on his make-shift bed and just as he closed his eyes, finally feeling comfortable enough to sleep he could have sworn he heard Clarke mumble the words,

"Good night, Lexa."
Chapter Summary

Things become complicated when Lexa attempts to discuss peace with Skaikru and is informed that there is another player in the game that takes her by surprise.

Chapter Notes

Sunday update!

Everyone enjoy their weekend? Mine involved getting everything ready to go back to school! Busy, busy days!

I hope you all enjoy the chapter. If you read the original, or if you didn't, let me know what you think! I enjoy hearing from everyone. Thanks to everyone who has been kind enough to comment/kudos! Next chapter will be up the 4th of March. :)

The cold of the late fall morning seeped into everything in and around Tondc, including Octavia who felt a shiver start at the base of her spine and climb up her back and forcing her shoulders to shake involuntarily in protest. Lincoln leaned in closer to her to try to her warm and was met with a pleased but concerned smile.

Octavia insisted she help Lincoln across the village square to meet the Commander who had summoned the pair to her residence. He tried to convince her that he could manage on his own but Octavia refused to yield. The first frost of the year gave the ground a crisp, white coat and if it weren't for her shivering she might have enjoyed it, but she chose to focus on helping Lincoln instead.

"Thank you for coming." Lexa said.

"Like we had a choice." Octavia growled, her green eyes locked on the pair opposite. Lincoln instinctively placed his hand on her in an attempt to dampen the fire behind her words.

Lessa was standing off to the side of the main room and was putting the last of her armour on, yanking the buckles until it was tight, but not too tight. After feeling content everything was how it should be, she turned to face her visitors.

"You are not prisoners here." Lexa shrugged indifference at her words. "You could be back with your people by noon if you ride with me to your camp."

"If?" Octavia questioned. "I thought that was the plan."

Lexa's attention moved to Lincoln who straightened under her gaze. She was appraising him and when she seemed content with what she saw, she looked back at Octavia.
"There is something I would ask of you. Both of you"

Octavia opened her mouth as if to say something but she felt the strong hand of Lincoln send her a message through a light squeeze. She looked up at him and his eyes remained on the Commander.

"What do you want?" Octavia asked.

"I want you to help me find Clarke."

Silence fell over the room and Octavia wasn't sure what was going on. If Lexa wanted them to find Clarke, why did she have her people attack them and stick them in cells?

"I'm aware that you have a way to track her and I'm concerned the longer we wait, the more difficult it will be for you to do so. I'm afraid I need your answer now."

"We will find Clarke, Heda." Lincoln stated for the both of them.

"We will find her, but I want you to allow Lincoln to be able to live with his people again." Octavia added. "This isn't negotiable."

Lexa fixed her with a glare which caused Octavia to shrink back under its weight. As for Lexa, this was not how she was used to being addressed and was something uniquely done by Skaikru. Lexa had come to understand it as a trait of Clarke's people but it was one she did not overly enjoy. Knowing her anger would not help here, eventually that glare flipped over to Lincoln who saw the anger in her eyes.

"if you find her, then you will be permitted to return to these lands as Trikru." Lexa stated.

Lincoln's expression turned to one of astonishment. It would not be an easy thing to do, both finding Clarke and to return to his people after being accused of betraying them. He wasn't sure if he would ever truly be welcome here again. After all, it wasn't more than half a day ago they had prepared to kill him for simply returning to Trikru forests.

"Is that satisfactory, Octavia kom Skaikru?"

Octavia nodded and looked to the shocked man she loved next to her. She could feel the emotion roll off Lincoln. She saw hope in his eyes and that hope gave her a reason to go in search of Clarke other than to make sure no harm came to Lincoln. She realized when she saw him dragged out of the cell just a day before, she failed that silent promise to herself.

She nodded, her eyes never leaving Lincoln. "Yes."

She swore that she would find Clarke for him. To give Lincoln what he lost when they met, when he protected her. This promise she swore she would die to keep.

"I am leaving with Bellamy and Monty shortly for your camp. Please let them know you will not be joining them on the return. Your leaders listen to Bellamy and I will need him there to make sure I can speak to whoever is in charge."

"Abby. Abby is in charge." Octavia explained.

"Clarke's mother." Lexa said quietly.

"Yes. Her mother. It might make things more difficult."

"Perhaps, but peace is something we all want. I am sure she understands that."
"You don't know her mother..." Octavia mumbled.

"We will inform them," Lincoln informed Lexa regarding her message, turning and directing Octavia to the door.

"Bell isn't going to like this." Octavia suggested as they walked from the small building. "I'm not sure Clarke's mother will, either."

Lincoln grinned and walked beside Octavia. As they walked back to their given quarters, he glanced around Tondc and his eyes came to rest on Octavia. He took her hand and raised it to his lips, pressing a kiss which caused her to blush slightly. A side of her only he got to see.

They returned quickly to their small house and Octavia was happy with how Lincoln was able to put all his weight on his legs. His balance seemed to be much better than when he first woke up. She was concerned his ability to walk would be an issue when they went in search for Clarke, but there was a renewed purpose in his step that wasn't there in the morning.

When they walked in the door, they saw Monty and Bellamy were sitting and enjoying a breakfast of fresh fruit.

"Welcome back." Bellamy said. "What did she want?"

Octavia glanced at Lincoln and took in a breath. "You aren't going to like it."

Octavia explained what Lexa wanted and what they had agreed to and immediately Bellamy was on his feet and his voice raised to match.

"You're right. I don't like it." Bellamy growled. "I'm going with you."

"I'll be fine, Bellamy." Octavia groaned. "I have Lincoln and Skaikru are allowed in the forests. We can find her and we'll bring her home. Everyone wins."

"But what does Lexa get in all this? Why did she stop us from looking for Clarke in the first place?"

"I know Clarke sure as hell didn't tell us everything when she was running things Bell, and she and Lexa are damn near the same if you ask me. All you need to do is get her there to speak to Abby. Leave Clarke to us."

Bellamy looked at her with a puzzled look on his face, "Clarke isn't like Lexa, O."

"They are more alike than you think." she scoffed.

"Guys!" Monty interjected, "Why don't you two go off in search of Clarke, Bellamy and I will go with Lexa back to Camp Jaha, then we convince Kane that we should send out another search party?"

"It is a good plan." Lincoln stated. The faster we get more people to look the better our odds."

Bellamy looked upset but he grudgingly accepted the idea he follow Lexa back to their camp.

"Let's get going, then." Bellamy growled, slinging his pack up over his shoulder and thrusting Monty's in his chest.

As they walked single-file through the doorway, Lexa sat atop a horse not more than fifteen feet away with Titus just behind her and her guards waiting behind him. They were surprised to see them all waiting.
"If you are ready, we can leave now." Lexa suggested, lifting her hand and directing them to two horses that had been prepared for them.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The ride to Camp Jaha wasn't as quick as Lexa had hoped for. The inexperience of both Bellamy and Monty on horseback was frustrating for all the Trikru who were making the journey. Titus seemed to be the most agitated simply by their presence, never mind their inability to ride their horses. After Monty fell from his horse and injured his arm, it was decided that they would have both Monty and Bellamy ride with two of the accompanying warriors in Lexa's guard. They were both offended, but once the speed of their travels increased, they understood.

The familiar clearing that led to Camp Jaha appeared before them and Lexa ordered them all to slow their pace.

"This is where you go by foot and inform Abby we are here." She turned her head and looked directly at Bellamy who was being helped down from the horse by its rider, as was Monty.

"Afraid to walk up to the gate yourself, Commander?" Bellamy bit at her with his words, then fell the remaining few feet roughly after being dropped by a grinning warrior. He glanced up with a glare.

"If anything were to happen to me, my people would declare war. I certainly don't want your people to make a mistake that could put your people in danger." she stated with not so much an ounce of emotion displayed on her face.

"It could take some time." he suggested to Lexa.

"We will wait."

Titus frowned at Lexa's words. He firmly believed she should not be waiting for invaders to invite her in to their camp. These were her lands and it was her right to go wherever she pleased. Of course, Lexa would like nothing more than to do what Titus was thinking, and in the past she would have. Things were different now.

Lexa and her people had long since dismounted their horses and waited word from anyone from the Skaikru camp. Even Lexa started to become angry at the delay that kept her waiting outside the gates so long.

Lexa had been leaning against a tree and enjoying an apple just outside of view of the camp when she heard a commotion at the gate and the sound of the Skaikru gate moving. As she walked in the direction of the gate she flipped the nearly eaten apple to the ground and clapped her hands. 'Finally' she thought.

The first person out of the gate was Marcus Kane. A familiar face and one she respected, likely sent out by Abby because of that fact.

Marcus was walking with a look of hesitation mixed with hopefulness as he approached but her guards stepped forward and intercepted him before he was able to come within fifty feet of Lexa.

"Sen em auda."(Let him through) Lexa ordered, watching two of her guards step aside to reveal Marcus.
"Commander. Always a pleasure." he smiled at her.

"Likewise, Marcus kom Skaikru. I believe you already know the reason for my visit?" Lexa wasted no time getting to the point and Marcus didn't seem surprised.

"Bellamy mentioned it, yes. Please forgive the delay, but it took considerable convincing to make this happen." Marcus sighed and Lexa nodded. She expected some hesitation on the part of Skaikru to be willing to discuss terms of peace so soon after.

Lexa signalled her entourage to join her and they walked toward the camp and Marcus looked back at her guard. It looked like he was going to say something but he simply turned his attention on the young girl beside him and continued their conversation.

"I do want peace with you and your people. I consider the peace that Clarke and I agreed as one that is still intact."

"I'm afraid Abby might not see things the same way as they once were. As you know, Clarke is no longer here and the group we sent to find them wound up in a cell, one of which was shot with an arrow."

"My people tell me that he was reaching for his gun. They took care not to hit him in any vital area that could have killed him."

"Then there is the matter of Lincoln..." Marcus trailed off.

"He is one of my people and subject to our laws. I am certain should one of your people break your laws, you would deal with the matter according to your punishments. Would you not?" Titus suggested, testing the waters of diplomacy.

"We would and we have." Marcus' voice betrayed him with a note of disappointment, his eyes downcast as changed the subject. "This way. It isn't much farther."

Lexa recalled what Clarke told her of justice on the Ark, and what happened to those under or over the age of eighteen. Children forced to live in little metal boxes, prisoners until their fate is decided by their leaders which would likely end up with them being "floated" as Clarke put it.

Lexa felt anger rise, thinking of a young blond-haired, blue-eyed girl sitting in one of the metal boxes and waiting for the day they would decide to kill her. They tried. Lexa tried. Maunon(Mountain men) tried. Clarke wasn't someone who would let that happen. 'Clarke is special' she thought, a small smile breaking on her face.

"Many of its systems still work. It took our best considerable effort to make it happen but if you would like a tour, I can arrange it." Marcus offered, assuming Lexa was impressed with the ship. Although it was impressive, it was also frustrating. It was a maze of cold metal and bright lights, hallways leading every which way.

"Perhaps another time." Lexa suggested which drew an understanding nod from Marcus.

They walked down a long curved corridor and approached an open hatchway.

"Abby is in here. Please make sure your guards remain in the hall. The door can be left open if you would like."

"This is Titus, my advisor. He will be joining me." Lexa stated, watching concern grow in his eyes. "Do not concern yourself. He is a scholar, not a warrior."
"I suppose that won't be a problem, but I've got to ask you both to leave your weapons outside. You can give them to your people to take care of while we speak."

Titus frowned at Lexa but the look she gave him while removing her many weapons, hidden and not, instructed him to follow suit. After a moment, they walked into the room where Abby sat, her eyebrows pointed aimed in a frown and eyes with daggers as sharp as the ones they just gave to Lexa's guards.

"Abby." Lexa stated.

"Lexa." Abby replied.

It was a sparring match between the two leaders with Lexa on the defensive for the most part. Lexa suggested they strengthen the framework of the previous agreement between her people and Skaikru and Abby continued to question the ability to trust her word if she could decide to reneg any agreement they make because it suited her.

They had been at it for hours and both Marcus and Titus could only watch them spar. Lexa attempted to placate her demands but short of giving the 12 clans to Abby, it seemed there was nothing she could do to win any ground from the chancellor.

"Then I am afraid there is nothing more that can be done." Lexa stated, standing from the table, looking at Titus.

"I will ready the men and we will return to Polis immediately." he stated, turning and heading toward the almost closed hatch to leave.

"Now, I'm sure we can find something to start with." Marcus implored. His eyes begged Abby to find some way to work toward peace. After a long pause, Abby sighed and let her shoulders fall forward slightly.

"We can offer her the same thing as the others." she suggested.

Lexa looked at Marcus and then back to Abby with confusion.

"Others?"

Abby nodded at Marcus to explain what she was referring to. Titus who had not left the room yet, spun around quickly at the mention of another group having spoken on what seemed to be her behalf.

"A couple days ago a delegation from the Ice Nation, Azgeda, came though and offered their support for the winter months to come. They gave us food and furs, suggesting that you might use such things as bargaining chips for our technology and weapons."

Lexa sat back down in the chair.

"You mentioned an offer?" Lexa asked. Her outward appearance was one of control and calm, but inside she was seething. How dare Nia make an offer to people in her lands that were not in the Kongeda. It took every bit of restraint for her to not get up form that chair, ride straight for Toron and cut the head clean off her rival.

"Thanks to you, Clarke left us after you abandoned her and our people." Lexa winced at the words and Abby seemed happy with the cut she gave her and continued, "She is somewhere out there. I know it. So I made them an offer. Find Clarke, bring her to me and we can negotiate."
Lexa's eyes shot wide open and her jaw dropped.

"You don't know what you have done..." Lexa stated, leaning forward in her chair and fighting to keep herself in check. "Nia isn't interested in peace, Abby. She only wants power and if you give her Clarke, you give her the chance to destroy us all. There will be war."

Abby sat back in her chair and crossed her arms. She stared directly across the table at Lexa.

"I guess you had better get moving if you are going to find her first."
Enemies at the Door

Chapter Summary

Ice Nation becomes bold in their search for Wanheda

Chapter Notes

Sunday-turned-Tuesday update!

Here it is! I feel bad about missing the recent Sunday update goal but life has been REALLY crazy of late. Did I mention I fractured my foot? Can't recommend doing it to anyone. It is terrible. Don't do it!

I'm keeping to the Sunday update schedule and will be putting up the next one on the 11th.

I hope everyone enjoys the chapter and I will see you all in a few days!

"Niylah.” Levai said, greeting the blonde haired, hazel-eyed woman who seemed to be in the process of walking around her shop wiping the dust from shelves in the room as he entered.

She spied over her shoulder knowing by his voice who the patron was. She playfully ignored him as she often did when he arrived and set herself to finishing her job of wiping the shelf clean. Once she was satisfied, she turned and walked to her usual spot behind the counter whenever a customer entered the trading post. Before looking across at him, she he reached up and tied her hair back in an effort to make herself more presentable.

"Levai, this is a pleasant surprise. I wasn’t expecting you for another couple weeks.”

“Hoping to get a little more prepared for this winter than the last one. That big storm kept me held up and things were rough.”

“You could always move closer and you could come in any time.” she offered. She always offered, but he would always change the subject or just smile that smile of his that melted her heart. Taking a deep breath and releasing it in a playful but frustrated sigh, she looked at the crate in his hands with resignation.

“Looking for the same as last time?” She asked as he lifted his crate of goods onto her counter top.

"As always. And a couple other things if you can spare them. Cloth for bandages and a change of clothes. I made sure to add in a little extra to compensate. I think there will be a couple things your customers might like in there.”

Niylah glanced at him curiously and then turned her attention to the crate of items he placed in front
of her. She let out a 'hum' as she opened the lid of the box and looked into the crate. One by one she began to slowly remove its contents and place them on the table. She didn't need to, but it prolonged his visit and she enjoyed his company. It didn't matter what he brought, he always left with what they agreed upon long ago. When she neared the bottom, she glanced back up at him.

"You've been holding out on me, Levai." she stated, pursing her lips. Reaching into the crate, she extracted a cloth bag and lifted it to her nose to inhale the sweet scent within. "You know how long my best customer has been waiting for more of these?"

Niylah untied the string at the top of the bag and placed the green candles side by side next to the wooden box, each one made with a blended scent from plants in the Trikru forests.

"Then those ones should definitely fetch you more." suggesting she should examine the box with greater scrutiny by nodding his head at it.

Niylah's lip turned up in a playful smile and her eyes lit up with curiosity. This was an unexpected visit and the conversation had already been a pleasant addition to her day. She eagerly lifted a small pile of furs to see a second bag with what she had already surmised were more scented candles. Lifting them to her face she inhaled the bouquet of scents and imprinted the blend in her memory.

"They will be more than happy! You won't believe how frustrated the buyer was when I told him I the plants didn’t flower as much as they needed to this year. I'm certain I'll be able to stay open for the winter thanks to these and what they will fetch from Polis."

Niylah lifted the candles to her nose individually, savouring the scent of each. Once she let her senses enjoy them, she covered them and put them under the counter while regarding Levai with a curious look.

"I thought you said you couldn’t get the flowers any more. How did you make these?"

"I may have managed to cultivate some of my own. I wasn’t sure that they would flower in this environment, but it turns out I just had to wait a little longer."

Well, I am one of two people who are glad you were able to. Nobody is able to make these the way you do."

Levai traded her a smile for the compliment and watched her as she unpacked the remaining items in the crate.

"You know. This is your second visit this month. If I didn't know better, I'd say you miss my company." She teasingly suggested, but only partially so.

Niylah had always respected his privacy and she never questioned why or what it was he did with the items he traded for, but more than anything, she wanted to be a part of his life in that way. She looked forward to his visits but he made sure to always keep himself in control and his priorities in check. He agreed to his life and the choices that were made protected those he loves.

She never asked him where he was going or when he would be back, letting him divulge the details he felt comfortable sharing. Years ago when he first entered her father’s shop, she treated him like any other and left well enough alone. At first. Having gotten to know him over those years, she had hoped he could trust her. She knew he did, but he held back and the curiosity of the mystery that was Levai had consumed her.

He had stood there listening to her playful and flirtatious words and was about to softly reject her advances as he always did, when two large, hooded men entered the trading post. One of the two
began to roam around trying to appear like he was interested in trading but his poor attempt was quickly deciphered by both Niylah and Levai. Neither looked like traders, they looked like trouble. The visible weapons that hung from their leather belts only confirmed their mutual suspicion.

Niylah quickly grabbed the box that was on the counter and placed it on the ground beside her. Patting her hair with her hands, she took a deep breath and exchanged a look of concern with Levai. When the strangers pulled back their hoods, the distinctive markings of Azgeda warriors were on full display.

Niylah cleared her throat and frowned, addressing the newcomers. "Is there anything you are looking for?"

One of the two had been watching Levai and Niylah since he and his friend entered the shop and the other walked around the perimeter had been studying the room. Levai gauged their concern about his presence and though he had knives on his belt, they didn't seem to consider him much of a threat.

"What is back there?" Asked the one who had been standing near the entrance, his voice rough and expectant as he pointed toward the back of the shop toward a door. Niylah's private quarters.

"Nothing that is any of your concern." she replied.

The second man looked to the first and received a nod informing him to proceed. He pushed on the door and it opened to show a modest living quarters that he likely assumed belonged to the two in the shop. He left the door open and turned and shook his head.

"This isn't Azgeda territory. You can't just walk in here and..."

"Have you seen this girl?" the first man asked, ignoring her protest as he walking up to stand next to Levai, nudging into him and forcing him to stumble sideways. Levai felt the instinct to let his hand slide downward to the knife he kept tucked in his belt his but a quick glance over his shoulder at the second Azgeda who was approaching from behind forced him to expunge the thought from his mind.

He placed a drawing of the blonde Skaikru runaway on the table between Levai and Niylah. The woman simply shrugged and shook her head.

"Never seen her before."

"What about you?" asked the second man, shoving Levai to emphasize who he directed his question toward. The action drew a glare from Niylah and conflicted restraint from Levai.

"No." he answered. He had, of course, seen her. He knows exactly where she is. He bit back the urge to ask why they were looking for her. Any questions he could ask might raise suspicions of the two men and that was the last thing he wanted.

"Emo sta branwada."(They are worthless.) stated the man who had been roaming the shop.

The one who seemed to be calling the shots laughed and folded the picture, tucking it into his jacket and signaling they were done here. As the second he walked past Levai, he attempted to shove his shoulder into Levai as a parting gift but Levai expertly dodged the contact, giving a small smirk as his response at the larger mans attempt. The warrior took offence and reached for his blade which led to Levai subtly taking a defensive stance.

"Ban op emo."(Leave them.) Growled the one who seemed to be in charge, reducing the tension that filled the room to an almost inescapable threshold.
With an unsatisfied grunt, the second let his hand fall from his sword, turned away from Levai and stormed out of the building. The leader watched him leave and he turned back to Levai, studying him for a moment before he turned to follow the other Ice Nation warrior.

"They are becoming a problem." Niylah said, trying to break the tension that held the room ransom since the two strangers entered. Levai looked at her and frowned.

"These two have been here before?"

"No. Not these two, but others. They always ask the same thing and then usually leave."

"Usually?" Levai's tone took on a concerned note that brought a small smile to Niylah's lips.

"Occasionally they take things like dried meat or clothing. It is why the room is so empty. I don't keep much out for them to take anymore."

"How long have they been coming around?"

"A week? Perhaps more. I've been hearing from travelers that they have been walking the trading routes looking for this girl but nobody knows who or where she is. They are becoming more and more aggressive." Niylah explained.

"I think you should close your shop for a while." he suggested. "If you have family or friends in Polis, you should head there. Azgeda is trouble and if they are in Trikru territory it only means things will likely get worse for everyone. You aren't protected here."

"I could stay with you?" she suggested in an almost whisper.

Levai wanted to protect her. He cared for the woman and her safety but he couldn't draw her into whatever Nia was planning. He knew he couldn't tell her about the injured woman he was trying to help back to health. The understanding of Azgeda warriors freely walking through Trikru territory was a likely precursor to something no Trikru wanted and with what he just witnessed, he was worried about leaving Clarke alone. These supplies were needed to replace the ones he used helping her with her injuries.

"I wish that were possible. I have others who I must make sure are safe." Levai said before he realized the impact of his words.

Niylah’s eyes found the floor and the usually cheerful woman was now anything but and it pulled at him to not be able to share the details as to why. Before the silence became their enemy, he continued.

“It is not safe for you to come with me where I will be going. Heda will make sure that Tondc and Polis are protected but I would feel better if you were safe in Polis.”

"I can't leave and it wasn't fair of me to ask to go with you." Niylah said, swallowing her sadness and forcing a half-hearted smile to hide the hurt. She waved her hand to emphasize the trading post and continued, “My father needs me here and the people on the trade route depend on what I can trade so they can make it through the winter. My family has never closed this shop."

"So you won't consider Polis? I will make sure everything in here is replaced should anything happen. You have my word. Everything in here is replaceable. Everything but you."

Niylah smiled at his words and after a few moments she leaned forward and let her face fall in her hands hiding her smile and trying to hide the rose colour that appeared.
"I will talk to my father. I doubt he will, and I can’t leave him alone."

"I just want you to be safe. Signs of Azgeda are never a good thing."

Niylah lifted her face from her hands and reached across the counter placing his hand in hers. Leaning forward, she kissed the back of it then placed it on her cheek. She had never been this bold before, but she was tired of waiting and if he wasn’t going to, she would.

“I can’t stay.” he said quietly, withdrawing his hand from her cheek and offering her the same sadness in his eyes that was in hers moments ago.

"You could." she answered quickly, but the sadness that was in her eyes moments ago was reflected now in his. She knew he couldn’t, but she couldn’t help but try once more.

"I will be back as soon as I can." he said, offering the best promise he could make. "Please consider what I said about Polis."

After Niylah collected the items the trade he brought from under the counter, she stood tall for a moment and then let herself lean back softly on the stand behind her to regard Levai once more, trying to act as though her heart hadn’t broken a little. "I'll talk to my father but if he refuses, I will have to stay with him."

Levai nodded. “When I return, I expect to find both of you here when I get back.” smiling at her for at least considering his suggestion.

"Levai?" Niylah asked as he was was packing the items he had asked for in the crate Niylah gave back to him.

"Yes?"

"Do you know the girl they are looking for?"

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Levai could smell the smoke for the last couple miles and his pace quickened and he seemed to fly over the ground that was covered in leaves, ignoring the roots that reached up to grab the feet of those less experienced in the woods. He was well aware that the only thing that could be burning around here was his home. The closer he got, the clearer voices became and before he made it into the small clearing in front of his home, he slowed his forward progress until he was just on the perimeter and hidden behind the trunk of a solid tree.

He noticed his house wasn't on fire which was a good thing, but the chimney seemed as though it had been plugged and the smoke was forced back into the cabin. What concerned him more was that Clarke was there on the ground between the four strangers, strangers who upon closer inspection appeared to be Azgeda warriors who seemed to be having an argument. He couldn't hear the specifics, but the man seemed to be the one who was giving orders and the woman was not inclined to agree with them.

Levai lifted his bow in the direction of the group and slowly drew a couple arrows from his quiver, his breathing calm and measured as he began to ready a plan of attack until he saw a man reach down and pick up Clarke by her hair, but not before she landed a solid blow to his head. Levai grinned at that. He nocked the arrow as the man in the forest began to walk away, training his sight on the thigh of the man leaving with Clarke. He stilled his breathing and readied his shot.

Only seconds from release, his attention returned to the man and the woman. He had struck her and
knocked her to the ground, drawing his sword just after landing the blow. Levai struggled with what to do. Clarke was being carried away but this girl was clearly in trouble. His eyes jumped back and forth between the two women and he grit his teeth as he saw the woman get back on her knees spit a mouthful of what he assumed was blood at the man who stood before her.

The man lifted his sword and before Levai could even process it, he loosed an arrow that dug into the Azgeda man's side. He watched him fall over and came running from the tree line toward the second Azgeda who seemed shocked, but not too shocked that he couldn't yell out a warning to Jurin to run. The warning ceased after Levai fired his second arrow and it landed, taking the man down as quickly as the first.

"Where did they go?" Levai shouted at her as he approached the kneeling Azgeda woman.

Echo opened her eyes and just stared at him, wondering where he came from, then down to the man who now lay in front of her with an arrow protruding from his side. She should be dead.

"Listen to me." He stated, now standing in front of her. He placed his hands on her shoulders and attempting have her to focus on his voice. "Where are they going?"

"To the camp. North East. They will figure out who she is." Echo fell back on ground, lifting her hand to her head which was throbbing, her hair matted with blood.

Levai glanced at the woman state then quickly ran off in the direction she told him they were going. Personal experience told him they would not get far if he had to carry Clarke the entire way.

As he made his way in the direction he saw the large man carry Clarke off in, Levai was easily able to find the trail. It wasn't long before he could tell he had nearly caught up to them and his suspicions were confirmed when he heard a quiet moan from the injured Skaikru girl. Dropping into a crouch, he continued to move in the direction of her voice.

Waiting for a few minutes, he scanned the tree line for any sign of the Azgeda. If he was there, he was waiting for Levai to show himself first. The only relief he felt was in knowing the warrior did not have a bow. He would have to throw a knife and that would mean he would have to move to throw it. It wasn't the greatest odds to survive the situation, but it was something.

The moment Levai began to move in Clarke's direction, what he was expecting occurred and a small knife embedded itself in his shoulder. Levai grunted in pain but managed to lift his bow and launch the arrow he was holding at the attacker who was running at him while trying to produce another small knife to throw. Levai followed the arrow with his eyes as it flew true, burying itself in the man's throat. Before the man fell to the ground, Levai yanked the dagger out of his shoulder and smelled the blade, frowning with the information he gleaned about the blade.

It was poison.

He quickly ran to Clarke, bending down to look at her body. She wasn't bleeding from any of her wounds but he could tell she was in pain. Not as bad as it was when they met, but considerable none the less.

"Are you able to move?" he asked.

Nodding, Clarke was able to stand with Levai's help and although the one leg that helped her get up when she fled the cabin was willing, the stabbing pain within the ankle of her other leg was not as accommodating. Clarke gave Levai an apologetic look that showed signs of frustration.

"It is alright. We need to get back to my home. I have to grab some things then I am afraid we will
have leave the area."

"Who are those people?" Clarke asked as she put her arm over his shoulders so they could get back to his cabin.

"Azgeda." he stated, as if that was all the explanation that was required.

"There was a girl, she tried to help me."

"She was back at the cabin. I don't know if she is still there, but I'm really hoping she will be." Levai suggested. "It would be good to understand why those people wanted to take you prisoner."

"They are looking for Wanheda." Clarke stated as they walked back into the small clearing.

Echo was no longer in the small clearing, rather on a ladder next to the chimney, climbing down with what they used to block the smoke from escaping the chimney. She was them and threw the small sheet of metal to the side.

"Sorry about your home." she said. "I tried to get them to keep moving but they saw the house and wouldn't leave without trying to smoke someone out."

Levai glanced at her and then his cabin. The smoke was no longer coming out in waves through the front door and he seemed a little relieved. He looked back at her and asked, "There are more of you in the area?".

"Yes." she answered. "I'd be more concerned about that cut on your shoulder. Has the burning begun?"

Clarke took a moment and realized that there was a not-so-small wound that had been bleeding the entire time he helped her back to the cabin.

"Let me have a look." Clarke offered, turning Levai so she could look at the cut. I can clean it and close it, but I need my pack. What do you mean by burning?" Clarke asked Echo.

"Barek loved..." Echo corrected herself when she realized he was likely dead with both Clarke and the Trikru man standing in front of her. "He loved, to coat his knives in a particularly nasty poison. It takes some time to work in to the system rather than the quicker poisons that work quickly. This one basically gives the feeling of burning the patient from the inside out before they die. Until Nia, nobody was allowed to use it."

"Your queen is a piece of work." He looked at his cabin and at the bodies that lay on the ground. "We can't stay here." he stated.

"We need a place to stay for a few days. I'm afraid the condition she is in," Echo pointed to Clarke "she will make it rather easy for Nia's people to find you. and once the poison works its way through you, we will need time for you to recover."

"Aren't you Nia's people?" Levai asked, unable to conceal the anger from his voice.

"I t seems I am a free agent now." she waved her hands at her former leader and ally. "If they don't find my body here and if I don't turn up back at the camp with an explanation, I'll be declared natrona. I have seen what she does to..." Echo shivered at the thought and stopped talking, her face losing a bit of colour at the same time.

"You said we can't stay. Do you have somewhere we can go to take care of your shoulder?" Clarke
"I have a place we can go." he glanced at Echo, "You can treat the poison?"

"I can." she said, patting a small pouch that hung from her hip.

"We should get moving. It is close to Tondc but we will be safe. I just want to grab some things from inside the cabin."

"We won't make it to Tondc. We will need somewhere closer." Echo stated.

Levai frowned and grunted his displeasure. The longer they waited to reach Tondc, the more likely they would run into more Azgeda when they did try.

"I know a place we can stay. Come with me. We'll need to get a few more things from inside the cabin." Levai motioned to Echo to follow him after helping Clarke sit on the ground.

Clarke watched the two enter the house and although she heard some coughing, they had reappeared rather quickly, both carrying a pack each over their shoulders.

"We need to get moving. You will be OK?" Levai asked Clarke as he and Echo helped her up from the ground and letting her put the weight of her injured side on him.

"I'll be fine. We need to treat your shoulder so the faster we get wherever it is we are going, the better." she stated.

"Where are we going?" Echo asked.

"Where we are least expected to be found." he smiled, leading them into the forest and away from his cabin.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The trio heads out to find Clarke but run into unwanted visitors.

Chapter Notes

Sunday-turned-Monday update!

Thanks to everyone who has been enjoying the story and leaving comments/kudos! :) This chapter is definitely a departure from the original and I hope everyone enjoys.

See you all next Sunday!

Lexa's ride from Camp Jaha to Tondc was a fast and quiet journey. She knew where Clarke was and that was one obstacle that she was happy to not have to fight. The true battle will come when she stands across from those blue eyes. Clarke would respect her decision as a leader, but as whatever they... she will be angry at the very least.

Clarke needed time and she had every intention of letting her take as much as she needed, but now things had changed. Lexa made a promise to herself that she would keep Clarke safe, and she would do whatever it took to make it happen. She wouldn't let Nia get a hold of her.

"Heda, you are back quickly." Indra stated after she hurried forward upon sight of her Commander, taking the reins of her horse while Lexa jumped down to the ground.

"Yes. Have Lincoln and Octavia left yet?"

"They were just preparing to leave."

"Very good. Have them come see me at my quarters. We will leave in an hour."

"You are going with them Commander?" Indra seemed concerned.

"Yes. I have information that indicates where she may be." Lexa stared at Indra a moment and paused her thoughts on what she would say when she found Clarke. "There is a problem, Indra?"

"Koma has returned from his search early. He found a group of Azgeda in Trikru lands, then another group a half a day's journey from their territory."

Lexa remained stoic and prevented anger from overtaking her appearance, though she did clench her fists. She was concerned about Clarke but now she had Azgeda wandering the forests looking for Clarke. This would make things more complicated. Nothing was going as she planned.

"They attacked him as he tried to find out why they were in Trikru territory, Commander." Indra
"Is he well enough to travel?"

"He suffered a few minor wounds. They are only Azgeda." Indra boasted.

Lexa grinned as heard the hooves of horses approaching from behind. She rode faster than the others with a goal of gathering supplies before they arrived to speed her along on the upcoming journey.

Titus was about to jump down from his horse when he saw his Commander raise a hand, motioning for him to stop. He looked at her curiously but righted himself back atop the horse. "Heda?"

"Titus. I want you to return to Polis immediately and my guard will escort you. There are Azgeda in Trikru territory and they have attacked scouts. I need you to return safely and protect the Natblida. Inform the ambassadors of Nia's actions and that her men attacked one of my scouts. Nia will be held to account for her actions against the Kongeda by sending her warriors into lands beyond her borders."

"Sha, Heda." Titus nodded a farewell and signalled her guard they were leaving. Her eyes momentarily looked for Bellamy but she remembered he was asked to remain behind by Kane and Abby. Likely it had something to do with them wanting him to keep an eye on her, but she wasn't concerned. She knew Bellamy was close with Clarke and she was his best chance at finding her.

"Indra, I want you and Koma to join me in my residence as well. We will need four days worth of supplies."

Indra nodded and sent one of her guards to gather what was needed then turned back to face Lexa.

"We must move quickly. Five minutes."

"Commander." Indra bowed and turned away to walk in the direction of the building where Octavia and Lincoln were staying.

Lexa walked off in the direction of her quarters and opened the door. After closing it a little harder than she should have, she fell back against the wood and exhaled a frustrated breath. Things had suddenly become much too complicated.

She tried to clear her mind by closing her eyes and when she managed to organize her thoughts, there was a slight knot form in her stomach at the realization that Bellamy and Clarke were close. It made sense, but she found herself more concerned about the relationship Bellamy had with Clarke than the Azgeda that were freely walking around the Trikru forests.

It wasn't long before the guards posted outside her house announced Indra had arrived and Lexa granted them entry. She watched them enter but her attention was on Koma and Lincoln and how they were moving with their injuries. She was satisfied with how both were not visibly impaired and walking with ease. Lincoln still sported bruises on his injuries, but bruises he could not hide.

"Where is Bellamy?" Octavia asked as she looked around for her brother.

"Your Chancellor and Marcus Kane wished for him to remain behind for a few moments and discuss something. He will be brought here by your people in one of your machines." Lexa explained.

Octavia frowned at her explanation but accepted it.

"I've been made aware Azgeda are in the lands." Lexa turned her attention to Koma.
"Sha, Heda." he bowed his head at his Commander. "I came across two groups of their warriors. The first I tried to speak to and was attacked. The first group I was forced to kill but my injuries would have made it difficult to fight the second group and return to warn our people."

Lexa nodded. "You made the right decision. We cannot afford to lose our best warriors." Koma's eyes widened in surprise at the praise from his Commander.

"Unfortunately, the news of Azgeda means we will leave now to find Clarke. We can't wait for Bellamy before setting out."

"What do you mean we can't wait? How will Bellamy find us when he gets here?" Octavia challenged.

"Koma. You will stay in Tondc and await his arrival and then together you will have to move quickly to join us, but I will explain where we are heading..."

Koma nodded but again, Octavia interjected.

"You know where we are going? That means you know where Clarke is." Octavia growled. "Why didn't you send someone to get her before this could happen?"

Lexa was angry at the interruption, but more-so at the knowledge that Octavia was right. She might have been able to prevent everything that was happening. She slammed her hands down on the table in front of her, glaring at Octavia. Both Indra and Lincoln cast concerned eyes toward Octavia.

"I wasn't aware that YOUR people entered into negotiations with Azgeda behind my back. I am aware that YOUR leader chose to walk away from her people and it was YOUR leader that endangers herself." Lexa growled and her eyes contained molten jade that caused Octavia to step back slightly and her chest constrict when she took a breath.

Lexa's chest rose and fell with deep breaths in an attempt to relax herself. She went too far. After a moment, her stare into the depths of Octavia seemed to ease. Octavia swore she could feel a weight being lifted from her chest as her anger that erupted from Lexa lessened. They all did.

"My scouts have given me a possible location and that is where we will start our search." She lied, but she had to establish control of the situation as much as within herself.

Indra stepped forward and spoke, "Our supplies are ready, Commander. We can go whenever you are ready."

"You will be remaining behind, Indra. Prepare Tondc for a possible attack from Azgeda forces and all scouts who return will stay in Tondc to ready it's defence."

Indra frowned her displeasure at not being able to accompany with Lexa to find Clarke, but she understood her duty with a nod.

"Koma," Lexa waved at him to step forward to the table and she pointed at a rough drawing of the area she planned on going toward and circled a small but general area with her finger. "This is the area we are heading. When Bellamy arrives, bring him as quickly as you can. Do whatever you must if you are confronted by any Azgeda. Explain that to Bellamy when he arrives. His life is in your care."

Lexa's eyes quickly flashed to Octavia then back to the table where her map rested. Octavia just listened to the conversation between Lexa and Koma, not interested in raising the ire of the Commander any further than she already had. The warning look Indra shot her reinforced that sense
of self-preservation.

"We should go." Lexa stated. "We will be travelling on foot."

Indra and Koma wished Lexa their allies a safe trip, Koma stated he would be at his Commanders side as quickly as he could with Bellamy kom Skaikru.

Lexa spent a moment discussing matters with Indra after she dismissed the others, telling them to wait with their supplies at the north-western entrance to Tondc. She would meet them there.

Lincoln threw a pack over his shoulder and checked his belt to make sure he had all his knives and that his sword was firmly secured, only to be double checked by Octavia moments after to make sure. He held up her pack and her attention seemed occupied all the while grabbing the pack and throwing it over her shoulder.

"You need to be more careful when you address the commander." Lincoln warned her.

"I'll be more careful when she stops keeping things to herself."

"Octavia..." he warned,

"I get it." she grunted back at him then she saw his shoulders drop slightly. When she looked up at his eyes, she saw worry in them. "I hear you love. I don't like it, but I get it."

"We will find Clarke." He said, thinking that was her concern.

"It isn't finding Clarke I'm worried about. It is what she is going to do to Lexa once we do."

Lincoln grinned and pulled Octavia into a hug, leaning down so when Octavia looked up, their lips connected and made the world around them disappear for a few moments only to be interrupted by a stoic Commander's clearing throat. Lincoln and Octavia pulled themselves apart.

Lexa smirked and walking right past them into the forest beyond but not before saying, "Save some energy for the journey. It is a tough four day hike to where we are going."

Lincoln looked at Octavia and he had an embarrassed look on his face if the slight reddening of his cheeks were any indication but Octavia's eyes were filled with amusement at the glib comment and Lincoln's reaction to it.

"Come on, handsome. Let's get moving." she said as she nudged Lincoln with her forearm, urging him forward. Lincoln smiled and put his arm across Octavia's shoulder.

Lexa who kept a rigorous pace, expertly avoiding roots underfoot while keeping her eyes trained on the forest around them. Lincoln and Octavia followed Lexa's example, remaining as silent as they could be with the sound of dried or drying leaves crunching beneath their feet. The lack of leaves on trees and bushes made it easier for the trio to see the area around them, but that meant it was easier to be seen. This close to Tondc Lexa wasn't as concerned about coming across any Azgeda, but the sun was dropping and they had been on the move for hours, taking very short breaks to drink water.

She expected there to be surprise when she got there. It was rare she ever made her way this far from Polis by herself unless it was on a personal retreat and with the arrival of Skaikru, she had little to no time to herself to be able to slip away from Polis, let alone the good week of travel that the journey would take.

"We are coming upon a place we can stay for a few hours, you can rest." Lexa stated quietly but it
drew a frustrated grunt from one of the three.

"We should keep going." Octavia replied quietly.

Lessa stopped and the two behind her did the same before they ran into her. Lexa turned and studied her, raising her eyebrows and appraising the brunette before her.

"If we go, we don't stop." Lexa's face betrayed no emotion and her eyes were hard. "We will leave you behind if we must."

Lessa was planning on stopping as a courtesy to Octavia but she was arguably impressed with her will to keep moving. Lexa glanced to Lincoln and gave a slight nod before Octavia had a chance to see his slight nod.

"Then we eat, drink and rest for thirty minutes. We will go until the morning."

Both Lincoln and Octavia tilted their heads in understanding.

Lessa sat a few feet away from Lincoln and Octavia to give them some privacy and her thoughts went to Clarke and what would happen if she couldn't convince her to go back to her people and abandon the overtures of the Ice Queen.

Clarke understood peace and she was relying on that to be Clarke's chief concern. Many people were at risk of dying in a conflict with Nia and her army if Skaikru were to unify their forces with Nia. The only other option would be to fight Skaikru, which would leave her vulnerable to Nia and she'd played that scenario out in her mind numerous times through the day. She was aware that was never an option.

Her eyes still scanned the forest around the three of them and she realized she could no longer hear the whispers between Lincoln and Octavia. This would be the only time they speak to the other until they rest in the morning so their silence and her surprise when Octavia sat next to her was surprising. Lexa, short a slight increase in heart rate, showed no sign of her sudden arrival.

"You know where we are going." Octavia stated bluntly but in a whisper, staring in another direction of forest in front of them, matching Lexa who was transfixed on the environment around them.

"I have an idea of where we are going."

"That is a lie, Lexa." Octavia hissed. "You know where we are going because you know where Clarke is." This isn't Tondc. If I'm going to help you and help Clarke, I want to know."

Lessa turned her head and looked at Octavia, then back out into the part of the forest she was looking at moments ago.

"I know where she went." Lexa admitted, but offered no more. Her eyes remained on the forest around them.

"You know what you are going to say to her?"

"No."

Octavia placed her hand on the hilt of her dagger when she heard a rustle in the leaves off to their left and her attention shifted to the spot. Lexa and Lincoln instinctively looked in other directions. Octavia did not draw her weapon and after a few moments, the three unwound slightly but did not remove their hands from their weapons once they were not in any danger.
"She is going to hate you." Octavia suggested, continuing their conversation.

Lexa took a deep breath and slowly released it, her eyes betraying her rigid frame and her hard stare with something that resembled regret and swallowed. They fell to the ground for the first time since they left Tondc and her reply was a barely audible whisper.

"I know."

Octavia pulled her shoulders back and furrowed her eyebrows trying to decipher what she just witnessed from Lexa but Lexa was up on her feet and suggesting they should be on the move. Lincoln exchanged a confused look at Octavia who shrugged her understanding of why they were leaving so quickly.

"Keep your focus on the forest. Watch your feet." That was the that was said between the trio for the rest of the night, the only sounds they heard were their feet on the ground and the struggle in their lungs as they maintained a solid pace.

Lexa was happy their pace was not as impaired by the darkness as she had believed it would be. Octavia had great balance and she was able to keep up most of the journey. There were times where she had to alter her speed when she could hear Octavia's laboured breathing, but she didn't have to stop any more than she would with her own people.

Lexa called a break a few minutes before the sky began to brighten and Octavia fell on to her knees then rolled on to her side. She was exhausted and although their pace had slowed to a walk for the last hour, she wasn't sure how much farther she could go without a considerable rest.

"Octavia, you need to sit up." Lexa instructed and she watched Lincoln help her sit upright, leaning her small frame against his solid one and wrapping his arms around her.

"You did well, Hodnes." Lincoln whispered after he pressed his lips to her temple.

"Next time, I'll choose rest first." Octavia groaned while trying to smile.

Offering the worn out Skaikru girl her water, Lexa offered held out her container of water to Octavia which she happily accepted, taking a few small sips, then passing the container to Lincoln at Lexa's direction. She observed her two compatriots and made a decision.

"There is a place we can get some rest just over the hill. We will go after a small rest here and regain our strength. It is a little more walking, but it will be worth it." Lexa informed them.

"Is she serious?" Octavia asked Lincoln.

"Heda is always serious." Lincoln answered as he handed Lexa her water container. If he didn't know better, she seemed to be fighting back a smirk.

"I think we should go now." Octavia suggested, trying to stand but her legs were uncooperative.

Lincoln scooped her up off the ground with an arm around her back and the other under her legs and his strength startled her momentarily but she was soon grinning at him.

"If I knew you had so much energy I would have had you carry me two hours ago."

"This way, children."

Lexa had started to walk up the small hill just as the sun broke over the horizon. She stood atop the
hill and waited for Lincoln and Octavia to join her. When she heard Octavia gasp, she knew they were right behind her. Lexa smiled as she watched Octavia's reaction to the view before, barely containing herself. She motioned to Lincoln, having him let her down so her stand on her own two feet and take in the experience.

On top of the hill they had a view of a crystal blue lake. that in itself impressed Octavia but what rendered her speechless was the gentle breeze in combination with the sun that rolled through the valley causing slight ripples in the lake, making the lake sparkle as if it were made of millions of tiny white stars.

The forest around the lake had leaves of every imaginable colour, or so Octavia believed. They all danced together in the breeze, making a tapestry that wound itself completely around the lake.

Octavia's eyes began to form tears and Lincoln pulled her into his chest and wrapping his arms around her, only to have Octavia respond in kind.

Lexa saw the awe in her eyes and she wondered what Clarke would think of this place. Clarke had told her that perhaps life should be about more than surviving, this is what she envisioned. That one day she could show Clarke this place and perhaps...

"We should keep moving." Lexa said, her voice catching as she spoke. She didn't have time for those thoughts. She had to get to Clark before Nia did and Octavia needed rest before they could continue.

"We are headed there." Lexa explained, pointing to spot on the other side of the lake.

Lincoln and Octavia nodded and followed Lexa who resumed her scanning of the forest around them. Both of them found a pocket of energy within themselves to continue the journey to their destination.

They all smelled it as they approached.

Smoke.

Lexa turned and glanced at Octavia and Lincoln. She motioned for them to stay and she crouched down, moving in the direction of the smoke. They had not seen it on the hilltop so Lexa assumed the fire had been started recently.

She slowly drew one of her swords from its sheath and a familiar, wooden-handled dagger from her belt to hold in the other as she moved stealthily toward her target. The closer she got, the easier it was to hear their voices – she counted five. She couldn't make out the conversation which forced her to try and get closer to see what she was dealing with.

They were all sitting around a small, clean burning fire. Three were facing away from her and two who could see her the moment she emerged. She figured she could take three before they could properly react to her sudden presence. None of them seemed ready for a fight as they seem to have just woken from a restful night's sleep. Lexa took a steadying breath and slowly stood, readying her body for what was to come.

The first one fell backward without so much an understanding of what happened, only the sound of bone being broken by the slice of a dagger entering his eye, sending him into the next world.

The one to his right, the only other who could see Lexa emerge from the woods froze with horror on his face. His heart could have stopped on its own as he watched her emerge from the forest as if she appeared from thin air. Her cloak floated behind her as if she were surrounded by the essence of
death, which was elevated by the black paint on her face that gave the impression her eyes were
deadlier than the swords that now resided in her hands.

The second warrior hadn't even seen the dagger she threw. Only as he fell over he glanced down at
his chest to see a brown handles knife that had imbedded itself, choking on blood as the first had.

The remaining three reacted differently until Lexa was upon them. Lexa launched herself in the air
and spun toward them. Steel met steel and her second sword found purchase in the side of one of the
remaining three and he groaned. It was a mortal wound. He dropped to his knees only to meet Lexa's
driving upward with a sickening crunch of cartilage breaking in his nose. Two left.

She had to side step a fast vertical swing which she did by spinning to her right and while doing so
she slashed the thighs of the other warrior who thought he could try to remove Lexa's head with one
clean swing. She spun past him and because of her cuts to his legs he couldn't turn fast enough, and
Lexa made short work of him by thrusting her sword into his back and driving the tip through his
abdomen. One left.

She let him fall with her sword in him and she smirked at the man who stood there watching her spin
her remaining sword.

"You have a chance to survive this. How many of you did Nia send?" Lexa asked, almost looking
bored as she addressed the man which.

He looked at his allies and then back at Lexa put the feeling of being prey that was cornered be a
rather hungry, and clearly deadly predator.

"More than enough." the man declared, his decision made to try and become the predator and lunged
at Lexa.

She deflected his blow and side stepped, allowing him to rush past while slapping him in the back of
the head with the flat of her blade. He stumbled slightly then recovered, spinning to see Lexa looking
back at him with a smirk.

"I thought Nia trained her warriors. I must be mistaken." Lexa mocked.

The man chose a different tact and began to train slashing cuts at Lexa rather than try to finish it
quickly but each swing was deflected by Lexa as if she was training a child. He had begun to tire
and Lexa seemed to never tire, moving with boundless energy and agility.

Lincoln and Octavia had emerged as Lexa dispatched the second warrior. They approached but kept
a respectful distance. Octavia had wanted to rush in to help but Lincoln held her back by placing his
hand on her shoulder.

"I might let you live if you answer my questions." Lexa suggested as she easily sidestepped a swing
while bringing her blade across the back of his hand, causing him to curse and drop his sword,
falling forward on his knees in exhaustion from the game that he had been playing with Lexa.

"Either you kill me or Nia does. Either way, I'm dead." he stated. "Better by your sword than in one
of her cells." Lexa walked along-side him and placed the tip of her blade on his collarbone.

"You could save a lot of lives." She tried. One last attempt.

"So could you." he replied, using his good hand to free a dagger on his belt on the side opposite.

"Very well." Lexa sighed and lifted her sword in preparation for her killing stoke.
The warrior used what he had left and the knife was in his hand quickly and driving upward toward the exposed abdomen of Lexa. She had expected it, and she brought her sword down, timing it perfectly so she could remove the offending hand from his arm. It hit the ground with a thud and the knife danced on some rocks as it fell free from lifeless fingers.

The man screamed in pain and held what remained of his arm but only for a moment as Lexa spun, her blade slicing horizontally to the ground and silencing the man with one clean strike that put his head alongside his hand on the earth.

Lexa took a calming breath and closed her eyes as her sword hung limply at her side.

"Yu gonplei ste odon." (Your fight is over.) she whispered.

Octavia walked up and though she was amazed at the skill of Lexa, she could not say anything about it. It was clear Lexa was skilled, and while she fought she was fearless but now she looked at the one who brought down these five men, there was remorse that she wore for the men and a respect for the fallen. When she opened her eyes, she was staring at Octavia and she nodded at the smaller woman as if she could hear her thoughts.

Lexa glanced around and removed her weapons from the corpses.

"It isn't much farther and then we can rest." Lexa said, wiping the blood from her swords on the clothes of the Azgeda.

"Is it safe?" Octavia asked.

"As safe as any place when Azgeda are roaming the forest." Lexa shrugged. "If we rest through the day and make good time through the evening and night, we can be where we need to be by tomorrow morning."

After thirty more minutes of hiking, they came to the side of hill. Lexa had been focused on making sure there were no Azgeda around and both Lincoln and Octavia became alarmed when she removed her sword. Shaking her head, Lexa told them everything was fine and began to tap it along the hill. Octavia looked at Lincoln and he just shrugged in response. After a few moments, the sound of sword hitting solid ground was replaced by a dampened and hollow sound.

"We are here." Lexa stated with relief.

She felt around and she lifted a mat of moss that hid an entrance to a cave beneath.

Octavia and Lincoln grinned at each other at this surprise and walked forward into the entrance, followed by Lexa after securing the mat.

It was clear that the cave had not been well maintained but it would suffice for what they required. They would not be able to start a fire, but Lexa figured their warmth and that of the sun would be enough for them to be comfortable.

"We should eat then sleep. Lincoln, you can take first watch and I will take second."

"I am capable of sitting in the dark and looking at the entrance." Octavia stated, displeased she was being excluded.

"If I recall, you stated that you would choose rest first." Lexa replied to her objection then bit down on some dried meat then taking a drink of her water.
Octavia looked over to Lincoln who was preparing a spot to sit facing the entrance. After picking up some of the rations and water, she carried them over to Lincoln so they could eat together. Once she had finished, she gave him what she could not eat and laid down so her head was in his lap. She picked up his hand and rested it on her stomach, interlacing their fingers.

"I thought you said she never jokes?" Octavia whispered to Lincoln who looked at her and smiled as he combed his hand through her hair with his free hand.

"Heda is full of surprises." he said, bending forward and kissing her forehead. "You should sleep now. Your body will thank you later."

"Mhm." she said, already on the way out of consciousness. She was exhausted and she had to fight her body to make it to the cave, but she made it. It had not gone unnoticed by Lexa who still remained impressed with the young girl. She could see first-hand why Indra is impressed with her.

As Lexa leaned back against the dirt wall behind her, she could feel the weight of the day and night on her eye lids. She wanted to keep moving and had considered leaving Lincoln and Octavia behind but it would mean leaving them in lands where Azgeda were traveling in groups. Groups that were looking for Clarke.

Before she fell asleep, she tried to think about what she could say to Clarke to say her to trust her once more. She was determined there had to be a way but every attempt at a solution led to the memory of Clarke's blue eyes staring back at her, the betrayal as clear as the knife she held in her dreams.

She threw her head back in frustration and when it connected with a root she groaned, forgetting she was not alone. Lincoln looked over in her direction and though it wasn't bright in the small cave, he could see Lexa with her hand rubbing the back of her head.

Octavia on the other hand, remained with her eyes closed beneath him. She was sleeping restfully after pushing her body further than she ever had before, and it wasn't over yet. Lexa let herself lean over on her side in an effort to become more comfortable.

She didn't intend on sleeping but Lexa was betrayed with a yawn by her tired body. She fell asleep thinking how much the colour of the lake reminded her of Clarke's beautiful blue eyes and how much she would give to have them look at her without a reminder of her betrayal once more.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Clarke has to make an uneasy alliance to save herself and her friend.

Chapter Notes

Sunday Update!

I hope everyone's Sunday has been a great one and thank you for continuing to spend your time with me and this story. It isn't the longest chapter but it introduces another character.

For those who have been patiently waiting, it won't be much longer before we see two of our favourite characters reunited. Can't wait for that update to come. ;) Not quite yet, but soon!

Clarke, Levai and Echo hiked their way through the forests in a northerly direction for the better part of the day. They had stopped for short breaks at Levai's insistence but Clarke wanted to get to their destination so Levai could be taken care of. Echo explained to them both that the antidote was just as painful as the poison and would take a day to clear his system so it was important they find somewhere safe.

A familiar throbbing in her ankle told her that she would not be able to continue for much longer without suffering serious injury of her own. It was numb for most of the day's journey which allowed them to travel at a fairly quick pace but with the sensations returning in the ankle, she could feel it start to slow her down. She was concerned that the next time they stop for a rest, she would be unable to proceed without help.

Clarke had spent most of the day watching Levai and noticing his body become increasingly fatigued thanks to the poison. It impressed her that he was able to fight through it but his eyes evidenced the fatigue of his body, even though they had never stopped looking around in the forest for any sign of Azgeda.

She saw Levai's breath catch from time to time and though he wouldn't wince, his movement had become much more rigid and he paid more attention to where his feet were as they went on. Clark figured the poison had worked its way through the rest of his body thanks to the many hours they had been travelling and she moved up beside him to help him along.

"Are we close?" Clarke asked as she continued to watch him, hoping for good news.

"Maybe an hour. We have to make it over that ridge and then..."

Half way through his explanation, an arrow lodged itself into the tree directly in front of them and they froze when they heard the order.
"Stop, and throw your weapons on the ground."

Levai dropped his weapons and lifted his hands, obeying the order and informing Clarke to follow suit. She frowned, but did as he requested. When she turned her head not hearing Echo drop hers, she was gone. The woman was nowhere to be seen and Clarke looked around in confusion mixed with anger. *That bitch.* Clarke thought to herself.

When she turned toward Levai, she saw a model of calm as three large figures approached them from the north east. Levai was angry with himself for letting them be discovered, but it was getting difficult to travel in the woods with so little coverage thanks to the change in season.

"You look like her." he said as he held out a familiar paper alongside Clarke's face. Levai had seen a similar image before but these weren't the same men as he had seen at Niylah's trading post.

Levai watched as the Azgeda warrior reached out with his other hand and squeezed Clarke's bicep tightly with his rough hand, drawing a wince to appear on her face.

"No!" Clarke shouted. She watching Levai try to take the man down but was met with a resounding blow to his chest that ejected all the air from his lungs and knocked him hard to the ground, struggling for breath.

"You shouldn't travel with such frail company, Wanheda. You are lucky we came along to protect you from these pathetic Trikru. You expected to make it all the way to Toron with that branwada as your protection?" the man laughed.

Clarke looked down at Levai, a mix of concern and anger. She had to do something to protect him and her mind scrambled for a way to keep them both from any further attacks and an idea came to mind.

"He has to come with us." Clarke stated as twisted herself so she was no longer in the warriors grasp and stopping with a limp a few feet away, she glared at him defiantly. If they wanted her to go with them, they will help her friend or she would make it a very difficult journey. "Help him up and we can get back on our way."

"You don't give us orders." stated one of the warriors who laughed at the small blonde girl's audacity. Clarke shrugged it off and kept her attention on the one who had grabbed her.

"You know your Queen will be angry if she hears I've been mistreated and that includes those who are escorting me to Toron." Clarke summoned up her most angry glare and threw it at the trio, hoping they would believe it.

She almost grinned when she saw it. Uncertainty. She pressed her attack by continuing to dictate how things were going to be. If they wanted her, Clarke decided it would be on her terms and then she would figure out some way to get them out of this. She just needed time to figure it out.

"He is injured so one of you will have to help him."

"He was taking you to the Azplana?" The tall man asked and his posture shifted to less aggressive one. There was disbelief in his voice, but it was laced with hesitancy because their orders were to not harm Clarke. They weren't told she would be escorted.

The two warriors looked to the one in charge with bewilderment at being ordered by the stranger. A stranger whose blue eyes turned to ice before them, eyes that were a startling similar to those of their Queen. The sight brought a shiver that ran up and down each of their spines with the understanding of what would happen to them or worse should Nia be angry with their treatment of the Skaikru.
"Get him up." the Azgeda leader spoke after a moment of contemplation. "Take their weapons. You are under our protection now."

Clarke nodded in understanding and hid her frustration. It would be much harder to get away from them if they didn't have weapons. She might have been able to convince the warriors not to harm them but not having their weapons would make any escape difficult.

She watched the Azgeda warrior yank Levai up off the ground so he could stand. Between the pain he felt from the poison and the most recent impact to his chest, Clarke's mind scrambled for a way out of this situation. It crossed her mind to tell them he had been poisoned but the they would likely leave him behind to die and that wasn't something she could accept.

"We have a camp not far from here. You and your..." The man paused, looking down at Levai with a disdain. "...escort, can rest." "The prince will decide what will happen to both of you. I expect you'll inform him that we have been more than accommodating."

He didn't wait for a response from Clarke after his words and with long steps, he marched forward in the direction that Levai and Clarke had been hiking.

Clarke took a moment and looked to Levai. When their eyes met, it seemed he was almost amused at the change in their circumstance. She had quite possibly saved his life with her plan but now they had another problem to overcome. Clarke gave him a reassuring nod and turned to walk in the direction of the leaving Azgeda warrior.

"I say we just kill'em. By how he looks, he won't make the trip back to camp." one of the Azgeda stated.

"You heard. We help him along. If he dies, it isn't our fault."

Levai was frowning at the two men openly discussing the possibility of his death and he fought the urge to say anything. It would do him little good in his state to try to start something he couldn't finish get away from the two men so he just tuned and started walking in the direction Clarke and the Azgeda went. He had to trust that whatever Clarke was doing, she had a plan to get them out of this.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke was determined to walk alongside the warrior for as long as she could with his quick pace. Levai was assisted by the warriors that trailed them and although she was concerned about the poison in his system, she needed to find out where they were going and how long it would take.

She was about to ask him but through the trees she could see their destination. A short distance away, a group of Azgeda sat around a fire and were picking at the body of some cooked animal over a fire while others were about their own business moving around the area. Clarke noticed that sentries were stationed around the perimeter that was visible to her. When they got closer, the man who led her to the camp spoke in a celebratory tone.

"Looks like we all get to go home for a while, boys and girls." The warrior shouted as he slowed to let Clarke overtake him and walk toward the group near the fire.
As she walked past him to get a better look at how many were there she counted at least twenty she could see, feeling the slight hope in her body extinguish itself with doubt. No weapons and severely outnumbered, her heart raced in her chest. Her look of concern must have overtaken her because the large man placed his hand on her shoulder.

"No need to worry, Wanheda. If we can't get you safely to Toron, there isn't anyone who can."

The group around the fire laughed and cheered at the words they heard from their comrade, and Clarke picked up the sound of one voice in particular. The one who hadn't looked at her unlike all the others around the fire.

Echo.

Clarke ran as best she could at the girl and when she felt she was close enough she lunged, tackling her through the fire and sending the burning embers in every direction. Clark threw punch after punch at her, betrayal fuelling each of them. Clarke had the upper hand but Echo's training quickly turned the tables and Clarke was suddenly the one on her back with Echo raining down her anger in the form of fists.

Everyone who had been eating were now cheering the entertainment that suddenly broke out for their amusement. Some cheered the actions of the newcomer for being able to blindside Echo, while others cheered for Echo to represent all of Azgeda.

Clarke grabbed Echo and tried to flip her back over by taking a fistful of her brown hair and yanking it, resulting in them rolling around in the dirt for position until a loud voice boomed over the group, drawing disappointed groans from the onlookers.

"Break them up."

In seconds, the spectators broke the two apart but not before Clarke landed a solid kick to the side of Echo which made her grimace at the contact before there was enough distance to separate the two.

"Echo, you should know better. Nobody is to harm her."

"She attacked me, Roan."

"I don't care. You are Azgeda and you knew your Queen's orders. Put her in shackles. Nia will decide what to do with her when we get back to Toron."

Roan said and directed his attention to the one who captured her. "Put in the tent next to mine. She knows what will happen to her if she tries anything."

The warrior nodded to the prince and directed Echo to start moving with a tilt of his head in the direction of Roan's tent. Echo who was throwing fire at Roan with her eyes, growled as she turned and marched off in the expected direction.

Both Clarke and Roan turned their attention on the Levai who came hobbling into camp, escorted by two of his warriors. She felt relief in seeing that he was unharmed beyond the injuries he had already sustained but the poison had worked itself deeper into his system. Clarke did notice he was standing taller, likely as defiance due to being surrounded by Azgeda warriors.

"And who might this be?" Roan asked.

"He was with her." the warrior pointed at Clarke who was still brushing dirt off her clothes while trying to avoid putting weight on her ankle.
Roan turned and looked at Clarke for an explanation.

"He is escorting me to Toron to meet your Queen." Clarke stated matter-of-factly.

"He was, was he?"

Clarke frowned at his choice of words.

"Put him in the tent with Echo and chain him up as well. Nia can have both." he said to one of the men helping Levai.

"He has been poisoned. Nia won't be pleased if you let him die." she repeated as she did earlier, trying to intimidate him by staring a hole through him.

"You clearly don't know my mother very well if you think she would reprimand her son for letting a Trikru farmer die. I think she would be more upset if I killed him and spared him the pain he will feel just before the poison takes him." he said as he walked up to Clarke with a smirk on his face, offering her his arm for balance.

Clarke looked past him toward the tent Levai was being taken to, concern on her face.

"Don't worry, I don't plan on letting him die. Not yet. He has answers to questions I and my mother haven't thought up yet."

Clarke looked up at him and let her eyebrows slant to show her displeasure with his plans.

"He is a friend. I don't want to see him killed or harmed." Clarke said again, but with less confidence in her voice.

"As long as he is in my protection, no harm will come to him unless he goes looking for it first. I will send our healer to him with an antidote. I trust this pleases the great Wanheda?" Roan asked with mockery in his tone.

Clarke nodded her acceptance of the offer. She was relieved Levai would be safe and they might be able to have to an opportunity to escape from these people. Clarke resolved to gain their trust and she decided the only way to do that was to get on prince Roan's good side. If this first meeting is an indication, it was not going to be easy. Roan didn't seem to be the trusting type and he was loyal to his mother, the Queen. She snapped herself from her thoughts to see Roan watching her. Both of them had been trying to decide something but Clarke broke her silence.

"And Echo?"

"What about her?"

"What will happen to her?"

"She'll get what she deserves. Nia gave very specific orders and she knows what happens to those who disobey them. Your concern is touching seeing as moments ago you tackled her through a fire and kicked her in the ribs."

Clarke shakes her head and looks up at Roan as she takes his still offered arm.

"Not concern, I'm wondering if you have any more of that poison."

Roan let his eyebrows rise after hearing the unexpected words that came from Clarke and laughed so loud it caught the attention of his warriors who looked at him with a look of concern.
"You certainly live up to your reputation, Clarke kom Skaikru." he said, trying to collect himself. "As much as I would enjoy continuing this conversation right now, I think you would prefer I take you to our healer. You haven't put weight on that foot since you were pulled apart from Echo. He will give you something for the pain."

"Thank you."

Roan gave a very regal bow but then lifted his head and smirked at Clarke. "Afterward you can join me in my tent for dinner. We can continue our conversation. I think you'll find we have a lot to discuss about the future."

"I agree." Clarke said.

She was exhausted, but he led her to where their healers tent was set up. After they entered, he ordered the man who was sitting in the chair to help Clarke with her ankle.

"Bring her to my tent when you are done then help the Trikru in the tent beside it. He was poisoned and will need an antidote. Stay with him and make sure he gets through the worst of it."

He turned his attention to Clarke but continued to direct his conversation at the healer. "And if you can, bring something to clean the cuts on Echo's face. It seems she got in a disagreement with someone and they got the better of her."
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

In trying to find Clarke and prevent her from falling into the Ice Queen's hands, Lexa loses a bit of herself in the process.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 16 Update!

Got it posted as quick as I could!

I hope you enjoy and see you all in a few days!

"Time to move." Lexa stated, her voice just above a whisper.

Lincoln raised his hand to his eyes and Octavia mimicked his actions, rubbing the sleep from their eyes. It took a short moment for their eyes to adjust due to the minimal amount of light that entered the small cave. Octavia rose first and offered a hand to Lincoln to help him off the dirt floor and after putting their water containers in their packs, they joined Lexa near the covered entrance.

"Two groups passed by. One in the direction of Tondc, and another returning toward Azgeda territory." Lexa whispered, now that they were next to her.

"We will travel faster tonight and the risk of being seen will increase." Lexa looked to Octavia as she spoke. Octavia was determined to not show any of the physical strain that coursed through her legs and managed a stiff nod of understanding. She looked at Lincoln and he offered a similar nod.

Lexa propped the entrance open enough that they could squeeze out sideways through the narrow passage and once they were outside she recovered the entrance to hide the hidden entrance. She turned and joined the pair in a crouched position to observe their surroundings. Lexa looked up to the sky and figured it to be after midnight. The clouds in the sky above dampened the brightness of the moon. She was happy that would help hide their movement, but also hide those anyone who might be looking for Clarke as well. Once she was certain it was safe, she stood from her crouching position and inclined her head to the north, directing them to follow.

Lincoln looked at Octavia and she reassuringly squeezed his shoulder and flashed him a quick grin then whispered "Try to keep up!", taking off in a dash after the Commander who had transitioned from walking into a quick jog away from the two.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Their progress was quick and although Octavia had to push through physical strain that constantly threatened to pull her to the ground via tired legs and clumsy feet, she didn't fall once. She did notice,
however, that Lincoln always seemed be nearby when the fatigue threatened to overwhelm her and it would not be long after that Lexa would call for a rest.

They managed to avoid patrols which was a relief to Lexa. Confrontation would create unwanted attention from the patrols Nia had sent into the territory. She knew it was reckless of her to have attacked the Azgeda the day before and she let her anger with Nia's actions override her better judgement and was determined to avoid that situation again if she could.

Lexa raised her had to slow their pace and they all dropped to a familiar crouching position. Even with the lack of leaves on the bushes and trees, they were still rather difficult to spot unless anyone happened to look in their direction. Lexa and Lincoln could smell the smoke that coated the trees and bushes in the area. Octavia looked at Lincoln with a puzzled look.

"What is going on?"

"There was a fire here. Could be Azgeda, could have been Clarke." he kept his voice low.

"How can you tell?"

Lincoln reached forward and pulled a branch of a bush closer to Octavia. "Smell this." he suggested.

Octavia leaned forward and quickly took a deep breath and all she could smell was the forest around her.

"Try it slower. Try to see if you can smell the smoke."

Lexa watched Octavia close her eyes and lean closer into the branch so it rested right below her nose and inhaled as she was instructed. When Octavia's eyes shot open, she knew why their two souls had come together. Lexa lifted her finger to her lips reminding then to remain quiet. She could leave them some time together while she went ahead and scouted the area she believed the smoke originated.

"Remain here." She whispered to the pair.

They both nodded their understanding but Lexa did not see it. She had already begun forward through the trees into a small clearing and walked toward a small cabin with a small stream of smoke coming through the chimney stack.

"Where are we?" Octavia queried as she tried to stretch out her sore muscles as best she could.

"Near the Azgeda border. The people who live closer to the border tend to have friendlier relations and trade quite often. I imagine she is going by herself to seem less threatening and get information." He turned his attention from the forest around them to Octavia and continued, "That or she's going to kill everyone again."

Octavia's face filled with amusement and she had to fight back a laugh at the flippant addition to his explanation, giving his a shove in the shoulder and earning her a grin from the big man.

Lexa continued forward with her hood up concealing her features and her cloak hung over her back similarly to hiding her weapons. stepping softly she moved around the rear of the cabin. She could hear gruff voices inside laughing and carrying on which elevated her blood pressure and quickened her breathing.

"Azgeda." She muttered with disdain.

She strained to hear what they were discussing and focused on the voices inside. She couldn't hear
much of their conversation and decided to move closer in an effort to learn more but as she did, her
muscles tensed at the sound of a foot stepping on grass a few feet away from her and around the
corner of the cabin. It was moving in her direction. Lexa was caught in the open and she cursed her
situation. She knew better.

Lexa moved slowly to the wall of the cabin, pressing her back into the dark wood while her hand
found the familiar wooden handle of her favourite dagger. She gave it the slight turn to unlock it
from the sheath and slowly drew it as the footfalls got closer.

Her heart rate was dead calm as the face of an Azgeda man sauntered past the corner unaware that
Lexa was waiting for him in the darkness. He took two steps further and before he could say a word,
he was abruptly struggling to choke down a breath of air as Lexa took position behind him, placed
her hand under his chin to expose his neck and plunged her dagger into the exposed flesh.

The man's large hands clutched at his throat in a futile bid to prevent the blood from escaping the
wound. Lexa caught his weight as he fell and slowly lowered him to the ground then placing her
hand over his mouth while the remainder of his life ebbed from the fresh wound.

Lexa turned her attention back on the cabin once she could no longer feel life in him. The
conversation seemed to go on uninterrupted and they weren't aware of what just happened. Trying to
determine the numbers they were facing, she moved back into position against the wall and pressed
her ear against it. Three voices, all male.

She looked at the body laying on the ground and she decided she would have to drag him into the
tree line and out of sight of the cabin before she rejoined Lincoln and Octavia. She snuck up on them
and Octavia clumsily reached for her sword after Lexa poked her with the rip of her blade from
behind. Lincoln snickered quietly sharing a knowing glance at Lexa then an apologetic one to
Octavia who looked back and forth between them, upset at their collusion. Lexa gave her a grin then
whispered "Better me than Azgeda. Your ears must be as important as your nose."

Octavia nodded at the lesson, waiting for Lexa's instructions.

"There are three in the cabin. Azgeda. I took care of one of them but they will be suspicious when he
doesn't return. Move to the sides of the door and I will stand in front of it. Once they come out for
their friend, we will kill those who leave the cabin then move quickly inside to deal with the
remaining Azgeda."

Lincoln and Octavia agreed, rising from their crouching positions and started off toward the cabin.

"Wait." Lexa said, grinning.

"Heda?" Lincoln asked.

"Lincoln, I've decided you are Azgeda."

Octavia and Lincoln looked at the other then back to the Commander with curiosity.

"Come with me." Lexa said, hopping up from where she crouched and jogged off in the direction
she first walked when she told them to wait for her.

Lincoln stood there in the clearing in his newly acquired Azgeda furs and stood about fifteen feet
from the front of the cabin. He had an axe in his hand and began chopping wood. Lexa and Octavia
took position at either side of the door waiting for someone to exit the cabin.

"What the hell is he doing?" a voice inside the cabin asked loudly, which was followed by heavy
footsteps on the wooden floor. Lexa motioned to Octavia who stood across the door to attack the moment the man appeared. She would enter the cabin and deal with the two inside.

The door opened swiftly and the Azgeda warrior shouted at the man he believed to be his friend, taking steps forward through the door and toward the steps leading down.

"What the hell are you doing making so much noise? We don't need more wood. We are leaving shortl..."

His words were cut short by Octavia who lunged forward, thrusting her blade into and through the back of the man. He had seen her sudden movement out of the corner of his vision but wasn't fast enough to do more than fall forward with her blade in him, pulling it from her hands. Lexa was through the door and moving on the men who had risen from their seats drawing their own weapons before the man Octavia had killed had hit the ground.

"Kill the bitch!" one of the Azgeda shouted, as he threw a cup across the room at another man who was laying in bed, slowly waking from the haze of sleep he just managed to fall into and trying to figure out what was happening.

In a slashing arc, one of the warriors brought his sword down which Lexa easily deflected. The second warrior followed quickly after with a similar swing that Lexa was unable to completely avoid, taking a blow that deflected off the armour on her shoulder but not before removing a piece of it.

Lincoln was running toward the cabin and Octavia was busy pulling her sword from the man on the ground while Lexa was busy with the men in the cabin. She had believed they would catch them unaware but these men were more seasoned than the men the day before.

Her body had moved to avoid the second blow and she used that momentum to spin and throw a kick into the abdomen of the first attacker which dropped him to a knee, gasping for breath. Her kick removed one from the fight for a moment but she had to swing her sword to the right side of her body, barely blocking the second swing from the warrior who landed his first strike.

She grimaced at the strength behind the blow and he pressed his weight forward through the contact, driving Lexa back against the wall, effectively pinning the arm that held her sword against her side. He pressed his face forward and a sickening grin revealed twisted and broken teeth. "Give up now and I'll make your end a lot more pleasurable than the one I gave the previous owner of this place."

Everything stopped.

Everything but the resounding thud of her heart pounding in her chest. The world around her had muted and she only saw the man in front of her, that sickeningly toothy grin and the words that replayed in her mind that made his life forfeit the moment he uttered them.

He believed he had Lexa at disadvantage but his cockiness turned to bewilderment and he winced in agony as Lexa drove her knee upward into his groin. That was followed by Lexa driving her forehead into the bridge of his nose, bringing a torrent of blood immediately down over his lips and over his chin. He staggered back which allowed Lexa to launch herself forward, screaming as she drove the man back in a tackle over the table they were sitting at when she entered.

Lincoln stepped through the door to see Lexa flailing fists downward onto one of the men's face that she had just forced over the table. There was another man on the ground trying to recover his breath and another who was running with a sword toward Lexa whose attention was solely focused on the man beneath her fists.
The sound of metal clashing next to her head wasn't enough to break her focus on the man below her. Lincoln blocked the Azgeda blow then quickly landed a strike of his own that killed the Azgeda man who didn't see Lincoln coming. Lincoln turned to see Octavia had entered behind him and plunged her steel into leg of the man the floor, not enough to kill him but to keep him from causing any problems if he tried to get away.

Lexa remained focused on the man below her, lost in the need to continue to make the man feel pain. He had long since stopped being able to protect himself and his body lay limp on the floor when Lexa felt her hands begin to ache. She decided this would be an appropriate time to try something else, feeling for the dagger that hung at her hip. She drew it, lifting it over her head to slam it down into the man but was stopped before her downward thrust.

"Heda. He is dead." Lincoln stated as if it was obvious to them all.

Lexa's chest heaved at her lungs took deep breaths. She looked at Lincoln's hand then up at him, the fire remaining in her eyes. His hand was still around her wrist which led to his quickly releasing of her wrist and stepping back apologetically.

"What do we do with this one?" Octavia asked, trying to draw Lexa's attention from Lincoln and on to the Azgeda who was still breathing.

Lexa's head snapped in her direction then down to the Azgeda beneath Octavia's blade. The rage that had consumed her before had been replaced by something else and then she spoke.

"Leave him with me. Lincoln, take Octavia and make sure we are not interrupted." Lexa's voice was so calm it was unnerving.

"Sha, Heda." Lincoln accepted the order and directed Octavia to leave with him.

"If he knows anything about Clarke, I want to hear it." Octavia stated defiantly, refusing to move her feet.

"Octavia." Lincoln warned her, looking at Lexa's hands which were covered in blood. "You will not want to see what comes next."

She looked at Lincoln and then back to Lexa who was staring at the man on the floor. Her eyes weren't filled with anger. They didn't seem filled with anything and it forced Octavia to shiver. Lexa was looking at the man as if he didn't exist –like he was dead and his last breath was a mere formality.

Octavia and Lincoln walked out of the cabin and when Octavia turned to look back at the door, she took in a deep breath. When Lincoln took in a similar breath beside her and they exchanged a glance, she understood they saw something in the Commander they never wished to see again.

They could see Lexa walk up to the door and she looked out in the distance past them both as she closed the door. The man on the floor sat wide-eyed and wordless as Lexa turned around to face him.

She looked at the dagger in her hand then back to the man in front of her.

"We both know you are already dead. How you choose to leave this life will be determined by how you answer two questions."

The man looked at his sword which sat between the pair and it drew a sickening grin from Lexa, leading the man to abandon any notion of being his own hero. He looked up at Lexa and swallowed
"What... what do you want to know?"
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Clarke is faced with a decision regarding her people and their future. Familiar faces return and are confronted with a dilemma of their own.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 17!

It has been a very long time coming and I am sorry for the wait. Thank you to those who have been patiently waiting for this chapter and the ones to come.

Updates will be coming bi-weekly, but there will be times I may throw up chapters earlier. It all depends on how chaotic life gets between physio, work and family commitments.

I hope everyone enjoys and Happy Father's day to all the dad's out there!

Clarke’s fingers shifted the food on the plate of food in front of her, her mind wandering to her current predicament. She sat in the warm tent that was given to her by Roan who had joined her for the meal. Occasionally she would glance across the table to him and though he didn’t speak, he always seemed to have a smirk on his face which seemed to frustrate her. Clarke decided she would not speak first under his watchful gaze no matter how uncomfortable it made her.

She was trying to figure out exactly how she could get both herself and Levai out of the situation they were in but couldn't come up with anything that seemed reasonable and neither were in any shape to try to run away and her frustration was mounting.

Roan shifted in his seat and took in a frustrated deep breath. She knew he was getting tired of their silent game and it was clear he wanted to ask her questions. Clarke couldn’t help but reply to his impatience with an upward turn at the corner of her lip.

"I will start with asking why the mighty Wanheda is wandering around Azgeda territory with a single Trikru scout." he asked, breaking the silence between them.

"I thought you said he was a farmer." Clarke said, finally picking up a piece of the bread in front of herself and popping it in her mouth, then raising her eyes from the table to meet Roan’s questioning look.

"We both know he isn't a farmer and we both know he wasn't escorting you to see my mother. He knows she would kill him the moment she had you. Again, what were you doing in Azgeda territory?"

"To see what Nia is offering for peace. I knew that once I was in your territory, we would be found
and I could be taken north. I don't know my way around this territory and it made sense to have your people find me." Clarke picked up a leaf of lettuce from her plate and popped it in her mouth after dipping it in some of the flavourful oil that accompanied it.

"Do you know anything of Nia, Clarke?"

"She is your Queen."

Roan released a small laugh and leaned forward.

"If Nia is willing to help us, I should be willing to hear her offer."

"Nia will demand things of you for helping your people. No peace is ever free. Even the beloved Heda knows this."

Clarke paused herself for a moment and sat back in her chair. She hadn’t had much time to think about Lexa and a pit in her stomach appeared when Roan mentioned her name. Lexa was the reason she was here. Lexa betrayed her. Lexa left her there. Alone.

Realizing she was getting lost in her thoughts, she brought herself back to the present by reminding herself she had to find a way to get free from the Azgeda and Levai back to his people. From there, she could go alone.

"I will do what I can to give my people a home where they will be safe. With Nia, or whoever is willing to work with my people and give them a chance at peace."

Roan leaned back in his chair and stared across at Clarke and she felt his scrutinizing eyes poking and prodding at her defences. Clarke decided to ask him a question of her own.

"Will Nia really kill him?" Clarke asked.

"You don't know my mother if you have to ask that question." he answered, drawing furrowed brows from his guest.

"He saved my life." Clarke said. If Nia was going to kill him, there was no way she could let him accompany her to Toron.

"Then you owe him." He stated. “I on the other hand owe him nothing." "Consider it a favour to a future ally, then."

There it was again – that smirk.

"I could set him free and send him back to his beloved Trikru and your debt to him would be settled."

Clarke let out a frustrated breath. She could save his life and that was why she agreed to go with the Azgeda to this camp. Owing Roan a favour was another matter entirely. Clarke certainly didn’t trust him.

"How will I know he will be safe once you release him?" Clarke questioned.

She had no reason to trust him. He was the son of the woman that would kill his friend. Clarke began to get angry at herself for sharing information with him.

"I could leave him in the care of Echo. My mother would kill her simply for putting her hands on
you as she did earlier." he then pointed to the black eye that was developing on Clarke. "I could leave them here when we break camp to tend to him as he works through the poison in his system. She would bring him back to Trikru lands –provided you don't discuss it with Nia, of course."

"I don't trust Echo." Clarke stated. The knowledge she abandoned them when they needed her was still fresh in her memory and if she could switch loyalties so quickly, who was to say she wouldn't leave him too die.

"Trust in her ability to stay alive."

"I don't doubt that." Clarke muttered. It was barely audible but Roan caught the gist of it and fought back a laugh.

"We will break camp in the morning and begin our way to Toron so you can discuss an arrangement with Nia. Echo will remain and everyone will be told she is staying behind to make sure he dies a painful death as a way to regain her Queens trust. Once he has recovered enough from the poison, she will escort him through Azgeda lands as a prisoner until they enter Trikru lands and release him. Do we have a deal, Wanheda?" he asked, leaning forward and offering her his arm across the table.

"If anything happens to him, I tell Nia about what she has done." Clarke amended the agreement.

Roan pulled his arm back slightly and after a moment of thought, extended his arm fully once more and nodded. "Very well."

Clarke leaned forward and extended her arm across the table and took hold of Roan's arm. "I agree."

"I want to go tell him." Clarke added.

"If you'd like, let Echo know what the future has in store for her as well." Roan smiled. "I'm sure you are the last person she wants to hear explain to her she has to babysit a Trikru farmer."

"I thought we both knew he wasn't a farmer."

"People are not always as they seem, Wanheda." he answered, popping a small piece of fruit in his mouth. "Others are much more transparent than they wish to be." he said while he chewed, putting his attention on the meal before him and away from Clarke.

Clarke turned in her chair and put her weight on her good leg, leaning against the table to help her stand. Once she was balanced, she grabbed the crutch the healer provided her and she slowly hobbled out of the tent.

It didn't take her long to get to the tent that Levai and Echo were in. It was a smaller tent and Echo sat on the ground in the corner, her arm in a shackle and secured to one of the tent poles in the corner, hanging over her head. When she caught sight of Clarke, she frowned at her.

"You don't have any idea what you are getting yourself into, do you?" Echo mocked.

"I'm not the one imprisoned in a tent." Clarke stated simply, ignoring Echo and making her way over to the spot where Levai was resting. The healer was checking him and turned to look at her and when Clark arrived at his side, he looked at her foot and sighed.

"You should not be moving about. That foot is going to take time to heal."

"The crutch you gave me helps. I had to come see how he is doing." she inclined her head at the man who was sleeping.
"The antidote will take a couple days to work through his system. I gave him something to help him sleep and that will help alleviate some of the pain he will experience. I will speak to Roan about remaining a few more days." he informed her.

"We leave tomorrow morning for Toron. Will he be able to walk?" Clarke asked.

"Not for at least two days and it will be with great difficulty. If he does not rest it will reduce the antidote's ability to do its work. He needs at least a day of rest without moving."

Levai began to stir, but his eyes remained closed. He was mumbling something incoherent and Clarke leaned past the healer, placing her hand on his chest to try to calm him down. She could feel his heart racing.

"It is normal for that to happen while people work through that particular poison. The body must work through it." The healer explained.

"He isn't in danger? His heart is racing." Clarke questioned.

Shooting the blonde a look as though Clarke had insulted his abilities, he stood and turned to leave the tent. "I said it is normal. Leave him to rest and I will speak to Roan about his condition."

The man who was tending to Levai stood up and left the tent, Clarke assumed to speak to Roan. She kept her attention on Levai's quiet mumbling and took a moment to be thankful that Levai was going to be alright. A moment that was broken when Echo began to speak again.

"You are a fool if you think you will find peace with Nia."

"I'm a fool for wanting peace for my people?" Clarke questioned, not turning for face Echo.

"That you think Nia is the one who will help you attain it."

Clarke now turned to look at Echo who sat with her back against the tent pole and her arms wrapped around her knees for warmth. "You don't think she will honour an agreement between our two people?"

"You don’t know Nia. She has two ambitions in her life. The first is to rule all the clans. The second, is to force the Commander to watch her destroy everything she built, then take her life from her."

"She believes she should be Heda?" Clarke hadn't considered the possibility Nia wished to replace Lexa as Heda.

"She wants to rule. She doesn't care about the Kongeda and opposed it from the moment Lexa proposed it. Nia had power over the smaller clans and though her people prospered, others suffered because they didn't have the ability to resist her army. Her supporters in Azgeda want to bring that way of life back to the clans." Echo explained.

"You are saying she wants to use my people to overthrow Lexa and go back to how things were before? If we help her, we would be her allies. If she betrayed us, we could fight back."

Echo laughed.

"You have no idea what you are talking about, all-mighty Wanheda. Nia's army numbers in the thousands. The only thing that stopped her from attacking Polis was Maun-de and now that they are out of the way, your people are the only thing standing between her and what she has always
wanted."

"Our technology, you mean."

"Now Skai-gada begins to understand. You are in the middle of a game that has been playing out between Nia and the Commander since Lexa ascended. If she gets you and your people, she wins."

Levai began to cough, moaning and rambling as he did moments before.

Clarke turned her attention back to Levai and his coughing became severe, his body shook uncontrollably. She placed her hand on his forehead and Levai was burning up. She frantically looked around the room for something to cover him with.

"It won't matter. The fight is his to win or lose now." Echo stated.

Clarke ignored her and yanked a blanket from a table next to them and covered him, securing it tightly under his shoulders and legs. Once she believed she calmed him down enough, she turned her eyes on Echo who appeared bored with her circumstance.

"I don't give up on people." Clarke declared

"Running away from your people isn't giving up?" she mocked.

Clarke turned to face Echo and growled, balling up her fists and taking in a fortifying breath. Echo looked at her with concern in her eyes after realizing she had no way to defend herself if Clarke chose to attack.

Clarke took a step forward but then the words hit her and she froze.

She never saw herself as running away. She believed she left her people to protect them from what she had become. Death followed her and she wanted to be as far away from them as she could to make sure nothing else could happen. For them to be safe but now they faced a threat in Nia and the Azgeda army that threatened all the clans. She wondered how much of Echo's words were the truth.

Echo realized Clarke wasn’t going to continue forward and seized the opportunity that presented itself while Clarke's internal conflict raged.

"You should let me go, Clarke" Echo suggested, raising her arms off her knees and presenting the shackles but Clarke was lost within her thoughts. It was only when she shook the chain enough that Clarke was brought back to the present.

When she first looked at Echo her eyes were distant but they focused on the girl. The memory of her abandoning the pair in the forest surfaced in her and for a moment, it was clearly expressed by her face. Clarke wanted nothing more than to present the girl to Nia so she would suffer her Queen's wrath. After letting Echo digest the anger in her eyes, she addressed her.

"There is a condition. You must escort Levai back to Trikru territory once he is able to travel. Afterward, you will be free to go and do whatever it is you do with yourself."

"You will just let me go?" Echo raised an eyebrow, asking suspiciously.

"The condition is that he actually make it back to his people. If it is discovered that you have left him to die or killed him yourself, I will tell Nia about what happened when I arrived here in the camp. You know what she will do to you."
Clarke's eyes bored a hole into Echo who seemed confused by the turn of events.

"This was your idea?"

"It was a decision Roan and I agreed upon."

Echo looked from Clarke to Levai and back to Clarke again.

"And if he dies in here?" She asked with uncertainty laced in her words.

"Then you suffer the same fate." Clarke said simply with a shrug.

After a short moment Echo nodded and said, "I'll make sure he gets back to his people."

She and Echo were locked in their stares at the other. Clarke wanted a reason for her to trust words and Echo cleared her throat and seemed as though she was trying to win a debate with herself and when she spoke, it was almost a whisper.

"If it weren't for me, your friend wouldn't have made it."

Clarke scoffed, disbelieving Echo's claim so she continued.

"You think it was coincidence they came upon you and your friend? I left and alerted Roan that you were heading in this direction and he ordered the group that found you to make sure you arrived here unharmed. What I didn't expect was you attacking me."

Clarke continued to look at her with suspicion and Echo seemed frustrated, letting an exasperated sigh escape her lungs.

"Why would he have put you in chains if you were the reason he was able to find me?" Clarke asked, not lowering her voice as Echo did and drawing from her a concerned look and her finger to her lips.

"Nia didn’t want you harmed and I disobeyed that order, hence the chains. Not even Roan would dare disobey his mother when it comes to her orders to find you and bring you to her unharmed."

“So Roan wants to bring me to Nia.” Clarke stated.

“That has been his goal from the beginning.” Echo said.

“If I let you go, will you help Levai and I escape from Roan?"

“I can’t do that. Nia has many supporters and this camp is full of them. As far as they know, I am one as well. If I give myself away, I am as good as dead. My best chance is to get away with your friend.”

“Which leaves me, in the hands of Roan and being forced to go to Nia.” Clark grunted in frustration and looked between Levai and Echo trying to convince herself on a course of action. “If I give you a message, can you get it to Camp Jaha?"

“I can try.” Echo said, leaning forward.

~*~*~*~*~*~
“She just went in that tent.” Bellamy stated, passing his binoculars over to Koma and brushing his dark hair out from his eyes. “The darkest one. Echo is still in there as well.”

“There are too many for us to be able to get in and out without being caught. They would be able to stop us.” Koma stated as he took his turn to look at the camp that sat a fair distance away.

“We should have stopped them before they got to the camp.” Bellamy argued. “We still have the dark of night to get them by surprise.”

“They would have alerted others. We would have had to use your gun and that would have brought more of them from the camp. It would end the same then as it would now.”

Bellamy sighed in frustration and turned to look at the camp in the distance. “Then we need to get more people to free Clarke. She looked injured.”

“For now, we can only watch. If we leave to get more people, there is a good chance they will be deeper in Azgeda territory and it will be harder to follow them. There is an even greater chance we won’t find them again.”

They both observed the movement in and out of the camp. It was nightfall which gave them a fair amount of cover and unmoving on the ground they weren’t likely to be spotted unless someone stepped on top of them. Bellamy shifted uncomfortably and Koma frowned at the noise.

“Do you think Lexa and the others are on their way?”

“The Commander is more than capable of finding us. Her skill in tracking is better than most.” Koma stated. “If you have any doubts of that, you can ask her yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“Heda, Lincoln and your sister are 100 yards to our left.” Koma said, his eyes never leaving the small encampment ahead.

“How did…” Bellamy whispered to himself as he turned his head to look westward. After his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he could make out the three figures in similar positions to their own on the ground for cover.

“They arrived roughly an hour ago. The Commander has been observing the camp since her arrival. She wants us to remain where here and she will inform us of her plan soon.”

He could see Octavia looking in their direction and a small sense of relief filled his chest when she gave a slight wave to acknowledge his new understanding of their situation. Bellamy grinned and looked back at the village, full of confidence.

“Now we can get Clarke out of there.” He stated, starting to adjust himself so he could rise from the ground. Koma quickly placed his hand on Bellamy’s shoulder and pressed him into the ground. Bellamy winced at the surprising strength that kept him pinned to the ground.

“Now we wait for Heda to make her decision. We are still outnumbered and from the looks of it, Clarke was walking freely but injured in their camp. This could be a problem. She will inform us what we will do next.”

Bellamy stopped trying to rise and Koma released some of the downward pressure.
“We are supposed to just lay here and wait for them to leave? I want to talk to Lexa.” Bellamy stated again, his voice rising in displeasure and his body moving once more. Again, Koma drove his body into the ground but this time with a crushing force behind it. Bellamy winced at the pressure.

“Heda wishes us to remain here. Quietly. If you continue to endanger us all, I will not be as polite the next time I tell you to remain here.”

Bellamy looked back to the three newcomers and could make out that Octavia was gesturing for him to remain still. He let out a sigh and let his body relax. Koma took it as a sign of understanding and removed his hand.

“Heda will have a plan.” Koma stated matter-of-factly.

“She better.” Bellamy growled in a low tone which drew a sideways glare from Koma which was ignored by Bellamy whose focus returned to the camp.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

This chapter is an updated version from the one I posted a day ago.

I changed some of the interaction with two of the characters which I believe will help tone of the story and lighten things up a bit.

Again, thanks for everyone for continuing with my story and I hope you enjoy!

See you all with the next update in a couple weeks.

Walking with light feet, the trio of Lexa, Lincoln and Octavia approached the camp from the south-east. They kept tight to the massive oaks, moving forward one at a time. Lexa was unsure of the situation ahead and made sure to keep them far enough away that the light from the camp fires could not reveal their position in the dark of night to the Azgeda.

Lexa’s forward momentum stopped when she felt they were close enough and signalled the pair behind her to hold their position behind the stout-bodied trees. trying to get a better grasp of the camps inhabitants ahead. After a moment of counting the Azgeda she frowned realizing the disadvantage in numbers they had.

Her eyes began to take in possible ways to attack the camp and frustration set in. It only took a swift glance at a tent door being opened to cause her breath to catch in her throat. The familiar face of a blonde-haired girl moved slowly from the entryway in the direction of another tent located closer to the middle of the camp.

“Clarke…” she whispered, expelling the air in her chest in surprise.

Lincoln and Octavia exchanged glances after hearing the word escape the Commanders’ lips.

Her stomach flipped nervously as she continued to watch Clarke and It was only after a moment of staring at the blonde that she realized she was injured. That brought on a different feeling within her, a feeling of anger.

Someone had hurt Clarke and she was going to find out who it was in the camp and make an example of them. Steeling herself for the fight she was imagining, Lexa let her hand fall to her dagger and begin to slide it from the sheath as she crouched to the ground. After convincing herself she had to free Clarke now, she took a small forward to the camp. Someone would pay.

Pulling her back from the brink was Lincoln with a firm but gentle placing of his hand on her shoulder. He too had seen Clarke walk across the camp but when he saw what the Commander intended to do, he had to try to get her to stop. Lexa spun and brought her dagger up in a defensive stance.

“She has to go!” he exclaimed in a quiet surrender, withdrawing his hand from her shoulder to create space between them.

It took Lexa a moment to blink away the anger and focus on Lincoln. Octavia stared wide-eyed at
the occurrence and the sudden change in her demeanor.

Lexa had to close her eyes and take a calming breath, her dagger away and opened her eyes to reveal frustration at their situation while thanking Lincoln with a nod from pulling her back from the brink of what would likely have been a fatal mistake for the three.

“Clarke is here.” Octavia said in a hushed tone after she moved up to join Lincoln and Lexa.

“She is here, but we have three problems.” Lexa stated as she leaned against the tree, putting her attention back toward the tent Clarke just walked into but continued her thought.

“The first being there are far too many Azgeda for the three of us to deal with. Even with Bellamy and Koma…” Lexa motioned with a glance over her shoulder toward the pair who were laying on the ground observing he camp in the distance. “…we still couldn’t take down a group that size.”

“The second problem?” Octavia asked, looking in the direction of her brother and the much larger Trikru warrior.

“Clarke is injured. Even if we could distract them, getting her away would only slow us down and they would eventually overtake us.”

Lincoln nodded in agreement with Lexa’s assessment.

“I’m going to guess the third problem is that she doesn’t have a guard, which means she isn’t at risk of running or she isn’t their prisoner.” Octavia volunteered.

“Which is going to make this a very difficult rescue.” Lincoln said.

Octavia looked back in the direction of her brother who seemed to want to get up but was shoved back down to the ground by Koma. A subtle gesture from Lexa suggested they should remain where they are.

Lexa looked up in frustration. She could see the stars through the trees and without any apparent reason to Lincoln and Octavia, her eyes opened wide with realization. “I have an idea.” Lexa grinned, turning away from Octavia and Lincoln. “You two will remain here and if all goes to plan, Clarke will be back with her people soon.”

Lincoln watched as Lexa pulled on the belts holding her swords to make sure they were tight to her back and snapped a strap over the wooden-handled blade to make sure it wouldn’t fall out.

“What are we doing?” Octavia asked.

It took a moment for Lexa to convince herself this was the right idea. Any action they could take could lead to a conflict with the Azgeda in the camp, but she wanted the one with the least amount of possible captures or casualties.

Then there was her other concern. Clarke.

The blonde girl had been in her thoughts a considerable amount since that day. The look of confusion turned realization that swam in her blue eyes – blue eyes that fought to hold back tears from her betrayal. Lexa had convinced herself it was for her people. That it was something Clarke would have done in her situation and she believed it right up until her words pierced the heart of the woman she wanted to love.

“I’m going to talk to Clarke.” Lexa stated, rising to stand straight and leaping upward to grab one of
the stout branches of the oak tree. In moments she was up in the branches and moving both carefully and quietly in the direction of the camp ahead.

“Will she make it?” Octavia asked Lincoln.

“I wouldn’t bet against it.” Lincoln answered, confident in the Commanders ability while he surveyed the forest around them in the darkness.

Moments later Lexa was no longer in sight. She maneuvered herself along the sturdy branches and it did not take her long to get close to the camp. Her concern became heightened the closer the tents became causing her speed to slow.

She couldn’t get directly behind Clarke’s tent as she had hoped but with the thinning numbers of Azgeda in the camp due to those who had gone to sleep for the night. She listened to the tent and though she could make out Clarke’s voice, the other was foreign.

This could complicate things. Lexa thought to herself.

She had been watching the Azgeda for a while trying to determine when her best opportunity to lower herself to the ground would be and when a pair of the warriors left the nearest fire to walk off in the opposite direction of Clarke’s tent because they “have to go take a piss”, Lexa took the opportunity and climbed downward and in moments she was on the ground, dashing behind Clarke’s tent.

Pausing behind it for a moment to listen to what was happening in the tent, she couldn’t hear anything but the murmurs of someone who sounded like they were injured.

Perhaps Clarke is helping one of the Azgeda wounded. She wondered. Lexa didn’t want to have to kill anyone if she could avoid it and she couldn’t imagine how Clarke would react.

Realizing her mind was starting to wander with possibilities, Lexa closed her eyes and took a reinforcing breath to calm herself. From this moment, Lexa was putting her trust in Clarke and she hoped that Clarke would understand she was here to bring her home. She couldn’t recall being this nervous at any point of the conclave.

Quick feet led her to the entrance of the tent and she was inside before anyone was the wiser. She first saw the Azgeda girl staring at her wide-eyed with surprise. Lexa’s hand had drawn her small knife and she started to lunge when movement to her right to rid of the threat. It was a second later when a familiar voice stopped her moments before she plunged the dagger into flesh.

“Lexa?” Clarke asked with shock and wonder in her voice. The world around her stopped along with her breath.

Clarke clearly wasn’t expecting to see Lexa enter her tent in Azgeda territory, especially in the middle of one of their camps. The colour that drained from her face in surprise matched the wide eyes and opened mouth that turned to see the unforgettable face of the Commander.

“What? How?” Clarke managed to stumble out regarding the sudden appearance, choking on the words. She braced herself by placing her hands on the table behind her where Levai was laying.

Lexa wanted to turn and face her. She had practiced what she would say numerous times as she travelled through the trees but like Clarke, the words were there but they didn’t want to make an appearance.

As she stared at the chained woman, now that she could bring herself to fully take in the situation,
was chained to the wall and her hands that were held up to show no sign of aggression had metal cuffs around them. She wasn’t a threat.

“How did you find me?” Clarke said.

Lexa didn’t want to turn to look into the eyes that she assumed was staring a hole into her, but she had to. She feared looking into those eyes and seeing nothing but anger. There would be judgement in those eyes and she inwardly fortified herself for what was to come. Turning away from the woman on the ground after giving her a glare to remain quiet, a glare that was met with a knowing nod she stood and faced the questioner.

“How did you find me?” Was all Lexa could say she could manage. The moment she looked into those blue eyes, she lost all sense of herself when memories of what she did came flooding back. The look of surprise in Clarke’s eyes mixed with confusion were what greeted her green eyes.

“How did you find me?” Clarke asked again, composing herself after having to ask the question a second time.

After a short pause, Lexa said, “One of her people told me.” Lexa tilted her head in the direction of Echo, who was watching the interaction between the two with silent curiosity.

“I need to get you out of here.” Lexa stated. She hoped that if she could stay on task, her mind wouldn’t get carried away with distraction. “It won’t be easy with your injured leg, but we can use the night to…”

“I can’t go anywhere. Not right now.” Clarke interrupted Lexa while leaning back against the edge of the bed behind her. Her mind entertained leaving with Lexa but, she squashed the thought knowing she had to make sure Levai was safe. She had already set her plan in motion.

“You can’t go to Nia. You don’t know what she will do not just your people, but all of the clans.” Lexa said.

Clarke studied Lexa for a moment. She could see the sincerity in her eyes and in truth, Clarke knew what Nia would be capable of thanks to her discussion with Echo. Silence filled the tent and Clarke was trying to figure out what she should do next. Before she came to any soft plans, Lexa turned her head and raised her hand asking them to be quiet.

“I don’t he…” Clarke tried to say but in the blink of an eye Lexa stepped forward to Clarke. She certainly wasn’t expecting it when Lexa lifted her hand to cover her Clarke’s mouth. She wanted to argue the movement but when Lexa turned her head in the direction of the tent entrance silently informing them that someone was near, Clarke dropped her shoulders. Lexa took that as a sign of understanding and removed her hand, one’s green eyes locked on the other’s blue.

After a short while, Lexa was confident they were alone but both she and Clarke turned to hear Echo speak. “Perhaps she could help us.” Echo suggested in low tones, snapping the staring contest between Clarke and Lexa.

It took all of her will to look away from Clarke but when she did, they took stock of the amber eyes that were on the ground looking up her and Clarke.

“She will have nothing to do with this.” Clarke ordered.

“Clarke. It would be foolish not to get her help.” Echo argued.

“She is alone. What is she going to do against all the Azgeda out there?” Clarke questioned.
Lexa wanted to tell her she wasn’t alone, but she didn’t trust the Azgeda prisoner. She had to be content to witness the discussion between the two. She saw the fire back in Clarke which gave her slight warming in her chest. Clarke was passionate and determined and it was clear whatever plan she was working with now was one Lexa could not cause her to deviate from.

“If she gets caught in here, it won’t do any good for any of us. Which begs the question, how did you get in here?” Echo queried.

Lexa was about to answer but was cut off as Clarke interrupted her, “We stick to the plan. If she wants, she can wait in the forest for you after we leave, she can either go with our plan, or she can take my friend back to Tondc once he is well enough to move.”

Lexa turned to Clarke and asked, “Friend?”

Clarke stepped sideways so she could see the face of the young man who was previously obstructed from sight by her body. It took everything in Lexa to remain standing once she caught sight of him. Her face reddened, and it must have been obvious because Echo let out a gasp and Clarke’s eyebrows rose with curiosity as she looked back and forth between Levai and Lexa.

“You know him.” Clarke said. It wasn’t a question and it was only met with a nod from Lexa. Neither Echo or Clarke pressed for understanding and Lexa would have been unable to supply an answer.

Lexa seemed lost in her thoughts and was clearly working harder than she would ever have to in keeping what was left of her composure from shattering. It was only when she remembered there was Azgeda present she managed to restrain herself.

“You have a plan.” Again, not a question. Lexa’s eyes turned to Clarke.

“We do.” Clarke answered and looked over at Echo who smiled her confirmation of Clarke’s words.

From outside the tent, Clarke could hear Roan’s voice addressing some people around the fire to keep a better watch for Trikru who were likely to be in the area. It seemed very close to the tent and all their eyes opened in concern. Lexa quickly reached to pull a sword free.

“Nobody can know she is here.” Echo whispered in concern and pointed in Levai’s direction. “Behind the bed. Quickly!”

Lexa looked to Clarke for her input and after a moment’s hesitation Clarke said, “Now!” and pointed behind the bed Levai was laying in. After she crouched behind it, Clarke threw part of Levai’s blanket over the edge which obscured Lexa from view in the small tent.

“Slap me.” Echo said.

“What? Why?” Clarke asked, stunned by Echo’s words.

“If they heard something in here and Roan was informed, we will tell them I was the reason. I goaded you into it.” Echo supplied her explanation. “Now do it!”

Clarke stepped forward and as her hand came across Echo’s cheek, the tent entrance was flipped open and Roan entered with an accompanying guard, a smirk on his face.

“I was told there was something happening in here, but it seems you two are getting along famously.”
Clarke turned to face Roan, anger on her face to sell the part. She brushed some loose hair back behind her ear and made a show about composing herself. Echo on the other hand, didn’t have to pretend the slap hurt. She shifted her jaw from side to side while wincing in pain.

Lexa remained under the blanket trying to figure out what was going on. Clarke was planning something with the Azgeda woman, but she had no idea what they intended. Not only was Clarke injured, Levai was unmoving on the table and clearly injured and unable to move, likely poisoned. Unless her numbers somehow increased, there would be no way she could rescue both Clarke and Levai.

Roan surveyed the pair and seemed to be trying to decide about something. While he did, Clarke moved back to where she sat next to Levai. His eyes bore a hole in Clarke who returned his gaze just as fiercely. It seemed to bring a smile to the lips of the Prince.

“If you two keep it up, I’ll be forced to separate you. As much fun as the pair of you seem to be having, we don’t need to draw attention of Trikru scouts.”

Clarke agreed to refrain from hitting Echo when Roan suggested if Clarke continued it would only be fair to free Echo, so she could properly defend herself. He left as quickly as he arrived after making his declaration and informed them they should get rest before tomorrow. The accompanying guard followed behind him.

Clarke flipped the blanket off an unmoving Lexa and lifted a finger to her lips directing Lexa to keep quiet.

“You need to leave.” Clarke told the brunette who was now rising from where she was hidden.

“Clarke, what is going on?” Lexa asked.

“I can’t explain right now.” Clarke said. “Tomorrow I will ride north with Roan and when we leave, Echo here will remain behind with Levai. Get him to safety and give Echo an escort to Camp Jaha.”

“It is safe for him to travel?” Lexa asked, a concerned look on her face when she asked about Levai.

“He will be able to tomorrow.” Echo said. “He was poisoned by one of the Azgeda scouts. Tonight will be the worst of it but once the fever turns, he will be fine. He has been given an antidote.”

Lexa looked at Clarke who nodded her confirmation that Levai would be fine.

“Why will you ride north with the Prince?” Lexa asked.

“That you can find out tomorrow when Echo and Levai are left behind, you can join them and she will explain.”

“But Clarke, you can’t…” Lexa started.

“Right now, this is the only thing I can do.” Clarke stated with frustration in her voice.

Clarke turned away from Lexa and leaned back down to attend to Levai who seemed to stir. She pressed her hand to his forehead and reached for a cloth that sat next to a bowl of water. She dipped the cloth and began to wipe the sweat from Levai’s forehead to rid it of sweat.

“Clarke?” Lexa asked, but the blonde didn’t reply and did not look up. Her silence was the only answer she would get.
“I will wait.” Lexa said, her words heavy with promise as she turned to leave the tent. Peering out through the entry, no eyes appeared to be paying attention to the tent. She slipped out and managed to reach the nearest tree that was suitable to make her escape. A similar jump to a branch as she did earlier, she pulled herself upward and followed the route she took to reach the center of the village.

She dropped to the ground where Lincoln and Octavia awaited her return and they both had questions in their eyes. She raised her hand telling them to wait while she signalled Koma and Bellamy to meet them at a spot farther from the camp. Once they had moved far enough, Bellamy was the first to speak.

“Why aren’t we back there trying to rescue Clarke?”

“Keep your voice down.” Octavia placed her hand on her brother’s shoulder. “Their scouts could hear you.”

Bellamy looked at her and frowned. “We need to get back there. We have the best chance to get her out at night.”

“It isn’t as simple as that, Bell.” Octavia stated.

“Octavia is right.” Lexa added. “We will not be able to get her away from that camp with her injury, and there is another in the camp we have to help.”

“How do we get her out of there?” He asked.

“We don’t.” Lexa stated.

“That is unacceptable.” Bellamy declared, taking grip of his semi-automatic rifle. “I will get her out of there.”

As Bellamy turned to move in the direction of the camp, Koma stood in front of him and refused to budge, looking at the Commander for direction.

“You need to get out of my way.” Bellamy growled, tightening his grip on his weapon, yet Koma stood fast.

“Bellamy, any rescue against those numbers would mean our death, or worse if Nia gets her hands on us.” Lexa explained. “Clarke has a plan and tomorrow when the Azgeda leave to return to Toron, we will meet with someone who is working with her inside the camp and another who is injured and needs to be brought back to Tondc.”

“So, we are just supposed to sit here?” Bellamy asked, staring at Koma who still refused to get out of his way.

“We will do what Clarke wants us to do. Until then, we must wait.” Lexa said. “We should rest while we can.”

“I don’t like it.” Bellamy said, lowering his gun and letting it hang from the straps on his shoulder.

“We have to trust Clarke knows what she is doing.” Lexa explained.

Looking to Lincoln, Octavia and Bellamy, Lexa suggested they get some rest while She and Koma took first watch for Azgeda scouts. Lexa kept her eyes on the forest around her but was aware that the trio all moved to a spot where some bushes offered them the best cover from unwanted attention.
Lexa motioned to Koma to join her for a moment and they walked off just out of earshot.

“Tomorrow I will need you to bring someone to Polis. There is a man injured in that camp and his safety is a priority to me. I want you and Bellamy to accompany him.” Lexa said, her eyes scanning their surroundings.

“I will make sure he makes it safely back to Polis.” Koma stated.

“There will also be an Azgeda woman who will be with the man. Her name is Echo. She says she is working with Clarke, but I don’t trust her. After she informs us of their plan, we will take her captive. Once you get her to Polis, imprison her.”

“Sha, Heda.” Koma said.

“Thank you, Koma.” Lexa said, ending their conversation. He turned and walked away from Lexa to keep his focus on another part of the forest around them.

Lexa kept her eyes and ears on the forest, but her mind had been preoccupied since she first saw the blonde girl walk across the camp. She was certain that Clarke would have done more than slap her had they been in a different situation. Lexa would have let her do whatever she needed to work out her anger.

*What do you have planned, Clarke kom Skaikru?* Lexa wondered. She knew it would be futile to wonder what Clarke would do. She was ruled by her emotions and Lexa wondered if part of her decision to remain with Roan to travel north was her fault.

Lexa spent the rest of the night thinking of those blue eyes and the way for a moment, it seemed like Clarke cared for her safety when she told her to hide. It was something that made Lexa smile.

“Something is better than nothing.” Lexa whispered to herself.
Peace Comes at a Cost

Chapter Notes

Chapter 19!

I hope everyone is enjoying their weekend and I thank everyone for the continuing to enjoy this story.
The next chapter will be posted as soon as possible (not longer than 2 weeks).

I'd like to get back to updating weekly and as soon as I can get more than an hour of free time in an evening, this story will get back into full swing. I'll be sure to let you all know when that can happen.

See everyone soon with Chapter 20!

A very tired Clarke bolted upright in her chair, gasping for breath. Leaning forward in the uncomfortable chair that became her bed as she watched over Levai, her hand attempted to rub some of the stiffness from her neck. She looked around the tent at her two roommates, one who was still sleeping off the effects of the poison and the other who stared at her as if studying her. The throbbing in her ankle had reduced significantly with her use of the crutch and not having to run for her life. Unfortunately, the rest of her body ached having been sleeping in the chair for the last five hours.

It was a restless sleep she roused herself from, her thoughts permeated with the vision of Lexa kom Trikru standing in this very tent attempting to rescue her.

Levai had finally fallen asleep after the anguishing night of the poison fighting his body. Clarke considered it to be the cruelest way to kill someone and when Echo told her it was permitted by Nia to be used on their enemies, Clarke’s hatred of the Azgeda Queen increased significantly.

Echo remained leaning against the post she was chained to, her eyes closed with her mouth slightly open allowing shallow breaths to escape. If she wasn’t asleep, it was very convincing.

Turning her attention back to Levai, she got up from the chair with a light groan which woke Echo who yawned sleepily. Once she reached his side, she grabbed a piece of dry cloth next to the bowl that had mysteriously been refilled during the short time she had been asleep. Taking a quick glance around the room for any other changes, Clarke spied two new bowls on one of the tables that were filled with fruit and cured meats causing her stomach to growl on cue.

She fought the want to go eat to return her focus on her patient on the bed. She wet the cloth in her hand and lightly wiped it across his forehead. Felling for his temperature, it was significantly better than the last time she checked allowing her to exhale in relief.

“Em keyron ste yuj.” (His spirit is strong). Echo observed. “Less than half of people who are poisoned as he was are lucky to survive.”

“Didn’t your healer give him an antidote that would cure it?” Clarke asked.

“There is no cure for that poison, all we can do is give the body a chance to fight it.” Echo answered.
“But now he will make it?”

“He will. Once the effects wear off completely he will be tired, but quickly back to his full strength within a day or two. When I get him to Tondc, he will be fine.” Echo stated.

“You think Lexa will let you get to Tondc, let alone to my people to give my message?” Clarke’s words were laced with sarcasm.

“She will make things much more difficult. She will not bring him back to Tondc. Likely, she will have someone who accompanied her bring him back and continue trying to figure out how to stop you from reaching Toron and Nia.”

“Lexa didn’t say anything about having people with her.” Clarke said.

For a moment, the look returned to Echo’s face that she was studying Clarke and then let out a little puff of air from her lungs and smiled in amusement. “For a moment, I thought you were smarter than you were letting on.”

Clarke frowned at Echo’s mockery and listened to what was going on outside the tent. It sounded like people were beginning to pack away the camp and prepare for the journey North and as if on cue, Roan entered the tent with two large guards.

He was in full armour with his sword on his hip. Clarke saw an imposing figure in him. Not as large as the two accompanying guards, but in his eyes a shrewdness that gave the impression he was always a step ahead that made him more dangerous. Each watched the other for a moment and once he seemed certain of something, his eyes passed from Clarke to Echo, finally resting on Levai.

“He made it through the night. He is stronger than I thought.” Roan said.

“No thanks to your people and the poison you use.” Clarke frowned at him.

Roan shrugged and returned his gaze to Echo. “You won’t be needing those any more.”

“Finally.” Echo rejoiced, feeling the metal cuffs removed from her wrists and flexing to stretch them out her sore wrists.

“We will leave shortly. You know what you have to do, Echo.”

He received a stiff nod from the woman who saw him pull a knife from his belt and hand it to her. Clarke watched the exchange with concern.

“He was to be taken back to his people.” Concern emanating from Clarke’s voice. “We agreed.”

“Sometimes plans change in the moment. Rumours of Trikru and Skaikru scouts have been starting to spread through the local villages. They are more than likely looking for you.”

“If he dies, Nia will never have peace with my people.” Clarke concern turned to anger.

“If he gets back to his and informs them of Nia’s plans, there would be war and nothing I could do to stop it. When he dies, we save thousands of lives.” He explained.

“He does not die.” Clarke stated, glaring at Roan.

“I have already decided. Guards.” Roan stated flatly.

Two large men entered the tent behind Roan and took hold of Clarke’s arms, preventing her from
striking out at Echo and Roan. It did not stop her from trying to kick at Echo who just barely managed to sidestep a swinging leg in her direction.

“I’ll kill you!” Clarke yelled at Echo who had a smile on her face as if she were enjoying the scene in front of her. Clarke struggled against the guards who simply held her tightly. Her adrenalin was quickly tiring her out.

“Wait until we are a half days ride then dispose of him.” Roan explained. He turned from Echo to the guards and said, “Give her a horse and bind her hands to the saddle. I will ride with her in front of the group so if she tries to run, she won’t get back into Trikru lands.”

Both the guards nodded and removed a struggling Clarke from the tent. Her right arm broke free from the guard that was holding her and before he could restrain her again, she managed to scratch at the side of his face which left a mark that would forever remind him the day he met Clarke kom Skaikru.

Clarke gave the large man a smug look after he took hold of her, continuing their way to here she assumed her horse waited. When he lifted his hand and touched the wound on his cheek, the man hissed which drew an even bigger grin from the blonde.

With the help of the other warrior, they hoisted her up on the saddle, but not without resistance once more. She had no intention of making this journey a pleasurable one for her captors. Roan had told her she was being escorted, but she certainly didn’t feel like a guest and the chafing of the rope that bit into her wrist was proof of that.

Clarke watched Roan as she sat atop her horse, her hands tied to the horn of the saddle. He was discussing something with a warrior who seemed to understand whatever Roan was saying by nodding in response. The man climbed on his horse and rode off North. To Toron, Clarke supposed.

At first, Clarke tried to free herself from the rope but realized that even if she freed herself, she could not protect Levai from all the Azgeda in the camp, let alone his executioner in the form of Echo. She sat next to Levai who was now sitting with his back against the tree. She could only imagine what was going through his mind regarding the scenario that was unfolding before him and his eyes were filled with questions as he took in his surroundings for the first time.

“You speak to him, he dies now.” Roan spoke the words as he walked up on the opposite side of Clarke’s attention.

“Float yourself.” Clarke spit the words but was only met with a chuckle from him.

“Let’s go home.” Roan yelled as he stepped into the stirrup, grabbed the horn and easily swung up and over into the saddle. It was a call that was met with a resounding cheer from the group. In moments, Roan was next to Clarke and he took hold of the reins to direct the horse who quickly fell in lock-step next to his own. She turned back to look at the others who were still taking down the camp.

“We will be riding ahead of the group. I sent a scout forward to warn us of any ambushes that might be waiting for us. I suspect the ride to Toron will be uneventful unless you decide you no longer wish to enjoy my company.”

“And if I am not enjoying your company, I am free to leave?” Clarke asked. She knew the answer and her sore wrists were evidence of it.

“Then my men will assume you have simply lost your way and make sure you don’t get lost as we
continue our way to Toron.” Roan said simply, indulging in her hypothetical.

Clarke stayed quiet for the remainder of the morning and looked around at the scenery around her. The leaves had mostly fallen to the ground and the temperature was colder than Clarke had ever felt before. It was clearly visible to Roan who saw her shivering. He whistled a sharp note and a rider from behind sped up along side him.

“I think we will take a break here. Bring up some food and water.”

“Sha, Hainofa.” (Yes, Prince.) The rider said, turning his horse around and riding back to the group to inform them of Roan’s wishes. Before he got too far, Roan yelled to the man.

Roan turned back to Clarke who did her best to be pretending to ignore him. She wanted to slap that smirk right off his face.

“This is your first Winter.” He stated.

“I am fine.” Clarke stated.

“It will get much colder,” Roan added as he hopped down from his horse and rubbed his hand up and down the neck of the large animal who replied with a pleased neigh at it’s master’s attention. After a moment, he stops and walks over to where Clarke sat atop her horse. He reached up, untied the rope from the saddle and helped Clarke down. Again, making life as difficult as she could for her captors by falling over with her complete weight on Roan causing them both to fall crashing onto the ground.

Clarke rolled off Roan and for the first time he seemed upset with her. Clarke took that as a victory and was happy with the results of her actions.

“I see you don’t appreciate help.” He groaned as he sat up. “I hope when I remove the rope from your hands you will be a little more grateful than you were to Ortim and not scratch my face? If not, I can just leave it alone.”

Clarke thought on it for a moment but the burning sensation on her wrists was more than enough to convince her that not attacking Roan to get them removed was the right decision. She sat up herself, holding her bound hands out for him to loosen the ropes.

Roan stood up, wiping the dirt and broken leaves off his armour with an unimpressed look. Once he was done, he freed Clarke. She did the same thing Echo did earlier in the day, flexing and rubbing her wrists to try to free them from the stiffness that resided in them. She wondered if Levai was able to escape from Echo and head back into Trikru territory with Lexa and the others.

‘Maybe Lexa stopped Echo.’ Clarke thought to herself. If they were alone and there was no one around, it should have been a simple matter to dispatch Echo. ‘She could be watching right now and fall into Roan’s trap.’

Her eyes jumped to the forest around her, careful to make sure Roan didn’t believe she was looking for someone. If Lexa was out there Clarke didn’t want to ruin a chance to get away from Roan. She reminded herself of Roan’s words earlier that by keeping his men behind might prevent any return to Trikru lands. She didn’t want to be responsible for anyone else being caught by Roan, or what might happen to them if they were caught.

With her focus inward, Clarke didn’t see Roan gather some branches nor did she witness him strike the flint that started the fire. She did however, see the small orange flame grow larger to combat the cold air around them. Her eyes transfixed on the fire, but she refused to move from where she sat
after falling on the ground with Roan.

“You should come warm up.” Roan offered to Clarke who looked past the fire at him. “There isn’t anyone out there. My scout would have made me aware of it. You are safe.”

Clarke scoffed at his understanding of her status. The red wrists, the rope that bound her to the horse and the army of warriors at their back, who were starting to arrive in the make-shift camp, did little to make her feel safe. She let her glare evidence her displeasure at the Azgeda prince.

“Suit yourself.” He said, raising his hand and catching a bag of preserves which he began to eat, turning his attention away from Clarke to his comrades who he joined in conversation. Her stomach letting a growl which she attempted to ignore. She took hold of the water skin she accepted from Roan earlier in the day and took a couple small sips.

Once Roan decided they had rested enough, he ordered everyone to prepare to leave and he looked over to Clarke who kept her back to the fire and was just far enough from it to not receive the benefit of it’s warmth. Clarke’s mind was on everything but herself. Was Levai alive? What happens when they reach Toron? Does Nia truly want peace? Will Nia just use her and her people? Those and a million other questions rolled through her mind and all of them were entwined with uncertainty.

Clarke scrambled forward and jumped up with a start when she felt something touch her shoulder, spinning to see what was happening. When she saw Roan with a fur-lined jacket, she relaxed her shoulders a bit but kept her hands up defensively with the jacket in front of him.

“We can all see how stubborn you are and I’m sure the fire in you keeps your spirit warm, Wanheda, but it won’t do you any good if you can’t keep the rest of yourself warm as well.”

He held the jacket out to her once more, but this time so she could put it on herself. She took it and quickly covered herself with it, cursing him for the truth in his words and the look on his face when he saw her exhale thanks to the coat which protected her from the breeze that was cutting into her bones.

Clarke saw the guard who earlier had bound her hands was walking in her direction with the rope causing her to step back and ball her hands into fists. It seemed to only embolden the man with a fresh scar on his cheek, who grinned at her and sped up his pace.

“I don’t think she will need that any more.” Roan stated as the man was within five feet of Clarke. The man grunted in protest but nodded to his prince and turned away, displeased he could not inflict some measure of discomfort on the Skaikru woman.

Clarke looked at Roan after watching the man sulk away, a confused but grateful look in her eyes.

“You aren’t afraid I could run?” Clarke asked.

“You have no idea where you are and would likely end up dead due to the cold of the night. If you started a fire, we would easily find you due to the light from your fire.” He stated matter-of-factly.

“You don’t have a high opinion of my abilities.” Clarke said, displeased with his summation, accurate as it was.

“Don’t get me wrong, Wanheda. I have the utmost respect for your ability to accomplish whatever it is you set you mind to. You were the only one who was able to defeat Maun-de, without the help of the clans. Surviving the winter is an entirely different thing.”

Clarke seemed to want to interject but Roan continued, “My people have lived in the coldest region
of all the clans for a hundred years, and yet the cold takes the bravest and the strongest of us. It isn’t a matter of having a low opinion of your abilities. If you are lucky, the cold only takes fingers, toes or the limbs they are attached to.”

She watched him as he talked and heard the sincerity behind his words. There was no smirk, no conceit in the tone – only truth, laced with sadness she did not expect. She did not expect it from him and just stood there watching the man, trying to figure him out. Before she could find traction, he offered to help her up on to her horse.

“And this time if you could not fall on me, it would be appreciated.” He smirked, directing her over to her horse which was next to his own.

Rather than accept his assistance, Clarke slid her good foot into a stirrup and grabbed the horn. Before Roan knew it, she swung her injured leg over the horse and was seated in the saddle with reigns in hand. She looked to Roan who had a smile on his face.

*Point made.* Clarke said to herself.

Roan jumped on to his horse and she joined him in riding to their destination. A destination Clarke did not look forward to reaching. She had been struggling to find a way to free herself from Roan and his army and the more they rode north, the more difficult it would become.

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They rode side by side, Roan always keeping pace with Clarke when she decided to speed up or slow down. She discovered there would be no way she could try to distance herself from Roan and was certain that any attempt to do so would and up with him right next to her, keeping pace.

“There are two days before we reach Toron. It is going to be quite a boring trip if we don’t at least try to have our conversation.” Roan said.

Clarke seemed for a moment as if she would ignore him and continue in silence but the words “our conversation” stuck out like a thorn and got the best of her.

“What conversation are you talking about? Like the conversation we had about freeing my friend, only to go back on your word and killing him?” Clarke fired back at him.

Roan sighed and closed his eyes, for a moment. “Then Echo didn’t tell you about our conversation. I bet she thought it would sell the act.”

“Act? You two spoke? I was in the tent and I didn’t see you come in.”

“You were asleep. We tried to wake you, but you seemed to need sleep more than you needed to discuss what would happen the next morning. She was to inform you when you woke up that the little drama that occurred was for the benefit of any Nia loyalists.”

Clarke was displeased at the revelation and regarded Roan with a suspicious glare.

“I’ll admit, I thought it was one of the finer performances I had ever seen.” Roan laughed aloud and then continued, “Levai is fine. If all things work out as planned, Echo is riding with him to TonDC. She will leave him there and then she will try to reach your people with a message from me and the
reason for your trip to Toron.”

“You think she will be able to reach TonDC and be allowed to go free to my people? They know Azgeda scouts were in Trikru lands in violation of the coalition. Lexa won’t allow it.”

“Then it is a good thing peace between our two people has nothing to do with the Commander. My mother has already attempted to negotiate with your people and if she can convince them to join her, there won’t be any clan who could stop her from doing anything she pleases.”

“My people are willing to negotiate with her?” Clarke asked.

“The mighty Commander may have done what was best for her people at Mount Weather, but she also betrayed yours. My mother plans on exploiting that to increase her power and finally get rid of the only thing preventing her from reaching her goal.”

“Lexa.” Clarke whispered. Her mind went back to the night before in the tent when she arrived, taking both her and Echo by surprise in the middle of the camp filled with people who would kill her on sight. Lexa was out there, trying to stop her from reaching Toron, and the Queen who sits in power.

“The Kongeda is powerful, but it would take all of them to try to stop the full Azgeda army. Even my mother isn’t foolish enough to attack without clear advantage. That advantage is you.”

“Me? What can I do? My people have guns, but that won’t be enough to fight thousands of people.” Clarke asked.

“You are Wanheda, Clarke. The people have heard of what happened at Maun-de. You were able to do what none of us has been able to for generations. You are the symbol of that power now.”

“I am not a symbol that can defeat thousands, Roan.” Clarke frowned as she spoke.

“A symbol is what lights the fire in a person. They believe you are the symbol that will lead them to victory over their enemies. If you become a tool for Nia, support her ambition against the Kongeda then people will follow you because they will believe the Commander of Death marches with them.” Roan explained.

“I am the symbol for Death? That is what Wanheda…?” Clarke was shocked.

The memory of those she was forced to kill, those who were sacrificed for the greater good. The useless slaughter of Grounders, of Skaikru, the families in Mount Weather. All the faces she could see clearly in her mind had her head spinning. She stared blankly forward trying to understand how her killing of so many innocent people being slaughtered was good.

Roan moved alongside her and reached his arm out to grab her shoulder and steady Clarke who seemed exhausted from the thoughts rolling around in her mind. Her eyes were dull and roan could see she was struggling to understand.

In a panic, Clarke shrugged off his hand and jumped down from her horse with a sloppy attempt to run away. When her injured leg hit the ground, a stabbing pain shot up her right side and she fell to her knees, yelping in pain. She tried to stand and ignore the all-too-familiar sensation from hitting the ground but had no luck, falling back to the dirt only this time with resignation.

“I never wanted to kill those people. I don’t want to kill anyone!” Clark cried out.

“Then help me, Clarke kom Skaikru.” Roan said calmly, kneeling next to Clarke who stared at the
ground below her, refusing to look anywhere but down.

“You want me for the same reason Nia does.” Clarke scolded him.

“You are right, Clarke. I need your help. Your help to stop tens of thousands from dying in a war that will make life worse for my people, your people, and the rest of the Kongeda once my mother takes control.”

“Why don’t you just let me go and deal with your mother yourself?” Clarke asked, looking up at Roan now for his answer.

“Because there are many who support her but believe in our traditions. Their minds could be changed if the right circumstances were presented to them. They follow Nia because they had no other option.” Roan said.

“If I help you, what stops you from doing the same thing your mother wants to do?” Clarke blinked away the tears in her eyes and waited for his answer.

“You can ask the visitor you had in your tent last night. She will explain it to you.” Roan smiled.

“You. You know that she…” Clarke stammered.

“That she came into the camp? Or that she is waiting behind and has likely intercepted Echo and received a message from me.”

“You planned all this?” Clarke asked with surprise in her voice.

“I like to be prepared. I assumed that Lexa would have found you first, so I have been in contact with her regarding my plan. She may not agree with some of the details, namely your presence in Toron, but I assure you if everything goes to plan, she will support my taking power from Nia.”

Clarke was shocked by Roan’s admission Lexa knows of his plan. “But she wanted me to go with her last night. That means you wouldn’t have been able to stop Nia.”

“The strategy would have required me to rethink my plan, so I must thank you for deciding to stay in camp. It would not have benefitted either of us if I would have been forced to imprison the Commander and present her to my mother.”

“She could have gotten help and escaped. You could have freed her.” Clarke argued.

“Which would have resulted in my mother killing me or banishing me for incompetence.” Roan countered. “That would benefit no one. I believe my plan has the best chance at succeeding and keeping the most people alive.”

Clarke sat back on the dirt and tried to realize what she has gotten herself into. She left to avoid these kinds of issues, not be the ‘Wanheda’ for people to look to and follow to war. She closed her eyes and thought about the last few days. Her interactions with Roan, Echo, and even the last night with Lexa. One constant remained; none of them trusted Nia.

Roan watched her for a while with her eyes closed, observing her as she was lost in thought. He had decided when he steadied the blonde as she realized the meaning behind ‘Wanheda’ that it was an appropriate time to rest. This area was suitable enough for a camp to be set up and a stream close by for water. He could hear the group behind was starting to approach because of the sound of hooves walking on the fallen leaves. He glanced back at the arriving group then at Clarke and when he spoke, his voice was quieter to not be heard by unwanted ears.
“Clarke, this can not be done without you.” He pleaded.

Clarke sighed and turned her head in his direction, opening her eyes. As he looked into those blue eyes, he knew the answer before she said the words.

“What do I have to do?”
Story Summary!

Chapter Summary

This is the story so far!

(This will be edited as I seem to ramble in summaries and it isn't as concise as I imagine it should be).

After the Commander’s betrayal at Mount Weather, Clarke could no longer carry the weight of leadership. She did what she could, but the constant wear at the fringe of her morality had done damage. Clarke fled from her people and the burden of responsibility that pressed upon her mind and her tired soul. Clarke chose to run. Run from her responsibility and her people.

Her betrayer was tormented by the betrayal at Mount Weather and when she discovered Clarke left her people, Lexa was determined to protect her because of her what she did. Her scouts had lost her and Lexa chose to make it her mission to find Clarke. When word came where Clarke might be, Lexa had set it within herself to find Clarke and bring her back to her people.

Clarke was unprepared for the world she was venturing into and found herself in peril and had believed herself ready for it to end. The struggles she faced had finally gotten the better of her and she was ready to let herself go.

The story of ‘Wanheda’ blossomed with the destruction of Mount Weather. It was not long before everyone throughout the clans was aware that the threat of Mount Weather was no more. This stoked the fire of an old enemy in the Azgeda Queen. She sent her son to accompany her armies into surrounding territory to find who she hoped would become her ally and reclaim past glory for her people. It would all depend on finding Clarke and convince her that they should ally with the Azgeda people against Lexa and her Kongeda.

Clarke’s life was saved by a stranger who was able to protect her and nurse her nearly back to health but Nia’s determination to find Wanheda was unending. So much so, her warriors began to search surrounding territories in her search for Clarke who was found resting at the small cabin in which she was recovering. Levai who managed to help her, became poisoned.

After being discovered by Queen Nia’s people, Clarke did the only thing she could think of doing; go forth to Toron with the promise of speaking with Nia. Her condition was that Levai would be helped with his injuries and returned to his people and for that, she found herself back into the the world she wanted to leave behind.

Having been a guest of sorts to Prince Roan at an Azgeda camp, she was presented with an option she was unprepared for. To help the Prince remove her mother from her throne and end the threat in the land of Nia’s cruel reign over Toron and the north.
Plans Change

Chapter Summary

Lexa learns what Roan has planned for Clarke, and sets a plan of her own in motion.

Chapter Notes

Update Sundays!

They are back and the good news is the story will be once again updated every Sunday

I just wish to say thank-you again to everyone for spending time with me and the story. Also, thanks for the comments & Kudos. They do help remind me that although I'm writing this story, I'm not the only one with time invested in it.

This chapter might feel a little 'light' but that is because the next chapter is a pretty big one with a LOT going on in it. It is fair to say it is my longest chapter yet and I hope you all will enjoy it as much as I have had writing it. If you want a little(and I mean little) info about what it will be about, check the notes at the end of the story.

Next update will be on the 26th and I will try to have it posted earlier in the day!

See you all in a week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The warmth of the dawn remained blanket of clouds above, offering minimal relief to the group who all stared at the Azgeda camp. They all wore the effects of the night on their tired faces as they waited for them to break camp and return to Toron.

Although Lincoln, Koma and Lexa were aware of how frigid the temperature would become at this time of year, Bellamy and Octavia were not and their light jackets were ill-chosen for the conditions they were facing but the duo resolutely did what they could to mitigate the cold that worked it's way into their bones during the early morning hours.

Lincoln did what he could to help Octavia through the night, wrapping his arms around her to share his body heat and prevent the smaller girl from the full affect of the cold. Even Koma offered his jacket to Bellamy to protect him from the elements, and offer Bellamy wanted to reject but eventually accepted with the hope that his body would cease shivering as much as it was.

None of them managed to sleep.

Lexa sat with her back against the same tree she leaned against after she told them they would wait to learn Clarke’s plan, her knees pulled into her chest. She remained motionless through the night as if the cold air didn’t affect her and light puffs of her breath were visible thanks to the crisp air.

She knew Prince Roan was not like his mother and with that understanding, hope rose in her chest
that one day the people of Azgeda would have a leader worthy of them. It had been years since she had last seen Nia and she decided long ago to find a way to dethrone his mother from her position of power. Power that she schemed and murdered her way into and led into conflict after conflict against the other clans.

She also knew it would do her no good to push Clarke in the tent, frowning to herself in frustration. Clarke was improvising which meant she was being reactive in her decisions and it troubled her that no matter what Clarke was likely to do, she could only anticipate part of Clarke’s plan. That meant she would have to improvise as well. Lexa was unaccustomed to improvising when so much hung in the balance.

What kept Lexa warm that night was the anger she felt knowing that Roan’s intent to use Clarke in whatever scheme he created to overthrow his mother, the Queen. Her mind imagined any possible scenario it could as she observed the coming and going of Azgeda patrols, all of which never seemed to stray too far from the comfort of the fires around the camp.

Lexa’s mind wandered back to after the bombing in Tondc, after the bombing and Clarke was pacing restlessly in her command tent. She wondered if she looked now as Clarke did then because she had never felt so on edge.

She had told Clarke that rather than worry about Bellamy, she should rest as it was “a waste of energy” to be concerned about something she could not control. Staring at the tent where Clarke was probably sleeping, she wished she could take her own advice.

They didn’t have to wait long after the morning began when they first noticed the increased activity of the Azgeda who seemed to be packing for their return to Toron. They were all in high spirits which only served to annoy Lexa further. With the increased activity, came Roan from his tent stretching and glancing around the forest and then his camp as he walked toward Clarke’s tent.

If anyone had been watching Lexa, they would have seen a flash of concern on her face. A moment after Roan and the two guards entered Clarke’s tent, they could all hear the sound of Clarke’s voice yelling the threat she was going to kill someone which then took every ounce of self control from Lexa to not charge into that camp and dispatch them all into the next world.

“We have to do something.” Bellamy whispered, a bite in his tone. “That is Clarke in there.”

Lexa fixed him with a glare that rooted him in place, and Octavia placed her hand on his shoulder to get him to calm down.

“We wait.” Lexa ordered, her attention turned back to the camp to watch Echo leave the tent with a grin.

“Echo is a part of this?” Bellamy asked, confusion mixed with concern.

Lexa looked over to Bellamy and her green eyes bore into him with questions but only one came forward.

“You know her?” Lexa asked, thinking any information about her would be useful.

“I met her in Mount Weather. In the cages.” Bellamy stated.

“Do you trust her?”

It didn’t take him longer than a moment to reply. “I trust her.”
“Why do we need to trust her?” Octavia asked.

“She is the one who is working with Clarke…” Lexa answered. “…and when the warriors leave, she and an injured Trikru man will be left behind. We will then get our answers.”

A commotion took place in camp and they all watched as the men pulled Clarke across the camp in the direction of horses on the northern edge of the camp. One of the guards lost their hold on Clarke which gave her the opportunity to take a swipe at the man. It was clear she did damage to his face as he brought his hand up to his cheek numerous times and cursed feverishly.

Unfortunately for the blonde, the other guard had a strong enough grip on her that prevented Clarke from breaking free. Once the guard Clarke hit collected himself, he forcefully grabbed her arm and bound her hands together with some rope. They anchored the rope to the saddle and hoisted her up so she could ride. It seemed as though Roan stated something to Clarke and in moments, she was being led away by Roan.

“They want to ambush us.” Koma stated, nodding his head at the guard who did not join the Prince as he rode away.

“They will not have the chance. After they pack up, the guard will follow behind Prince Roan and then we will have our answers.” Lexa explained. “Once we hear what Echo kom Azgeda has to say, I will make my decision how we will move forward.”

Once Roan and Clarke had gone from sight, the camp was quickly dismantled and the guard left in the same direction as Roan and Clarke had gone leaving both Echo and Levai standing near one of the fires that were left for them to put out.

Lexa could feel the level of impatience within her become elevated as her eyes caught sight of Levai’s bound hands and when she witnessed Levai shoved in the direction of the fire, her hands closed in a tight fist.

After waiting an hour, Lexa gave the order to approach with caution. “There could be Azgeda hiding in the forest. Be careful. Koma, kamp raun. Hez op fassopas.”(Stay near. Watch out for scouts.)

“Sha, Heda.” Koma nodded, stepping back from the group and quietly moving away from the group which drew a frown from Bellamy.

“We should stick together.” Bellamy said, words that were ignored by Lexa, whose attention was on the two figures in what was left of the Azgeda camp. She drew one of her swords and started to move forward in a crouched position.

“Let’s move, slowly.” Lexa said, her green eyes scanning the forest for any threats.

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Lexa and the others seemed to appear out of nowhere if Echo’s expression was any indication. She went for her knife and though she stared at Lexa whose eyes were boring a hole into her, it was Bellamy’s voice she heard which caught her off guard.

“I wouldn’t do that.”
Echo’s features went from tense to surprised when her attention fell on the dark, curly-haired man who was walking forward with his gun raised in her direction.

“Bellamy?” She asked, her hand still on her knife. As she took a moment to observe each of the new approaching visitors, her instincts left her feeling cornered, and her eyes went to Levai who hadn’t said a word when the group approached.

“Cut him loose.” Bellamy directed toward Echo.

“If you touch that knife, you will never hold another one again.” Lexa commanded, halting Echo’s movement. She slowly lifted her hands in surrender, keeping her eyes on the Commander and backing away from Levai.

The group circled Echo and Levai, waiting for Lexa’s orders.

“I would really like to have this removed.” Levai stated before Lexa could say anything else, raising his hands which were still bound by the rope. He glanced between Lexa and Echo then lifted his hands toward Echo. “She won’t harm me.” he added with a smile in Lexa’s direction.

Echo received threatening glare from the Commander, then a nod in the direction of Levai. Echo couldn’t help but notice the fingers on Lexa’s hand tapping the pommel of the dagger in her own belt.

Lowering her hand to her knife as slowly as she raised them moments ago, Echo drew the knife and glanced at the rope only long enough to see where she was cutting and returned her attention to Lexa.

“Sis em op.”(Take her.) Lexa ordered.

“Beja, hod op!” (Please, wait!) Echo yelled out in defence but it was too late.

Lincoln had stepped up from behind Echo and grabbed her arms and drew a look of frustration from Echo. Octavia followed up Lincoln’s advance by wrenching the knife from her hand. Before Echo knew it, she was on her knees and surrounded by people who she believed would be her allies. Her eyes flew in Bellamy’s direction in an appeal for them to stop.

“You ste laksen?”(You are hurt?) Lexa directed her question toward Levai. He replied with a slight frown regarding her actions to Echo but remained silent.

“Ai ge ku.”(I am fine). he answered.

Lexa turned back to Echo who seemed to understand the situation she was in, not trying to fight against Lincoln who pressed her to her knees on the ground before the Commander. The continued pressure keeping her in place until Lexa seemed satisfied Echo understood her situation.

“Breik au emon.” (Let her go.) Lexa directed at Lincoln. “Chit laik Clarke kom Skaikru’s strat?”(What is Clarke of the Sky People’s plan?) she asked the woman who now looked up at her from her knees.

“Perhaps it would be best if the details were said to you alone.” Echo suggested.

“You will tell me the plan now, or I will assume that you are the expendable part of Prince Roan’s plan.”

“Very well, but I will need your word that you won’t kill me after telling you.”
“This is no negotiation. Lincoln.”

Echo felt one of the hands release it’s tight grip on her shoulder then the knowing sound of steel being withdrawn from it’s sheath. Her heart had begun to thump rapidly within her chest. “I will tell you.”

“Now.” Lexa ordered.

Echo nodded and began to explain to Lexa the details of Roan’s plan, the expectation that she was to travel to Camp Jaha and inform them of Clarke’s intention to travel north to Toron with Roan after bringing Levai back to Tondc.

There wasn’t a moment during her explanation that any emotion cracked to the surface in Lexa’s appearance. Her body sat perfectly still and her eyes bore into Echo, drawing from her details that Echo hadn’t intended on sharing. Details like Clarke being required to stay in the Royal House and offer some support regarding Nia’s desire to wield the power of Mount Weather now that it’s guardians were dispatched. That Clarke would be required to earn the Queen’s trust by betraying Lexa.

‘Would she?’ Lexa asked herself. Clarke had protected her from discovery in the tent, but would she do it when all of her people's lives were on the line?

Echo explained that were Roan to gain the support of Wanheda, and by proxy her people, those who support him would do so not only by word of mouth, but hardened steel. People were tired of living under the rule of Nia, who was seen as a tyrant but also unstoppable. Echo stressed that if Clarke could make Nia look weak, her people would see it as well.

Lexa listened, reminding herself to stay calm. She knew Clarke was capable of taking care of herself but this was different. Clarke was going to reside not just near, but in the same building as Nia. This was the only time during Echo’s detailed explanation that she almost let her emotion show. Lexa knew fear, having been victor over it countless times in battle.

Nia was not like fighting an enemy who stood across from you. She was cunning and the knowledge of what Nia might be and is capable of doing had never left her. Her body shivered at the thought that Clarke might waver in convincing Nia, suspecting the Skaikru leader of deceit. Deceit that would result in the worst possible outcome for Clarke.

A moment later something flashed in Lexa’s eyes and startled Echo because she abruptly stopped talking. She wasn’t sure what she saw but Lexa’s impenetrable wall had cracked. She hadn’t even heard the rest of Echo’s words but decided she had heard enough.

“Lincoln. Take Echo to Tondc and imprison her.”

“Wait, that isn’t what Clarke and Roan…”

Lexa fixed her with a glare and Echo could only protest with her eyes.

“Send a messenger to Skaikru informing them that Clarke has been taken by Azgeda and that they are forcing her to show them how to use the weapons in Maun-de.”

“That isn’t what Echo said.” Bellamy protested in her defence.

“That is what they will be told. Nia will expect nothing less than to be able to use those weapons and I will not allow my people to be killed or fall under her rule.” Lexa stated.
“Clarke won’t let her use them. Roan will stop her before that can happen.” Bellamy argued.

“Nia is not stupid, nor is she patient. Tell him what will happen if the plan does not succeed.” Lexa commanded of Echo.

Bellamy looked to her for a defence of Clarke but was shocked with it did not come.

“Nia will kill her. Likely, both Roan and Clarke would be killed if she suspected anything.”

“Tell them how.” Lexa almost growled.

“It would be in public. Roan would be accused of conspiring with Skaikru to try to displace her and she would then send her army to march on Skaikru and force them to give her what she wants.”

“But she needs Clarke?” Bellamy asked with confusion on the fringe of his words.

“She only needs what Clarke represents to strengthen her hold over her people. Keeping Clarke alive shows good-will, but it isn’t entirely necessary for her to gain control of Maun-de.” Echo clarified.

“So you let Clarke go to a place where she has a good chance of getting killed?” Bellamy’s voice rose to match his frustration which he turned on Lexa.

Noticing the change in aggression, Koma stepped forward and took hold of his weapon to dissuade Bellamy. His response was met with Lexa raising her hand and a slight shake of her head. She wished to hear what Bellamy had to say.

“We could have stopped them yesterday. This is your fault. Clarke could be going back to her people right now, and you just let her go.”

“You would have died.” Echo answered for Lexa.

“You don’t know that.” Bellamy countered.

“I do because in all of this, the Commander has left out the fact she knew of Prince Roans intention of displacing Nia. She fully supports his actions to remove Nia from the throne as long as it benefits her people. Roan knew she would be in the woods last night, but I am certain that he did not expect Clarke to receive her as a visitor.”

“I did not agree to his use of Clarke or her people in his scheme.” Lexa declared.

“When you agreed to his proposal, Skaikru had not yet arrived. You agreed that no other clans in the coalition could be involved and Skaikru are not a part of the coalition.” Were this any other time, Echo might have chanced a grin. Instead she pressed on. “Clarke joined Roan of her own accord. To save…” Echo pointed at Levai who had remained silent during this conversation, “…that one’s life, she agreed to help us.”

“Sounds to me like she was coerced into helping you.” Bellamy said.

“Clarke does not seem the type to allow herself to be coerced.” Echo stated.

“You were going to let him die if you didn’t get her help. You forced Clarke…”

“Enough!” Lexa shouted, forcing them to abandon the bickering that was likely to ensue. “Koma, you will bring Levai, Echo and Bellamy to Tondc. Inform Indra that she is to Ride to Polis and address the ambassadors regarding Nia’s intention to try to gain control of Maun-de.”
“Sha, Heda.” Koma bowed his head and glanced at Echo, asking Lexa a silent question.

“She should not need restraints.” Lexa said, receiving a conciliatory nod from Echo. “She knows what will happen should she prove unwilling to go along with my decision.”

Taking a moment to organize her thoughts, she turned to Bellamy and said, “I ask that you return to your people and inform them that Clarke has been taken to Toron to see Queen Nia, and that her life is in danger. Echo will join you to explain Nia’s intentions and with it, their support.”

“We will have to trust Clarke knows what she is doing.” Lexa said. “Clarke is, resourceful.” She added, though she wasn’t sure it was solely for Bellamy’s benefit. “After you inform them, Indra will have spoken to the Ambassadors and requesting their armies move north toward Azgeda territory.”

Echo looked shocked at this plan of action from the Commander.

“You can’t. Roan has a plan.” She argued.

Lexa fixed her with a cold stare. “Plans change.” As yet, there is no need for my army but should circumstances change, I will not allow Nia to follow through on her ambition and the ambassadors will offer full support to prevent Nia from reaching her goal.”

“I don’t like leaving Clarke alone.” Bellamy stated.

Levai addressed Bellamy’s concern. “She won’t be alone. I am going North and will keep watch of her in Toron. I own Clarke my life, and the least I can do is keep her safe.” Levai responded before anyone else could. Lexa seemed angry with his suggestion.

“You will not. I cannot allow you to endanger yourself needlessly.” Lexa ordered, leaving a bite to her words.

They were stuck in a stalemate, neither refusing to back down until Octavia’s voice broke the silence between the pair.

“I will go with Lincoln. We aren’t your people, and we will go to Toron. Levai is more than welcome to join us. If they want peace with Skaikru, they won’t harm me or my friends. We will watch out for each other, and Clarke.”

After a moment, Lexa nodded her approval with an addendum. She would be joining then to Toron.


“I see. It is fine for you to put yourself in danger, but I can’t?”

After a moment, he glanced around to the others and then back to Lexa. “I only meant, that you are the Commander.” His voice softened slightly and he continued, “If Nia were to do anything to you,”

“Then the next Commander would take my place and the law dictates what would happen to Nia. Safeguards have been put in place.” Lexa looked at the group, then dismissed everyone who had their orders. As Koma turned to leave, Lexa pulled Koma aside. She handed him a note which received a curt nod in response from the large man.

“Keep Clarke safe, O.” Bellamy said, pulling Octavia into a hug. “Keep yourself safe too.” His eyes fell on Lincoln who nodded his understanding to Bellamy. He would do what he must to keep Octavia safe.
“Same to you big brother.” Octavia reciprocated, then moved to join Lincoln and Levai and discuss the route to Toron. “We will all see you soon.”

Lexa stood to the side after bidding Koma farewell, watching Octavia and Bellamy. She smiled inward, not allowing the warm feeling bubble through to the surface. Bellamy and Octavia cared for Clarke, and it seemed Levai too also cared for Clarke. There were many things Lexa wondered about and she was determined to find answers on their journey northward.

“We should go.” Lexa said, urging her group on toward their destination. If things worked out as she planned, Indra would be well on her way. Lexa set the pace for the group and it was quick. She just had to keep everyone safe until then. That and try to account for Clarke’s unpredictability.

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Not far from their position, a figure slithered down from Their position in a tree after waiting what could have been hours. They were clearly agile and moved from the branches to the earth below with ease. A knowing smirk formed on the lips of the stranger and they ran off from where the group had been discussing their plans.

After a few minutes, the figure approached a horse, jumping up on to the saddle with the same ease as they had maneuvered from branch to branch.

“Hos op!”(Hurry up!) The rider called out, urging the horse to move quickly. It responded by switching from a trot to a quick sprint. The hood of the rider flipped back exposing the flowing dark hair of it’s rider, and the distinctive markings of an Azgeda warrior who still had the smirk on her face as she moved quickly toward her home.

Chapter End Notes

Ch 22 Preview:
Clarke and Roan travel north to Toron
The Journey North

Chapter Summary

The meeting of Nia and Clarke draws near. Travelling north with Prince Roan, she discovers a little more about Nia, Lexa, and the people Roan wishes to lead.

Chapter Notes

Happy Update Day!
Here it is, Chapter 22!

Once again, thank you to everyone for the comments and the kudos. They let me know what you think of the story and I look forward to reading them!

See you all in 7 days and enjoy!

Clarke did not enjoy the ride north to Toron. It was a long journey and although her Azgeda escorts seemed to be able to shrug off the colder temperatures, Clarke could not. She often found herself wearing twice the layers of furs the others required just to stop from shivering in the early mornings and late evenings of their travel. Clarke also didn’t like that the sun spent less and less time in the sky above, making the days colder and colder.

The trees had lost almost all of their leaves which left the forest hollow and unfamiliar, this being her first fall back on earth. The ground below her horse had also changed during her time away from Camp Jaha, from the brilliant green she had become accustomed to seeing into a somber yellow-brown, devoid of the warmth and comfort that it once provided.

They had travelled through what Clarke had understood to be the ruins of small towns. Almost all the buildings and houses had been turned to rubble or close enough to it that they were uninhabitable but that didn’t stop Clarke from trying to explore some of them when they stopped for rest, or the night.

She tried to remember the names on some of the signs but most were unrecognizable. It wasn’t until they stayed in a place called “Harrisonburg” that she was able to make a note of where they were. During one of their stops, Clarke found a stack of notebooks in a large metal box, along with some pencils which allowed her spirit to light up at the possibility of being able to draw again.

When she walked out of the building carrying the stack of notebooks and packs of writing instruments, Roan took notice and emptied out one of the leather bags that sat on the ground. He threw it to the ground next to her saying, “Nobody is going to carry all the trinkets you find along the way. We still have a long journey ahead of us.”

Clarke had accepted the bag and stuffed the notebooks in it. This was the first time she felt any excitement on her trip to Toron and the first time she felt like more like herself. She filled four pages with various buildings and people that accompanied her as she continued north. It was a ritual she
repeated every night.

That and a crude map with the names of every town they had passed through on the route they were travelling if anyone would be following them.

Roan attempted to make the journey more pleasant, but every time he spoke it reminded Clarke of what it was she wanted escape from. Her ankle had long since healed, thanks to the constant supervision of Roan’s healer and the ever present glare he threw at her when she attempted to do something he had told her not to. Clarke would be lying if she didn’t do it in part to spite the man who had treated her with nothing but contempt from the day they met.

The others barely spoke to her and only then when ordered to. In their eyes, there was something between reverence and fear. They had questions. Many Questions that none of them had the courage to ask the Commander of Death. Whether it be the worry of Nia’s wrath for offending someone that was under her protection, or the fury of Wanheda should she become angered. They all chose the safest choice and that was to stay away from her.

The day had been cool, but not cold and it seemed to lift the spirits of everyone in the group. That and when Roan explained they were a day from Toron, Clarke understood the increased excitement in their voices and the laughter that soon followed. They were close to their home, their families.

For Clarke, she had never felt farther from home. They had all been sent to look for her. She understood, but she felt the ache in her chest for the familiar. She felt a twisting in her chest knowing that nothing here was familiar. Everyone and everything she cared about was behind her and she didn’t know when she would feel as they did again.

Clarke tried not to dwell on that feeling. She attempted to distract herself by studying the world around her and moments later they emerged from the treeline into a scene that led to Clarke stopping her horse. Roan took notice and ordered the group behind them to continue on the path to Toron, then he glanced out over the same landscape that held Clarke’s attention.

“This was once a city called ‘Buffalo’. We won’t be staying here. We have to get through the ruins before night fall. There is something I believe you will want to see.”

“Is this what Toron looks like?” Clarke asked.

“No. Toron is quite different. Though there are areas that were destroyed. Some of the structures survived and others rebuilt. Have you visited Polis?”

“I haven’t seen Polis.” she said, barely above a whisper.

Clarke frowned at the invasive memory of Lexa promising to show her Polis once the conflict with Mount Weather had been settled. The notion of visiting it now felt similar to her current trek to Toron. Cold and uninviting.

“Toron started with a dream to be a twin city to Polis by my grandfather, King Theo. I was too young to understand his vision, but I believe I can see it now.”

“What happened?”

“My mother claimed the throne only her ambitions have reached well beyond Toron. She wants to rule all of the clans.”

“You don’t mean like Lexa and her coalition.”
Roan shook his head and directed Clarke to continue riding through the ruins of the once-thriving city be directing her with his hand as he answered her questions.

“Not quite. My mother wants to destroy the very notion of any future Commanders. If she is able to rule over the clans, there would not be any chance that clans could prevail against Nia’s army and she would destroy any natblida(nightblood) born in the clans.”

“She would kill children?”

Roan frowned at the thought but continued.

“Yes. If it meant holding power, she would. A nightblood would challenge her position and with the clans being forced to submit to her authority or be killed, the clans would likely surrender anyone who had been chosen. She had always believed her father weak for not taking what in her mind, belonged to Azgeda.”

“Now Nia wants my help to do it.” Clarke stated.

“If you joined with Nia, she would gain support from people throughout the clans. It would also solidify her position with the Azgeda people. You are a symbol of power, Clarke. You are the key to freeing my people from Nia, or you are the

“Any you want to bring me there, to help you stab her in the back. What stops you from doing exactly the same thing she wants to do?”

“A good question. I suppose you will have to trust me.”

Clarke scoffed at his suggestion.

“I have been quite fair to you and your dark-haired farmer when you entered the camp.” Roan added.

“We are still calling him a farmer?” Clarke asked, with an inquisitive eyebrow raised.

Roan smiled. “It would seem we are. I imagine he is home now, and fully recovered from his injuries.”

“It was the least you could do, as it was your people who almost killed him with that poison.”

“I suppose saying that I have the support of the Commander isn’t going to be enough?”

Clarke shook her head. “It is going to take much more to convince me what you are doing will benefit my people, and not lead to the death of anyone in the other clans.”

Roan regarded Clarke for a moment and she met his gaze with suspicion. He simply smiled and gave her a nod of understanding. “Then I will simply earn that trust.”

“You are welcome to try.”

As they rode through the ruins, her eyes scanned the rubble of concrete and steel beams but if anyone looked closely, they would have seen that her mind was elsewhere. It was back at the door of Mount Weather, where the one person she trusted most had left her and her people to be killed and she swore to herself that trust would be the one thing she no longer had to give.

She realized Roan had started to pull away because the conversation between them had ended. Clarke took in a deep breath, fortifying herself for whatever was to come with Nia and her people
and urged her horse onward to match Roan’s pace.

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The ruins seemed to stretch on for eternity and it felt like it on her back. They were no longer travelling on soft earth and dismounted from time to time in order to give their horses a rest. Roan explained that the hardness of the cement was difficult on the horses and that they were prone to injuries if they spent too much time on it.

Clarke nodded her understanding and she rubbed her hand up and down the neck of the horse who gave a small snort of happiness at her care.

“When will we reach Toron?” Clarke asked as she adjusted her leather bag on her shoulder.

“In about four days. We have to send word once we reach the other side of the falls, and then wait for Nia’s guard to escort us the remainder of the way.”

“Nia is very careful about visitors to the capital?”

“She should be. She has made many enemies and it is common knowledge what it is she wants.”

“If everyone is afraid of what she wants to do, why don’t they just stop her?”

“Because the Commander had agreed to forgive past actions if leaders of the respective clans joined her coalition. Everyone would be an equal and as long as conflict between the clans ceased, nobody would face the punishment of the coalition’s army.”

“But what” Clarke’s voice wavered as the words escaped her lips.

“She told you.” Roan sighed. “What she did was try to get Lexa to break her own law.”

“I don’t understand.” Clarke searched for understanding from what Lexa had explained to her. She knew Lexa hadn’t told her everything about Costia, only that she had to make a choice to bring together the clans and it was the hardest decision she would ever have to make as the Commander. Roan could see the confusion in her eyes so he continued.

“The most adhered to rule of the coalition is that at no time may the Commander unilaterally remove a clan’s leader without first consulting all the ambassadors, and then only after receiving unanimous agreement of all the clan leaders, could another clan leader be removed from power.”

“What does that have to do with what happened?”

“Nia presented her the head of her lover after being accepted into the coalition. She believed that in doing so would make Lexa irrational to the point she would attack her in front of the assembled ambassadors. Had Lexa done what Nia wanted, her life would be forfeit. And Nia could have assumed power of the coalition.”

The colour drained from Clarke’s face. She felt her stomach twist and the rising feel anger welling up inside her began to show in her eyes. Clarke’s jaw clenched tightly and her hands tightened into fist causing Roan’s heart rate to elevate, not knowing the reaction he would elicit from the Skaikru leader.
“How could she?” Clarke whispered to nobody in particular. “Who could do that…”

“That is what Nia is capable of, Clarke. That and so much more were she to assume the power you have the ability to give her.”

“I’ll never agree to work with her.” Clarke growled. “This was a waste of time. I should have just stayed away from all of this. If I wasn’t found, Nia wouldn’t ever have the opportunity to go against Lexa and the coalition.”

“Wanheda.”

“I could just leave. You can simply kill your mother and then agree to peace with Lexa.”

“If you leave, Nia will still rule our people and continue to find a way to defeat the Commander and eventually take power over the clans. I don’t have enough support to stop her without you.”

“How am I supposed to do that, exactly? You’ve been very light on details and we are what, four days from Toron? How am I supposed to pretend to support someone who is capable of doing what she has done?” Clarke was shouting now, her anger spilling out into her words.

“You will do that because she has the ability to control the next Commander. If she kills Lexa, she will force the clans to accept her adopted child their ruler.”

“But…” Clarke’s mind quickly processed Roan’s words and she stared at him. “Nia has a nightblood child.”

“Yes. She was from the Trikru lands, but their family was killed during a raid on her village near the border with Azgeda. One of Nia’s warriors saw the blood and presented her to Nia. Since that day, the girl has been trained by the best fighters our people have to fight against Heda.”

“Nia underestimates Lexa’s abilities.”

Roan nodded in agreement. “That has always been what infuriates my mother and it has become her obsession. One I hope that will keep her distracted long enough to do what we need to do.”

“What will happen to the nightblood?” Clarke asked.

“She will be killed, along with Nia.”

“But she couldn’t help what happened to her.” Clarke argued.

“She isn’t the child she once was and you will need to be careful around her, Clarke. She is dangerous and loyal to a fault regarding Nia.”

Clarke and Roan had walked their horses through the more difficult parts of the concrete graveyard that was once Buffalo and Roan suggested they ride them once more and it wasn’t long before Clarke could hear a loud roar coming from ahead and curiosity got the better of her. She asked Roan what it was, he simply smiled and said that words couldn’t do it justice.

He was right.

Clarke was speechless as they crossed what the sign said was the “Rainbow International Bridge”. She stopped her horse and jumped down from the saddle, moving to get as close to the railing of the bridge as possible.

She was filled with awe, observing the water rush over the top of the waterfall and crash down into
the water below. If it were just the sound it could be a terrifying scene, but the perpetual mist brought
to life a perpetual band of colours that stood in contrast with the loud rumble of the falls. She
remembered the feeling when the door to the drop ship opened and the world around her had been so
alive. It was like she had been reborn in that moment and the raw power of what was before her
unlocked that feeling once more.

Clarke dug into her bag and pulled out her notebook, scribbling down the name “Rainbow Falls” all
the while unaware that Roan had moved up behind her and informed her that they were called
Niagara Falls.

Clarke cheerfully explained that she liked hers better, and proceeded to start her sketch of the
waterfall.

“No time to do that now. We have to go get settled for the night. You will have time to come back
tomorrow and draw it.” Roan told her.

“We are staying here?” Clarke asked, hopeful for a positive reply.

“Not here, but over there.” He pointed to a large building. It wasn’t far from the falls, and it was in
relatively good shape considering the city they had just traveled through had been mostly rubble.
“You will have a good view from the top of the building. And it will be warmer. This is one of the
villages my people are most proud of.”

Clarke was aware of his comment about his people and how much it seemed to bring him happiness.
She also didn’t miss how he referred to them as his people. She tucked the notebook back in her bag
and felt a note of comfort being around Roan. She didn’t trust him, but it was a start.

She didn’t want to seem too excited, but she jumped up on her horse and seemed to urge the horse
on quicker then she normally would. It was her belief that the horse would be well cared for that
night so she didn’t think it would mind.

After they crossed the bridge and made their way to what Clarke was told was a “hotel” in the past, it
now housed many Azgeda families that lived in the area. Clarke was shown her room and she passed
many men women and children, all of whom were ordered to make room to let the group pass. An
order Roan decided to curtail.

It wasn’t long before the curious eyes of children were first to appear, sticking their heads through
slightly opened doorways to see Prince Roan and stranger with blonde hair and the brightest blue
eyes they had ever seen pass by to the only usable stairwell in the building. All of them gazing at her
with curiosity.

Clarke noticed a little girl and smiled at her and lifted her hand in a greeting. The tiny eyes flew wide
open and before she knew it, the girl vanished from sight. Clarke couldn’t help but chuckle when the
door the girl had peeked out from was unceremoniously slammed shut.

It was a tiring climb, and as they walked through the door leading to the hallway, Roan explained
that she would stay in the room farthest from the stairs for her own protection, guards would be
placed along the hallway and that she was to remain in the building for the night. Dinner would be
brought to her and that she would finally be able to sleep in a bed.

“Where will you be?” Clarke asked.

“I didn’t know you cared so much for my well-being, Wanheda.” Roan grinned.

Clarke was tired and it took a moment to process his words. She then shook her head pretending to
be unamused. “In case I need something.” Clarke amended her question.

“Just ask one of the guards. I will be occupied sending word to Toron in regard to our arrival. It will be a couple days before Nia sends her guard to escort us to the city.”

She accepted the situation and after the room was checked by one of Roan’s guards, Clarke entered and her eyes immediately found the bed in the middle of the room. She couldn’t say it was her most graceful thing to ever happen in her life but Clarke walked over to the bed, let her bag fall from her shoulder to the floor with a thud and proceeded to let herself fall face first in the mattress. She decided if she could sleep on a cloud, this would be what it felt like. Her wish to draw was still present but somewhat subdued by her comfortable position on the bed.

The toll from the journey seemed to sneak up on her all at once and although she wanted little more than to go to the window and draw the miracle of nature not more than 500 meters away, she chose to close her eyes and listened to the calming roar of water crashing down in the distance. She reasoned that she could draw them tomorrow and that if the Falls had survived the end of the world, they wouldn’t be going anywhere, anytime soon. For the first night that she could remember, Clarke had managed to fall asleep with a smile.

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Clarke woke up and her body celebrated the soft mattress and clean bedding that she managed to wriggle herself under at some point. Gone too was the ever present chill that took residence in her bones when she slept on the trip north. She hadn’t expected it to be as long as it had been but if she had to she believed she could find her way back home if things don’t go her way. Knowing Nia, that possibility wasn’t likely on the table but after the first day leaving camp to start the journey to Toron she had decided to attempt to always make it an option.

She pinched her eyes closed and released a stretch to try to loosen the tight muscles in her arms and legs, groaning with comfort at the feeling. She had yet to open her eyes and continued to lay on the bed under the blankets there listening to the soft rumble outside. That was, until her stomach did it’s own impression of the mighty waterfall and caused her to laugh and address her stomach’s cries.

She was about to call for a guard until she glanced at the small table in her room. There was a plate of dried meat and what she suspected to be a pitcher of water next to it. A suspicion she confirmed she crossed the room and leaned over to smell it as she grabbed a piece of the meat and began chewing. She filled one of the cups on the table with the water then wandered over to the window that gave her a magnificent view of the sun beginning to climb in the eastern sky.

She decided now was the time to sketch the waterfall, finishing the last of her drink and placing the cup back on the table. She took what was left of the dried meat and rolled it up in a small piece of cloth, allowing her to bring it with her to eat throughout the morning.

She picked up her bag, placed the food in one of the small pouches on the side and walked out of her room.

“Prince roan gave orders that you are not to leave the tower.” stated the large guard nearest to her room. His rough voice took her by surprise and she did not recognize him from the trip north. ‘He must live here’ Clarke thought as she sized him up and grinned inwardly when she saw him flinch under her gaze.
“If you recall, His order was that I was to remain in the room for the night. The sun is rising, and I have chosen to leave my room. If I am inclined, I will leave this building.” Clarke had to fight the urge to smile but she managed to appear in control.

“He. I wasn’t here when...” the man stammered.

“I am not his prisoner. I am a guest of your Queen, Nia kom Azgeda and as such, I expect to be treated accordingly.” Clarke was relishing her improvised role but the elation in her disappeared when she saw the fear in his eyes when she spoke of the land’s ruler.

“Do not worry. Perhaps you could accompany me and make sure no harm will come to me during my time away from the tower. I am sure Prince Roan would appreciate your concern for my welfare.”

“I, It would be my honour Wan, Wanheda.” he managed to reply.

Clarke nodded and gave the man a small smile to put him at ease. She was certain that had she continued, the man might have begun to shake and Clarke decided it was something she would bring up the next time she spoke to Roan. It was her first interaction with someone from this village and she didn’t like the reaction of the man when she used Nia’s name.

She informed the guard that she wanted to go to the falls and wanted to know if he could suggest the best place for an unobstructed view. He smiled and explained there was a bench that his daughter and her friend always sat on that provided the best view. Clarke simply directed the man to show her and when they left the tower, he was urging her on, explaining the history of the village. Details Clarke didn’t ask for, but was happy to receive.

With the arrival of a visitor in Niagara Falls, with it came the curious eyes of its citizens. Clarke could hear the whispered conversations and could hear the occasional “Wanheda” escape the lips of village inhabitants when they were curious enough to stop and watch her. Something that her protector had decided would make her feel uncomfortable, leading him to get people to continue on to where ever it was they were going. He was taking his role seriously, and at times a little too seriously which Clarke found amusing.

It was nearly noon before Clarke and she was unaware of how quickly the time passed. This wasn’t anything new to her and it was her favourite way to spend her free time and she let herself get lost in the sketch in her lap. After glancing up and down numerous times to make sure everything was as precise as it could be, she let out along breath she didn’t know she was holding and leaned back in the bench she had chosen to sketch from. Her protector had moved in the direction of some teenage boys who were admiring the blonde girl who sat on the bench and she chuckled at the entertainment.

“Are you Heda?” a small voice asked from the right.

At first, Clarke felt her heart speed up but when she turned to take in the appearance of the young girl, she smiled and let herself get pulled back into the present. She had a curious look in her brown eyes while she stood beside the bench, her arms crossed.

“Do you think I am?” Clarke asked as she slid along the bench to make room, tapping her palm on the bench and suggesting she should take a seat.

The girl regarded Clarke with a suspicious look, emphasized by a sideways tilt of her head. After a brief moment the girl shrugged, skipped over and sat down where Clarke indicated, letting her legs swing in the air under the bench.
“No. I don’t think you are.” The girl answered, shrugging her shoulders.

“Why is that?”

“She is supposed to be really tall. Taller than my dad. You aren’t taller than him. That and she has dark hair, like me.” The girl nodded curtly, certain of her response.

“You are right. She does have dark hair but can I tell you a secret?” Clarke leaned into the girl conspiratorially and whispered, “Her hair isn’t as pretty as yours.”

The girl lowered her eyes in a bout of shyness, only to see them raise again and her wide eyes brought back the memory of the girl from the night before. It took only a moment more for her to realize this young girl was one in the same. “I heard she is really tall. Taller even than my dad and he is a warrior.”

“She is a quite tall. Taller than I am, and she is very strong. She works hard every day to make sure she is strong enough to lead her people.”

“You know Heda?” She leaned back from Clarke in her seat, trying to gauge the truth in her answer about knowing Lexa.

“I do. Did you know she has green eyes?”

“Green eyes? I have never seen green eyes. Are they as pretty as your blue ones?”

Clarke beamed a smile at the innocence of the question and told the girl, “They are very pretty”, and decided to keep the knowledge that they were the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen to herself.

The girl seemed to ponder what to say next as Clarke seemed lost in thought. The young girl’s eyes looked at the notebook in Clarke’s lap. “What is that?”

“This is a notebook.”

“I know what it is.” the girl groaned and rolled her eyes dramatically. “What were you writing in it?”

“I was drawing the waterfall. Would you like to see it?” Clarke asked.

“Sure.”

From behind she hear a woman cry out, “Aline, you shouldn’t be bothering this woman. Leave her to her business!”

The voice belonged to a tall but thin woman who ran toward her quickly and was intercepted by her guard. "Teria, nobody is to disturb her. You know Prince Roan's order because I was the one who told you."

"You did a great job keeping my daughter from not disturbing her." the woman scoffed, smacking the guard in the shoulder.

"It wasn't my fault. I was chasing some kids away and she must have managed by before I could see her. Now get her out of here before Prince Roan tells the Queen!"

The realization sank into the woman and she looked at the bench and her daughter sitting next to the woman she knew as Wanheda. From where she stood, she called to her daughter and told her to come join her “this instant or she will do her brother's chores for the next week.”
“Mom! She was going to show me her picture that she was drawing of the waterfall!” the young girl protested.

“Let her by.” Clarke stated to the guard who was clearly a friend of the woman's and was put in a difficult, yet amusing situation.

“Apologies, Wanheda. I didn’t mean for her to bother you.” The woman was urgently trying to get her daughter to come with her and leave Clarke alone by grabbing her arm and lifting her from the bench. "My daughter and her friend come here in the mornings when they are done their chores. It would seem that her friend actually listens to their parents when they tell her not to do something."

“It is alright. I’ve enjoyed the company of your daughter.” Clarke asked, putting an end to the struggle between the two momentarily. “She is certainly curious.”

“We don’t receive many visitors here unless they are permitted to visit by the Queen.” The woman offered as a reason for her daughter’s curiosity, hoping it would be enough. The look in her eyes was similar to that of the guard earlier, outside her bedroom door.

“Would you like to join us?” Clarke asked, handing her notebook over to Aline and they watched her take a seat on the ground so she could flip through the pages.

“Thank you for your patience with her, Wanheda.” the woman was still clearly nervous.

“Please, call me Clarke.” she offered, trying to put the woman at ease. “Perhaps you can tell me a little about your people.” It was when the woman regarded her with a curious look that was accompanied by a tilt of her head to the side that Clarke was certain this was Aline’s mother.

“You already know Aline, I am Teria.” the woman said, then followed up with a not so simple question. ”What is it about my people are you wondering about?”

They spoke for the better part of an hour and although Clarke knew Tiria was withholding details regarding Nia and Lexa, but that was expected. She doubted she could get exactly what she was looking from Teria but she learned enough to know that she feared Nia by the way she avoided discussing the Queen.

When Roan approached, Clarke's guard told Teira it was time to be leaving and Clarke ended their conversation by bidding Tiria and Aline farewell. Aline seemed hesitant at first but after she stood up from the ground, she quickly stepped in to hug Clarke then pulled back as her mother told her it was time for them to go and prepare dinner. Clarke made sure that before she left that Teria would let her say farewell to Aline. An offer that Teria happily accepted, causing her daughter to smile brightly.

“Bye, Clarke.” Aline said as she was led away from the bench, toward the tower.

“Wait!” Aline shouted as she spun around and ran back to Clarke. “Here.”

Clarke reached out and took back her notebook. “Did you draw anything?”

Aline nodded, then turned to run back to her waiting mother.

They passed by Roan, wishing him good health and were caught off guard when he smiled and sincerely offered the same in reply.

When he stood across from Clarke, he turned his head and looked out toward the waterfall.

“Dinner will be ready shortly in the dining hall.”
Clarke didn’t say anything but she turned to look at the waterfall as well.

“Did you get what you needed?” he asked.

“I haven’t figured that out, yet.” Clarke offered as it was the only answer she had to give.

“We don’t have much time.”

“I know.”

Roan turned and Clarke walked beside him toward the tower, placing her notebook in her bag. Every step Clarke took toward the tower added a layer of exhaustion to her tired body. She had skipped too many meals and the stress of the situation was taking it’s toll as the trip north had.

Dinner was a blur as Clarke tried to piece together what she knew of Nia from what she had been told by Echo, Lincoln, Lexa and Roan. She now had what Teria had shared during their conversation but what she was most concerned about was what she had omitted. There was tension to every word she said when it came to the Azgeda relationship with the coalition, and Lexa in particular. Her thoughts followed her up the stairs to the top of the tower, down the hall and into her room where she once again fell on to her bed, though this time much more controlled.

It was all too much for her as tired as she had become and she decided to distract herself by trying to focus on an image of Aline so she could draw her. She pulled the notebook from her pack and proceeded to flip to the next blank page to get started and that is when she noticed the drawing Aline put in her book. She had given Aline her bag when she asked if she could draw and Clarke didn’t think much of it but she stared down at the page to see two dark green dots staring back at her and the word Heda above the crudely drawn figure.

It stood in contrast to the precise drawings and the details that Clarke put into her work that was found throughout the pages of the notebook but it had a beauty of it’s own in it's contrast. Clarke left her finger trace the lines that Aline used to draw Lexa and smiled. She wondered if Lexa had ever seen the waterfall, and if she felt the same way.

Clarke was frustrated at letting such an intimate thought regarding Lexa permeate her mind. She scolded herself for not keeping her mind in the present and focusing on the more important matters at hand. Roan needed her. Aline and her mother needed her but she had no idea what to do or how to help any of them. Roan had explained very little in regard to his actual plan, other than she had to seem to support his mother, but not make promises.

She rolled over in frustration, buried her face in a soft pillow and pressed downward to release a groan. She didn't have an answer. Not for Roan's question earlier by the bench, and she didn't have one for whatever it was she had to do in the coming days. The only consolation is that her frustration made her tired, and It wasn’t long until she had fallen back asleep, too exhausted to continue worrying. Her next challenge awaited her when she slept that had two emerald green eyes staring back into her own, surrounded by black war paint and her hair tied back in elegant braids.

It was the same one she had every night. The one where no matter how far she ran, her heart would break and the ground fall out from beneath her.
Uneasy Allies

Chapter Summary

The return of Bellamy, Echo and Koma to Tondc and Indra presents the Commander's request to the Kongeda ambassadors.

Chapter Notes

Sunday Update!

Is everyone is enjoying their Sunday? A big thank-you to everyone who is enjoying the story and to all who have been awesome enough to leave comments & kudos. I really enjoy seeing the notifications pop up in my e-mail when I arrive at work.

This is the first of two chapters, and I am planning on having the next one out this evening. I have some tinkering to do with chapter 24 because it plays into what you will read toward the end of this chapter.

Ok, you don't want to read my notes! Go and (hopefully) enjoy this chapter!

See you all in a little bit.

Four days later and the return to Tondc had been fairly uneventful aside from having to avoid being caught by an occasional Azgeda scouting party who seemed to be making their way back north to Azgeda territory.

Koma spent much of their time as they avoided the small groups trying to convince Echo that it was in their best interest to remove as many Azgeda threats as possible should there be a war between her people and the combined forces of the Kongeda. A suggestion that she flatly refused explaining that the warriors are only following Nia’s orders and once Roan wrested control from Nia such future threats would cease.

When they were in sight of Tondc, they collectively sighed their relief and although ordered to remain still from guards, they felt safe for the first time in more that a week. Two guards walked out from their cover, one with a bows at the ready and another with his hand on his sword. They seemed to be paying most of their attention on the Echo, who became the target of a rather aggressive search for weapons.

“Hey! She’s with us.” Bellamy interjected while a guard shoved Echo to the ground. Bellamy stepped between the guard who looked to be only starting the rough treatment of the woman who was now pulling herself to her knees.

“Em-de laik baga.”(She is the Enemy.) One of the guards growled.

“Breik em au.”(Let her go.) Koma ordered the man, drawing his blade.
With the sound of a bowstring being pulled taut, Bellamy quickly followed suit and lifted his gun and aimed it at the guard who created the offending sound. “I said, she is with us.”

“Em Pleni!” (Enough!) yelled a voice in the distance but in clear view of what was taking place outside the village. Koma and Bellamy could see Indra sprinting in their direction, abandoning the conversation she was in the middle of. Neither party willing to budge in the confrontation.

“Indra, daun teik ai frag em op.” (Indra, let me kill her.) asked the guard holding his sword asked.

"Sis em au na gyon op." (Help her up.) Indra ordered the man who forced Echo to the ground.

He replaced his sword and offered a hand but Bellamy stepped between them and helped Echo to her feet. Once Echo had brushed the dirt from the knees, Bellamy stepped in closer to Echo who was the target of a warning glance from Indra.

“Heda don sen osir.” (The Commander sent us.) Koma answered the one question he believed Indra would have for him.

Indra nodded with understanding and invited them in to Tondc. She could see they were exhausted and warm food and a comfortable night’s sleep would be celebrated but before anything else was said, she thanked the guards for doing their job and sent them back to their posts. Turning to the trio of newcomers, she took stock of their clothes and the tired look in their eyes.

“You have made it in time for dinner. Something warm to eat and then you can rest.”

“Heda has given us orders to deliver messages to you and to the Skaikru leaders.” Koma explained. “She insists the messages arrive as quickly as possible.”

“Then tell me while we eat.”

The newcomers accepted the offer and set themselves to devouring their meals. It had been the first time in weeks they has the luxury of eating something cooked over a fire due to hide from watchful Azgeda eyes and their bodies welcomed the nourishment. So much so, they all ate two helpings of the meal while discussing the past couple weeks.

Koma explained Lexa’s plan to continue north and was met immediately with furrowed eyebrows and Indra’s disapproval. He knew Indra would not like the idea of the Commander putting herself in danger by traveling close to Toron and it was only when he gave her the letter that Lexa handed him before they separated, did she understand the urgency that Koma had stressed when they first arrived. Lexa was scouting the enemy.

“You two will be given horses and an escort to your people. Meet at the stables in fifteen minutes.” Indra told Bellamy and Echo. “Your escort will remain at Camp Jaha and wait for your leaders answer.”

“It might take some time to convince them.” Bellamy said. “My people don’t trust yours.”

“From what I understand, that is what she has come along for. If not, I’ll throw her in a cell until we can decide what to do with her.” Indra hid nothing of the fact she didn’t trust Echo. Something that was evident with the guards at the door and how they remained focused on the only Azgeda in the room.

Echo had remained silent during the conversation between Bellamy and Indra as she was certain she would create unwanted tension. She was here to speak for Roan, but as Koma explained Lexa’s plan and Roan’s intention to displace his mother all she needed to do was nod an affirmation from time to
time.

Bellamy lifted his pack from the floor next to him and Echo stood to join him to exit the building. Neither wanting to delay their trip to Camp Jaha any longer than necessary.

"It will take no more than three days to resolve this in Polis. We head north in a weeks time. I’ll expect your escort to return with your answer before then.” Indra stated, turning to Koma and signaling an end to her conversation with the pair.

After they left the hall, they walked toward the stable Bellamy and dug into his pack to pull out his radio and turned the dial on the top with a click. It’s range was limited and it seemed that Tondc was the farthest they could reach from Camp Jaha.

“Camp Jaha. This is Bellamy. Is anyone there?”

There was no answer so Bellamy checked to make sure the power was on. Seeing the small red light, he tried again. The signal on the handset hadn’t been strong enough to reach Camp Jaha through most of their journey, and it seemed like it still wasn’t working which irritated Bellamy.

“Camp Jaha. This is Bellamy. Raven. Are you there?”

After a short pause and the sound of static through the radio, Raven’s familiar voice came back over the handset. Echo seemed utterly amazed, and the curiosity she had a moment ago when Bellamy first pulled it out of his bag was tripled when she witnessed a conversation start to occur.

“Raven, am I glad to hear your voice.” He sighed.

“Where the hell have you been?! It has been weeks and you haven’t radioed once.”

“The range on these is not much farther than Tondc. We found Clarke but...”

“You found her? I’ll go get Abby. She has been going crazy waiting to hear from her! Wait, but?”

“Don’t get Abby. Clarke isn’t here.”

There isn’t anything over the radio for a second but the silence is broken by Raven’s voice once again.

"What do you mean Clarke isn’t there? You said you found her.”

“We did. But we couldn’t bring her back with us.”

“Bellamy…”

“I’ll explain when we get back. The Commander was there and now Clarke is going north. I’ll explain everything when we get there in a couple hours.”

"We”?

“Echo and I. There will be an escort from Tondc as well. She has a message for Kane and Abby from Prince Roan.”

“Echo?”

“Yes, Raven. I'll explain later. We are on our way back now. We won’t be more than two hours.”
“Abby’s going to be pissed. At least she’s safe.”

Echo leaned against a wooden post in the stable and crossed her arms while she listened to the conversation between Bellamy and the small device in his hand. The amusement was evidenced by a small grin starting that appeared at the corner of her lip, watching Bellamy get an inquisition from the voice on the other end.

“Bellamy. She is safe, isn’t she?”

“Just let Abby and Kane know that we will be there in about two hours.”

“Fine. But when you are done talking with them, I want to know everything you will leave out.”

“You’ve got it. I will see you when we get there.” Bellamy said, “And Raven? Don’t tell them about Clarke.”

“Don’t tell them about Clarke? What…”

Bellamy quickly put the conversation to an end by turning the dial to the off position while taking in the view of a now overly-amused Echo. He clicked the radio off and stuffed it back in his pack.

“Smooth.” Echo teased. “Is she someone special?”

“No. Raven is…” Bellamy paused for a moment in contemplation, “…Raven is Raven.”

“I see.” Echo answered with a note of something in her voice that caught Bellamy’s attention. He watched as she pushed herself off the post she was leaning against as their escort arrived and told them they had to be on their way. They walked their horses to the path leading from Tondc to Camp Jaha and mounted up.

“Raven is a friend.” Bellamy explained as they were warming up the horses for journey in a slow trot that turned into a spirited pace. Had Bellamy been skilled enough with a horse, he might have been able to stay alongside Echo and seen the small smile that appeared on her lips.

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“The law is clear. There can be no war without complete agreement from all ambassadors!” exclaimed the Ambassador from Shadow Valley.

This argument had been ongoing for the last three hours. Each time Indra explained the Commander’s message that constant incursions by Nia into Trikru territory warranted at the very minimum, a show of force to bring Nia to Polis to explain her actions. The council remained divided and could not come to an agreement on resolving the issue. Each time they argued that with winter on it’s way, Nia would not be reachable with the cold and snow that would envelop the landscape. That it would cause undue harm on clans to have their men and women go off to war.

Having heard enough, Indra turned on her feet and her hands shoved against the two large doors, flinging them open into the hallway. Koma waited in a chair in the hall but rose quickly upon seeing Indra storm out of the room, rose to his feet waiting word of his next course of action. Once the door was closed again, both Indra and Koma could hear bickering by the ambassadors within the chamber.

“We will get nothing decided while they continue to oppose sending warriors north.”

"Heda’s call for her army has been refused?” Koma asked.
Indra nodded an affirmative. The chamber door to the council room opened once more and while Koma looked, Indra remained steadfast, staring forward and ignoring the Trishankru ambassador.

“Indra, wait.”

“I have nothing to say to you or the other ambassadors.” Indra said with derision flowing off her words.

“You need to understand the risk the Commander is presenting the coalition.”

“The risk? Nia invades coalition lands at will, takes Trikru and Skaikru prisoners, and all you and the other council members can talk about is how cold it will be? Go back to your table and ignore the wishes of your Commander.”

“There is another option.” he explained.

“I gave you the Commanders orders. There shouldn’t be a need for another option.”

“Go north with Trikru warriors.”

“We do not have the numbers to take on Nia’s army. Even if we were to defeat her warriors twenty-to-one, they would still outnumber us by many thousand.” Indra scoffed at the ambassador’s notion.

“Then perhaps you could get creative. Perhaps look beyond the kongeda for assistance.” he stated simply. “Then it would not be a matter of starting a war, but defending one’s sovereignty as the Ice Queen’s ambassador asserts every time this issue arises.”

If anyone present could recognize her tells, they may have seen the almost undetectable lifting of her eyebrows upon this revelation. She stayed facing the elevator door and did little more than give a nod of understanding to the ambassador who smiled at her concession.

“Best of luck to you, Indra. Give my best to the Commander when you reach her.”

“I will.”

Koma watched the exchange between the two and could feel some of the stress dissipate from Indra. The ambassador turned and walked back to the room, closing the doors behind him. Indra turned to Koma and said, “It appears we will be going north after all.”

“There is more?”

Indra’s teeth seemed to grind and her eyebrows furrowed in displeasure at the answer to his question. “We will gather our forces in Tondc, then we have to make a stop at the Skaikru village on our way to Toron.”

“What if they don’t join us? Will you still do as the Commander requests?”

“I am loyal to the Commander. Nia will not wield the power of Maun-de for as long as I draw breath even if we must face the wrath of Wanheda.”

The elevator arrived on their floor and they both stepped on the platform.

“The ground.” Indra ordered, wondering if this would be the last time she would have the opportunity to visit Polis.

“Send messengers to surrounding villages that our warriors are to meet at Camp Jaha in three days
time. We will meet in the clearing west of their camp.”

“Sha, Indra.”

“Be sure to have our people bring extra supplies from the villages. Enough for the Skaikru army. I have a feeling they won’t be prepared for what is to come.”

Koma fought back a laugh at the memory of how poorly Bellamy and Octavia had fared while they sat outside the Azgeda camp. Indra’s face gave no indication of amusement, her mind focused on the coming days and the challenges that awaited her small army. They faced an uphill battle, even with the assistance of Skaikru as allies. Hopeful allies who had little reason to trust the Commander. Her hope rested on Bellamy and Echo, and their efforts to sway their leader’s minds.
They all rode side by side for the last kilometer as they approached Camp Jaha. Bellamy was beginning to recognize the forest even though the trees appeared as empty as they were. It was much different that when they first landed and the once lush green of the forest canopy had either turned shades of yellow and red, still clinging to their respective trees, or had fallen to the ground and begun to decompose on the dry ground below. It was their home now and the sights and sounds had begun to feel familiar. He couldn't place an exact moment when everything stopped feeling different, but he had only just become aware of the change.

The closer they approached the clearing in front of Camp Jaha, the more Bellamy began to stew in the thoughts of what they would tell Abby and Marcus, and if he should adhere to Lexa’s order regarding Clarke. He and Echo had discussed what they would share with his people when they arrived, but it felt wrong to leave any detail out of something that could bring their people into another war, led by the woman who betrayed their trust the last time they agreed to an alliance.

“Your people will listen. Once we explain what it is Nia truly wants from Skaikru, they will understand the threat she poses.” Echo said in encouragement, trying to prevent the doubts he had from taking root in his mind. 

“I hope you are right.”

They broke into the clearing and the absence of clouds allowed the moon to reflect brightly off Camp Jaha’s metal structures, giving the light-blue glow an almost ethereal look. The closer they rode, they could see increased movement at the main gate and voices calling for reinforcement.

“Open the gate.” Bellamy called up to the guard above the door. They were no more than twenty meters from the gate and certain he was clearly visible but he was forced to shield his eyes from the bright light that was shone in his face.

“Bellamy?” Asked Miller from atop the gate.
“It’s me. Abby and Kane are expecting us. Open the gate.”

Miller yelled down to open it up and in seconds the door swung outward on its quiet hinges.

As he walked down from atop the gate, Miller called out to Bellamy, “I was told they want to see you guys in the council room right away. The grounders have to wait outside.”

“Echo is coming with me. Our escort is tired. Make sure he can get something to eat and a place to sleep for the rest of the night.”

“You can take the horses to the stable beside the Ark.” Miller informed him, pointing to the newly constructed wooden building.

It didn’t take long before a young boy approached them and took the reins from their hands. “I’ll take care of them, sir.” Bellamy thanked the boy and suggested that one of the guards could either show the Trikru guest to his quarters or he could go have something to eat and. The Trikru man choose rest as his option, which prompted Bellamy to send him with one of the Skaikru security guards into the Ark and toward a bed.

“About time you got back.”

Bellamy turned to see Raven walk out from the mechanics shop. His eyes went to her leg and he saw her limp was not as pronounced as it had been. She had a smile on her face and when they were close, she stepped forward and gave him a hug.

“Good to see you too.”

They separated and Raven took a step back to appraise the Azgeda woman to his right who if she was not mistaken, had been standing closer to Bellamy now than she had been before Raven welcomed Bellamy back. Raven raised an eyebrow in curiosity and looked at Bellamy.

“This is Echo. Echo, Raven.”

The two women simply looked at each other for a moment then Raven smiled, looking back at Bellamy.

“Your message for Abby better be a good one. I thought she was going to destroy my lab when I told her you radioed but didn’t stick around long enough for me to get her.”

“I thought it would be best if we talked in person.”

“She tried to reach you for an hour after I told her that you were on your way back here. I said the radio battery was dead and that you got cut off while we talked. You owe me one. Speaking of radios, I'll charge that one for you.” Raven reached out her hand expectantly for the radio, which Bellamy produced from his bag and handed it over. “The council is all in the Ark waiting for you. They have been there for the past hour when Abby dragged them all out of bed to sit and wait for you.”

“I hope I get the chance to repay that when we get back. We have to go talk to the council and we don’t have a lot of time.”

Raven watched as Bellamy and Echo walked past her and toward the Ark. Curiosity got the better of her and she decided there was no way she was going to miss out on what the two were going to share while talking to Abby and Kane, so she pushed her body to match speed with the pair.
“Bellamy, what do you mean you hope you get the chance?”

“You’ll find out in a minute.” Bellamy said over his shoulder.

They walked the halls of the fallen space station until they reached the council room door. Echo hesitated a step when she entered the large structure but found the strength to push through the entrance. This place felt eerily familiar to a place she intended never to see again and her nerves were getting the better of her. Every step into the Skaikru ship was chipping away at the edges at her usually unbreakable facade. As they approached the door to the council chambers, Bellamy turned to face her and he lifted his hands to her shoulders.

"Hey." Bellamy said, trying to get their eyes met. Bellamy had seen that look before and he hoped his voice would bring her back to the present. His voice cut through the chatter in her mind, helping to clear her thoughts. “We got this. Just like we talked about, ok?”

“What if they refuse to help?” she asked, focusing on the present problem.

“They won’t. Abby will choose to save Clarke.”

“Clarke isn’t my only concern. Roan, my people...”

“We have faced worse things than Clarke’s mother. We do what we have to in there and when we join the armies of the coalition, Nia won’t have a chance.”

Echo closed her eyes and took in a deep breath and a moment later, she nodded when she felt Bellamy’s reassuring squeeze of his hand on her shoulder. When she opened her eyes the concern had been wiped clear. Bellamy smiled and let her go in order to turn the handle on the hatch to inform the council of recent events.

Bellamy went over the details of his journey with Koma, finding Lexa near an Azgeda camp and how Clarke was being forced to go north to and be brought to Nia. That Koma had been sent to Polis with Indra to gather the armies of the coalition and bring them north to secure Prince Roan's claim of the throne once Nia has been deposed.

“Your Queen has petitioned us for peace, but you are saying she wants to use us to control the coalition? We have no intention of giving control of the rockets in Mount Weather to Nia.” Marcus stated.

"Nia wants Clarke to use as leverage. With Clarke in Toron, she believes she can convince you to give her what she wants.” Echo explained.

"We offered an alliance to the Commander and to Nia. The first who would find Clarke we would agree to peace. Why wouldn't Nia bring her here?” Abby asked.

"She doesn't believe that peace between our two people would give her the power of Maun-de. Without it, she couldn't defeat the coalition and take control of Polis and your interest in finding and bringing Clarke back gives her power over you. Roan believes she will let your people become weakened by the upcoming winter, then present you one of two options in the spring. Work with her to defeat the Commander or Clarke will become a weapon she will use against you.”

"Couldn't Prince Roan have brought Clarke here directly, then asked us to help him fight against his mother?" Marcus wondered aloud.

“Prince Roan was forced to bring Nia’s warriors with him and they serve as Nia’s eyes and ears. Clarke wasn’t interested in going north to Toron, but Nia’s orders were to make sure Clarke was
brought to the Azgeda capital. We had to improvise when she started a fight with me and that forced our plan to change. Roan decided it would be best I joined Bellamy here to explain to why Nia must be stopped.”

Marcus leaned over toward Abby and suggested something quietly, then continued asking his questions. “Bellamy said the Commander was there and you were in the tent with her when she met Clarke. What did she want?”

“She intended to rescue your daughter and bring her back to your village.”

"But she chose to leave her there?"

"She was forced to. Clarke's ankle was severely injured which would have made it impossible to take her from the camp without being caught. Clarke refused to leave because she had already agreed to help Prince Roan, and a condition of it was that I remain behind and make sure an injured Trikru man made it home safely."

Abby let out a sigh of frustration, "Couldn't you all have fought your mother's warriors and brought Clarke back?"

"We would have not stood a chance against so many of Nia's warriors. The Commander has an agreement with Prince Roan in that If he could remove his mother from power, she would permit his ascendance to the Azgeda throne. With that will come peace for our people and all other clans of the coalition - and your people as well.”

Marcus leaned forward in his chair looking between Bellamy and Echo. “Nia has offered us peace. She hasn’t betrayed us, and she seems interested in our well being by bringing us some things to help us through the winter.”

The frustration had begun to mount in Echo, and the tension was apparent in her voice when she replied to Marcus' suggestion that Nia's effort to help Skaikru was an honest one.

“The food and the furs you have been given were forcibly taken from Azgeda families. Families that needed them to get through the winter. I promise you that any assistance my Queen offers you will be at the cost of Azgeda lives, unable to survive the winter. My people do not have much thanks to Nia and for every person of yours she helps, ours will suffer to match.”

“I hope you are not blaming us for killing your people because of what Nia has given.” Abby was visibly displeased at Echo for the possible inference.

“No. I am blaming Nia. She doesn’t care for her people, only her chance to claim more power. She will sacrifice whatever it takes, even if it means half of Azgeda freezes in the cold of winter due to lack of furs, or no food in their stomach because she thinks giving it all to your people will give her the power to rule. If Nia manages to defeat The Commander and the armies of the coalition by allying with you and taking control of Maun-de, she will rule the clans of the coalition as she rules Azgeda.”

“But from what I understand, only a nightblood can assume the mantle of the Commander. Nia isn’t a nightblood, is she? They are trained in Polis.”

“Nia has a natblida child to replace the Commander. She will then order the slaughter of any possible challengers to her authority including the remaining children with the gift. She will rule the coalition with her pet natblida and we will all be at her mercy.”

The council members sat in silence for a moment, thinking that if they were to believe Echo's
detailed account of Nia's plans, and that she had been working meticulously on a strategy to replace Lexa, there was a lot to consider beyond a simple alliance. Echo and Bellamy shared most of what they knew and the council had attempted to absorb the details they have become privy to during the last two hours. Abby could see the tired eyes of the councilors and the exhaustion that was present in Bellamy and Echo as they slouched in their seats.

“I think it is time we took a break so we can consider what you've told us. We will come back and discuss this further in the morning after breakfast.” Marcus suggested.

“A good decision. We can all use some rest.” One of the other council members agreed.

“You have given us a lot to consider for one night, Echo. Thank you. We need to discuss our options. and what is best for our people.”

She held her words when Bellamy placed his hand over hers and shook his head to indicate that they were done discussing for the night. The pair stood up from their chairs and the fatigue that washed over them was apparent in their uncooperative limbs, making it difficult to rise with ease.

“I’ll show you where you can stay for the night.” Bellamy said Echo as they walked into the hall.

They were so tired, they hadn't even seen Raven approach the from behind as they entered the corridor.

"Guys," Raven said, her eyes seemed filled with a million questions.

"Not now, Raven. Breakfast.” He grunted, leading Echo away.

"Fine…” she said, leaning in to Bellamy to not be overheard as she continued to speak. “…but you are going to tell me exactly what happened with Clarke, and where she has been all this time.”

“Good night, Raven.” Bellamy didn’t hide the frustration in his voice which sent the understanding brunette mechanic on her way. His attention back on Echo, she seemed nervous once again now that she was back in the corridor. “This way.” He directed her down the hall with his hand and began to walk with her to the destination.

The quarters she was given were not far from the council room and when they arrived, Bellamy opened the hatch for her to enter. She stared into the room and shook her head in refusal. She was tired and that allowed everything she was feeling to rush to the surface unabated.

“Nobody is going to hurt you here. You have my word.” Bellamy promised her.

“I can’t stay here.” she stated, her voice shaking.

"Echo. Look at me.” Bellamy said, trying to calm her nerves which were clearly taking control of her. It was as her eyes glassed over and her frame trembled, he stepped forward and he wrapped his arms around her. “You are safe here. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Echo buried her face in his shoulder and he could feel her taking deep breaths trying to calm herself.

"You just need some rest. We both do."

“Stay with me.” she asked, her voice muffled by the fabric of his coat that she was speaking into.

Bellamy held her to his chest and she squeezed against him tightly as they both walked into the small guest quarters. He didn’t consider how much this would feel like mount weather for Echo and that
while he had memories of his childhood, family and friends in the Ark, for Echo, the metal walls and
the artificial light represented nothing but torture, seeing her friends and loved ones be murdered.

They moved over to the mattress and sat down and she refused to let him go. Bellamy gently
lowered her so they were laying down but she refused to unwrap her arms from around his torso.
When he tried to get up, she only squeezed tighter and repeated, “Stay.”

Bellamy brushed her hair from her face and the trails of her tears were visible on her cheek. He
brushed at them with his thumb and leaned in, kissing her on the forehead.

“You are safe. Soon, your people will be too.” he promised her in a whisper.

Echo’s exhaustion had taken full control of her, but not before she could gave a small smile at the
sound of his words.

After a couple minutes, her breath had begun to even out and he attempted to re-position himself on
the tiny bed, but her arms only squeezed him tighter, pulling herself tightly against his frame. He let
his hand fall over hers and their fingers intertwined which drew a contented sigh from Echo and a
smile on his own face. Knowing that she was asleep brought Bellamy a sense of calm, allowing his
own fatigue lead him to the best sleep he had in weeks.

From the hall Raven smiled watching the pair. Once they were both asleep, she pulled the door
closed and secured the hatch. While she walked back to her shop which doubled as her quarters, she
added another question to the already impressive amount she intended on asking them in the morning
over breakfast.
The morning arrived quickly with Bellamy and Echo being left to sleep later than they expected. Their extended rest came at the behest of Raven who approached Abby and Kane after observing the two after the meeting. Marcus had suggested they wait for the morning for the debrief but Abby steadfastly refused to let them rest when they arrived. She wanted answers to her questions, ignoring the struggle of the exhausted news bearers.

Raven explained what she saw transpire between the two, minus the personal details and Abby continued to insist they were to discuss the matter immediately after breakfast. A breakfast that would prove difficult for Abby as Marcus sat across from her refusing to discuss the matter at hand.

“We needed to know what they knew.” She defended herself in the face of Marcus’ silence.

After a mouthful of her eggs, she placed her fork alongside her plate and looked across at Marcus and amended her statement in a much quieter tone. “I needed to know.”

Marcus lifted his eyes and let her know all she need to in a glance then reinforced it by saying, “There was nothing you learned last night that you couldn’t have waited until this morning to learn. You saw how exhausted they were.”

“Clarke is in trouble, Marcus.” Abby’s voice strained as the words spoke the unpleasant truth. As if saying them made it more real.

“Clarke seems to always find herself in the middle of these situations. We have to trust she knows what it is she is doing. Clarke will find whatever way she can to come back to you.”

“Marcus. She has been gone for so long.”

“I know you don’t want to hear this Abby but whatever decision we make, there is more at play here
than just Clarke. If it puts all the clans in danger we must consider Prince Roan’s proposal.”

“Perhaps we should discuss what we heard last night with the other councilors before we meet with Bellamy and Echo. That and I think there is someone else who can shed a little more light on who Nia is and her history with the commander.”

Abby agreed to his suggestion. As much as it frustrated her to leave her daughter to her own devices, she was also aware Clarke could take care of herself when forced to. Every day after their drop ship arrived on the surface was all the evidence she required.

“After they eat breakfast.” Marcus added, drawing a smile from Abby.

“After they eat breakfast.” she confirmed, reaching across the table and picking up a piece of bread from Marcus’ plate and taking a bite, amusement in her eyes as she placed the what remained back on his plate.

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Bellamy and Echo woke to the sound of knocking on the metal hatch. Bellamy was the first to stir and his movement drew a tired groan from Echo.

"I'll get it. Try to go back to sleep.” He told her.

She closed her eyes but it was no use. When he left the bed, the warmth his body provided vanished and left her to shiver at the unpleasant chill that took his place. The realization that she missed his warmth caused her heart to beat a little quicker in her chest and for a moment, her eyes opened in understanding. Pulling the blanket that Bellamy had gotten them at some point in the night over her body, she attempted to preserve as much of the warmth as she could while trying to listen who was knocking once more at the door again.

“Coming.” he mumbled, turning the hatch handle and pulling it slightly open to see Raven standing in the hall. “Yeah?”

“Nice to see you too.” She remarked at his less-than-excited response.

“You woke us up, Raven. What is it?”

“I just thought you would like to know it’s almost noon. You missed breakfast.”

He looked down in her hands to see a tray with two plates which she attempted to hold away from him.

“Yeah? What is that, then?” he asked, smelling the food that sat under the partially covered plates.

“This? This is my breakfast. Keeping this place running is exhausting. I need a lot of energy to keep it from falling apart.”

“Raven.” He said in a less-than-amused tone.

“Fine. I got it for both of you. You can have it if you invite me in.” She offered.

Looking over his shoulder to Echo, he waited for her decision. After watching her slide out from
under the blanket, stand from the bed and lazily yawn as she walked over to the table in the room, Bellamy invited Raven in.

“That didn’t take long,” she whispered to Bellamy as she walked by so she could place the plates on the table. “Eggs and some toasted bread with honey. Meat is being rationed so I couldn’t get any of that.”

“This is great. Thank you.” Bellamy said as he sat down and began to pick at the food. Raven sat across the room on the bed.

Raven sat there letting them eat their meal and refrained from asking them any questions but for both Bellamy and Echo, the silence had become awkward. They had questions for each other but with Raven being present, they couldn’t address them. The only other option was to tell Raven what she wanted to know.

“Go ahead.”

“You don’t want to finish eating first?” Raven asked, watching the pair.

“Maybe if you ask your questions, we will have a chance to relax before we go and talk to Kane and Abby.”

Raven looked back and forth between Bellamy and Echo, fixing them with a serious look.

“Where is Clarke and what the hell is she actually up to?”

Echo grinned and shrugged while she bit into her bread, suggesting to Bellamy that because her mouth was full, he would have to field the question. If anyone could have portrayed betrayal in a look, it was Bellamy in response to her action. Raven just sighed expectantly, waiting for either of them to answer and when they did, Bellamy and Echo explained to Raven the series of events as they knew it, filling in the blanks for the other when required.

Clarke had spent time with a Trikru man who lived near the Azgeda border. She was injured but the details were limited to after she had been discovered by a group of Azgeda scouts that had been sent to find her, one of them being Echo. Levai fought them off and Echo took the opportunity to try and keep Clarke out of the Nia’s hands by joining them in the hope she could get Clarke back to Camp Jaha.

Levai becoming poisoned brought them to the Azgeda camp for a cure. That was when Roan presented her the proposal to remove his mother from the throne, which she accepted for Roan having his healer to cure the poison.

“I believe she is well on her way to Toron now. The Commander was on foot, as were the other three. They won’t be able to catch up to her, and even if she did she would refuse to return home.” Echo said, finishing the explanation.

“She wouldn’t let anyone rescue her?” Raven asked.

“Wanheda is stubborn.” she said, pointing to a partially healed cut on her cheek.

Raven smiled at the understanding of how stubborn she could be then she asked the obvious question. “Wanheda?”

“Yes.” Echo responded. “The Commander of Death. It is what our people call her after she defeated Maun-de.”
Raven raised her eyebrows and let herself lean forward giving Bellamy the same serious look she did when Bellamy suggested she ask her questions.

“There’ll be no living with her after this.” Raven broke into a laugh, then stood up from the bed and walked to the door and opened it. Before she closed it to give them their privacy she said, “Finish your food and take your time. They have been discussing what you told them since after breakfast. I’ll let them know you will meet them in the council room after you are done eating. After last night, it’s only fair you make them wait a little bit.”

Bellamy thanked her and they returned to their food. They were quiet for some time but it was a comfortable silence. When they finished the meal, Bellamy took the empty plates and the tray and placed them on the table nearest the door.

“Thank you.” Echo said.

“No problem.”

“No, Bellamy.” she stated. “Thank you.”

His mind was already clouded with what they could say to the council. When he turned around he opened his mouth to discuss it with her, Echo was directly in front of him. She lifted her hand and slid it behind his neck, pulling him forward and pressing her lips into a kiss driving every thought from his mind but the woman in front of him.

In response, his hands moved to her hips and pulled her even closer into him. Turning her head to deepen the kiss, she pushed her hips against him as he let his tongue graze her upper lip. She allowed him to slide his hand from her hip, slowly upward until he cupped her breast through her shirt and receiving a moan of approval from her throat for his efforts.

Echo pulled away for a moment and laid her forehead on his chin as they both gasped for air. She let her arms encircle Bellamy and though they tried to keep their kiss under control, they failed miserably.

She led them toward the bed and Bellamy’s hands moved to the hem of her shirt, lifting it up over her head and dropping it behind her. An act quickly duplicated by Echo to free him of his clothes.

She couldn’t resist the way he consumed her body with need and it took her by surprise how her core responded so easily to his touch. She felt like she was on fire, expressing her desire by thrusting her hips upward into Bellamy from below..

Her hands anxiously worked his belt loose, then threw it across the room. Bellamy understood the struggle and helped her by stripping his pants loose then kicking them off the bed to the floor.

She opened her eyes and grinned when she let her eyes devour his body. She separated herself from Bellamy by falling backward on the bed so she could see the desire in his darkened eyes reflecting the need she was sure was in her own. She took the opportunity the separation provided to also slide out of her pants.

As she took in all of Bellamy with her eyes, her breath shook. Her eyes lingered on his cock and she bit her lip nervously as she saw how hard he was, imagining what what was to come.

He reached down between their legs and let his fingers slide through her soaking wet folds, brushing her clit and eliciting a sharp intake of breath from the brunette while she reached forward and wrapped her hand around him, feeling him pulse with need.
When she opened her eyes, she nodded to him and wrapped her arms around his back. She felt him ease his cock inside her with little resistance thanks to how wet she was. She couldn’t help but groan with pleasure that was similar to his as he drove deeper and deeper inside her with each thrust.

Echo pulled him down and bit into his shoulder, following it up with kisses while Bellamy leaned forward taking one of her breasts in his hand. He teased her nipple with his fingertip, lightly brushing her areola then pinched it lightly, relishing the moans that escaped her.

His mouth hungrily devoured her other nipple, moving his tongue in circles then capturing it in his teeth causing Echo to whine with pleasure beneath him and arch her back to try to extract every ounce of pleasure from the contact. It wasn’t long before she felt herself being driven closer and closer, the familiar feeling starting to build beyond her control.

She thrust her hips upward to match Bellamy’s rhythm which started to have it’s desired effect. His breath was beginning the falter and before long with his lips on her pulse point, he told her the words that sent her over the edge.

“I’m close.” he moaned, driving himself into her.

“Fuck. Bellamy.” she cried as she came, arching her back and digging her fingers into his back as she came undone beneath him triggering his own orgasm. She felt him release into her as he spoke similar words.

He slowed his hips and as he appeared to shift his weight to move off of her, Echo stopped him while she rolling her hips, unwilling to let him go just yet and letting them ride through their orgasms before he pulled free from inside her. Bellamy leaned down and pressed his lips to hers, only this time their kiss was much more tempered.

After a moment, Echo moved letting Bellamy pull free from inside her and the loss of contact was instantly regretted by the both of them. She reached out and took Bellamy’s hand, letting their fingers dance until she decided to braid them with his.

They exchanged fingertip touches and small kisses for as long as they could until they both knew they had to remove themselves from the small world they created and confront the day.

“I know.” Bellamy said as they got up from the soft mattress. “But there is good news.” he added with a smile.

“I don’t consider getting having to stop what we were doing and get out of that bed to go talk to Wanheda’s mother as anything close to good news.” Echo only half-heartedly joked.

She watched him as he walked over to a cabinet, opened the door and produced a few towels from a shelf.

“Showers.” he said with a cocky smile.

“This might have been nice to know about before I let your filthy hands roam all over my body.” She laughed as Bellamy threw her two of the towels.

“I didn’t hear any complaints from you a moment ago.” Bellamy laughed as he wrapping a towel around his waist while echo wrapped hers around herself.

“As long as it stays like that, you won’t.” she added with a wink as Bellamy look her hand and led her to the showers.
Bellamy and Echo hustled their way to the council room, knowing that Abby and Marcus would be unhappy with how long it took them to arrive. When they came through the hatch, it was only Marcus and Abby who sat in the chairs which left both Bellamy and Echo with a feeling of confusion.

“Sorry we are late. We were pretty tired.” Bellamy explained.

“Raven spoke to us that she brought you your breakfast but you were still asleep.” Abby told them. “It must have felt good to have a bed to sleep in after so long.”

“Yeah. It was nice to have a good sleep.” Bellamy paused and the silence hung over the two new arrivals so Bellamy continued to talk. “Should we wait for the other councilors to join us?”

“Marcus and I have spoken to them and they are willing to agree to whatever decision we come to provided it is in the best interest of our people,”

“There is more at stake here than your people.” Echo interrupted.

“You didn’t let her finish.” Marcus raised his hands as if to suggest the need to calm down, then looking at Abby.

“in the best interest of our people, and the Commanders coalition.”

“That means you will join us?” Echo couldn’t help but let hope take root.

“We will need certain guarantees from Indra on behalf of the Commander regarding winter and aiding our people, but from what we know of Nia and from what your escort from Tondc told us this morning, Nia is a threat to us all.” Abby stated.

“You spoke to our escort?” Echo asked.

“He was able to shed some light on Nia and the Commander’s history that helped us make our decision. You have a vested interest in having us help you, he on the other hand has lived with the threat of Nia and her forces all his life. It was his information with yours that led us to the decision we made.”

“We have to send the escort back to Tondc and give that message to Indra.” Bellamy explained.

“That has already been done. Your escort left more than an hour ago with our decision. I think he didn’t enjoy staying in the Ark any longer than required.” Abby said.

Bellamy looked at Echo and he knew she agreed with the sentiment. Even now, she didn’t want to spend more time in the downed space craft than was required.

“Maybe you two could use a little more time to relax while we wait for Indra to receive our decision. There isn’t anything more we can do until the armies arrive.” Marcus suggested.

“I’m sure we can find something to keep us busy.” Bellamy suggested, drawing a glare from Echo, but also some drawing some warmth to her cheeks as they left Abby and Marcus in the room behind them.
Bellamy leaned in to her and she took his hand in hers. It was the first good news they received and they hoped the Commanders call for the coalition’s armies would be granted to finally put an end to Nia’s cruel reign over the Azgeda people.

“Let’s go outside.” Echo said to Bellamy, who was already taking her in the direction of the front entrance of the Ark.

“Do you want to go see Raven’s shop?” he asked.

“Maybe later.” she answered. “I just want to spend some time in the sun.”

As they exited the Ark, they walked to the gate and told the guard to open it up. The sky was as clear as it had been the night before only the sun sat high in the sky to ward off the frigid fall temperatures.

“This is better.” Echo said as they walked across the clearing toward the forest with no destination in mind.

“This is definitely better.” Bellamy agreed.
They walked in pairs toward their destination following the path that was easily visible by the large group of Azgeda who were travelling behind Clarke and Prince Roan. During the first couple days, they had avoided Azgeda patrols who had been returning northward but as the days passed, the number of groups decreased. It had been three days since their last encounter yet they remained watchful and just off the path.

“We should have a fire tonight.” Octavia suggested to the group after they had begun the new day’s journey.

The cold hadn’t been a significant problem through the day thanks to the unseasonably clear skies, but the night became difficult for them all - even Lexa, who for the first week seemed impervious to any conditions they found themselves in. The following week, the resistance to the notion of a fire lessened and the notion of having a small fire to try to keep the frigid temperatures at bay was finding traction.

“A fire will bring unwanted guests.” Lincoln had told her on one of the many numerous times she asked.

The risk of being discovered by a small group was significantly higher than not and it had been a risk the Commander wasn’t willing to take. Looking at the weary expressions on her allies, she could see the toll it was taking. Knowing she considered the possibility of a small fire herself with her gift, the toll it must have been taking on the others must have been considerable. An hour into their renewed journey, Lexa surprised them all.

“We will have a fire tonight if we do not encounter any Azgeda patrols. Coals only and we will have to be well clear from the road.”
The news gave the group a boost of optimism they needed which helped push them through the day. Lexa and Levai kept the pace while scanning for obvious ambushes or traps that may be waiting for them, while Lincoln and Octavia walked behind roughly twenty meters away and listened for the sound of hooves that might be approaching. It was shaping up to be another uneventful day filled with near silence which was welcomed by their leader.

“We can’t continue like this.” Levai suggested.

“They are getting farther away. We can’t allow that.”

“We aren’t all like you. We may be fine now, but on foot it will be two months before we reach our destination. One will get sick, then we all will.”

Lexa regarded him with a disapproving glare.

“They know you are a Natblida, Commander”

Lexa walked next to Levai and her eyes hardened for a moment, but only for a moment. Levai who could see a struggle going on within them.

“We don’t have much choice. The farther we get from Wanheda, the more of a threat Nia becomes. If she is forced…”

“You know she won’t do that.” Levai interrupted. “She is aware of who Nia is, and what she is capable of. Clarke is trying to do what she believes is right.”

“She doesn’t know everything…” Lexa stated. “…and she was forced to go because it was the only way to keep you alive. Wanheda’s weakness is that she cares too much.”

Her words forced her to flinch at the unintended implication, offering a quiet apology from her, which resulted in Levai extending an understanding hand to her shoulder.

“Clarke chose to go because she cares about her people, and your people.”

“She fled from her people and abandoned her responsibility.” Lexa argued, but there was no conviction in her words.

“She fled, but she was not trained to lead her people like you were. She told me a lot about herself and her people.”

“She takes unnecessary risks.”

“She does.” Levai nodded in agreement. “Your pursuit of her, with only three others is not a similar risk? You endanger your life and the peace of all your people if you are caught. Nia wants you dead, and you walk to her capital city expecting what?”

“I have a plan.”

“I know you have a plan. If there is one constant with you, it is that you always have a plan.”

Lexa shot him a warning glare, but she shrugged with indifference.

“She was ready to die when I found her. She said the words.”

Lexa glanced over her shoulder back at Octavia and Lincoln. She was met with a signal from Lincoln that they were not being followed. She returned her attention to the forest around them and
seemed to pull herself inward.

“Ha don yu hon op em?” (How did you find her?) Lexa asked in almost a whisper almost as quiet as the slight breeze that rolled through the empty trees around them.

Levai recounted the series of events that brought Clarke into his life. He told Lexa of hearing the gunshot while he was hunting, then the wolves that tore at the Skaikru girl who he found on the ground, and the words she uttered as she was resigned to a fate she was able to prevent. Before he could continue, he heard a sharp intake of breath from Lexa and was taken aback for a moment before he could continue.

It wasn’t the first time Levai had seen her with tears in her eyes. The day they came for her, she was twelve years old and lived a half a days travel from Tondc with her family. Unlike most initiates, she did not want to go to Polis. She didn’t want to lead her people. She wanted to stay with her mother, father and brother.

She tried to run. To get away so she could stay with her family but she wasn’t strong enough. That was the last time he saw her. It was from the doorway of their family home and his twin sister looked back from atop the the horse with tear-filled green eyes that matched his own. That was the last time he had seen her and that was the last memory he had of her.

They had remained in contact with letters delivered through family friends in Tondc for years, but as Lexa took the reigns of power and began to bring changes to the clans the danger increased for her family. Titus was aware of her messages to her family and stressed the need for her to stop, explaining that love wasn’t just weakness because it left her vulnerable, it was because of what enemies would do to those she loved against her. They would become a weapon.

Enemies like Nia. Weapons like Costia.

Her heart stung in her chest and she was drawing deeper breaths wishing he knew how hard it was for her to bury that part of herself and keep it locked away. A part that constantly fought to be free. One day not so long ago when she went to face an unknown enemy, it fought harder than she believed it could, chipping away at her resolve.

“Did you do what they say?” He asked.

Lexa’s chest rattled with a loose breath and she looked at Levai with eyes that weren’t the eyes of the Commander. These were the eyes of Lexa kom Trikru, daughter of Enlin and Leandra. She was a sister to a brother.

His question brought her back to the conversation, and her answer was blunt. Her tears may have betrayed her to her brother, but the rest of her held resolute against the torrent of feelings that slammed against her walls.

“Yes.”

“I understand.” he said with a sad smile on his face, ending the conversation.

Behind them, Lincoln and Octavia remained mostly silent. They could not hear the conversation ahead, but when Levai embraced Lexa with his hand, it drew the curiosity of them both.

“I can tell you are thinking the same question I am.” Octavia suggested quietly.

Lincoln’s silence only spurred on Octavia’s sense of curiosity and that sparked a sense of concern in the warrior.
“They know each other.” Octavia stated as a fact, confident in her assertion. “The question is, how do they know each other?”

Lincoln gave a small warning, which she knew was coming.

“The Commander won’t like us meddling in her personal affairs.”

“This isn’t like some secret. So they are friends. It isn’t that big of a deal.”

“As Commander, she does not have friends.”

“What do you mean she has no friends? They have been talking for the last thirty minutes. You saw how he ignored her order to go back to Tondc.” Octavia presented the evidence to her claim.

“Watch them.” Lincoln said.

“Watch them?”

Octavia was a curious and a little frustrated with Lincoln’s advice but she was determined to figure out what he meant. As if Lexa could sense their conversation, she glanced back toward Lincoln and their conversation about Lexa abruptly ceased.

Lincoln informed her with a quiet whistle that they hadn’t heard or seen anything and Octavia quickly resumed studying the forest rather than the duo in front of them, occasionally glancing at the Commander and Levai when she resumed looking forward.

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The evening was closing in and although the day had been unseasonably warm, the cold rolled over the hills with the accompanying clouds above. They could all tell things were about to take a turn for the worst and Lexa was reminded of Levai’s earlier assertion that one of them would become sick sooner than later with the weather as it was. When the rumble rolled through the clouds in darkening skies, Lexa stopped and waved for Octavia and Lincoln to join them.

“We need to find cover.” Octavia stated which was met with agreement.

“The hills to the west will give us the best chance but we will not reach them before the rain reaches us.” Lexa said with a measure of frustration. She scolded herself for letting her mind become burdened with the past and not being aware of what was happening in front of them.

As Lexa prepared them to run to the hills, Levai placed his hand on Lexa’s forearm to draw her attention. When she turned toward him, she glanced down at his hand which he removed quickly but there was no sign of having committed a transgression when she lowered her arm.

“There is somewhere else we can go.”

Lexa regarded him with curious look and an accompanying statement. “You should have said this earlier.”

Levai and Lexa shared one of their many silent conversations that they have been having since they were reunited after they left the former Azgeda camp.
“Well?” Lexa said, directing Levai to start their journey by extending her arm outward.

Octavia watched the small smirk appear on Levai’s face and the momentary look of amusement on Lexa’s that led Octavia to wonder if the Commander had already known Levai knew of a place they could go all along.

They followed Levai for more than an hour eastward. The night was claiming the sky and the clouds were now black overhead. They came to a bridge that was precariously suspended over a river and on the other side, the ruins of a small abandoned town. As they approached the bridge, a sign had the word “Juniata” on it. When Octavia asked Levai if it was the name of the old town, he shook his head.

“It was once called Mill Creek, but now it is called Ogonzaun(Truce).” Levai explained.

“How much farther?” Lexa asked.

“There is always a danger in Azgeda villages. Nia’s spies are everywhere and if word reached the ears of an ambitious spy that Heda is travelling with only three guards through her territory, we would not make it much further than a day from this town. Thankfully, there are people I trust to keep us safe.”

Lexa sighed with frustration.

“We cross the river. We then head north for about twenty minutes.” he explained with precision then with a grin added, “Give or take.” then took off running quickly across the bridge, with Lexa quickly on his tail, moving expertly across the swaying structure.

Octavia was hesitant to cross a bridge that looked like it was falling apart, so Lincoln took her hand and they carefully made their way across the bridge. As they crossed, Octavia found her feet beneath her and enjoyed the feeling of the bridge moving back and forth above the water but as they were close to the other side, they saw Lexa and Levai finishing up what appeared to be a heated conversation.

“This way.” he said as he lead them across what he explained was once a highway but now had almost completely been reclaimed by the nature it divided. It was as they crossed, they felt the first drops of rain on their exposed skin, causing Lexa to frown at Levai.

“It is at the top.” he told her.

They climbed the small hill and as they crested, Levai turned to the others and raised his hand suggesting they stop. “I’ll need a minute. They aren’t expecting me and they certainly aren’t expecting the three of you.”

“We can trust them?” Lexa asked. She was the Commander now, her features hard and one hand on her dagger and the other on a sword handle.

“They are family.” he replied, turning toward the house that was well hidden in the cover of thick trees leaving Lexa puzzled at his choice of words.

Lexa continued to keep her hands close to her weapons which meant Lincoln and Octavia followed suit, all of them looking between Levai and the house before them.
Levai walked out from the edge of the trees and let out a couple distinct whistles and waited. A minute later, he let out the same call and a reply came from within the house. Levai answered with a different whistle and seconds later, the door opened and a woman sprinted from the door toward him, launching herself into his arms and pressing her lips into his with a hunger that was not intended for an audience.

It was only after a Levai remembered that there was in fact an audience, he broke the kiss and attempted to catch his breath.

“Monin hou ai snogon!” (Welcome home my love!) the woman said, ignoring the rain that fell steadily around them now.

Lexa was about the stand and force the introduction, but found herself unable to move when a loud cry from the house and a young, brown-haired boy ran with equal excitement toward Levai resulting in his tiny arms around his leg in a hug.

“Nontu!” (Father!)

Lincoln and Octavia watched on with smiles to see Levai be reunited with the woman, and the surprise of a learning he had a son had filled them with more warmth than they had felt during the entire duration of their journey.

Lexa looked on at the reunion and her eyes began to water. Before she knew it, she stood up from where she was couch and her legs drove her forward toward the family.

Lincoln and Octavia remained in the trees watching everything unfold before them. The woman who embraced Levai became aware of the approaching stranger and quickly moved behind him, calling her son to join her.

“Enlin, come to me.” she said, taking the boys arm and pulling him away. They all felt the tension that developed the small space around them.

Lexa froze in place to not scare the mother or her son. Her mouth fell open with silent words and she wasn’t aware that her eyes had filled with tears for the second time in one day until she had to lift a hand to wipe her vision clear and make sure what she saw wasn’t a dream.

“This is my family. Jules, my beautiful wife and as you heard, Enlin. My son.” He paused for a moment and let Lexa absorb everything. “There are two more friends in the woods.” he explained and she nodded that they may come out.

“You can come out.” he called out to the pair as he picked up Enlin. He looked at Lexa and saw her staring in wonder at the boy in his arms. Lincoln and Octavia emerged from the trees and stood a few feet away, giving them time to become accustomed to their presence.

“Trikru!” the boy in Levai’s arms shouted as he pointed toward Lincoln and Octavia.

“Very good, Enlin. They are friends.” Levai smiled warmly.

“This is a pleasant surprise, but we should continue introductions inside where it is warmer.” Jules suggested, taking Enlin from Levai and urging them all to get out of the rain.

Lincoln and Octavia were eager to step out from the rain and into the house and quickly walked in through the front door and happily embraced the warmth of the fireplace which kept the impressively large house warm.
Jules took their jackets and hung them next to the fireplace to dry, then directed Enlin to the table where he was drawing pictures. Lincoln and Octavia thrust their hands toward the source of heat while craning their necks to watch Lexa and Levai who were still standing at the door.

“Go inside. I will get some wood and join you in a moment.” he suggested to Lexa.

“I'll help you.” Lexa’s tone was clear in that it wasn’t a suggestion.

Levai smiled nervously and turned to Lexa. “This way.”

He expected Lexa to be angry with him at the revelation that he had a wife and son but upon closing the door to the house, Levai walked to the shelter where they stored their wood and when he turned to ask her a question, was surprised when Lexa stepped forward hugged him fiercely.

“Enlin.” she whispered, causing Levai to reciprocate the hug with similar intensity. It was their first real embrace as brother and sister since the day she was taken to Polis over ten years ago and neither could say how long it lasted. When they separated, and it took more than a couple moments to collect themselves.

“I wanted to tell you.” Levai said, breaking the silence.

“I know. I didn’t give you much of a choice.”

“It was for us as much as it was for you. I just couldn’t keep this from you anymore.” he tried to explain. “What we are doing, what could happen…”

Lexa pulled him into a hug once more to try to calm him down and speaking with a calm voice. "You shouldn't have brought us here."

“I needed you to know them. In case.”

Lexa nodded her understanding and smiled. “He looks like him.”

Levai wore an impressed look on his face at her statement.

"You thought I wouldn't remember?” Lexa shoved his shoulder playfully and he laughed.

They remembered they came to the shed for wood so they loaded their arms with wood and made their way back to the house while trying impossibly to dodge the rainfall. As they approached the house, Lexa stopped about five meters from the front door and looked at Levai. The contentment that was present a moment ago was gone from her eyes and he knew what was on her mind.

“What do we tell Jules?” Levai asked.

“I am tired of standing in the rain. Let’s go in so you can introduce me to my sister. But Levai,” Lexa said as they approached the door. "you should not have brought us here."

"We can trust them, Lexa."

Lexa followed behind Levai and dread filled her thoughts. She couldn't protect the one she loved once before, how would she be able to protect an entire family from her enemies? There would always be those who disagree with hard decisions she was forced to make as Heda. Could she allow Levai and his family to suffer similar fates? Would she have the strength to face the brutality once more?

Stepping through the threshold, she fought the panic that rose in her chest with the walls she built
years ago after the coalition was fully realized. She would not allow it. Not again. She would risk her life for others as Heda. This was her responsibility, not the other way around. This was why she would go north to Stop Nia, to protect her people, to protect those she cared about.
Clarke awoke to the warmth of the morning sun on her, the light of the morning filling the room. The make-shift curtains that couldn’t span the entirety of the window and with her mind starting to take inventory of the upcoming trip to Toron, the fight to remain in bed was over. Her arms reached out in a less-than-enthusiastic stretch to welcome the arrival of a new day, accentuated with a yawn for good measure. Like the day before, she slid reluctantly from the warmth of the bed and with slow steps, moved toward the window to take a moment and appreciate a clear view of Niagara Falls.

Aboard the space station, she had seen the geography of what was once North America hundreds of times. She was taught about the countries that bordered this natural wonder by her history teachers but smiled that she could now see it with her own eyes and understand the details. Things like the torrent of water that calmly rolled over the edge, falling as a thunderous, never-ending assault into the basin below that had been carved over hundreds of thousands of years. She could feel the force in her chest when she first saw the falls, in awe of how small she felt in comparison. These things she could have never imagined as she spun around the world at 17,000 kilometres an hour, looking down at the planet that they were told was unlivable.

She thought of Levai and she hoped he was in Tondc and safely alongside his people. The knowledge of him having been hurt trying to help her and that had it not been for his help, she would never have had the opportunity to visit this beautiful place. If things go according to Prince Roan’s plan, perhaps all the clans will have an opportunity to behold the beauty resides in Azgeda territory.

She glanced down in what was left of an old roadway to see numerous figured on horses which she gathered were the ones who were to escort her and the Prince to Toron, all wearing dark cloaks. There was one who seemed to be directing the others whom Clarke assumed was in charge. A knock at the door pulled her from her thoughts as she turned to address the visitor.
“Min op.”(Enter.) Clarke replied to the knock.

Her effort to learn Trigedasleng had been a focus of hers as they travelled north. At first it was she would often try to use the mix the two languages, but as they approached what remained of the former American city of Buffalo, she was a quick study and quite proficient in her ability to use it. It was only when they were alone could he teach her the language, along with discussing the people of Azgeda and what the future peace could mean to all of the clans were they able to remove Nia from her seat of power.

The door opened inward and Prince Roan entered with a small grin on his face.

“Your accent is still terrible.”

Clarke shook her head at his jest, thinking it was far too early for his brand of humour.

“I gather you are here to tell me we have to go?” Clarke asked.

“Commander of Death and a mind reader. That will be advantageous when you speak to Nia.” He said with a small laugh, but Clarke wasn’t interested. Not with what was to come.

“Yes, the escort to Toron has arrived. Nia expects our arrival for a feast in your honour tonight which means it will be a hard ride to the capital.”

“What do you think she will want to discuss tonight?”

“Tonight? Nothing that will require you to offer your support. Tonight will be about showing you that she is a good and just leader. She will extol upon you the noble people of Azgeda, and what the aim of her leadership could be once our two clans unite. She won’t discuss details, only try to bait you with platitudes to gain your trust. Things like wanting to improve her peoples situation with Polis, helping your people learn what it is to live on the ground. Things of a general nature.”

“Helping my people survive is not a topic of general nature.” Clarke stated with a hint of irritability that was almost convincing.

“You know what I meant.” Roan shook his head at her game.

“We have gone over this more times than I would care to. If I can handle the commander, I can handle your Azplana.”(ice Queen). I won’t offer her anything without explaining that I must bring her request before the council.”

“She will press you on the issue of your relationship with the Commander.”

Clarke swallowed hard. She didn’t feel comfortable talking about Lexa with Roan and avoided it at every opportunity on their journey. She knew he was trying to determine what Clarke thought of her, and it was an easy lie for Clarke early on. She was mad at Lexa, that much was clear, but there was frustration buried in her words and confusion that masked a deeper confusion within her. Something that sat under the surface of every thought she had about the woman who abandoned her.

Watching her get lost in her thoughts and struggle to find the words that she easily repeated over and over when he initially brought up the Commander in conversation, he shook his head and put emphasis behind his next statement. “You will have to do better than that. Nia will not hesitate to kill us both if she thinks you and your people are not going to give her what she wants.”

“Lexa betrayed my people and left us to die. We owe her and her coalition nothing.” Clarke stated resolutely, earning her a smile from Roan.
“Lets hope she believes that.” he smirked. “We should go. The escort waits us downstairs.”

“I promised someone I would say goodbye to them. It won’t take long.” Clarke informed him.

Roan nodded his understanding and told her he would wait downstairs in front of the building for her, but added she should not take too long. Before he made it to the door, Clarke’s mind was wondering about the journey ahead of them.

“How far is Toron from here?” Clarke asked, reflexively rubbing the muscles that she imagined becoming sore from the long journey.

As he opened the door he glanced back at her and said, “It will take us about eight hours. It should be a lot more fun for you than the previous leg of the journey”

“What do you mean?”

“Most people have no problem with it, but many suffer from wada haken on their first trip.”(water sickness).

“Water? What does riding horses have to do with water? What does ‘haken’ mean?” Clarke asked curiously, watching him leave the room without a reply.

Clarke made her way to the main floor of the building via the stairwell and approached the doorway of Aline and her mother, Teria. She knocked on the door and after a moment, the small frame of a young girl appeared adorned with a large smile on her face.

“Clarke!” she shouted, a smile as wider than any Clarke could remember appeared on the girls face and her mother standing a few feet in the room behind her watching the two. “Come in!” She reached for Clarke’s hand but instead, Clarke crouched down so she could be eye level with her.

“Hi Aline.” Clarke said, returning a bright smile of her own in reply. “I’m afraid I can’t come in, but I wanted to give you something before I left.”

Letting the backpack she was carrying slip down from her shoulder, she pulled out one of the notebooks she had found and with it a few of the mechanical pencils. She extended them to Aline and saw the girl’s smile brighten even more.

“These are for me?” Aline asked.

“They are for you. I want you to keep practicing your drawing. You are very good at it and if you keep doing it, you will only get better.”

“I am going to draw you.” Aline stated resolutely.

“You asked me if I looked like Heda. On the first page in the book, you will see what the Heda Lexa truly looks like. That way if you ever get to meet her, you will be able to know if it truly is the real Heda.”

“Are you coming back?”

Clarke paused for a moment and her smile faded slightly. Seeing the hopeful eyes that were standing before her, she stood up and threw her backpack over her shoulder. “When I am done in Toron, I will come back here to see the picture of me you are going to draw. I started the book for you, to show you how good an artist you can become with practice.”
Turning and walking from the door after waving farewell to Teria, she heard the young girl open the book thanks to the impatient fingers trying to impatiently open the cover. Aline gasped and understood the feeling all too well. It was the same one she had to fight to suppress when she met Lexa for the first time, then every time after. Clarke knew she had done her justice with the drawing.

Ontari spent her time waiting being frustrated at the delay, stating that the world doesn’t operate on a “Skaigada’s schedule” and that Nia would be displeased if they were late.

“Oso beda gon we kom nau.” (We should leave at once.) Ontari stated coldly.

“Wanheda gaf in chich op lukot”. (Wanheda wants to talk to a friend.) He explained with a smug smile taking shape on his lips.

He enjoyed frustrating Ontari, but he knew it was a dangerous game. She is Nia’s favourite and though she was adopted he knew she could and would happily take his place if the opportunity arose. He had no doubt that if he did not have support of the people of Azgeda along with some senior generals of the army, Nia would have already taken an opportunity to remove him as a threat.

Clarke exited the building, waved, then walked down the stairs that led to where Roan and Ontari sat atop their horses waiting for her to arrive.

“Sorry I’m late.” She stammered, looking around at the Azgeda guard that would accompany them. “Can I get some help?” she added. Although Roan sat on his horse and directed two of the guards to dismount and help her into the saddle, it took every ounce of will power not to laugh. After watching her struggle, even with the assistance of two seasoned Azgeda warriors, it was a sight to behold.

“Du laik Branwada.” (She is a fool.) Ontari mumbled to no one in particular.

Roan felt an understanding begin to surface within him. He looked at Clarke who he knew could easily climb atop a horse with the practice she had over the last month, then to Ontari who seemed she couldn’t be bothered to see through the Skaikru girls ruse. Clarke had started the game quickly, then the understanding turned to nervousness. So much will rely on her for everything to come together and he could only hope she understood the warnings he gave about the danger they were now in. He’d never known his mother to lose a game to anyone but Heda Lexa.

The trip to Toron was long, but to Clarke it was incredible. They’d ridden their horses to the river below the falls and there, left their horses in the care of a stable master. For the first time, Clarke had the opportunity to ride a boat and when they walked up to the long wooden craft with towering sails, she knew that every second of it was going to be thrilling.

It took her a moment to get used to the swaying of the craft, but she remained by herself near the back of the boat. Her mind running through scenarios of how things could go depending on what happens when she meets Nia. Roan had expected her to engage Ontari in conversation but the two remained fairly distant from the other. Instead, Clarke eventually chose to pull one of her notebooks from her backpack and began to draw the boat as she first remembered it as well as the surrounding landscape.

They were approaching Lake Ontario, Roan explained where his adopted sister had gotten her name. He leaned in and lowered his voice adding that the lake is cold all year and in a couple months will kill those who spend too long in it by turning them blue and pulling the life from their bodies.

“We will have five more hours before we reach the shores of Toron. There it is a fairly quick trip through the remains of the city to Nia’s residence. That is where Nia will receive you.”
Clarke nodded, and resumed her drawing. There were moments where she started to feel nauseous, but only when the water began to send the boat rocking in a less-than-enjoyable manner. Then it hit her. She heard on of the fisa(healer) that travelled with Lexa use the term “haken” regarding sickness and she looked over at Roan who had been watching her battle the uneasiness of her stomach for the past thirty minutes.

“Sickness.” she frowned at him, as if learning the word made her circumstance a reality. She couldn’t tell if he was laughing at something one of the Azgeda warriors had told him, or her situation but that didn’t matter as much as the rolling of her stomach. Rolling that caused her stomach to decide it would be best to expel its contents outward and on to the floor.

Her embarrassment was evident, but nobody laughed. Before she knew it, she was offered a small stick from one of the warriors with the promise it would help her with the remainder of the trip. An offer she happily accepted until she had no idea what to do with a small dried stick she was handed.

“Choj op.”(Eat.) The warrior said, making a motion to put the stick in her mouth. Clarke confusingly glanced at Roan for an explanation.

“It is a root. It will help calm your stomach when riding on the water or you are new to riding a horse.”

“This would have been nice to know about about two hours ago.” Clarke groaned, suspiciously glancing at the root then at the people who waited to see what she would do.

Ontari observed her as well, and Clarke caught sight of her in the corner of her eye. With a reluctant sigh, she stuck the root in her mouth and began to chew on the end. Initially it tasted like nothing, but it wasn’t long before a flavour began to make it’s way to her taste buds. She pulled the root out and looked at the yellow colouring and was intrigued by the strange taste, wondering what other properties this root might have for helping different types of sicknesses. Rather than continue to chew on it, she tucked it in one of the pockets of her backpack. She believed if they made it our of this, she would take it back to her mother so they could determine how useful it could be.

The sun rolled over the sky while they moved across the large lake. For a time, Clarke lost sight of the shore in ever direction and wondered is they had, in fact, accidentally wound up on the ocean. She kept her questions to herself now, worried that if she was too friendly with the Prince, it could draw the suspicion of Ontari. He had kept his distance from her as well and kept the conversations with her to a minimum.

Looking around the boat at the strange faces and people she didn’t know, she had begun to wonder if that her trust in Roan’s plans might have been too easily offered. When she was running through the Trikru forests, there was the chance she would or could be found. The security of being able to return to her people if she needed to was always there in the back of her mind.

Here on this boa and, heading to a place where if the stories were true, she was going to meet one of the most cruel and vile women to live. Then she was to convince the woman that she is willing to help her overthrow the Commander until Roan moves his chess pieces in place to relieves her of her rule.

She felt the cold shiver roll down her spine at the magnitude of what she was trying to do. If it meant peace for all the clans, it was something she was willing to do. For Aline and Teria, for her people and for the everyone who wanted a future of peace and prosperity rather than one where blood must have blood.

“Toron.” Roan stated from across the boat, pointing at the harbour that was appearing in the distance.
“Thirty more minutes.”

Clarke watched as they approached the city which was clearly the focus of a missile strike during Praimfaya. The closer and closer they got to the former metropolitan city, the clearer the reconstruction was on many of the lake-side buildings.

“There will be horses to take us to where Nia is waiting. Nia will expect you to enjoy the feast she has prepared in your honour. Your stomach should be settled by the time we get there.” Roan explained, walking toward the front of the boat in Ontari’s direction.

“No turning back now.” Clarke whispered so quietly, nobody else could hear her as she tried to motivate herself for what was to come.
Clarke watched the land ahead approach with surprising speed. She saw the beaches lining the shore and behind them, trees that spanned the entire length of what appeared to be small islands. Behind those, the remaining structures of what Roan stated was Toron. She could make out the shape of some buildings and though many seemed damaged beyond repair, others seemed almost untouched.

Loud shouts from the men on deck had momentarily startled her and stole her attention from the approaching city. She observed them engage in a flurry of activity. Hands pulled at ropes, lifting the sails. Remnants of old tires were thrown over the side of the boat which Clarke rightly assumed were to protect it from impacting on the structures they were aimed toward. Her attention so focused on the tasks the men were busy with, she did not see Ontari approaching on her right.

“First Impression?”

Clarke’s head turned quickly to Ontari and she forced a smile.

“Amazing.” Clarke stated a truth. “I’ve never been on a boat.”

“This is the only way into Toron because the journey by land is nearly impossible.”

“Why is that?”

“Wuskripa.”(Monsters.) she answered, as if that were an all encompassing answer but the misunderstanding on Clarke’s face required greater explanation. “They are people who survived Praimfaya but live with deformities.”

“They aren’t welcome in Azgeda?”

“They aren’t people you want to live alongside. They carry sickness and disease that turns them into wuskripa. Not long after, they die. My grandfather tried to bring them to Toron, but they brought the haken(illness) with them. Many Azgeda lost their lives.”

“I would like to speak to your fisa’s(healers) about them. Perhaps there is a way to help them.” Clarke suggested.
“The only way to help them is to end their suffering. It is law that any of their kind must be killed otherwise we risk their sickness spreading to healthy Azgeda. The last time our leaders thought to help them, it nearly killed all our people. We will not take another risk like that again.”

Clarke frowned at the declaration. If the Azgeda were truly in danger of the diseases the Wuskripa represented, then it made sense to protect themselves from it. She would mention to Roan her wish to talk to an Azgeda fisa as soon as possible. If there was anything she could do to help them, she would like the opportunity to try. Even if it meant having to return to Camp Jaha and working on a solution from there.

“Let’s not worry about them. Winter is almost upon us so they won’t venture far from their territory and the danger is minimal. I am looking forward to showing you where you will be staying while you are here.”

By the time Clarke realized it, they had sailed through the entrance of the harbour and were almost in what she assumed was their destination. Ontari let her take in Toron that rose up in front of her.

Many of the larger towers were clearly beyond repair but there were many that seemed to be in use, and none stood taller than ten stories high. The city impressed her, especially after seeing the destruction of Buffalo just a couple days past. It had been concrete and metal laying in ruin at what once was a sprawling metropolis. Toron on the other had was a living, breathing city and the awe was present by the way Clarke’s lips opened slightly, allowing a small intake of rushed air.

“That is what I thought when I first arrived.” Ontari smiled. “It wasn’t quite as it is now. Nia has put a lot of our people to work making Toron what you see today. Not all the buildings have been recoverable, and they once stood much taller than they do now but we have worked hard.”

The boat jerked forward, stopping in the dock that was to the right of a small park. Clarke could hear the voices of people on the shore and they were thrown ropes which they tied to small metal stumps sticking our of the ground. A board was brought to the ship and Ontari directed Clarke to follow her down the ramp, offering her assistance if it was needed. Clarke tested the ramp with her feet, finding it sturdy enough for her to walk on and declined her help. Ontari shrugged and made her way down the ramp then turned to watch Clarke. The moment the blonde allowed her full weight on the ramp, she began to tip sideways.

Roan caught her as she tipped, steadying her and allowing her to get her feet under her again.

"I’ll help you the rest of the way down.” he had laughter in his voice but seemed to be able to keep it mostly in check. “It might take you a minute to get used to being on land. The water has a way of tricking our senses. Even the most experienced suffer from it.”

Clarke noticed with suspicious eyes neither he nor Ontari seemed to suffer the same lack of balance she was suffering. She accepted his help and as they reached the bottom of the ramp, Ontari extended her hand to Clarke while addressing Roan.

“You are to speak to the Generals about the Trikru you encountered. Nia’s orders. I will bring Wanheda to where she needs to be.”

Roan looked at Ontari with a silent question but her face remained impassive. He nodded then made his way to a path that led toward a treed area.

“Clarke, if you’ll come with me. It is a short walk to where we will be staying.”

“Alright.”
Clarke and Ontari walked north through what remained of the asphalt roads beneath their feet. Clarke’s legs were still fighting for her balance but it was getting easier and easier with each step she took. Ontari didn’t speak which gave Toron’s newest arrival the opportunity to observe as much as she could. There were many buildings that stood two or three stories which were much taller at one time but reduced to little more than rubble today.

Small carts and booths were set up along the side of the road. Some were closed, but others had people sitting in them trying to sell things from fruit and vegetables to relics of the old world. People seemed to be bartering, sometimes civilly and other times with angry shouts and accusations. Clarke noticed that all of them aware of Ontari’s presence, silencing their activities and bowing their heads as she passed by.

Periodically, they would pass through what appeared to be a junction with the remains of well-travelled roads leading to the left or the right. She’d seen pictures of the mass transit routes in cities, but only now did her imagination try to envision vehicles filling the streets and millions of people trying to navigate the hard surfaced ground beneath her feet.

“I’m told you have knowledge of the old cities. Do you know anything of this place?” Ontari asked.

It took a moment for Clarke to respond as she challenged her mind to recall any details of the city they were in. Once she could recall some details she turned her attention to Ontari.

“I believe this was once Toronto. Roughly eight million people lived here when the bombs fell.” Seeing Ontari nod her understanding Clarke continued, “It was considered the capital city of Ontario, a territory within what was once Canada. I am going to guess that your parents named you after it?”

“They did. More-so because of the lake we just travelled across. It is called Lake Ontario.”

Clarke noticed a moment of sadness in her eyes. It wasn’t there very long, but it was one of the very few moments Clarke had observed Ontari not be in control.

“They also used to have professional sports teams that competed in athletic competitions.”

“Sports teams?” Ontari asked, curious to hear an explanation.

“My mother and father told me about them. My father loved ice hockey and was a fan of the Maple Leafs. My mother detested the notion of a game where people hit each other for fun so she was a fan of the Blue Jays. They had to hit a ball that was thrown really fast. The players that could score points after hitting the ball would win.”

Ontari turned her head and regarded Clarke curiously. “I don’t know these things.” She answered, “But I enjoy athletic competitions. Perhaps you can show them to me.”

“I can’t see harm in that. Ice Hockey won’t be easy because we need ice, but baseball would probably be easy.” Clarke pondered aloud.

They discussed small things as they continued down the road and Clarke was surprised at the easy going nature of Ontari. Roan had warned her not to trust the young girl, but she had fallen into easy conversation with her and the brown haired girl was eager to learn about Toronto. She hadn’t asked any questions of Skaikru nor any possible alliance which Clarke rationalized was for Nia to discuss with her, not Ontari.

“We are here.” Ontari stated, raising her hand to the sandstone building in front of them.

It was visible all the way from the harbour even though the sky had begun to darken considerably.
The most impressive feature was the large clock tower that stood fifty feet higher than the building itself. How well the building survived time, let alone the destructive force that had hit the city all those years ago was impressive. The tanned coloured stone arches rested above the stairs, and before the main entrance a monument remained relatively unscathed with the words “TO OUR GLORIOUS DEAD” and what appeared to be an etched date partially unreadable but showing the date “1914 - ”.

Atop the stairs stood warriors who remained at attention which Clarke was just realizing now. Ontari walked forward up the stairs and stood before the guards, raising her arms to the side. She turned her head to Clarke and explained.

“There are never any weapons allowed in the presence of the Queen. The penalty for it is death, and I wouldn’t challenge her on that.”

“I understand.” Clarke agreed, walking up the stairs and followed Ontari’s example.

“Lesad.”(Left side) Ontari stated, looking at Clarke with an apologetic grin.

The guard seized Clarke’s arm and forced it outward while a second guard patted up her arm and down the side. The second pass, the guard looked at her with a glare but Ontari smiled at the attempt.

“It is for your protection as much as hers. If you would have had that in her presence, Wanheda or not, your life would be taken.” Ontari said.

“I’ll assume I am among friends and have no need for it.”

Clarke let her finger tug on a string in the wrist of her coat. It was one she had been given by Levai after he was forced to destroy her old, blood-soaked jacket she was given by Lexa after they fled Pauna. He showed her it had a small knife that would slide down the sleeve and came to rest, handle first in her palm if she ever needed it in a life threatening situation. She felt the blade slide down the sleeve and the small handle fall into her palm. With a grin, she held it out to the Azgeda guard who looked as though he wished to strike her. Instead, he roughly grabbed her arm drawing a pained sound from her throat.

“Hod op. Klir of Wanheda.” (Stop. Let go of Wanheda.) Ontari ordered. The warrior immediately stepped a few steps back only to feel the fiery gaze from the young woman. Clarke saw no regret in the man’s eyes as she brought her hand up to rub the soreness from the arm he squeezed.

“He’s just doing his job.” Ontari said by way of apology. “Let’s go in. Nia will be waiting.”

Clarke followed behind Ontari, through the large doors that rested on hinges below the arched entrance. Inside, Clarke was treated to various pieces of artwork that hung on the walls. None by anyone she could recall as she did when Dante Wallace showed her the works that were stored within Mount Weather. Here, candles gave the paintings a warm ambiance, as if this was how they were meant to be viewed.

Ontari waited by even larger doors as Clarke took her time to observe the paintings that hung on the walls of the building. After a short while, she cleared her throat to insist Clarke continue on with her.

“Sorry. They are so beautiful.” Clarke stated, pointing at the pictures around the room.

“It is nice to have a new pair of eyes view them. I’m sure I looked at them that way, once.”

Clarke looked at Ontari after hearing those words, but now her back was turned and she opened the large doors she had been waiting at.
The doors opened to what Clarke could only reason to be a grand hall, only it looked as through the buildings walls were similar to the ones on the exterior of the building. She looked up to see large beams and what had to be a new addition to the structure - a wooden roof. Her eyes trailed to the center where two large beams supported an enormous chandelier. It appeared to be made of branches, but they appeared too ashen in colour to be wood. That and to hold at least a hundred candles, wood would be a very dangerous thing to use.

It was suspended over the center of the room by two large beams that extended across the entire space. A space Clarke was convinced was once a courtyard because of the stone floor beneath her feet.

“Welcome Clarke kom Skaikru.” A voice called out, drawing her attention to the elevated platform that Nia was currently standing in front of. “I trust the journey was uneventful?”

Clarke took in Nia’s appearance and she immediately saw her eyes. There was something in her steel-grey eyes that granted her an imposing, other-worldly presence. As if her eyes could see through anyone they set their gaze upon. She stood taller than most, even taller than Lexa if she chose to compare the two. The grey eyes were missing something that lived behind the emerald eyes of another leader she knew, even those who sent people she loved into the blackness of space. They all had warmth. In Nia’s grey eyes she could see nothing of the sort.

“The journey was long, but I enjoyed the visit to Niagara Falls. It is truly a wonderful sight.”

“And you are wondering how long I will keep you here, talking to an old woman when you want to get some rest. Am I right?” Nia jokingly suggested.

Clarke looked at the food that sat on the table to their right and she couldn’t recall seeing that much food in one place. Her stomach signaled it hadn’t, either. The smells of the freshly cooked meat and the various plates and bowls of other foods which teased her senses left her mouth salivating.

“Please, sit. Enjoy some of the food while we wait for our guests.” Nia directed both Ontari and Clarke to sit atop the elevated platform at the table overlooking the room. Servants busily set themselves to cutting pieces of meat while others piled generous helpings of vegetables and other mysterious foods that were unknown to Clarke. As she picked up her fork, she glanced at Nia who pursed her lips but smiled, knowing the question that she believed was on Clarke’s mind.

“There is time for that tomorrow. It does neither of us any good if either is too tired or too hungry to be able to think straight.” She suggested, drawing suspicion from Clarke. Nia was right, but Clarke assumed this was just a measure to try to gain her trust, as Roan said she would.

"Nou wich em op." (Don’t trust her.) was something Roan repeated to her often and she wasn’t likely to forget, knowing what Nia was capable of. He said the same thing about Ontari which made this all the more difficult for her. Two people she was likely to always be in contact with were people she couldn’t trust. Ontari had pretty much ignored her the moment she had an opportunity to eat so Clarke decided to join her. After taking a taste of the meat that the servant explained took two days to prepare, she glanced at the empty tables in the room.

"This is all for us?” Clarke asked, looking at the vast assortment of food that could feed what she imagined was a hundred people.

Nia laughed aloud and Ontari coughed, seemingly choking on the food she was trying to eat which drew a concerned look from Clarke.

“I can see why you would imagine that, but no. More will be joining us shortly. My son will be
celebrating his return to my people along with your safe arrival to Toron. We were unsure when you would be arriving and with the weather, it is difficult to time such things. We had expected you yesterday and more than one hundred people sat in this room waiting. I didn’t think they would appreciate having to wait again. I see no harm in the two of you enjoying some of the food before everyone arrives.”

Clarke nodded her understanding and turned to look at Ontari as she spoke.

“If it is anything like this,” Ontari waved her hand at the table that was covered in food. “then I imagine they certainly didn’t complain about the feast they were given for their time.”

Clarke chuckled and Nia nodded.

“They did indeed. Speaking of our guests.”

Nia welcomed everyone by standing near the entrance as they entered. Ontari had even stopped eating to observe the newcomers. Clarke had seen that look before; it was one of appraisal. Everyone who walked in the room, Ontari seemed to scrutinize. They never looked to the platform where she and Ontari were seated, but Clarke was certain they all knew she was there. Clarke looked to the door every time someone new entered.

“My brother won’t arrive until he is fashionably late. He likes to make an entrance.” Ontari told her as if she knew who Clarke had been searching for. The statement sent a shiver up Clarke’s spine that she had to fight to control and a lingering question wondering how she knew.

“What did Nia mean when she said Roan was celebrating his return?” Clarke asked.

“I’m afraid I cannot say. It is not my story to tell.” Ontari deflected her question and continued to scan the attendees.

It wasn’t long before the room was filled to capacity aside from the chair to the right of Nia and one farther to the right. The chairs below their elevated position were filled with those who were considered influential members of the Azgeda community and as Nia explained, some were selected based on need due to falling on hard times.

When Clarke asked Ontari about hard times, she was more than willing to explain that life has become very difficult for the Azgeda.

“Crops have been less than plentiful and our livestock suffered affliction that killed more than half our herds. It has brought hard times because that was what we traded with neighbouring clans to get through the winters. We have been unable to continue trading as we once did and it looks like this year will be the hardest we have seen in many years.”

“The other clans refuse to help? Your ambassador has explained to the Commander the problems?”

“Heda has to feed the other clans and we are no longer able to handle the expectations she had forced upon us. Nia is afraid that were she to petition on behalf of her people, the Commander would have her arrested until she complied with her demands. If she were to do that, our people wouldn’t last a single winter.”

Clarke looked at the tables where those who were chosen were sitting. It was at the back of the room, but they seemed to be fine with the arrangement so long as they were able to eat. She could see several small children waiting patiently with their parents, and all of them looking undernourished.
She also could see that the parents were transfixed on her, the blonde woman who sat on the dais. Wanheda.

The last to enter was Roan who was accompanied by two guards who moved to stand at the bottom of the stairs on each side of the platform they were on. As Clarke glanced at Roan, she received a much needed nod and a smile that helped strengthen her resolve. It was good to see a familiar face, even if it belonged to someone she didn’t entirely trust. Her reflection was cut short by Nia’s voice which rose over the various conversations that occupied the space.

“Today is a joyous day for the people of Azgeda.” she began, waiting for the voices in the room to quiet down before resuming, during which she walked to her large throne that sat in the middle of the large table and stood directly in front of it, looking out at the gathered audience.

“We are honoured to welcome our guest, Clark kom Skaikru to Toron. Her arrival signals a new and prosperous era for our people. The Commander will finally listen to our plea for fairness as an important clan within her coalition.”

The assembled guests all cheered at the words of their Queen who waved her hand urging them to quiet.

“I look forward to all of you showing her the beauty and generosity of our ways, and that Toron has to offer her people to help them as they rediscover what our world has to offer. With Wanheda and her people as as our allies, there is nothing our people can’t accomplish to ensure prosperity for future generations of Azgeda regardless of the opposition that tries to keep us from rediscovering our full potential!”

Cheerful optimism filled the room and people celebrated the notion of prosperity for the Azgeda people. Cups clashed together in celebration, truly believing that Clarke and her people could do this for them. When she looked up at Nia she saw the the woman raising her cup in salute, looking back out over the people in the room.

“To our new allies and a future of prosperity!” she yelled, hearing her people recite the toast in response.

Clarke watched the people in the room all look upon her when they shouted the words. She wasn’t sure she should raise her cup because she hadn’t promised Nia or her people anything but to not raise her cup in toast to Nia’s words would seem like an insult. She reached out and held her cup, and at the insistence from Nia she stood from her chair and lifted her cup in the air.

“To the future!” Clarke reluctantly shouted over the raucous crowd, only to be met by the same words shouted back to her. It was as vague a toast as she could think of, but it pleased the people who assumed it was merely a continuation of Nia’s words. She didn’t know Nia but she imagined she was displeased. Thankfully, she kept it to herself.

Both Clarke and Nia sat back in their seats after Nia told everyone to enjoy the celebration. It didn’t escape Clarke’s attention that Nia neglected to toast the returning of her son, creating even more questions in her mind that she didn’t have answers to. Yet.

The celebration went well into the night and Nia had chosen to excuse herself saying that celebrations stating that such celebrations are for the young, stating that she cleared her afternoon in order to discuss what the Azgeda have to offer should a partnership be agreed upon.

Ontari had remained quiet during the evening, preferring to enjoy the food that was constantly replenished as she ate. When they attempted to pile more of the meat on her plate, Clarke had noticed
that the ones in the room that looked like they needed the food were rarely visited by the serving staff, Clarke informed them that they were to bring what remained of the food to them.

The serving staff looked at each other then to Ontari and Roan as to what they should do. Roan leaned forward and addressed the serving staff.

“IT would be a shame if you ignored the wishes of Wanheda. Imagine our Queen’s displeasure if you were to endanger the alliance that she wishes to build with them. Especially over a few servings of meat and vegetables.”

Clarke looked at Ontari and she swore she just shrugged with indifference, listening to Prince Roan chastise the hesitancy of the serving staff.

“We will make sure they enjoy all they can eat and drink, Wanheda.” stated the server who bowed reverently, then frantically directed the others to move quickly.

“If it means I won’t get my cup filled, I am going to take my leave. I was to show you to where you will stay, but the Prince can show you. He knows this place as good as I do. A good night to you, Wanheda.” Ontari said. It was clear she was enjoying the wine that was constantly offered through the night and the slight wobble in her step indicated as such.

That left Roan and Clarke sitting at the table. He took hold of his cup, stood up from his chair and walked over to Clarke. He sat gingerly into the one whose owner had just left for the night and took a sip.

“Not bad.”

Clarke frowned at his nondescript comment. “What do you mean?”

“You managed to anger Nia without insulting her and now you use her to elevate yourself.”

“What do you mean? I didn’t…”

“No, ”Roan interrupted, “You misunderstand. Nia tried to get you to promise a commitment with her in front of all these witnesses. Do you remember what I said about Nia always testing people? This was the first one. She underestimated you and she is angry with herself.”

Clarke looked around the room at the Azgeda who were enjoying themselves, and she let her sight linger on the ones that were now receiving extra attention as ordered by the new visitor. Many raising their cups in a silent toast to her as she watched them. It gave her a warm feeling that wrapped her as if it were a blanket.

“You don’t even see it.” Roan chuckled, sipping at his wine. It would be some time before it could be refilled thanks to Clarke’s order to the serving staff so he had chosen to make it last.

“See what?” her attention turning back to Roan.

“In ordering the food brought to those people.”

“They weren’t getting served.” Clarke stated in her defence.

“You did what nobody else would do. Do you think it was coincidence they weren’t getting food? Nia brought them here to seem like she cares about her people. You don’t know them, but you have given them something. Specifically, their children something.”
Realization began to show in her eyes with Roan’s explanation.

“They will wake up tomorrow morning, bellies full of food they likely won’t have in this quantity again. They will wake up saying how “Wanheda made sure they got their share food”, and that you stayed when everyone else had left to make sure they got their share.”

“That isn’t why I am here.” Clarke stated.

“You know that. I know that. But them? They think you are a promise of a better life and a better future for us all. I’d say you are off to a wonderful start. Just don’t make a habit of getting the better of every situation you are in or Nia will take steps to correct what she feels she must.”

Clarke reached for her cup and decided to finish the contents quickly, underestimating the volume within that remained and choked a little after having forced the liquid down.

Roan smiled after sipping his wine again saying, “Don’t worry. There isn’t any reason for her to kill you, yet.”

Clarke looked in her empty cup and frowned. When she looked around for whoever it was that was refilling their cups through the night she seemed to deflate a little which forced a hearty laugh from Roan adding,

“The sacrifices we make for our people.”
Lexa and Levai both deposited the chopped lumber they retrieved with the small pile that remained after Lincoln threw a few extra on the fire at Jules’ insistence for the soup she was preparing for them all. She could only imagine how hungry they were if the poor state of their appearance had been any indication.

“ Took the two of you long enough.” Jules called from the kitchen where she was busily preparing them something to eat. “I’ll have something for you all to eat shortly.”

“We appreciate your hospitality. We do not intend to be staying long.” Lexa stated, brushing the dirt and shavings of bark from her hands over the pile of wood and walking over to stand next to Levai.

“There is a bowl over there for you to clean yourselves up a bit. I didn’t expect any of you,” with a particularly targeted stare towards Levai as she continued, “or I would have had Enlin bring more water from the river.”

“It wasn’t planned but the weather was becoming difficult.” Levai explained.

“You know better than to be out as you are this time of year. All of you should know better.” she scolded them all while she continued to prepare the food. “What happens if you get sick again? We still need meat to tide us over for the winter.”

Levai looked at his party and back to his wife. “Then you won’t like what Heda and I need to talk to you about.

Jules stopped what she was doing and put the knife down she was using cutting the vegetables and took in a deep breath.

“You weren’t joking when you said you knew important people, then?” Jules turned her head to look at the pair standing before her and she could see the same curious look on Lexa’s face.
Lexa sighed and looked back at Octavia and Levai who had poorly attempted to turn their heads and conceal their eavesdropping. Shaking her head at the situation, she leaned her shoulder into him urging him to just tell her the truth. Levai took a good look at Lexa for permission and was met with green eyes that were filled with conflict.

“Someone better tell me what is going on…” Jules warned, tapping the knife on the wood block.

“She is my sister.”

Though Lincoln and Octavia had their suspicions, to hear it simply confirmed their earlier conversations. It did not, however, stop Octavia from coughing on a small piece of bread Jules had given the pair when they entered the house to tide their hunger until she could make a better meal.

Jules turned to face the pair and it was obvious now as she compared the two side-by-side. They were nearly the same height, both with similar builds although Levai had more muscle on his frame which made him bigger. The light from the candles in the home showed their similar hair colours and now that she could see it, they had the same eyes. She wouldn’t say it, but her sisters eyes appeared more tired than his own.

“Many people have sisters. I have a sister. Enlin has a sister.” Jules declared, wondering where this conversation was going.

“Not everyone’s sister is Commander of the 12 clans.”

Jules studied Levai, expecting to be one of his jokes that she was accustomed to hearing but when she saw the seriousness in his eyes, in his sisters eyes, a sudden understanding took hold and she let out the breath she didn’t know she was holding. When she spoke again, it was after a full minute of silence. Only the crackling of the firewood could be heard, that and perhaps Jules’ heart from the shock of the news.

“Don’t think because you know the Commander and that she is your sister is any sort of excuse as to why you are going to hunt late again this year.” Jules frowned at Levai, earning her a smirk from Lexa.

“And you.” she stated with a small smile while pointing the knife she was holding in a non-threatening manner at Lexa kom Trikru, Commander of the Kongeda and heir to Becca Pramheda. “You have some nerve skipping all your nephew and niece’s birthdays. What kind of an aunt do you think you are?”

Seated in front of the fireplace, both Octavia and Lincoln began laughing. Nobody had dared speak to the Commander in such a way in public that didn’t involve the Commander taking their life. When they turned to look back at the Commander, their laughter immediately tempered seeing hard emerald eyes. They suddenly realized this was privileged information they are hearing and that consequences would follow for anything possible transgression. The pair leaned into each other in front of the fire but continued to remain silent so they could eavesdrop on the conversation.

“I will always love my family. I have no family.” Lexa stated, humour vacant from her words as she turned back to regard Levai and Jules. “This will not change after tonight. I will not return here to visit you, my brother, my nephew, or my niece, whom I have not had the pleasure to meet. They will know me as a stranger and nothing more.”

Jules looked at Levai as to what to do, but Lexa walked over to the table in the middle of the dining room and sat down.
“We have never shared the truth of our kinship because it would be used by my enemies to endanger not only my family, but the people I am entrusted to protect. As much as I wish to know you, all of you, the greater danger you will be in. I am already risking the lives of three others and I will not endanger you.”

“We can trust the people in the area. They are no friends to Nia and want peace.” Jules stated.

“And if she learns I was here tonight?” Lexa asked.

“I would say I don’t know anything.” Jules answered.

“Would your children do the same? If a hot iron was put to your flesh, they wouldn’t share what they know? Could you if the circumstance was reversed? To stop the screams of your children by just saying that I was here, even if you lie and say I forced you to help us?”

Jules’ mouth opened and closed with wordless arguments. She couldn’t make a promise like that and Levai decided enough was enough.

“Leave her be, Lexa.”

“She needs to understand.”

“I will explain it to her.”

“We shouldn’t have come here.” Lexa said aloud, but she meant it as a reprimand for allowing this to go as far as it had. She had let weakness allow her to follow Levai and take her where she should not have gone. Now she endangers not only Levai, but his family. In light of her thoughts, she looked at Levai and declared, “We will leave tonight. The less time we spend here, the less danger I put your family in.”


“You know I am right.”

“We are safe here. We can rest the night and leave in the morning.”

“You are leaving with them?” Jules asked, unaware of the situation that has walked through the door to her home.

“He will remain here with you and his children.” Lexa stated.

“We have been over this. I have a debt to her and I won’t live with that burden for the rest of my life.” Levai glared at his sister for what he considered a suggestion.

“Wait, debt? Who do you owe a debt to and what is going on?” Jules started to become angry at this interruption in her life and she wasn’t sure who was responsible for it so she turned to the food she was cutting up to put in a soup for the visitors. “Someone better start explaining what is going on.”

Lexa closed her eyes and put her face in her hands. She intended for it to give her a moment of solitude to collect her thoughts but the silence in the room only compounded her frustration.

“This is not a topic of conversation we should have with your children present.” Lexa spoke through her hands entirely uncomfortable with the setting.

“I will have them stay in their rooms until we are done. It will be difficult for them to hear unless we are shouting.” Jules suggested, making her way from the kitchen, down the hallway to the back of
“Lincoln, Octavia, join us.” Lexa said, noticing their poor attempt at eavesdropping. The two rose from next to the fire and took seats across from Lexa.

“You will never speak of this again.” Lexa ordered, waiting for their confirming nods before continuing. “If you do, you endanger each of their lives as well as my own. By knowing of this, you too are in danger from my enemies.”

“Heda. Neither Octavia or I know anything about such a thing.”

Lexa smiled, knowing she would not be in danger from Lincoln. Octavia, on the other hand concerned her and she focused her eyes on the small Skaikru girl.

“Is this true?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you are talking about.” Octavia added with a wry smile.

“You have my gratitude for your discretion.” Lexa said.

A moment later, Jules walked back in the room and took all the food she cut up and threw it on a pot. She nodded at it and Levai took the pitcher of water on the counter and filled it until it was near the rim. They all watched him take it over to the fireplace and hang it on the hooks that suspended from the trim so that it would hang over the hot coals below. Once he returned, Jules pulled him into a hug then turned to face Lexa, keeping her arm around the waist of her husband.

“Now, please tell me what is going on.” she requested.

Lexa and Levai both took turns filling her in on the various understanding they had of their situation. Levai explained how he found Clarke, how he helped her and when he was poisoned, she put her life in danger to try to save his. Lexa explained with as few details as possible the war that would be arriving in the coming days, and that the danger exists that none of them might return if things do not go according to Lexa’s plan. A plan Jules suggested was short-sighted if it relied on two people in the Azgeda capital to pull off what was expected of them.

Lexa explained what could happen to them should Nia find out about them, and she stated in no uncertain terms that she could not protect them. They would be on their own and a target from someone who wouldn’t think twice on killing them to further her own ambitions at the expense of the coalition.

“If this is happens as you want it to, that would mean Nia no longer rules.” Jules asked. “We would be free to travel among the clans?”

“That is the hope, along with trade and peace between all members of the Kongeda.” Lexa said.

Leaning in to Levai, Jules whispered something that none of them could hear and Levai gave a sad smile.

“I can get you horses and some better clothing for your trip north. It isn’t unusual for early snow this time of year in the capital so you will need layers. And food to keep you going.”

“We couldn’t ask you for that. You aren’t prepared for the winter, your children…” Lexa suggested, looking to Levai for assistance but it was Jules who responded.

“The way I see it, if you get up there fast, you have enough food to keep your strength up, and none
of you get sick? Nia won’t know what hit her. That is if the stories about you are true. Between you
and Wanheda, Nia we will not stand a chance.”

Lexa smiled, glad to hear the confidence in the woman’s voice. She just hoped she was right. There
was a lot to do between now and then, and it didn’t do them any help to wait any longer.

“We should leave as soon as possible.” Lexa tried to make it sound as close to an order as she could
while being respectful to her host.

“Unless you want to leave with only one horse and no supplies, then you can leave now. I can’t get
the other three until morning. The horses and what you will need for your trip.”

“The other three?” Lexa shook her head resolutely. “Levai will stay with you and your children.”

“I think you will stand a better chance if I were to join you. After all, who taught you how to swing
that sword?” Levai grinned as he pulled his wife in to his side. As Lexa was about to defend her
skill, Levai took the opportunity to make a suggestion. “Perhaps now you could meet your niece and
nephew.”

Lexa swallowed her defence and allowed a small smile to grow on her lips. “Very well.”

“Enlin! Madi! Come meet your fathers friends.” Jules said as she made her way to the end of the hall.
When she walked back in the room, the young boy and girl were walking behind their mother, wary
of the new visitors as they had been taught not to trust those they didn’t know.

“Madi?” Lexa asked, studying the girl who was equally appraising the group that sat at the table her
family usually ate their meal at. Levai just nodded, aware she could see it in the girl.

“Hello little ones. I am… Tris. Who might you be?” Lexa smiled at her niece and nephew. She
wished with all her being she could tell them who she truly was.

“I’m Madylin but nobody calls me that. Everyone calls me Madi. This is Enlin.” She stated as she
pointed at her younger brother.

“You are Trikru. All of you are but that one.” she said, pointing at Octavia.

“And how do you know that?” Lexa asked.

“She doesn’t have any markings and she doesn’t sound like Trikru. She isn’t like any other clan
either.” Madi explained.

“You figured that out quickly. How did you know she doesn’t sound like the other clans?”

“When we go to nontu’s house, I get to meet a lot of people.” the brown haired girl explained. Lexa
realized she had most of her mother’s features, but there was something about this girl she
understood immediately. She had seen it among the initiates in Polis.

“The house in Trikru territory?”

The girl frowned at Lexa’s knowledge of her fathers house and she looked at Levai unsure how
much she should share with the stranger about her family. Levai smiled and rested his hand on her
head which caused the girl to try to wiggle out from under it. Lexa could remember that feeling all to
well. Their father used to do the same thing to her.

“She helped build that cabin.” Levai said, looking at Lexa to make sure he wasn’t divulging anything
she was uncomfortable in sharing.

“You father and I have been friends for as long as I’ve been alive. I was the one that carved the symbols around the top beams.” Lexa said, but the moment she finished saying it, she saw Levai close his eyes. ‘too personal’.

You told me your sister carved those.” Madi said, frowning at the two truths presented to her.

"I have known Tris so long she is just like a sister. Sometimes people can be like your family if you have known them long enough. Like Old man Ulmat who lives down by the river. He isn’t your grandfather, but you call him komfona anyway. Tris is like a strisis (little sister) to me.”

Madi seemed to contemplate what her father was saying and weighed the evidence presented to her. If Lexa could have seen herself as a child, this would look as if it were a look in her past. The young girl even raised a hand to her chin and tapped it as Lexa did and still does when she is lost in thought.

“Ok.” was the simple response from the girl, shrugging her shoulders with indifference. At least, she wanted to appear as such while trying to sneak glances at the woman at the table who seemed to be in charge of the others.

Octavia cleared her throat and Lexa nodded, confirming Madi’s suspicion that the brunette was in charge of the other two. Two who seemed to be latched on to each other the moment they entered the home. She’d seen her parents do that and she decided she needed to keep an eye on them. It was gross and to her mind, nothing good ever came of it.

“I’m Dendra.” Octavia said.

“No you aren’t.” Madi stated, surprising everyone at the table but Lexa who remained frustratingly impenetrable to the young girl. “You are Octavia. And you are Lincoln. I heard them say your names when they called you in from the fireplace.”

Lexa sat back in her chair and crossed her arms, allowing a grin to appear on her face.

“Perhaps we should all wash our hands before we eat our dinner.” Levai said, taking control of the situation, recognizing the stubbornness that threatened to take over his daughter.

Madi sighed and rolled her eyes at her father who did this all the time when she wanted to try to figure something out. She would, as usual try to figure it out in silence while everyone went about their adult conversations at dinner. Everyone but Lexa who remained as quiet as she was. She also didn’t like how when the older woman stared at her she seemed to pick apart her focus. She couldn’t concentrate when Tris was looking at her. After a quick intake of breath, her eyes lit up with excitement at her discovery as the revelation hit her.

Right on cue, the woman raised an eyebrow to match the corner of her lip, engaging in the non-verbal conversation with Madi. That was something that annoyed her about the stranger as well. She was certain she had magic and could read her mind. She knew something about her fathers “friend” but when Tris shook her head ever so slightly, she lowered her eyes. She didn’t know why she did it, but now she had a feeling she stumbled upon something that she shouldn’t have.

Levai had been participating in the conversation with the others in the room and Enlin had long since left the table after eating, yawning in retreat to his room so he could sleep. They were all starting to show signs of weariness and the mood in the room had dampened considerably.

“I think we should all get some rest. I hope we can leave as early as we can when Jules returns.”
Lexa said. It was one of the infrequent times she chose to speak and almost everyone agreed.

"I’m not tired.” Madi stated, leaning forward and pulling off a piece of bread on her plate and dipping it in the soup broth that had gone cold in her bowl.

Levai looked to Jules who simply nodded as she took the empty pot from the table, too tired to deal with protestations from their daughter. It was clear she would put up a fuss if they forced her to bed.

“You can stay up a little while longer, but when I tell you it is time, I don’t want a conversation about it.” Levai bargained. “You will go with your mother and I tomorrow morning to get what we need and I don’t want to hear that you are too tired because you didn’t get enough sleep.”

“Okay.” Madi smiled, content with her small victory and returning her attention back toward *Tris*.

"And don’t bother your father’s friends.” Jules added with an apology. “I’m sorry. When we have guests from other villages and clans, she tends to bombard everyone with questions.”

Lexa looked back at the young girl and chuckled. “I don’t doubt she has many questions.”

Jules looked at Levai once she put the pots and dishes away with Levai’s assistance. Levai offered her some reassurance. “They will be fine. It will be good for her to have someone to answer those questions we don’t have answers to. She knew something was off the moment she mentioned the artwork in the cabin.”

“Very well. Lincoln, Octavia. There is an extra room in the small building behind the house if you would like. It has a fireplace and privacy for the two of you. I assume you would like some after having to spend so much time with these two.” Jules suggested. Both of them offered a quick thank-you and they were through the door and off in the direction of the promised privacy.

Levai looked at his wife and she shook her head. “Oh no. Not after tonight.” she laughed and walked past him to the bedroom. “It’ll be the spring before I let you do anything like you are thinking after what the lot of you have pulled.”

Levai wanted to protest but now Lexa’s eyes were on him and she was shaking her head and chuckling. “Terribly inconsiderate of him, wouldn’t you agree Madi?”

Madi nodded her agreement with a larger-than-required smile on her face.

“Great. The two of you teaming up against me! What have I done to deserve this?” Levai dramatically cried walking toward the room his wife had entered.

“So.” Lexa said once the door closed behind Levai.

“So.” Madi replied, not giving *Tris* any satisfaction of divulging anything first.

“You figured it out pretty quickly.” Lexa said calmly.

“Not as fast as normal. I can’t figure you out. I don’t know why.”

“You know why.”

Madi shook her head in response and Lexa could see there was some agitation in them. She was showing Lexa that she would keep the secret.

Lexa told Madi to stay calm, and she pulled a small dagger from her belt. She held it out to Madi so she could examine it, showing her that she was trusting her with her own weapon. After a moment,
Lexa held out her hand and took it back.

“We are the same, you and I.” Lexa said, letting the sharp edge of the knife slide along the tip of one of her fingers, drawing from it the black blood. The shock in Madi’s eyes, seeing Lexa cut her finger was replaced with understanding.

“You are my Ani.(Auntie).” Madi stated happily. “You are my father’s sister.”

“I am.” Lexa nodded, wiping her blood with a piece of cloth she had tugged from her pocket.

“You are also Heda.” Madi said with hesitancy. “You were discussing whether or not we could be trusted knowing who you are.”

“You understand the danger of you knowing who I am to you?”

“If people know who we are, they could use us to hurt you. I figure that is why my father has been keeping the truth from us. For two years when I began to ask about his family, he told me everyone was killed during a battle and he was the only one who survived. That is why he doesn’t like to fight any more. Sometimes he makes mistakes and talks of you as if you were still alive. Tonight was something I think he had wanted for a long time.”

Lexa smiled at Madi’s revelation. “Your father is going to help me with a very important mission. If things go to plan, he will be home within a months time and I will make sure your family has all you need to make it through the winter.”

The young girl sat there and was working through her mind what that mission could be. She assumed Lexa wouldn’t tell her the truth. She was a child.

“Is there a chance my father might not return?” Madi asked. She couldn’t help but feel a hitch of the breath in her throat while she asked and Lexa could see her fighting the tears that had begun to form in her eyes.

“I will sacrifice my life to make sure your father returns to you.” Lexa promised her niece. “But that will not be necessary because like you, I understand people. We are all creatures of habit, and we are victims of them too. The time has come for what must be done and your father is one of the most gifted warriors in all the clans.”

Madi nodded her acknowledgement. “He trains me when we are at his home in Trikru lands. He even said he used to beat his sister when they trained.”

Lexa smiled and leaned forward and waited for Madi to do the same. When she did, Lexa whispered conspiratorially, “I used to let him win sometimes.” to which Madi replied in the same manner, “Me too”.

They both laughed and spent the next hour discussing any questions the young natblida had that didn’t pertain to what they were going to do in the coming weeks. She deflected Madi’s relentless attempts to pull information from Lexa, but she wouldn’t divulge anything.

When Madi asked about Skaikru, Lexa seemed to hesitate which made Madi wonder if she shouldn’t have asked. Lexa freely talked about the people and their strange customs. How they crashed to the Earth in metal boxes from the stars above, and could be so intelligent about technology and make people who were far apart be able to speak to each other with little electronic boxes they called “radios”, yet could not shoot a bow or farm like any of the clans could.

“One of the traders that came through said they could bring people back to life after they die. Is that
“They can bring some back to life. They could also cure the Ripas(Reapers). Once the demon in them was killed, their fisa could pull them back to the world of the living, no longer burdened with the demon that held them against their will.” Lexa explained.

“Did you see it?” Madi asked, in awe of Lexa’s description.

“I did once. When Skaikru first arrived, They had appeared to be dangerous enemies. They fired rockets which were meant to inform people who remained with the stars that it was safe for them to come down and live among us. Those rockets landed in a village and killed many Trikru, leading to a conflict that nearly led to their destruction.”

“But they brought back people who were Ripa’s and you changed your mind?”

“Nearly. Some of their people believed our people kidnapped their leader. A misunderstanding led to me having to bring our warriors to their gate and demand justice. Jus drein, jus daun.”

“My father doesn’t like that.” Madi interrupted.

“Neither do I, but it was our tradition and a leader must listen to their people. It is to me to keep our people as one and as our laws demanded it, Skaikru was forced to agree to the demand or they would all be killed.”

“Did you kill their leader for what they did?”

“No. Their leader promised that if I gave them peace, they would show that they could rid the Ripa of their demons. That they could reunite those who were lost with their loved ones. The one you saw earlier, Lincoln. He was one of the people cured of being a Ripa.”

News of this triggered shock in Madi and her eyes opened wide, unsure if this was just a tale or the truth but she had no reason to doubt the woman in front of her.

“He was dead on the floor of their sky box, and their master fisa struck him with a stick that bought him back to life. Upon the sight, I agreed to a peace with their people and that I would take my people from their gates.” Lexa had rationalized it was of little use to explain to Madi the tragedy of what occurred that very same night.

“That was when you met Wanheda?”

“It was. She was the one who requested the terms of peace in exchange for curing our our people.”

“Is it true she killed Maun-de?”

“She did.”

“So she can bring people back from the dead, and she was able to kill Maun-de.”

Lexa nodded her agreement. It was a lot more complicated and Lexa was certain she was not going to get into the details of it, rather she was going to let the girl come to an understanding of her own. After a minute of contemplation, Madi nodded her head as if having made her mind up. She focused back on Lexa and seriousness washed over the girl.

“If Wanheda is your ally, can you get her to kill Nia?”

Lexa was taken aback by the question. She didn’t see it coming and usually that doesn’t happen.
Before Lexa could answer, Madi resumed speaking.

“If she has power stronger than the mountain, she could get rid of Nia and we could have peace.”

Lexa smiled at the simplicity of the idea, but she shook her head and responded, “She would not do that.”

“If she is so powerful, why not?”

‘Because I forced her to make that choice already and the cost of it nearly destroyed her.’ was what Lexa wanted to say but instead she simply said, “Because she has a better way.”

Madi let out a large yawn and she knew what Lexa was going to say before she did. Knowing she wouldn’t get any details about what the group of them intend to do in the coming days, she decided to give up for the night.

“I’m going, I’m going.”

“Reshop, Madi.” (Goodnight, Madi) Lexa said with a smile, watching her niece rise from the table.

Rather than walk off in the directions of her room, Madi walked around the table and wrapped her arms around Lexa in a tight hug. “Reshop, Ani Leksa.”

After she let go of Lexa, she turned and walked to her room, closing the door behind her after she entered. She looked around the room and put out the candles that illuminated the space. She walked in the direction of the room she was told would be hers, closed the door and was asleep almost immediately after hitting the mattress.

“What do you think she told her?” Jules asked, laying so she could face her husband.

“I doubt she kept anything from her she didn’t already know. You saw them while we ate. I’m certain she figured out that Lexa is her ani. She is so much like Lexa was at that age that it is almost frightening.”

“Do you think she will take her away to Polis once this is all over? I don’t want that life for her.”

“I promise you I won’t let that happen.” Levai said, leaning forward and kissing his wife on her forehead. They locked eyes and Levai leaned in, kissing his way down to her cheek bone, then to her cheek. As he was about to press his lips to hers, she pulled back, out of reach of his lips.

“I wasn’t kidding. Next spring.” Jules stated firmly, rolling over and pulling a fur over herself.

“Unbelievable. Here I am trying to free the Azgeda people and I am spurned by my wife!” he exclaimed with a huff.

“Reshop, houmon.” (Goodnight, husband).

“Reshop, ai hodnes.” (Goodnight, my love).
Skaikru's Choice

Chapter Summary

After hearing that the Commander’s request has been refused by the coalition ambassadors, Skaikru reconsiders their participation in any conflict without a decisive advantage. Abby is forced to make a decision that could turn the clans against Skaikru and end the threat of war with Nia, or risk the lives of all her people to save just one.

Chapter Notes

Update? I know, I know.
It is a couple days later than I wanted but here it is. :)

Thanks to everyone for being patient and being kind enough to wait a couple days. I hope you all enjoy and thank you for your comments and kudos. I appreciate them all and the motivation they give knowing people are enjoying this story.

See you all in a few days!

The pair walked through the perimeter forest of Camp Jaha for what ended up being most of the day. For both it had been welcome solitude from the past couple weeks and they only noticed the late time of day due to the crisp air that accompanied the sun’s journey to the horizon, causing Bellamy to suggest the return to the camp and they slowed their pace as they walked toward the main gate.

The conversations they shared were molded around Echo’s curiosity and insistence about knowing more of Bellamy’s life in space. He told her about his youth, his family, and how everyone had the same far-fetched dream of returning to the Earth. Everyone but Octavia of course, who just wished to know more than their cramped living space and the three meter by two meter compartment in the floor.

When asked her about her life, Echo expertly deflected as much as she could. Rather than give specifics as Bellamy had, she spoke in generalities typical to people in the north. He smiled his understanding, deducing from her modest stories that her life had been hard. It was clear she wanted to open up to him but the weight of her truths that slammed against the walls that protected her. She trusted him and even cared for him, but whatever she felt confused her. Until she could sort it out she decided she couldn’t open up those old memories. Not yet.

Where he had gone on about stories of processed food that gave everyone the nutrients their bodies need each day, she kept the details of her childhood inside. Times where she would have nothing if she didn’t catch it herself. When she often had to risk her life to take a piece of meat from a vendor. She couldn’t tell him it was a crime punishable by death and often employed by Queen Nia. Where Bellamy had friends and family, she couldn’t say had to fight and claw for everything she ever got, often against other children who risked the same fate.

He never pressed her for details. Not when they first met in Mount Weather, not when they met in
the Azgeda camp, not when they were together the previous night, and not now. There was no
expectation, no demand that he seemed to request of her. She had always held back and waited for
his demands to come. If her life had taught her anything, it was nothing is ever free. She was just
worried that when he asked, she wouldn’t be able to say no.

“About time you two made it back.” Raven scoffed as the duo entered her workshop. She had
remained focused on the task at hand, soldering wires to a circuit board. “I thought you two would
head back for a nap after the council meeting.” she added with a grin.

“We are nice and rested. What is that?” he asked while Echo took a moment to wander around the
room and began to look at the various projects Raven had been in the process of creating, noticing a
pink container of something on a shelf which she decided required closer inspection.

“Radio transmitter.” Raven said, as a plume of smoke rose from soldering another wire as she bit her
lip in concentration on making the final few connections. Once she finished, she slid her equipment
to the side with a victorious smile. A smile that vanished almost immediately when she saw the
Azgeda woman extending her hand toward a pink container.

“Don’t touch that!” Raven shouted, standing up and warning Echo who froze in place. “If you
knocked that over, it would blow up this entire building and we’d be in pieces!”

Echo stepped back slowly from the small container and closer to Bellamy in response to the danger.
Raven sat back down after the near-crisis had been averted and shook her head at the grounder girl.
Echo shivered with the realized it was the entirety of the Skaikru camp frightened her, not just the
Ark. Everything was foreign in this place and it forced her body into a never-ending sense of
anxiety.

“Hydrazine? Why would you have hydrazine just sitting on your shelf?” he asked, crossing the
distance between himself and Echo, who now restricted her wandering in the room to her eyes.

“Because my genius knows no limits? And these babies wouldn’t pack as much of a punch without
it.” Raven gloated. “These little guys will rip Nia’s warriors to shreds.” Raven pointed to a box at the
end of the table that had what must have been thirty pipes with pins in the top of each and metal wire
keeping the pin set in place.

“What are they?” Echo asked, trying to figure out what what it was they were talking about.

“They are bombs.” Bellamy answered for Raven which drew a small glare from the mechanic
expressing his underselling of her creations.

“Not just any bombs. I rigged these up so the hydrazine will mix with something that gives it an extra
punch to anyone who happens to be within twenty yards.”

“That’s not comforting if an accident happens.” he stated.

“Relax. They will only explode on impact after the pin is pulled. Rocket fuel, little pieces of metal,
no more Nia’s army!” Raven explained with a proud smile on her face and her hands spreading open
quickly as if to emulate the explosive force of her inventions.

Echo glanced at the box then back at Raven with disappointment in her eyes. “Those won’t be able
to defeat the ten thousand warriors Nia has at her disposal. We will need many more.”

“They aren’t meant to beat her army, but it will disorient them, maybe take out enough to get them
thinking twice so we get the upper hand.” Raven explained. “With the Commander’s armies and our
guns in the mix, Nia will be begging us to accept her surrender.”
Echo smiled and nodded to Raven, she but knew differently. Nia wouldn’t give up power until the very last of her people were dead as a result of her vanity. If she couldn’t have the north, she believed nobody should and she would spend the life of each and every Azgeda to make her vision a reality.

Raven was about to explain the transmitters she had built and stacked in the corner of the room but the door to the room swung open and Marcus walked through with a concerned look on his face.

“Glad you both made it back. We have been waiting for you” Marcus said to Bellamy and Echo, but the seriousness in his voice elevated every heart rate in the room. “There has been a development.”

“What? What happened?” Bellamy asked, looking at Echo and then Raven.

“Things have changed. The Commanders request for the coalition armies has been refused by the council and Abby is reconsidering our participation in the fight against Nia. She wants to talk to you.” Marcus explained with his focus on Echo.

“I will come with you.” Echo said, letting Kane lead her and Bellamy from the building and across the yard toward the Ark. Raven quickly joined them but grimaced at the stabbing pain in her leg she was rewarded with for trying to move faster than was comfortable.

Echo leaned in to Bellamy and whispered, “Without the Commanders army, we do not stand a chance.”

Bellamy frowned and seemed to be trying to consider options, but in Echo’s mind, the only chance they had was Heda’s plan. “We’ll figure something out.” he stated, trying to alleviate the concern they both shared.

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As they walked through the Ark, Echo knew she would never like this place but for now, there were larger concerns at the forefront that kept a bit of the continual fear away. When they stepped through the doorway into the familiar council room, Echo caught sight of both Indra and Koma, who were in an argument with the Skaikru chancellor.

“We need to leave. Now.” Indra insisted, ignoring the newcomers and focusing her statement in the direction of the Skaikru leaders. “The Commander’s life is at stake.”

“My daughter is also in danger.” Abby said as she leaned forward in her seat.

“We all know the Commander sees angles most of us do not but without the armies, what can we do to defeat Nia? She had to suspect this was a possibility.” Marcus asked, hoping someone would be able to offer a solution.

“Mount Weather.” Abby stated. “We use Mount Weather. Without the numbers, we don’t have a chance against Nia.”

“The Commander would never agree to it.” Indra rejected her suggestion outright, her anger rising to the surface through her words.

“You would rather we ally with her? If she will only offer peace on the condition we give her the
ability to destroy Polis, there is no other way. It is the only option we know will work.”

Abby turned and looked toward Echo with hope that it was the best option they had. “Would it work?”

“Yes. It would also kill many innocent Azgeda. It would also kill Wanheda.” Echo said. “There is no doubt Nia makes sure Clarke is within her vicinity at all times. She would use your daughter as a shield against you.”

At the news of her daughter, Abby let her shoulders sag and she sat back in her chair with a sigh which gave Echo the opportunity to continue speaking.

“It would be impossible to win support of my people when you use the very weapons that the mountain men unleashed to use to force all our people to live in continual fear of their weapons. The Azgeda people would revolt against Polis if they believed that the Commander agreed to use them. It would be a war that nobody in the clans could stop.”

“We can send someone to mark the target as they did in Tondc. It would only take one missile and Nia would be removed from power.” Abby explained.

“They missed the Commander in Tondc and many innocent lives were lost. Mothers, fathers and children all killed by those bombs. We will not allow them to be used!” Indra shouted her frustrations and walked forward to the table, slamming her hands down in anger. She had heard enough of Abby’s insistence that the missiles were their only option. In response, the guards who stood behind Abby lifted their rifles as a warning.

“Perhaps we could send some of the guard north with Indra and her warriors.” Kane suggested, trying to offer a compromise. “They need our help and we have people up there who could use it as well.”

“I will not send the guard. They are the only thing protecting us from those who betrayed us. Not on some sort of suicide mission because Nia has a feud with the Commander.”

“Skaikru only thinks of themselves.” Indra spat her accusation. “If the Commander did not continue to abide by the peace agreement she negotiated with your daughter, the clans would have already voted, we would have marched on this camp long ago. It is by the generosity of the Commander that you and your people are alive.”

The entirety of the room fell silent and each and every one of the council including the Chancellor were shocked by Indra’s admission.

“I think we should take a minute to calm ourselves. We are here to discuss possibilities for peace. We can’t ignore our options no matter what we may personally feel.” Marcus suggested.

Indra wanted to continue her passionate argument for warriors to take north but she knew nothing would get resolved with the current temperament of everyone in the room. She took a few steps back from the table and took a deep, calming breath. Marcus offered Indra a small nod of thanks for her restraint.

“We all know we have to go with them to Toron.” Raven stated. “Clarke needs our help and the clans depend on it to stop Nia.”

“What happens if we fail, Raven? We wait for Nia to come here with her army and force us to give her what she wants?”
“Abby, I’ve been working myself to the bone and nearly blowing myself up trying making things that we will need so we can win this fight. If Clarke and Prince Roan fail, you heard Echo. We won’t have another opportunity.”

Echo stepped forward and her movement caught everyone’s attention. Once she was sure she had their attention and all were all listening, she began.

“Nia doesn’t care what weapons your men could attack with. Yours…” she pointed at Indra then turned to point in the direction of the Skaikru council. “…or yours.”

“So you are saying nothing we do can stop her?” Abby asked.

“’We have to go to Toron if we want to defeat her.” Echo said. “If we do not go north, she will come south. I have told you this already. There will not be any way to stop her now that Maun-de is no longer a threat to her and her people. Wanheda won’t support her outright, which delays Nia from being able to make any concrete plans. Not even her generals want to march south but life has become difficult for many Azgeda and they will listen to Nia. We have to reach her before her patience with Wanheda runs out.”

“If we use the best weapons at our disposal, we risk the resentment and anger of an entire clan. Going north is little more than me sending our people to their death. I don’t know if I can risk the life of everyone for just one person if it could bring peace.”

“You won’t just risk resentment from those who survive the attack in Azgeda, you will present yourself as a threat to all remaining clans for using them. What would stop you from using them again if you felt yourselves being threatened?” Indra interjected. “If the people believe the Prince used the weapon on his own people, they would never allow him to be King.”

“What chance would sending fifty of our people north do? I still can’t want to risk our people if it seems like we don’t have a chance to defeat Nia by going to Toron.” Abby said.

“I’m willing to take the risk.” Raven chimed in. “I need to set up the transmitters. This would be the best time for me to be able to do it.” Raven piped in. “If anything, it could be an early warning system if Nia does come south. It might be the only thing that saves our people.”

“I’m going too.” Bellamy added. “Clarke needs our help, and we owe it to her after all she has done for us.”

Abby leaned back in her chair and sighed, unsure of what to do. It was so much easier knowing that they had the coalitions full support and an army beside them. Now, the danger for them all was much more evident. If they went against Nia and lost, she would come south and try to force them to give her Mount Weather. If they used Mount Weather to destroy Toron, they risk becoming the monsters who could oppress clans on a whim. Neither option appealed to her which added to her frustration adding in that her mind renewed the nearly constant concern for her daughter who was now a political prisoner in Toron who might end up dead if she does nothing.

“Your transmitter might be the only thing that stops her from destroying Polis.” Indra said. “If Nia is not stopped, we can have someone send a message back to you to evacuate your people to the city. Your people would be protected within it’s walls.”

Marcus looked at Abby, who now had her eyes closed and she was rubbing her temples. He reached out and put his hand on her arm and drawing her out from under her burdensome thoughts.

“We have to choose a side, Abby.” he said, watching the options that weighed on her mind pull her
in different directions. Once he realized Abby wasn’t responding to the suggestion, he began to speak as an official member of the council.

“I request a vote on the choices we have. We support the Commander and Clarke and go north with the guard, we ally with Nia and resist her demands and risk facing the threat of her army, or we use Mount Weather to end the threat in Toron.”

Silence filled the room for a lengthy period while everyone waited for Abby to officially call a vote on Marcus’ options. Reluctantly, she recognized his request.

“We will vote on the options presented by Marcus. Everyone will need to leave the room and once the vote has been taken, we will inform you all.”

Indra and Koma were the first to leave the room. Koma had remained silent and observed the various factions in the room and what they had to say regarding the situation but when he and Indra walked out into the large yard in front of the Ark, he leaned over and began talking to Indra. She nodded and Koma made his way to the stable, retrieved his horse and once mounted, rode it quickly to the front gate only to find it closed. He told them to open the gate and after the guards talked for a moment, they refused his request.

Moments later, Bellamy’s voice could be heard shouting instructions to the young man atop the gate as he walked into the yard from the Ark, beside Echo and Raven.

“Open the gate. He is an ally, not our enemy.”

Raven turned and studied Bellamy with a critical eye. Bellamy saw, but chose to ignore it and kept his attention on the gate and the door being opened for Koma who shot forth on his steed, through the metal gateway in the direction of Tondc.

“Is everything alright?” Bellamy asked Indra.

“Your people debate on whether to use Maun-de to kill Nia and many other innocent people in Toron, or go north and fight her as the Commander requests. Your leader’s mother can’t make up her mind so she requests more time. Nothing is alright.” She couldn’t hide the dissatisfaction in her words.

She was still glaring at the guard who initially refused to open the gate, she shook her head and turned to recognize the intent of Bellamy’s question. “My warriors wait a short distance from this camp. We didn’t want to make your leaders feel as though we are forcing their decision. Your people startle easily.”

“She’ll make the right decision. She won’t launch rockets at her own daughter. She can’t.” Bellamy defended.

“Is this any different from what you told me about Clarke’s father?” Echo asked, regretting the question the moment it passed her lips when she saw Bellamy’s reaction to her words.

“She won’t abandon Clarke.” Bellamy stated firmly.

“Is this any different from what you told me about Clarke’s father?” Echo asked, regretting the question the moment it passed her lips when she saw Bellamy’s reaction to her words.

“She won’t abandon Clarke.” Bellamy stated firmly.

“How long do you think they will take in there?” Raven asked, trying to redirect their conversation from the subject of Clarke.

“Your guess is as good as mine. Why don’t we get something to eat?” Bellamy suggested. The notion of just standing around and waiting for the decision was going to drive him crazy.
Even Echo, who was normally able to mask her emotion was agitated with waiting for the council’s decision. Indra, on the other hand was irritated the moment the council didn’t agree to her request for their warriors to go north and displayed it consistently. Before they walked in the direction of the dining hall, Indra spoke.

“If you are sincere in wanting to travel north and aid the Commander, we will leave at sunrise regardless of your leader’s decision. It would be an honour to fight alongside you.” She looked at Echo and paused for a moment before adding, “With you as well.”

Echo gave Indra a slight tilt of her head. “Mochof. (Thank-you.)

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The council had completed their vote after an hour of deliberation, talking each other in circles as to why each of their reasons were the most valid. There were two votes for using Mount Weather to stop Nia before she can become a threat, and two for joining the Commander’s small militia.

When the two members voted for using Mount Weather, it took everything for Indra to not launch herself at the two council members. It was something Marcus was aware could be a possibility but he knew the restraint Indra was capable of. She was here representing the Commander and she would act accordingly.

“Abby?” Marcus asked, trying to keep her mind from shutting her out form the situation at hand. He could see the toll it was taking on her, but time was something that was no longer a luxury for them. They needed to make a decision so Marcus pressed on. "It is to you.”

“I need some time.” she sighed, not to anyone specific but more out of exhaustion with the situation before her.

Marcus looked at the council in the room waiting for the resolution to their current stalemate. He got up from his chair and said, “I will tell them we need more time.” referring to the group waiting outside the Ark for their decision but she grabbed his arm preventing him from walking away.

“Wait.” She said, turning to him with tears threatening to build in her eyes. “I can’t use Mount Weather. I can’t lose my daughter.”

The two council members who voted to use Mount Weather frowned, knowing Abby’s decision before she actually said it. Marcus sat back down in his chair while the two who chose differently rose from theirs, displaying their displeasure of her choice by leaving without saying a word. Jackson on the other hand, the other person who voted they go north and try to save the Commander and Clarke from Nia softly placed his hand on Abby’s shoulder as he walked by, offering his support with a reassuring squeeze for having to make the difficult choice. Once it was just Marcus and Abby in the room, she turned to look at Marcus, unable to hide the emotion of choosing her daughter and risking an unwinnable war with Nia.

“Bring her home, Marcus.” she begged of him. “Just bring her home.”

“I will do everything I can to get her back to you.” he answered as Abby wiped tears from her cheekbones as they fell. “I will tell the guard to be ready to leave in the morning.”

“Take it all. Guns, ammunition, and people.” Abby said, surprising Marcus.
“We can’t leave the camp unguarded.” Kane insisted. “I will take half the guard and I will talk to Indra about logistics. You should go rest.”

Abby nodded, feeling the exhaustion set itself inside her body due to the stress of the day. “Make sure you come back as well.” She stated, standing and pulling Marcus into a fierce hug and silently hoping this wouldn’t be the last time she saw him.

“Marcus?” she whispered, “Thank you.”

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Echo, Bellamy and Raven sat in the dining hall and pretended to enjoy the meal of bland soup and semi-soft bread that they used to soak up the broth that lingered in their bowls. They hadn’t said much while they ate but now that their meals were done, they got up and placed their bowls and cutlery in the bins to be cleaned. They decided to make their preparations for the following day rather than just wait to hear what decision was made.

“Whatever decision your Chancellor makes will not change what I have to do.” Echo stated once they were outside, offering Bellamy a chance to back away from any sense of obligation he might have because of her. As they walked, she created a little distance between the two - distance that Bellamy quickly filled by taking a step to his right which moved them a little closer than they had been before.

“We.” he said. His tone caused Echo to turn her head and see him staring at her with conviction. “Whatever decision she makes will not change what we have to do.”

“Bellamy, I won’t ask you to do that.” Echo argued.

“Don’t worry. He won’t be alone.” Raven said, adding her support.

“We don’t leave our friends behind.” Bellamy added which drew agreement from Echo whose spirit was elevated by their offer.

“Is that what we are? Friends?” she raised an eyebrow at Bellamy who simply smiled at her inquisition of their relationship as if he hadn’t heard her ask.

Raven threw her head back and laughed, then turned to go in the direction of her workshop suggesting she was going to prepare the transmitters and bombs for their trip north. “I will see you two out here in the morning. Make sure you two manage to get some rest tonight.” she joked as she walked away from the two.

“Well?” Echo asked teasingly, throwing her arms around Bellamy’s neck. Bellamy put his hands on her hips and pulled her close. Neither able to break the eye contact that elevated their heart-rates to the point they were sure the other person could hear them.

In an attempt to dodge the question, Bellamy responded by leaning in and kissing her, then pulling back from her thirsty lips. He gave her a suggestive grin and said, “I think Raven had a good idea about how we could spend the rest of the night.”

“Kyongedon, Skaikru. Oteim seim.” (Grounder, Sky-people. Always the same.) she said, shaking her head with mock indignation and pushed Bellamy back.
She started to walk with purpose toward the room they shared the night before, causing Bellamy to jog up beside her to catch up. When he was beside her once again he reached down and took her hand in his own, entwining their fingers and giving her the wordless answer she was hoping for and knocking down another wall of resistance within her.

“Your friend is right though.” she agreed as they arrived at the door to their room. Echo turned her back to the door and turned the latch behind her so they could get in the room, never losing eye contact with Bellamy. She pressed her lips to his then leaned back into the door and using her weight to open it behind her and walk backward in the room slowly lifting her shirt over her head while saying, "It would be a shame not to take advantage of such a comfortable place to spend the night.”
Clarke is given a tour of Toron by Nia's adopted daughter Ontari and learns there is nothing more frustrating than the Azgeda girl who winds up showing her more than she expected.

Update day!

I know this one took a LOT longer than anticipated and I want to say thank you for your continued patience. It may take longer than I would like sometimes, but I'll always update until this until completion.

This chapter is a BIG one. Not because it is as many words as it is, but because of what happens in it and how it plays into future chapters. Hopefully it lights up your imaginations with possibilities. ;)

I hope you all enjoy it and be sure to let me know what you think! As always, thank you for all comments and kudos. See you in a couple weeks!

~ Toron ~

Clarke had felt the day wear heavily on her over the last two hours but she did her best to try to spend the evening with the guests. They were there to welcome her to Toron and she was determined to stay as long as she could. Little did she know the night would extended well into twilight hours and her fatigue-ridden body was losing the fight to remain in the here and now. The only thing keeping her head from falling forward on to the table was her hand which was precariously wobbly on the table in front of her. Both Nia and Ontari had bid her their goodbyes and that was hours ago. All she wanted now was to go in search of a bed to rest her tired body for the next week, and if that wasn’t possible for as long as long as she could. At least, that is what she was thinking.

Her slouching shoulders and heavy eyelids betrayed her to Roan who had been observing her fight in and out of her rigid posture she believed she required to show the guests that were present. Seeing Clarke start to falter to the losing side of exhaustion, he took mercy on her and brought her back to the present with his voice.

“I think it is time for Wanheda to retreat to her room for the night.”

Clarke simply nodded her understanding to Roan. If she was asked, she wouldn’t be able to explain the events of the last fifteen minutes, perhaps even longer and she scolded herself for not being
present. She startled slightly when Roan placed his hand on her shoulder, bidding everyone a farewell on behalf of Nia and their guest of honour which resulted in Clarke being met once more with cheers from the Azgeda citizens in the room. Clarke did everything she could to not groan when she rose from her chair, hiding it well and offering a smile and wish a safe return home to everyone in attendance.

Roan led her through the doors on the opposite side of the hall form where they entered, informing the guard standing there that it was time for their guests to leave. The pair walked through the door and into the stairway to the upper levels but before they continued upward, Roan stopped her by placing his hands on her shoulders and giving her a slight squeeze to make sure she was listening through the veil of sleep threatening to overtake her.

“You did well in there.” he stated, “But now you must watch your words. Everyone in this building Nia trusts with her life so you must be careful. No matter where you are, assume Nia has ears listening.”

“I know.” Clarke fought against a yawn but failed to reign it in. “Tomorrow Ontari wants to show me around Toron. If you are there, it might make things easier for us.”

Roan shook his head. “I won’t be here. My mother wants me to deal with a dispute to the west near the border of our lands and it will a few days before I return.” He could see her eyebrows furrow at his admission. “I expected this. Nia doesn’t trust me so she wants to send me away so I cannot discuss her intentions.”

“So I’m going to be here, alone? What the hell, Roan?” Clarke shrugged his hands off her shoulder. “What am I supposed to do?”

“Do what you did tonight. Don’t outwardly oppose her, and continue to delay her demands. Explain that you can’t give her what she wants without taking her requests back to your people.”

“What if that isn’t good enough?” Clarke asked.

“She won’t try force you into anything. Not immediately. Just don’t give her anything to use against you. As long as it stays that way, people will see her inability to negotiate as a failure. When that occurs, I will do what needs to be done.”

“What do I do about Ontari? She wants to take me through Toron tomorrow.”

“She will observe you and see how the people take to you. I imagine Nia wants you to see her people, feel for their circumstance that she blames on Polis and most importantly, Heda. Ontari’s presence will remind the people that Nia is their leader and that because you are with her, you will be inclined to support her.”

“So just meet your people, not commit to any guarantees with Nia, and then you will take over? You make it sound so simple.” she scoffed, knowing with experience that things never go as easily as they could with transitions of power.

“If everything goes to plan, yes. I will make sure my business away from Toron will be settled as soon as possible and when I return, you can fill me in on your talks with Nia and we will go from there.”

As he finished talking, one of the guards walked through the doorway from the hall and approached them. “The guests have all left for the evening. This is from the Queen.” The guards then handed a folded piece of paper while he stared at Clarke with a mixture of fear and curiosity.
“Thank you. That will be all.” Roan stated, dismissing the man as he opened the folded note he was handed and sparing Clarke the man’s attention.

“It seems Nia has business to attend to that will occupy her time for the next few days as well. It looks as though you have a little more time to get accustomed to Toron than we thought before Nia begins requesting things of you.” Roan explained the note to his co-conspirator.

“Will Ontari be joining her?”

“No. She has been placed in the position of your escort when you aren’t in here to ensure your protection. There isn’t a person in the kingdom who would dare try to hurt Nia’s protege.”

Clarke sighed. She didn’t want to think about tomorrow and she certainly didn’t want to think about Ontari. The only comfort she had in her life was that for the next few days, she wouldn’t have to deal with Nia and her demands. For now, that was enough.

“I’ll show you to your room.” Roan suggested, directing her up the stairs and following behind. Clarke couldn’t help but notice every ten feet, a guard stood in place. They all stared forward as if they were statues, unmoving and every bit as intimidating as they were intended to be.

As they walked by, they refused to meet her eye but Clarke observed each of them and could see the markings on their faces signifying their allegiance to their clan, alongside other more telling scars she assumed were acquired in a less desirable manner.

“This is where you’ll be staying while you are here. Nia is one floor up and on the other side of the building. Ontari has a room one floor directly above. If you need anything, speak to one of the guards in the hall and they will inform the servants.” Roan explained as they approached one of the rooms midway down the hall.

“You don’t stay here? Where will you be?” Clarke asked while fighting the concern that wanted to creep into her words.

“I live in another building to the North. If you need to speak to me, just let them know and they will send word you wish to speak to me.” the Prince waved his hand in the direction of the many guards in the hall.

She nodded her understanding, then turned and opened the the door. She glanced over her shoulder and Roan had already begun walking down the hall toward the staircase they had just climbed. When he turned the corner and vanished from sight, she shivered at the thought she never felt so alone in all her years - not even during her time locked up on the Ark. At least in space she knew the members of the guard who brought her meals. She was also allowed to have occasional visitors like her mother or Wells but here in this place, she had nobody. Her only ally was about to leave her for days and the thought forced her chest tighten with anxiety.

Once she was on the other side of the door, she leaned back against the hard wood. Once she heard the click of the door latch, Clarke closed her eyes and took in a few deep calming breaths. She wanted to explore the room and discover it’s secrets but once she opened her eyes and they fell on the bed to the side of the room, she couldn’t think of anything beyond some sleep. She let her feet drag her to the edge of the bed and what was becoming a habit to her when confronted with a soft bed to sleep on, she unceremoniously fell on to the bed. Moments after yanking one of the blankets that rested on the bed over herself, she let sleep take control.
A soft knock echoed throughout the room but Clarke did not stir at it’s intrusion. Not even the light of the early morning sun could wrest her from the contented slumber beneath the blanket she hid under the night before. The persistence of the knock was what finally drove her from her slumber. She rubbed at her face and propped herself up on her elbow while trying to figure out what was happening. Once she realized someone was at the door, she turned her head in the direction of the unwelcome visitor who was increased the force of the knocking.

“Yes?” Clarke’s raspy voice called out.

The door slowly opened on it’s large hinges and Ontari first glanced in by slipping her head in the slightly opened door. Once she saw Clarke under the blanket, she stepped into the room with a small smile on her face. Clarke opened her eyes fully and could see the brunette had clearly been awake for some time. She looked expectantly at Ontari for the reason she was here in the room.

“The servants said that they thought you might be dead. They have been trying to wake you for the last two hours.” Ontari explained. “I guessed you would probably enjoy a bath and something to eat before we start the tour of the city if your body hasn’t yet become accustomed to so much travel in so short a time.”

Clarke rubbed her eyes free from sleep and though the sun was bright, if wasn’t directly coming in the western facing windows. She never considered herself a morning person and had no interest in starting today.

“The travel was fine. I’m fine.” Clarke said.

“I can see that.” Ontari quipped, regarding Clarke with a grin. Clarke figured she probably picked that habit up from Roan.

“Is there anything in particular you would like for breakfast?” Ontari asked causing Clarke to raise a questioning eyebrow to the stranger in the room.

"Breakfast?"

“Yes. It is the meal that starts the day. Usually right after one wakes up.” Ontari was still grinning and if Clarke’s stomach didn’t betray her by letting out a little rumble at the mention of breakfast, she would have snapped back at Ontari.

“I... do you have eggs?”

“I'll make sure some are brought up for you.”

Clarke was now sitting up in her bed and glancing around the room, unsure of what to do now. Ontari was just standing there watching her and it was making her uncomfortable. Clarke was about to speak but Ontari managed to cut through the silence first.

“There is a bath ready for you in the room through that door. There are some clothes in there as well for you to change in to. I’ll have a servant take these and return them to you once they have been washed. It is one thing to have travelled for as long as you have, but it is another to smell like it.” she said, trying to hold back a chuckle which drew a frown from Clarke.

She looked down at her clothes she slept in and realized that she hadn’t had a chance to change into
any other clothes before she was brought to meet Nia. They arrived late to the city and before she
knew it, she was in the presence of various Azgeda in the hall and was their guest. A couple short
sniffs led to her frowning, then exchanging a knowing glance with Ontari who was clearly trying to
hide a smile.

“I think a bath might be a good idea.”

“We usually eat breakfast in the hall but with my mother and Roan not being here and it being almost
noon, I’ll have it brought here for you.” she told Clarke, pointing at the desk. “I will be back in a
little while and then I’ll show you around the city. I think you will enjoy Toron.”

“Thanks.” Clarke tried not to make it sound like she was surprised at Ontari’s hospitality. Ontari
simply said she hoped she enjoy her bath and breakfast, and that she would return once the servants
have told her she was done with breakfast.

Once Ontari left the room, Clarke stood there wondering if this was some kind of trick. She had not
expected pleasantries from Ontari, just more of the attitude she presented the day before. Clarke slid
off the bed, making her way to the room Ontari told her the bath was waiting. She began stripping
her articles of clothing she was wearing as she went, then tossed them in a pile on a chair next to the
basin of steaming water.

Once she made her way to the metal tub, she was greeted by the perfumed fragrance of a type of
flower she had never smelled before. It wasn’t like the sweeter smelling flowers she knew from
around Camp Jaha or Tondc. This was sharp, but not unpleasant. Once she stepped into the hot
water and submersed herself, she decided with a contented sigh that no matter what happens in
Toron in the coming days, this moment will be what she enjoyed most.

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“Ready to go?” The now familiar voice of Ontari could be heard from the doorway. Clarke hadn’t
even noticed her open the door and lean against the frame while she devoured what was once a pile
of the most heavenly scrambled eggs which were cooked with some sort of spice she told Ontari she
had to bring home so her people could try it.

"Trade is Nia’s business. I’m just here to keep you entertained until she comes back and bores you to
death with negotiations. Don’t worry, I’ll make sure when you go home to your people you’ll have
enough of the spice to make it through the winter.” she added.

Clarke was feeling much better now that she was clean and full of food. Spectacular food, actually.
She couldn’t remember the last time she had eaten so much and she was grateful to have the chance
to try the various foods that when they were brought in were explained to be local to the area. She
had even convinced some of the servants to eat some of the food with her.

Although her offer was genuine, she had ulterior motives for having the servants remain with her
until she decided it was time to call Ontari. She wanted to learn about Azgeda from it’s people and
not under the watchful eyes of Nia’s daughter. Unfortunately, they were less than forthcoming with
details. They spoke in generalities, and Clarke assumed that was out of fear what could happen if
they anger their queen.

“Ready to go?”
“Sure. Oh, thank you for the clothes. They are comfortable. I especially like this.” she said, showing Ontari what she meant by tucking her hands into each side of the pouch of the sweater that let her hands go right through to the other side.

Ontari just smiled at the blonde girl sticking her hands out the other sides of the pouch simultaneously.

“Then it is yours.” Ontari stated simply. “I found it when I was scouting this summer. It was my favourite but if it can make someone smile like that, it certainly has found it’s rightful owner.”

Clarke’s eyes opened wide and she immediately attempted to pull it up and over her head due to it not having a zipper. “I couldn’t. It is your favourite.” Clarke said, trying to refuse the gift and any potential obligation that came with it.

“Keep it Wanheda. I never knew what the “W” on the middle of it meant but I guess it makes sense now that it is yours.” Ontari shrugged trying to seem indifferent to the situation but Clarke was left feeling a mix of curiosity and caution.

“Let’s go.” Ontari said. “The servants will clean that all up and your clothes will be waiting for you when you get back.” Ontari turned in the doorway but spun back around which started Clarke who was just a couple feet from her now. “Oh! I almost forgot. Your bag is under the bed. I put it in there last night and forgot to tell you.”

Clarke’s eyes looked under the bed and she could see one of the straps, she turned back to Ontari who had a smile on her face.

“I had to go through it to make sure there weren’t any more weapons. I wasn’t kidding when I said weapons aren’t allowed. Only the guards are allowed weapons, along with Nia and myself.”

Ontari turned and started down the hall and Clarke looked back at the bag and had an urge to go check it’s contents to make sure all she remembered was still within.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t look in your books even if the pictures you drew on the covers are really pretty.” she said as her pace slowed allowing Clarke to catch up.

“Lead the way.” Clarke said.

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Ontari spent much of the day acting as a guide and trying to answer as many questions as she could about Toron. She took her to sights that used to be celebrated before the city was destroyed, even giving her pictures of what the buildings used to look like so she could compare the various landmarks. When Clarke tried to give the pictures back, Ontari shook her head at every attempt. “They are just pictures” she would say, and then lead her on toward the next destination.

The day was a challenging one for Clarke. She regarded everything Ontari said to her with a measure of doubt. She spoke of her Azgeda grandfather who had ambitious goals for his people, suggesting he was a dreamer with grand vision. Clarke was certain Ontari spoke with admiration of the man and that only added to Clarke’s frustration in trying to understand the girl and what she wanted.
When they reached their next destination, they stood at the ruins of what was a large concrete base of a building. It stood roughly six stories high and was a light grey colour.

“This is the tower. Or, it was.” Ontari explained.

The picture she was currently looking at was beautiful. It had to have been taken at night of the brightly illuminated city skyline from somewhere out on the water. She thought back to her arrival and tried to imagine what it would have looked like to see such a tower standing so tall, reaching toward the skies. This place had been the focal point of what was once a sprawling metropolis.

Like many of the streets, they had been cleaned and all debris removed to resemble as much of the old city as it could. She looked at the picture, then at what remained of the base of the tower, happy to see at least this much of it had remained intact. Clarke flipped to the next picture she had which was of the tower by itself. Every time she compared the imagery of the two, she would become envious of what the world once had, then be overtaken by a sad understanding that nobody would see such a thing again in their lifetime.

Ontari had remained quiet during her observations of Clarke’s emotional reactions. It was only when she could see that sadness growing in her blue eyes that she resumed talking to her, guessing at what she was thinking.

“I used to see it that way too.” she said. “Nia’s father wanted to rebuild it. It was his vision to recreate the past and give his people what they lost.”

“You think that is a bad thing?” Clarke asked as she handed the photos back to Ontari.

“I think it does no good to dwell on the past.”

“The past wasn’t all bad. It gave us medicines, science. Technology!” Clarke pressed.

“It is one thing to have a vision, it is another to let your people starve and freeze to death to achieve that vision.” Ontari countered. “It also nearly destroyed the world, forcing you and your people into space to survive. It also led to countless deaths while you all remained safe in your metal boxes in the sky.”

Clarke opened and closed her mouth but didn’t offer anything to fortify her argument. When Ontari saw her struggle to make her point, she held her hand out for Clarke to take but was met with a curious look from the Blonde.

“Come with me. There is one more thing I want you to see and we can have dinner when we are there.”

Clarke did her best not to look at her hand suspiciously and she did not take it. She chose to step forward and use her movement to let Ontari know she was willing to go where she wanted her to visit. It was only a few minutes west, and they arrived at a patch of green that existed in a world surrounded by brick and concrete.

As they got closer the sound of various voices could be heard. Clarke could see various tents and small structures built that had people trying to sell the items they had. The smell of cooked meats permeated the area and found a home in Clarke’s nose and pulled her attention from the children who seemed to be running around in a small area that seemed designated for them to play in.

“A marketplace?” Clarke asked.

“This is Azgeda.” Ontari answered as a couple young children who had been running through the
crowd of people, came to a sudden stop in front of Clarke and stared at her wide-eyed.

“You meizen!” (You are beautiful!) the small girl exclaimed, pointing up at Clarke.

Clarke looked at Ontari and gave her a puzzled look.

“It seems you have an admirer.” Ontari smiled, then knelt down before the child who gave her a curious look. “Du yu ron won?” (Do you want one?) reaching into her pocket and drawing out two small items wrapped in a clear plastic film, then handed one to each of the children.

Clarke watched the children light up with smiles that were as bright as the sun that now rested in the western sky, exclaiming “Mochof!” (Thank you!) over and over, holding the small items in the air and running straight back in the direction of who must be their parents. The parents smiled and bowed in Ontari’s direction. Clarke curiously watched the interaction.

Ontari returned their acknowledgement with a slight nod of her head, she put her hands behind her back and walked forward, smiling and interacting with a shop owner who was a few steps away. She glanced beside her expecting to see Clarke but upon seeing she was not there, spun her head around urgently trying to find Clarke who hadn’t moved from where she was standing when the children approached her. She then called out to Clarke who was a good twenty feet behind her.

“If you want something, just point to it and he will cook it up for you.” she told Clarke, waving her hand at the containers that held a number of foods. When Ontari gasped, Clarke turned her attention from the containers she was looking at to the one Ontari was pointing at. “Come here and have a look at this.”

Clarke took a couple steps forward and as she stood next to Ontari, curiosity got the better of her when she saw the red shelled creature he pulled from a boiling pot of water but became fairly concerned when he was cracking open. “What is that?”

“You have to try this.” Ontari joyfully proclaimed. “It is late in the season which means for the next six or seven months, we won’t be able to have these again. You are lucky you came here when you did.”

‘Yeah, I’m lucky to be here.’ she sarcastically told herself as she watched the tall, thin man in the stall go to work at pulling what Clarke assumed was a white and red coloured meat from the creature after cracking the hard shell of the animal.

He placed some pieces on a plate and handed it over to Ontari who had already filled a little bowl with what appeared to be a warm, yellow-looking oil that was giving off a most delicious aroma that started Clarke’s mouth to water.

Ontari handed the bowl to Clarke and then accepted the plate of meat from the vendor. She reached into another of her pockets with her free hand producing two strange looking coins which she gave to the vendor. He seemed speechless at her payment and Ontari acted as though nothing was out of order. As they walked out of the stall, she reached out and took hold of a pitcher of water, thrusting it into Clarke’s free hand. Holding the two items she was given, she was directed to a bench and table in the middle of the park where many others were seated, already enjoying their food.

“Mochof, ai lukot.” (Thank you, my friend.) she said, walking with Clarke toward the tables she pointed at earlier. It surprised Clarke they were going to sit among everyone eating their meals. Once they were seated, Ontari took the pitcher clarke placed on the table and poured each of them a cup of water and showed Clarke how to eat what she called “Red shil” (Red Shell).
Clarke watched Ontari and followed how she ate the meat. She stabbed it with the utensil then dipped it in the deliciously smelling yellow liquid then after a moments hesitation and at Ontari’s urging, she popped the meat in her mouth. Ontari was staring cautiously at her, waiting for her reaction. Clarke couldn’t help it as her jaw wanted to drop open. Her previously tense frame fell into a relaxed state of bliss and was emphasized with a moan which drew the eyes of onlookers and if Clarke had been watching, a slight pink grew on Ontari’s face as she glanced around at people who were watching with discreet interest.

“That good, huh?” Ontari laughed, stabbing a piece of the meat and repeating Clarke’s action without the moan.

“This is incredible!” Clarke’s eyes were now wide open and she stabbed at another piece of the red shil’s meat. Her taste buds were exploding with the flavour of the lobster and the way the liquid in the bowl seemed to make it melt in her mouth.

They enjoyed the rest of their meal and Ontari puled out one of those small packages that she had given the children earlier. Clarke had seen her retrieve it in the corner of her eye and after a moment of thought, she handed it over to the blonde who studied it by sniffing it and spinning the solid amber object around in her fingers.

“What is it?” She asked, her curiosity peaked.

“It is a tree candy. It is only something we can get at certain times of the year. Before the winter thaw, a tree can be made to leak a sap. That has to be boiled to get rid of excess water and after that happens, it can make a thick syrup or small treats like that. You will love it.”

“This is edible?” Clarke asked, inspecting the amber treat. “It is really hard.”

“That is what I like about it. You can pop it in your mouth and let it slowly dissolve. They are really hard to find, even for me.”

Clarke studied the candy a moment longer. She reminded herself that she had already accepted the sweater and the pictures. She held the small offering out to Ontari so she could take it back. She couldn’t continue to accept these things from Ontari on behalf of Nia. It was when Ontari leaned back in her chair and shook her head with a slightly offended look.

“We don’t return gifts, Clarke.” Ontari said, taking another piece of their dinner and dipping it in the bowl between them before popping he delicious food into her mouth with a smile, expecting the debate to be over.

“I can’t accept it.” Clarke stated firmly. She didn’t want to become indebted to the girl and she didn’t like the level of comfort she was starting to feel around Ontari. When Ontari ignored her words and refused to take the candy back, Clarke placed it on the table in front of her rather forcefully.

She figured that Ontari would pick it back up but when that didn’t happen, and she saw the smile that was on her lips disappear and be replaced by shock, Clarke felt confusion take root in her.

‘Did I offend her? Is it really an insult?’ Clarke wondered. She then felt a sudden urge to reach out and snatch the candy off the table and apologize for refusing her offer. Just as she decided to change her mind and apologize, Ontari picked it up off the table with a quick swipe of her hand and tucked it back in her pocket, releasing a frustrated exhalation from her lungs.

“I’m sorry. I’ll take it.” Clarke offered.

She looked at Ontari who appeared both angry and offended, deciding to let her cool off and try
again later. The rest of their meal was eaten in silence. Occasionally Clarke would glance at Ontari to try to gauge her mood but as with most grounders, it was nearly impossible. Ontari seemed as well trained to conceal her emotions as well as any grounder she had ever met. There was nothing visible for Clarke to read in her expression and everything Ontari did was mechanical. From eating what was left of the dinner which she neatly portioned in two after tucking the candy back in her pocket, to observing the people around them as if she were simply there to simply ensure her protection.

The silence had left Clarke alone with her thoughts. If Ontari was offended, would she tell Nia? How would Nia react to her spurning her daughters offer. Of course she could lie, she knew she would have to lie to Nia and if she had to about this, she would as well. Still, Clarke felt as though she still owed the girl sitting next to her a real apology. Her thoughts were interrupted by a cold voice belonging to Ontari.

“I think we should go.”

she made her words a statement and one that carried a note of finality, that there would be no further conversation. Clarke nodded and rose from the bench seat and her discomfort was visible. If Ontari saw it, she made no effort to address it. “I’ll take you back to your room. It has been a long day.”

Clarke wanted to object. Something in her told her that there was no reason to treat the girl ill. It had been a good day and although she didn’t trust Ontari, she had been a pleasant guide. She learned a lot about the city and Ontari had promised to show her it’s people tomorrow.

In the recesses of her mind Clarke couldn’t help but recall the memory of Nia’s past actions coupled with Roan and Echo’s warnings about Ontari fought against her need to give the girl an apology. She rationalized her need to apologize as being weak, and she knew grounders didn’t respect weakness. At least that is what she told herself.

Ontari maintained a brisk pace on their journey back to the Queen’s residence. Every time Clarke felt like she could summon the courage to initiate conversation and try to get a read on her, to try to mend what was clearly a grave offence to the Ontari, she found herself only able to offer embarrassed silence instead.

They walked up the stairs and Clarke realized the guards that had previously accosted her in the search for weapons were not moving to search her form their position atop of the stairs. She glanced at Ontari, but there wasn’t any indication she was going to offer an explanation. Ontari opened the door for Clarke and it was the first time looked at Clarke since dinner.

“i trust you can find your room.” she stated, suggesting that she had something else more pressing to be doing.

“Yes.” Clarke said, her voice as small as she felt.

Once they entered the main hall, Ontari turned and walked in the opposite direction. Clarke wasn’t sure what to do and the slight panic in her chest urged her to say something to try to mend whatever it was, if there was anything honest about the day they had.

“Ontari.” Clarke yelled out in a voice louder than she would have liked. When Ontari stopped, she remained facing away from Clarke but her lack of forward progress gave Clarke encouragement.

“Thank you for today. I enjoyed seeing your city.”

Ontari never turned around, and once Clarke had finished speaking Ontari continued walking forward without a word and turned a corner near the end of the hall. Clarke sighed, and walked up the stairs to the second level and into her room. She wasn’t sure what tomorrow would bring, only
that she was once again all by herself in a city. A city with people whose customs she did not understand and now she’d offended the one person who could explain them to her.

Clarke entered her room and she walked directly to the bed. It had been straightened by who she could only assume were servants and she could see her previously dirty clothes were washed and neatly folded at the foot of it. She sat down on the very edge of the bed and lifted her hands to her face in frustration and shame.

Ontari’s attitude had become a completely different one from girl who showed her around the city in the afternoon. Clarke didn’t realize it, but she had gotten used to the girl’s excitement that she put in her words to describe the sights of Toron and the people that lived in it. She answered nearly every question Clarke asked of her. Everything from farming and medicines to what life was like in the cold winter. She told her everything but what she believed Nia would wish to discuss and assured her that she would become sick of politics and clan relations when Nia returned. She told her that this was a time for her to unwind from the long journey north.

“What game is she playing at?” Clarke groaned out her words in frustration as she fell backward on to the bed, trying to fend off an invasive feeling of guilt that was taking over.

She moved to pull the hooded sweater off and she hadn’t realized the pictures Ontari gave her fell from the pouch and on to the floor. Noticing the back of each picture was blank, she thought of a way to try to forget the incident with Ontari. She pulled her bag out from under the bed by it’s strap and smiled as she flipped the top open to reveal her art supplies in the bag.

After taking out some of the pencils, she laid out the pictures on the bed and once they were organized in order of how she visited throughout the day she flipped the very first one over so the picture was facing down. Taking hold of the sharpest pencil, she began to draw. It wasn’t long before she could recognize in her drawing what the building looked like in it’s current state. After a few more details, she looked at the next picture and did the same until they were all completed.

She lifted her head and glanced around the bedroom and realized that is was no longer day. The light in the room was provided by many candles that were lit before her arrival. She had no idea what time it was in relation to when she got back to her room, all she knew is that she was tired and she wanted to put the latter part of the day behind her. With her drawing completed, she stacked the pictures on top of each other and walked to the desk, placing them on top.

‘Perhaps Ontari will accept them as an apology.’ She wondered. ‘Ontari mentioned she did like my artwork.’ she smiled at the thought and walked back to the bed and removing her clothing as she walked. Clarke hoped it would improve the dynamic between them and make amends for her behaviour today. It wouldn’t be long before Ontari resumed her tour of the city and if Ontari was as angry as she seemed, it was going to make for a miserable day.
Tell Me Why

Chapter Summary

Part One

The group has been travelling for weeks but poor weather forces Lexa, Octavia, Lincoln and Levai to find shelter from the storm, but the shelter they find might not be as unoccupied as they would like. Levai convinces Lexa to give him some answers regarding Clarke.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 32!

I hope you all are doing awesome and thanks for sticking with this story and I appreciate everyone for the ongoing patience! Sometimes life just doesn't like to cooperate, but here it is, Chapter 32 (Part one)! :

Info about Chapter 33 summary will be in the end note if you want to know what it will encompass.

See you all in a few days and I hope you enjoy the chapter.

It was a chilly morning and Lexa’s mind was focused on the day ahead of them and their journey north. She half-watched on as Lincoln and Octavia prepared the horses for the trip, packing dried meats and fruit to sustain them on the days they would come up empty on their hunts. The cold brought on the unwelcome sight of frost and were it not for Jules’ offering of jackets for each of them along with furs to keep them warm at night, Lexa was certain it would be a much less comfortable trip, even with her nightblood being able to partially combat the elements.

Octavia was amazed at seeing her breath puff out in a white cloud while the sun stayed hidden behind the heavy grey clouds above. Simple things, even Octavia’s awe each time she waved her hand through the hot air she expelled brought smiles to all their faces and their smiles widened when Enlin decided to do that same thing but with much more dramatic swinging of his arms.

Seeing everyone laugh and share the moment brought a small smile to her lips, momentarily allowing her to forget the coming days and weeks as they ride north. Unfortunately, Titus’ teachings always lingered in her mind was trained to focus on duty as she thought of Levai, his family and the future he was risking to go with his little sister on what could be a suicide mission.

She observed Jules who was leaning into the side of her husband, their arms around the other savoring the feel of their closeness as if committing it to memory. She fought the urge to order him to remain again, knowing it would be no use. He would argue, they would be at odds and he would win and ride with them anyway. That wasn’t what she wanted her nephew and niece to see as their
father rode away. Not with what could happen. Instead turned her attention to the young brunette
girl, the very same one who had been staring at her for the last five minutes. Lexa walked over and
sat in the empty seat next to Madi who chose this moment to break her morning-long vow of silence.

“This isn’t like the other times he has gone away. My mother is acting different.” Madi stated with a
nervousness that Lexa hadn’t heard before.

“That is because this isn’t like any other time he has traveled. He is willing to risk great danger in
order to bring peace to all the clans.”

Lexa saw her nod slightly in understanding but a frown appeared on Madi’s face.

“How can they laugh and pretend like nothing could happen, and that everything is alright?”

Lexa took in a deep breath and leaned back in her chair and looked out on her comrades who were
still laughing and smiling. After exhaling, she addressed Madi’s question.

“To remind ourselves why we do what we must. For your father, it is Jules, it is Enlin, and it is you.”

Lexa began to tap the top of her dagger and Madi’s eyes were drawn to the unnatural sound. A
nervous tick of hers when things got emotional or she became nervous but many confused as a form
of intimidation. Lexa could see Madi’s eyes jump back and forth between her tapping finger and her
face with a silent curiosity so she turned to face the questioning eyes before her.

“It might be some time before he can come back. What we are doing will change things, which is
why he refuses to remain behind.” Lexa explained to the young girl.

“Change things how?”

“If things go as planned, your people will have the opportunity to join the kongeda as full partners.
The threat of war will no longer cast itself as a shadow over your people.” Lexa took Madi’s hand in
her own and smiled brightly at her as she added, “The most important thing, is that you could come
visit me in Polis any time you’d like and I could come here to visit my niece and nephew as often as I
can.”

“I’d like to go see Polis but my dad says it isn’t a good idea.” Madi informed her, taking a moment as
if trying to decide something. After a moment, she asked in a whispered voice, “Is it true what they
say about people like me? I have to kill kids like me?”

“There is much more to becoming Heda, but it is our tradition for Commanders to be the strongest of
our kind. This is how the spirit of the Commander chooses a rightful successor.”

Lexa could see Madi frown at the notion of having to kill other children, as if that was her path to
walk as well so she added to her explanation. “…but as Heda, that is a tradition that has been on my
mind since I was chosen and ultimately rests in my hands.”

“You would change it so people like us didn’t have to kill to become Heda?” Madi asked.

“There is a lot to consider before being able to make such a change, but someone once told me that
we deserve better. I can’t help but to agree.”

Lexa could feel the warmth build in the center of her chest that quickly radiated outward resulting in
the heat spreading to the tips of her fingers and toes. She let out a sigh and leaned back into the chair
slightly. Thinking of Clarke always had this effect on her and it usually resulted in her doing
something Titus would say was ‘out of character’.
Clarke was her second rebellion against Titus’ teachings of love being weakness, one she swore she wouldn’t repeat. Not after Costia. Yet here she was in a group of four and riding north without her army into Azgeda territory. It was only as Madi cleared her throat did Lexa’s attention return to the present and the young nightblood in front of her. A quick glance to Levai and Jules to make sure they were occupied with each other, she returned her attention back to her niece.

“Madi, I am going to give you something very important to me. Can I trust that you will always keep it safe?”

Madi wasn’t sure what to say so she leaned forward and nodded conspiratorially, glancing between her parents and her aunt with a question in her eyes. When Lexa flipped the buckle on her belt, the wooden handled dagger detached from her belt. Lexa held it in between the and closed her eyes. Her lungs took in then released a wavering breath. She held the dagger closer to Madi who wasn’t sure what to do other than take the knife, which she did.

“This dagger was made by someone very important to me. Someone who gave me the strength to challenge the past and see a future that could be different. She was the one who showed me who it is I could be.”

“You are giving it to me?” Madi’s voice rose as she spoke.

“I am, but only with your promise that you will pass it to someone once you no longer need it.”

“How will I know?” Madi asked, letting her fingers trace the intricate pattern carved around the pommel and hilt of the knife.

Lexa smiled at the brunette, letting her hand drift to Madi’s long hair so she could brush it back over her ear, so she could see just how much she reminded her of the memory of her mother.

“You’ll know when someone comes into your life that makes you want to be better. Someone who is thrust into your life and will take everything you know and flip it around to give you a new strength. When that is what you think of when you go to sleep, and when you wake up. That is when you’ll know you won’t need this anymore. That it has served it’s purpose.”

Madi didn’t say anything, she just spun the knife with the blade still in the leather sheath which had small decorative leaves stamped into the hide. Lexa gave her a warm smile even though she was focused on her new knife. Lexa stood up and placed a kiss on the top of the girl’s head.

“Mebi oso na hit choda op nodotaim.”(May we meet again.)

Madi looked up to see that Lexa had begun walking toward the group while indicating their time here was over.

“Thank you for your help, Jules. I will not forget your kindness.” Lexa said, pulling the woman into a hug. “I will do everything in my power to give them a better future.”

“That and be sure to get my husband back before the snow falls. He has a lot of hunting to do and Madi isn’t old enough to go on her own, yet.”

“I can too!” Madi shouted from the seat she just vacated in order to run to her father and jump into Levai, wrapping her thin arms around him in a hug.

“You know the rule. If you can’t carry it back, you can’t go alone.” Levai explained to his daughter while he hoisted her up so her arms could wrap around his neck in a proper hug, also giving him the chance to whisper a few words in her ear that could not be overheard by the others.
Levai bid his wife another farewell with the promise echoed by Lexa that they would all return as soon as they could and the group departed from the house, down the hill toward the road that led in the direction of their destination.

“Madi, Get back up here. You have your chores to do!” Jules warning voice could be heard through the thick line of trees on the hillside.

“Ai laik ste komba.nomol!” (I am coming, mother!) the young girl answered, having had run down the hill to watch the the four travel the road north. She looked up the hill toward the sound of her mother, then back at the group.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Sticking to their routine of avoiding the heavily traveled roads, they were having a difficult time navigating with the speed that Lexa demanded from the group. They listened to their leader and continued to fight the terrain and the forest but the horses didn’t have any problem displaying their dissent to the brunette who was giving the orders.

After a difficult night trying to keep the horses calm, Lexa agreed to Levai’s advice that they should keep to the road when the forest became too difficult to work through. If they lost the good will of their horses, they would not reach Toron before the snow fell and then the threat of black toes and fingers due to the temperature were just one of the threats they would face. When she told them they would ride in pairs, that they were simply a group of travelers who decided to journey north in each others company. They all knew the threat if Lexa were to be discovered so she rode in the back with Levai with Lincoln and Octavia riding in front, Lincoln doing the speaking for the group.

With the cold days, few people were on the usual trading routes and those that were, kept their business to themselves. Not to say all of their hearts didn’t begin to race when anyone approached them from the North or the sound of heavy gallop that overtook them only to race past them without a second glance as to who they might have raced past. It also didn’t prevent them from all lowering a hand carefully to the hilt of their swords if things went sideways.

Though the last two weeks of travel weren’t the easiest, they were lucky that the clouds did not remain overhead long and what sun they did get managed to make the miserable days a little better. They had long abandoned the risk of being discovered by lighting periodic fires in order to get the chill from creeping deeper into their bones, but that was only when Lexa witnessed Octavio shivering beneath the many layers she had on. Lexa didn’t want to risk her becoming ill so they decided that night they would need better shelter, perhaps stay for a couple days and regain their strength. Even Lexa was feeling the strain on her body and it made her wonder how her comrades could keep their complaints of weariness to themselves. Not even Octavia complained, which only added to Lexa’s admiration of the girl’s tenacity.

“We will stop in Brad. It can’t be far.” Lexa stated, looking at the sign which was laying on the ground, partially covered in brush and only showing a part of the name “Bradford”.

An hour later, they arrived at the outskirts of what was once the small town of Bradford. There were many buildings they could see just off the main road they rode alongside with their walls collapsed and overgrown with what would be vibrant green colours had the warm fall not turned into the early chill of winter. As they continued forward, Lexa suggested Lincoln ride ahead and find a house along one of the adjacent roads. After another twenty minutes, Lincoln returned, stating he found a suitable one for a night or two that had a fireplace to keep them warm and a large building the horses could stay out of the weather. When Lexa felt the first drop of cold rain that hit her, she sighed with relief.
‘Soon’ Lexa made her silent promise again, finding what strength she could to keep pushing herself forward.

When Lexa turned to observe her allies, to say they were exhausted was an understatement. Octavia looked like she was asleep, swaying on the back of her chestnut brown horse. Had Lexa seen her earlier, she would have seen how close Lincoln rode beside her to stop her from falling hard to the ground below. Levai was in a similar way, but even his strength ebbed from his body. Lexa decided they would at the food they had caught and cooked two nights ago. It was supposed to stretch out over a week, but she would go hunting if needed, and she concluded it was.

It wouldn’t do them any use to fall ill, and with what was going to come, they needed all their strength. This was one of the trials of reaching Toron when the weather turned to late fall. Not once had any army succeeded in going north to fight Nia, and Lexa scolded herself for her poor decision in trying to bring her army north. She intended to be a liberator, to free the Azgeda from the tyrant who was at the helm of their nation and keeping them from prosperity. With the trip taking as long as it has, there were times it was difficult to push back the doubt and thoughts of what could happen if she failed her people.

“It is just ahead on the right. A short trip into the trees and good cover.” Lincoln said, his voice higher than normal to carry itself through what had become a solid downpour of nearly freezing rain.

“We need to get out of this rain.” Lexa shouted back. “Lead quickly.”

The chill of the rain had snapped some life into Octavia, giving her the focus to ride as hard as the others but when they rode the horses into the make-shift stable, Lincoln had to rush over to catch her as she fell sideways.

“I’ll start the fire in the house. Try to get that one going for the horses and I will see you inside soon.” Lexa said, running over to the large wooden doors what they rode through. Once Lincoln brought Octavia through, he didn’t look at Lexa. He knew he wouldn’t say anything, but he was unhappy with how hard the ride had been on Octavia, as she is not used to such hard riding. She also knew Octavia would refuse any special treatment. It was what she respected most about the girl but at the moment, she knew she was pushing them all beyond their threshold.

She found the doors very difficult to close, but they needed to be able to keep the horses safe. She was certain it would remain nearly closed, allowing the horses to escape should they try to force their way out if there were any issues with the fire Levai was starting in the stove in the building. She ran around gathering the very few pieces of wood she could find before she joined Lincoln and Octavia in the house.

Stepping through the door, Lexa could see he had already gathered a pile of wood and sticks, working frantically to get the small pieces of wood in the fireplace to take flame as he stroked the flint with his blade. When Octavia started coughing, Lexa began to remove the soaked clothing from the girl whose eyes were not opening. Once she removed all she could while leaving her in her underwear, she stood up and looked around the room for anything dry to cover her with, grunting in frustration at the lack of options.

“I’m going upstairs.” Lexa stated, spying the weathered stairs and the best way to proceed up them. Once she decided on a route, she moved with urgency. Every step forced her to tense her body when the wood beneath her feet creaked and groaned, but she was at the top and moving nimbly on her toes, glancing in each of the rooms. When she looked in the first room, she let out a low curse.

This house was made to look deserted but when she saw the beds in the rooms covered in cloth blankets and furs, it was clear that this building already had owners. Ones who were likely to return to get out of the weather should they be in the area. She walked over to the first bed, rolled the furs
and blankets up and tucked them under her arm. From the top of the stairs, she threw the items to the 
ground and watched Levai gather them up then look in her direction.

“Company?” he asked quietly as he gathered up what she had thrown down the broken staircase.

Lexa nodded and mouthed the word ‘Maybe’ then turned and drew one of her swords that hung 
from the hip. She walked delicately back down the length of the hall, her head turned to the side with 
a slight tilt forward as she listened for any possible noise from the homes usual occupants.

She walked past the first door on the right she had already visited, then spun in front of the first door 
on the left mid way down the hall. Scanning the room, it appeared to be a small storage. There were 
jars on a shelf that appeared to have food in them; various vegetables and fruit. If edible, she made 
herself a promise they would only take what they needed when they left.

Lexa stilled when she believed she heard a small thump coming from the last room at the end of the 
hall. The door was closed as it had been when she first climbed to the top of the stairs. She was 
content to let the door keep its secret but with the possibility of Azgeda in the house, they were all in 
danger. With her decision made, she approached the door by walking alongside the wall and her 
sword raised in front of her.

Lexa reached down and turned the handle slowly. Expecting a squeal from the metal handle, the 
knob turned easily and the latch clicked. The door flung open and Lexa jumped back so she 
wouldn’t be visible when the door flew open. Taking a breath and listening for movement, she could 
hear the sound of an open window and rain tapping the roof outside of it but nothing else. 
Committed, she stepped forward and sprang into the room, sword arcing before her in defense.

Her heart raced in anticipation of the fight to come but when she glanced around the room thanks to 
the low light that was coming through the window, she stood straight and let her tense shoulders 
slightly drop. She recognized the room immediately. It was a child's room with toys littered on the 
floor, and there were clothes neatly piled on the beds, which were in the same state. She sighed and 
let her shoulders drop the rest of the way, walked over to the window to glance out, but the rain was 
falling so heavily now it was hard to see more than twenty feet. Sliding the window down so it 
would be closed, she flipped the latch, locking it closed. An act she would repeat with the latches in 
both the other rooms.

While in the first room she walked toward the well maintained armoire and opened the two large 
doors, standing to the side in case there was a surprise awaiting her arrival. When she saw nothing 
but clothes hanging in the stand or folded in the drawers below, she grabbed a some shirts and pants 
that looked like they would fit the group and made her way out of the room then back down the 
stairs.

“Change into these.” Lexa said, throwing Lincoln the clothes she retrieved. He immediately pulled 
the blankets off of Octavia and began to help her into a pair of pants and one of the shirts. Levai 
changed into the dry clothes and Lincoln followed shortly after.

“This house is not abandoned. There is a room upstairs that looks like a food storage and we can will 
eat some, but we will eat the meat we hunted for before we take what is likely their winter store.”
Lexa stated.

“We can’t take Octavia back out in the storm.” Lincoln stated, but to Lexa’s ears it sounded more 
like an order.

“You will remain with her. Levai will ride farther north. We will make sure you can find our trail off 
the main road and to the western side and we will continue our journey.”
“And if our hosts return while we are all here?” Levai asked.

“Then I will lay on the floor near Octavia. The two of you will explain we are trying to travel to Toron but the weather forced us from the road. If they will let us stay until the weather turns, we will give them this.”

Lexa reached into a pocket and produced a golden band. Levai immediately shook his head.

“You will not give…”

“You are in no position to give me orders and I will not hear your objection. If this is the cost to keep us all safe, and make sure Octavia does not become ill, then it has given us the chance for something much more valuable.”

“It is all we…”

Lexa leaned forward and pressed her forehead to Levai’s which interrupted his protest. She spoke next barely above a whisper as she took his hand, opened his palm flat and placing the ring in it.

“I can always come back for it later for it. And if I can’t, it will easily feed these people for the winter who we have forced to take us into their home. We must get to Toron. It means everything.”

‘to me’. Lexa added for herself.

Levai pulled his forehead back after a moment and nodded his understanding. He tucked the ring in his new pocket and looked up the stairs.

“Not until we eat the food we have.” Lexa stated, watching Levai frown and walk over to the bag that had their rations and the cooked meat.

“With Heda’s permission, I’ll look for spices to try to make our bland meat a little more palatable.” Levai asked, lacing every syllable of question with teasing sarcasm in an attempt to lighten the mood.

“I give you permission,” Lexa grinned, “but only if you can find the ones type that father used to use.”

Lincoln remained next to Lexa while Levai prepared the seasoning for their meat. He decided to make a stew which would be the best option for Octavia. They could not afford to have her become sick with the winter illness. Although Skaikru had what they were told were “antibiotics” and could prevent Octavia from such a fate, they could not reach Camp Jaha in time to help her, especially with the weather as it is.

With the meal cooked, Lincoln helped feed Octavia who was now awake and pressed against Lincoln to try to take some of his body heat. Lexa and Levai sat on the chairs in the room, which weren’t much more than a cut up bench with loosely attached back rests. They all ate their meal and with the weight of the meal in their stomachs, Lincoln and Octavia were asleep on the floor, a space beside Octavia for Lexa to claim should anyone return to the house. With Lincoln and Octavia wrapped up in themselves and evidently asleep if their relaxed breathing were any indication, Levai slid his chair next to Lexa. She would usually react to her space being violated, but with her brother being right beside her, she couldn’t help but feel more relaxed than she had been in months. She waited for him to break the silence in the room but when he didn’t speak, she looked up at him and saw expectant eyes.

“Yes?” Lexa asked, her voice higher than it should have been. She realized it when his familiar smirk lifted at the corner of his lips.
Levai glanced at the sleeping pair and started to speak with a quiet voice, “It wasn’t my place when we were out on the road, but I think this is as good a time as any for you to explain.”

Lexa looked down in her bowl and wished there was another spoonful left so she could fill her mouth. Letting the spoon twirl in the empty container, she took a breath and let it out slowly.

“Explain?” Lexa asked, resignation in her voice.

“Why don’t we start with the blonde girl who I found in the middle of the forest who was ready to let herself die, and why before she passed out it was your name she cried out.”

Lexa involuntarily bent forward as if she had been stabbed. Levai reached out to her shoulder to steady her but Lexa shook her head, pulling herself to sit straight up. For the first time since they were children, he heard his sister take in a shaky breath and hold it in her chest. She stared forward into the small fire in the fireplace and Levai could see Lexa fight back the water from rolling over her eyelids. Had anyone been looking at Levai, they would see he was completely unprepared for her reaction.

“It was my fault.” Lexa said, squeezing her eyes closed and letting the tears roll down her cheeks. She was doing everything she could to keep herself together. “I gave her my word and then I left her there, alone. I didn’t mean to. She… I just…”

Lexa felt Levai pull her toward him and she fell against his chest. She wouldn’t let herself sob, but some quiet tears she could not stop. The closer she got to Toron, the more Clarke began to occupy her thoughts, and she realized now that it may have been the reason she pushed Levai, Lincoln and Octavia to ride as long as they have been. She wanted to explain to him. That she had to do this. It was the only way she could show her.

Lexa wondered how would he react to the truth. The driving force of her plan to free the people of Azgeda, bringing peace to all the people living in the land. That everything she does is driven with the reminder that she will never be able to do enough. Never be able to give enough to make it up for what she did.

She could see it had been selfish and although her intention to reach Toron as quickly as possible might have been a noble one, it endangered the three people who were willing to risk their lives to see her succeed with her plan. She told herself they were here not because she was Heda but because they all had their own reasons which set them on the same road that took them to Toron. Allies of convenience which let her indulge in what might just be a flight of fancy.

“I am going to need more than that, Lexa. You know what I have left behind for you.”

When Lexa pulled herself back, she had managed to reign in and control her emotions. She knew at some point they would have this talk which is another reason she rode them so hard. She knew her actions were unfair and now she knew she was obligated to share a truth she kept locked away in herself. She just couldn’t share it with everyone.

Lexa stood up and walked across the main level in the house to the opposite side for privacy, in case either Lincoln or Octavia woke up but abstained from sharing that fact. She watched Levai lift his chair and walk over to join her, but instead of sitting beside her, he sat directly in front of her and waited for her to speak.

“It started when I had brought all my Trikru warriors to the front gates of the Skaikru camp and threatened to kill all her people…”
Part Two

This will be posted on Monday (Nov 12th).

After sharing the details of Clarke with Levai and some much needed rest, the group is visited by unwanted visitors. Their plan is put in danger and they must act quickly in order to keep their trek to Toron a secret. Levai presses Lexa to offer Lincoln and Octavia a choice to continue or return to Trikru Territory and their people but when she does, the group could face a fracture that could end Lexa's vision for peace before it has a chance.
Chapter Summary

Deep in Azgeda territory and forced to find cover to hide from the weather, Lexa has explained her motivations to find Clarke with Levai. She listens to his advice but before she has an opportunity to act on it, the group finds themselves in a confrontation.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 33

I hope everyone is having a great day/night and thanks for visiting this little story of mine! :)

This is a part B to chapter 32 and I hope everyone enjoys it. Thanks so much for feedback and the kudos. This is my story but if people weren't interested in reading it, I don't know how far I would have made it into the story so again, thank you!

Chapter 34 is in flux atm. It is a Clarke chapter and I have to play with it a bit but work is chaos with my boss on vacation for the next week. I'm itching to have you all wonder about Ontari, why Nia had to leave Toron, and the battle going on in Clarke's mind about what she's been told about Nia's adopted daughter.

That tease ya a little? ;)

I will try to have it up this Sunday. See you all soon!

“You have to let them know.”

He was right and she knew it. Lexa had been able to push her own protesting thoughts to the back of her mind under the pretense that she was just doing what her duty demanded of her, his words mirrored and amplified her what she fought against in herself.

She had sat in the silence with only the quiet crackle of wood in the fireplace and she understood no sleep would come to her once again. She kept her eyes on the three of them all content to sleep on the floor under the blankets she had found them. Lexa’s ears attentive for any sound outside that could not be a part of the storm that still poured down heavily. For a long moment, her eyes came to rest on Octavia who laid in the strong arms of Lincoln.

A small smile found it’s way to her face thinking of the last time a Skaikru girl slept by a fire while she watched over them. Much like Clarke, Octavia shared the same tenacity. It was evident many of the Skaikru shared that trait, but aside from Clarke, Octavia impressed her the most. Initially she knew nothing of the girl but words from Lincoln and believed her to be a curiosity for Lincoln, but that changed when they were in the drop ship and Lincoln had his breath returned to his spirit. That same breath brought Octavia back to life as well.
She was here because Lincoln was. She is certain of that, but she doubted she would change her mind about joining them to go north. Skaikru is loyal to their people and although Octavia wore the clothes of a Trikru warrior, under the face paint and the armour she proudly wore, she was Skaikru. Octavia could no more leave Clarke in the hands of Nia than Clarke could let her die when Lexa ordered her death. She just hoped Octavia would be able to control herself when she shared her plan.

She leaned back in her chair and her eyes glanced at the door then back at the group on the ground, emitting a small series of whistles from her pursed lips. Both Lincoln and Levai were starting to get up as quietly as possible with their hands on their weapons. Levai glanced at Lexa and motioned with his eyes she should lay down on the ground where he was and he signaled he would take her seat. Lincoln had stood up and walked over to the chair beside it. Her nod was all that passed between them and she took her position under the blanket to wait for what was to come.

A creak from the deck outside that could be heard over the rain brought Octavia to consciousness and her eyes opened to look across directly into Lexa’s eyes. Lexa had her finger on her lips, urging Octavia to remain quiet. Octavia nodded and her hand moved to her hip to free a dagger from it’s sheath. Lexa mouthed the word ‘wait’ and then slowly moved her hand to draw her hair over her face allowing it to obscure her features from view.

The click of the lock gave them all pause and Octavia forced her eyes closed and tried to relax her breathing but in doing so, her throat began to itch that turned into a coughing fit. The only thing Lexa could think was at least it was parallel with their excuse they had to get their sick friend out of the weather. She could see the frustration in Octavia’s face but she managed to recover quickly and resumed a more relaxed posture beneath her blanket.

Lincoln and Levai had their eyes on the door but weren’t making any aggressive motions aside from their hands on their weapons. When it opened slightly, the cool air rolled into the room and both Octavia and Lexa felt it roll over the skin that was not hidden under a blanket.

“We mean you no harm. We just sought refuge from the weather.” Levai said, his voice loud enough to be sure the person on the other side of the door could hear him clearly.

“How many of you?” called the male voice on the other side of the door.

“Four. Two men, two women.” Levai responded.

The door opened slowly and the minimal light from the fireplace reached the door and the figure standing in it. He wasn’t a large man, not much taller than Bellamy and shared a similar build. His hold on his blade seemed confident enough and gave them all they needed to know about the man. He walked into the house and the only thing Lexa was aware of was his footsteps and the slight waver in his breath. He was ten feet from her, moving slowly forward.

“This is my house.” the man stated, his eyes now switching between Lincoln and Levai.

“And we apologize for coming here uninvited. We would seek shelter in another but this was the only one that could keep us free from the cold. One of us is sick and we needed a fire.” Levai added.

“And my food, it seems. Winter is nearly here and you endanger my family by bringing your sick friend here.”

“When I found this place, there was nobody here to ask for shelter. As for the food, it is our own. We only used one of your pots to cook it in.” Lincoln explained.

The man looked at Octavia who drew his attention as she had another coughing fit. His features
softened slightly hearing the girl under the blanket.

“I want your weapons. All of them. Put them on the table in the kitchen and as long as they stay there, we won’t have any problems.”

“We can stay?” Levai asked, adding hope to his voice to sell their theatre.

Both Lincoln and Levai stood up and unbuckled their swords, Lexa began to cough and when Lincoln looked at Levai he saw the same concern. If they put them on the table out of reach, only the two under the blankets would have any weapons. Neither able to see what is going on, and one of them being on the edge of becoming very ill.

He sighed slightly then nodded.

“My wife and child won’t return until tomorrow. You are welcome to stay the remainder of the night, but you must leave in the morning. Cold weather or not, I won’t risk my wife and daughter.”

“We appreciate your hospitality. We will leave as early as we can.” Lincoln said.

“You will leave before first light. If you don’t, you will find my wife and daughter standing with a group of the Queen’s warriors waiting for you outside. You can be certain they will not be as hospitable.” the man said, turning and walking back to the door to close it and prevent the heat from escaping the house.

“Might be best to throw on more wood.” he said, walking toward the kitchen and their weapons they’d placed on the table.

“Thank you.” Levai said, walking into the living room of the house and tossing a couple small sticks on the fire and pushing them around with the metal rod that leaned against the stone fireplace. “We won’t be a problem.”

“You are already a problem. I’m here to make sure it doesn’t get bigger than that.” the man said.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“You should be leaving now.” their host said abruptly.

He hadn’t said a word since they agreed to be out of the house in the morning which frustrated Lexa. She had hoped to hear more about the man but he seemingly refused to share anything more than he wanted them to know. Lexa believed he was simply trying to get them out of the house as soon as possible. She was certain none of them found sleep after the home owners suggestion that Nia’s warriors might be waiting for them outside. The rain had stopped two hours earlier and her instincts told her to leave immediately and were it not for Octavia’s cough, they would have.

“You can keep those blankets. Wrap that one in them because she is going to need them.” he pointed at Octavia who was slowly rising from the floor thanks to trying to stay as still as she could on the floor. Even Lexa rose slowly, turning to avoid the homeowner’s gaze.

“You can keep those blankets. Wrap that one in them because she is going to need them.” he pointed at Octavia who was slowly rising from the floor thanks to trying to stay as still as she could on the floor. Even Lexa rose slowly, turning to avoid the homeowner’s gaze.

“Thank you for allowing us to remain.” Octavia said, reaching down for the blanket on the floor and hearing a grunt from the man in reply.

“I said all your weapons.” the man frowned, jumping up from the chair he was in, his sword drawn.

As Lexa rose, she tried to keep her body turned from the man and shield it with her blanket. Her stiff body had other plans and she couldn’t hide it well enough. Seeing the aggression from the man,
Lincoln and Levai circling to the side of the home owner Lexa lifted her hands in defence.

“I don’t think a sleeping woman was a threat to you. We are leaving now and I promise you that no harm will come to you. We appreciate your hospitality and don’t wish to leave your wife and daughter without a father.”

Lexa’s voice was calm and cold. Stepping back toward their weapons, he waved his blade at the door.

“Out. Now.” the man said in the most menacing voice he could summon outnumbered four to one.

They looked at Lexa and she nodded. She wrapped Octavia in her blanket and turned back to the homeowner. “We have taken some clothes. You have my word you will be compensated for them.”

The man sarcastically laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. “If you are sick, I’d end up burning them. Now go.”

They made their way out of the house and toward the building where they left their horses. Lexa was urging them on faster and as they reached the large wooden door, the sound of hooves could be heard approaching from the path leading south.

“Inside.” Lexa urged in a hushed tone. Once they were inside, she slowly pulled it until there was a small gap she could see out of. The horses shuffled at the sight of visitors, but stilled when they saw their owners.

Lexa watched as three warriors decorated in white face paint and solid leather armour rode straight up to the front door and hopped off their horses. They drew their weapons and after exchanging words in a similar volume as Lexa had moments ago, they approached the front door and abruptly kicked it open, running through the broken frame and into the house.

Lexa looked at the door then the three horses. She could hear talking but it was increasing in volume and it wasn’t long until there was shouting being heard from inside the house, along with the sound of breaking pottery and splintering wood.

“We have to help him.” Octavia said through her cough, throwing the blankets off her shoulders and walking toward Lexa and the large wooden door. Lexa raised her hand and blocked Octavia’s path.

“This is not our fight.”

“He gave us shelter.” Octavia stated.

“We also do not have all our weapons.” Lexa countered.

“Give Levai one of your swords and I’ll give Lincoln mine. I’ll use a knife until we get inside.” Octavia stated simply.

Lexa frowned and let out a puff of air knowing they were the reason the warriors were here. She didn’t want to get involved in local problems but Octavia was right. She squeezed her hands closed into tight fists and closed her eyes. When she opened them she turned and looked back across at the house where rather than yelling, she could hear laughter that was laced with mockery.

“Lincoln will come in behind me. Give Levai your sword and remain here with the horses. Get them ready because we will leave as soon as it is done. If things do not go our way, you have to ride back to your people. Inform them of what happened and make sure Indra turns the army around to defend Polis.”
Octavia gave a small nod and with it her blade to Levai. Lexa drew both of her swords and handed one to Lincoln who waved it in the air testing the balance. When Lexa raised an eyebrow at Lincoln, he shrugged.

“I thought it would be heavier.”

“Let’s move.” Lexa ordered as she pushed the door open enough for them to get through single file and make their way over to the house.

The continued sound of objects being destroyed in the house spend their movement forward and through the doorway. The man who gave them shelter was motionless on the ground but her focus was on the three warriors turning the house upside-down. The first warrior Lexa approached had barely an opportunity to pull his sword from it’s scabbard before Lexa had run him through the stomach and finishing him with a pull sideways and taking his life.

The two Azgeda in the kitchen turned to see Lexa fell their comrade, drawing their swords to take care of the threat that appeared.

“Looks like the woman was right. We get to kill intruders after all.” one of the warriors boasted.

Lincoln and Levai intercepted the warriors as they attempted to reach Lexa. The sound of metal on metal filled the small house and Lexa walked forward with intent. One managed to knock the sword out of Lincoln’s hand and drove the hilt of his sword into his face, staggering him backward with a cloudy mind.

Trying to take advantage of a momentary two-on-one before Lexa could arrive, the Azgeda turned his sword on Levai who was busy deflecting a sword coming down from his opponent on his left and leaving him unprepared on his right. He winced, preparing for the sharp sting of metal on flesh.

The Azgeda warrior who believed he had the upper hand lost his cocky grin when a yell broke from Lexa’s throat, her body lunging the five feet across the room resulting in a tackle that sent both their weapons to the ground. Unlike the Azgeda warrior he was fighting, Levai kept his focus on the man in front of him and slammed his forearm into his nose causing blood to spill as the cartilage crunched beneath the blow.

Levai made quick work of him after his opponent dropped his sword to cover his nose with both his hands. A thrust into his chest and the man’s torment ended which allowed him to observe Lexa drive a small knife into the throat of the man who tried to take Levai’s life.

“Check on Lincoln.” Lexa ordered, but Lincoln had already re-entered the room.

“I’m fine. Looks like the guy who let us stay here is breathing too.” He said, rubbing his chin which was beginning to swell.

Their attention turned to the front door with the sound of horses and a man shouting orders. Lexa picked up one of the Azgeda swords and swung it around for a moment. After a second she handed it to Lincoln saying, “This might be heavy enough for you.”

Lincoln didn’t see it because she walked past him and in the direction of the front door, she had a small grin on her face. Levai fought back a laugh and quickly hustled to join his sister to greet the newcomers.

The rising sun filled the sky with a deep red colouring as it started to peek over the tree line to the east. What awaited them outside was a surprising sight. There were four Azgeda on horseback and two on foot.
“Frag em op!” (Kill them all!) shouted the one who seemed to be in charge of the men.

The two on foot were quickly joined by three others who jumped down from their horses with a solid thud, then they lunged forward at the trio to fighters who were ready for their assault.

The fight was more difficult that the one in the house just moments ago. These warriors were simply better than the last few they faced and they were relentless. Lexa pressed her attacks but due to being outnumbered, she couldn’t gain any ground against their opponents. Glancing at Lincoln and Levai, she could see them being confronted by the same dilemma.

Lexa fought against releasing a grunt of frustration. It seemed every time they gained advantage and would attempt to exploit an opening, their opponents would shift and the opening would close before their weapons could find purchase. It was an old tactic meant to draw one one of the three to over-extend themselves leaving them vulnerable to a waiting slice from an enemy blade. Lexa knew if they continued to fight this see-saw battle, they would begin to tire and that sloppy mistake would be their undoing.

It was a risky choice, but she decided to separate herself from Lincoln and Levai, with the hope of drawing two of the Azgeda with her. She faked a tired stumble backward and heard Levai shout her name in concern as it opened up both her sides to an attack. When a third joined the group focusing on her, likely believing they would kill her quickly then be free to go after Lincoln and Levai, Lexa stepped forward into the chest of the closest Azgeda and managed to trip him up, twisting her leg in his and spinning which sent him crashing to the ground.

She glanced at the duo who seemed to understand what she was up to. It was a risk, but she had faced worse odds and come out with minimal injuries. They were holding their own and keeping their opponents at bay while the one that still sat atop his horse was shouting warnings at his men.

The two on their feet stalked Lexa, walking in circles in an attempt to keep her focus from being on both at once. Lexa decided enough was enough and she swung the sword in her right hand around in a wide arc which led to the Azgeda lifting his sword to block. A smirk was the last thing he’d seen before his life ceased, Lexa’s sword in her left hand driven straight through his chest. She didn’t have time to pull it out as the man directly behind her ran forward and released a shout in anger.

She released the sword that was embedded in the man, letting him fall backward. Deftly sidestepping the swipe of the enemy blade from behind her, she spared a glance at the man she tripped who was nearly on his feet and would be back in the fight soon enough. The man’s attack was not meant to cause damage, it was a precise thrust intended to kill. Lexa was able to jump past the man and move behind him, sweeping her remaining sword across the back of his thigh and planting a kick in the middle of his back which sent him falling forward on his face thanks to the fresh wound in his leg. She lifted a hand to her cheek and felt the familiar warmth of her own blood and frowned.

‘Too close.’ she thought.

“Yu gonplei ste odon, branwada.” shouted the man she tripped initially. He stood still, waiting for her to approach. A different tact in his approach without two allies at his side.

“You should have stayed on the ground.” Lexa growled, taking small steps forward with her sword held above her head and the tip aimed at her opponent. “Jos yu na ai, gona.” (Just you and me, warrior.)

Lincoln and Levai were well matched against their opponents but now they were playing their own game, trying to frustrate their opponents with their own game. Their swings were short and measured whereas the Azgeda were starting to fluster, taking small chances thinking the fight should have long
been over with them victorious yet the Trikru fighters were still frustratingly persistent.

The man on the horse was agitated but he did not dismount. He clearly did not expect the tide to turn as it had, and the look of concern on his face was understandable.

Lexa chose not to delay the man’s departure from the living, casually deflecting his frantic swipes until she caught him in a lunge. She stepped forward once more but this time threw out her hip casing the man to flip over. As he rolled in the air, Lexa swung her sword in an upward swipe, removing the man’s head from his body.

Her opponents either killed or disabled, she sprinted over to Lincoln and Levai and was greeted by her brother’s voice.

“You took your time.”

Lexa would have laughed at his teasing if the sword of the Azgeda warrior he was fighting didn’t miss him by only a couple inches.

“Are you done playing?” Lexa asked, swinging her sword as more of a distraction to the two warriors who were surprised by her arrival as much as seeing their allies on the ground or rolling around in pain fifteen feet away.

Lincoln threw a fist forward and caught his opponent in the chin resulting in him being dazed. Lexa swung her blade down across the man’s arm producing a scream, a scream that Lincoln ceased by plunging his sword into the man. Their remaining opponent saw his fortune and jumped back, dropping his sword in surrender.

Their attention went to the leader on horseback who had turned and urged his horse into a gallop. Lexa’s hand went to her forearm and she pulled out a knife then stepped forward. She turned her shoulder, flipped the blade in her hand so she was holding the blade and then threw it with a slight grunt due to her fatigued state.

They all watched in anticipation as the silver metal flipped in the direction of the man. It got closer and closer and moments before it was to bury itself in the fleeing man, the horse stepped left causing the blade to fly past and miss the target.

“We have to stop him.” Lincoln said, starting to turn and run in the direction of the building that housed their horses.

Without warning, a thrum was heard in the direction of that building and the whistle of an arrow being released. The three outside hadn’t seen Octavia step from the barn with a bow or aim it at the man riding away. What the did see was the arrow lodge itself into the neck of the man, and him falling sideways off the horse to the ground below.

“A nice shot.” Lexa said, walking over to pull her sword out of the man she killed. Her attention then went to the one she wounded. Her cut was deep enough that he could not be helped, not even with the skills of the Skaikru fisa.

“Ai gonplei ste odon” the man said, begging to be released from his pain. Lexa nodded and repeated the words that not more than two minutes ago his ally attempted to mock her with.

“Yu gonplei ste odon.”

She slowly pushed her blade into the man, watching the puffs of breath in the cold air get smaller and smaller until they were no longer possible. She pulled the sword back out, walked over to the nearest fallen Azgeda and wiped her blades clean on their clothes.
“More will come to look for them.” said the familiar voice of the homeowner who had his hand on his head.

“We would be leaving a mess.” Lexa said, pointing at the bodies.

“I can deal with those. When they arrive, I’ll say it was Wuskripa. The cuts and bruises on me are all the evidence they will need. I’ll have to make the wounds a bit messier. They don’t have the precision in their swords of our Heda.”

Lexa’s group stopped their movement and turned to look at Lexa. Lincoln had begun to draw his sword in anticipation of Lexa’s orders. When she shook her head at him, he resumed readying his horse and talking to Octavia who was more than proud of her recent foray into archery. When she turned back to the stranger, he raised both his hands.

“As far as I am concerned, I have never seen any of you. If anyone found out I knew who you were I’m sure I would end up in the Azplana’s (Ice Queen’s) dungeons and my family would likely end up starving in the winter. Getting rid of some bodies to keep my freedom is a price I am willing to pay.”

“We all thank you for your hospitality.” Lexa offered then turning to walk toward her allies.

Levai had gathered up the blankets the man offered and retrieved their formerly wet clothes which were put in a large bag and waiting at the bottom of the porch stairs.

He didn’t bid them farewell, but they did hear him curse about how “the damn door is destroyed” and something about having to “replace all the damn plates and cups” as they rode away. Lincoln and Octavia rode in the rear and Levai and Lexa in front as usual. As they turned the corner to head toward what remained of the former highway leading north, Lexa turned to Levai and asked him to ride in Octavia’s place and to send her up so she could take his.

“Are you sure?” Levai asked.

“It is only fair. The closer we get to Toron, the greater the chance these situations will present themselves.”

“Do I tell Lincoln?”

“I am sure she will tell him soon after we talk. When she decides to no longer want to be in my company, you can rejoin me when she slows up to rejoin Lincoln at the rear.”

Levai nodded and slowed his horse. When Lincoln and Octavia caught up to him, they looked at him curiously.

“Lexa wants you to ride point with her for a while.” Levai explained the reason for his actions.

“Told you she liked the shot. I bet she wants me to show her how to shoot like that.” Octavia grinned, urging her horse on and nearing Lexa who kept a slow pace.

“It isn’t about the shot, is it?” Lincoln asked.

“I’m afraid not.”

When Octavia rode forward and reached a parallel position to her, Lexa could see a cocky grin on her face. She smiled a little and sat straight on her horse, drawing in a fortifying breath and decided on a way to start the conversation she knew had to happen. As she exhaled, she made her decision.
“Octavia, what do you know about Clarke?”
Chapter Summary

Clarke is forced to confront the possible reality of her actions and it forces her to re-evaluate her role in Roan and Lexa's plan to remove Nia from the Azgeda throne and the threat that Ontari represents.

Chapter Notes

A proper Christmas update!

Merry Christmas to everyone! I hope this chapter will be a nice enough gift to you all for continuing to enjoy the story. I hope you all enjoy the day doing exactly what you would like to be doing with family, friends, or just taking time to yourself to relax.

It turns out if you just edit a chapter, there is no notifications about it happening! I've decided to re-upload but as an entirely new chapter. Anyone who has read the previous edit to chapter 34, I suggest giving it a re-read as I amended/added some details.

See you all in a few days and I hope you enjoy!

The sudden sound of the room’s wooden door being driven open led to Clarke jumping up in alarm from her restful sleep. It opened so forcefully that wood splintered from it being nearly removed from its hinges.

“Clarke! You have to wake up! We have to go!”

“Wha…?” was the only sound that escaped the partially-asleep Skaikru girl who was now trying to rub the sleep from her eyes.

“I knocked but you weren’t answering. I thought they had taken you.”

The familiar voice that called out in the darkness she had recognized as Ontari’s and it was thick with relief. Clarke’s mind wasn’t quite processing what was going on, but her instincts were acutely aware that her tone evoked a concern that danger was approaching. Life on the ground had its difficulties and a great many of them were ones that were preceded or followed by violence.

“What could be threatening Toron?” she wondered. Toron was isolated thanks to the distance between itself and the other clans, even without the threat of the upcoming winter.

Clarke rolled off bed and realized she was still wearing the clothes she had on day before. She ran around the end of the bed, grabbed the jacket that hung on the corner post as well as the backpack below it that had all her books.

With her senses awakening, she could hear faint sounds of fighting from the other side of the curtained windows. They were getting louder and louder and she wondered how she managed to
stay asleep long enough to require Ontari to wake her up with such urgency.

“What’s happening?” Clarke asked as she ran forward to Ontari.

“The city is under attack. We need to get out of here before they break through the city guards.”

“Attack? I thought Toron was unreachable be armies.”

“Not the one attacking. We need to get to the horses and get you out of here. Nia said to keep you safe and that’s what I am going to do!”

Clarke nodded, following Ontari out of the room and back into the long hallway. The sound of fighting in the direction of the front of the building led Ontari to slip her hand into Clarke’s in an attempt to make sure she stayed with her but it gave Clarke a moment of pause. Ontari seemed to be indifferent to her questioning look. Ontari simply squeezed her hand tighter and urged her with a slight pull toward the rear of the building.

“There is another exit this way. Hopefully we can get out of here before…” she answered one of Clarke’s unspoken questions she could see in her eyes.

“Hod op!” (Stop!) shouted an imposing man who turned the corner ahead of them, blocking their escape. Clarke gasped when she noticed his distinctive tattoo on his face, signifying his Trikru affiliation. She pulled her hand out of Ontari’s grasp which drew a questioning look from Ontari who had now stopped moving forward.

‘Lexa’s army is here? But… how?’ Clarke wondered. Lexa would have been days behind her and her army even further behind.

Clarke’s eyes opened wide when she witnessed the man’s speed, lunging at Ontari and swinging his sword at Ontari. Ontari adeptly turned her torso to avoid the man’s attempt at finishing the fight in one stroke. His impatience was met with a flick of Ontari’s wrist, she fluidly withdrew a dagger from her belt and flung it upward into the man’s chest as he continued forward and past Ontari. The large man fell to the ground clutching at the now embedded blade directly in front of Clarke who winced at the man’s condition.

It wasn’t anything new to Clarke, to see someone die in front of her but the sense of wasted potential in life always set itself in her spirit. She knew warriors weren’t just mindless fighting machines. This man likely had a family. No doubt, he would have children who would now not have a father to help them through the winter.

“Clarke, let’s go!” Ontari reiterated, pulling Clarke from her contemplation of the man on the ground before her. She hadn’t even seen Ontari pull the dagger out of his chest but the stress was present in her voice. She pleaded Clarke to follow her her only to see two men round the corner from the stairwell toward the front of the building where fighting could still be heard. “They are breaking through the guard!”

“Du-de laik daun. Teik Wanheda au!” (She’s the one. Kill Wanheda!).

Clarke froze hearing the words from the warriors and she staggered back slightly, her mind clouded with confusion. ‘Why would Lexa’s warriors want to kill me?’

She felt Ontari’s hands on her shoulder, yanking her away from the two approaching warriors. Ontari stepped in front of Clarke and her eyes were filled with intent that Clarke had seen in someone else before. Ontari’s hand seemed to fuse around hilt of her sword that was now in her hand.
“Yo nou na teik Wanheda. Em de ona ai shil op.” (You will not kill Wanheda. She is under my protection.) Ontari growled, stalking forward at the two men which eerily reminded her of her fight with the wolves in the forest. Ontari was leading them in a deadly game that the two warriors were unprepared for.

Both warriors charged forward but Ontari’s sword was quick. Clarke winced at the loud sound of metal clashing, watching through partially closed eyes as one of the men grunted and fell to the floor unmov ing with blood quickly pooling beneath his heavy frame. She turned to focus on the remaining warrior who seemed impressed at her quick strike.

“Os fragon.” (Good kill.) the man said, decidedly taking more care in his approach to the fight.

“You don nou sin in eni diyo.”(You haven’t seen anything yet). Ontari smirked.

This man fought with the understanding that Ontari was a skilled opponent which led to his movement not progressing and waited for Ontari to take the initiative in their dance. He attempted to circle behind her in an attempt to get closer to Clarke but she mirrored his movements with Ontari’s, side-stepping to make sure Ontari remained as a buffer.

Ontari grunted and understood the game the man was playing. He was stalling. If he could keep her here, more of his allies would arrive and improve his odds. Ontari decided she had enough and started to impress upon the man she was not interested in his game. When their swords met in a loud clash, the man kicked out his leg causing Ontari to stumble slightly, eliciting a gasp and a look of concern from Clarke.

The Trikru warrior swung heavily in an attempt to knock Ontari completely off balance by using his strength to his advantage but Ontari raised her blade and deflected the sword coming down at her. He was now off balance and her elbow shot upward. The clack of the man’s teeth as they slammed together sent him dizzily staggering back as his sword fell with a clattering sound to the tiled floor. Before the man could regain his bearing, Ontari gave a level swing of her blade and separated his head from his torso.

“Clarke! Let’s move!” Ontari shouted, using her free hand to grab Clarke’s once more. The pair rushed toward the exit she described moments ago.

Clarke was torn. She knew Lexa was coming north to Toron and that she had a plan with Prince Roan but now her warriors seemed to want her dead? Clarke was unsure what was happening. Her mind continued to ask her the question, “If Lexa wanted me dead, why didn’t she kill me in the tent?’

A shiver ran through her body with one question weighing heavily on her. ‘What do I do now?’

Clarke decided to allow Ontari to lead until she could figure out what was going on. Her feet moved with purpose behind Ontari who was happy Clarke was now listening to her plea to move with more urgency. Ontari led her down the stairs at the back of the building and out into the alley behind the building. The Azgeda girl skillfully led her swiftly and carefully through alleys and they avoided the number of Trikru and Azgeda warriors who were in conflict.

“Where are we going?” Clarke asked in a quiet voice.

“We are going to the stables. When we get horses, we can head farther north. There are many places we can remain until Nia can get control of the situation and we can return safely.”

“I need to talk to Lexa. I can get her to stop fighting.” Clarke declared.
“Like she helped you and your people at Maun-de?” Ontari frowned at her naivete. “The Commander is only concerned with one thing, Clarke. Her rule over the clans. Why do you think she wants to kill you?”

Just as Clarke was about to protest, Ontari yanked her down to the ground and held her hand over her mouth, insisting Clarke be quiet with a warning look. Clarke nodded in understanding which allowed Ontari remove her hand slowly. After a few moments, Ontari and Clarke both let out the breath they had been holding. The patrol of Trikru warriors Ontari heard were passing by the street ahead but they had not been seen.

“Why are you protecting me?”

Ontari turned back to Clarke and seemed to think for a moment.

“Because the Azgeda people deserve more. With you, we might have a chance at that.”

“Why do you think that my people can help yours? With what Nia has done…”

“Nia can’t be our leader forever, Clarke.”

“What are you saying?”

“Not now.” Ontari shook her head. “Right now, we have to get out of Toron.” Ontari skipped past her question and rose from her crouched position and extended her hand to Clarke who rose without her assistance.

“We can go to Niagara Falls. There was a family I trust. They can help us.” Clarke suggested.

“It won’t be safe there. We have to go farther north. We will be safe for the winter and the hunting will be good in case we cannot return.”

“What do you mean we cannot return?” Clarke’s eyes opened with concern.

“Every one of these warriors wants to kill you. The Commander likely controls all the territory south of Toron now and with what little we have, it would be impossible to make it back to your people before Winter arrives. We would die before we get there due to the cold. That is assuming we aren’t captured and killed before that.” Ontari reasoned.

Clarke was at a loss for what to do next so she nodded and followed Ontari. She decided she had to get a message to her people some how, to let them know that Lexa would likely attack them next. Perhaps Ontari would send one of her people for her. They were able and accustomed to the colder weather.

They approached the entrance of a building that had clearly been rebuilt. Ontari had Clarke crouch down with her and they observed the surrounding buildings. Many were damaged, but the one Ontari was focused on had a stone foundation. It’s grey concrete still remained with elegant patterns etched into it and the red-orange bricks above it indicated at one time this was likely a rather exquisite building. Ontari raised her hand signaling they should wait a moment longer before crossing the street.

They had only traveled what Ontari called “ten blocks” but what would usually take seven or eight minutes turned into thirty. They were forced avoid conflicts and in order to keep Clarke’s position hidden from the warriors who had been searching for her, it took much longer than Ontari and Clarke would have liked to reach their destination.
Clarke saw that the guards had been overrun because there were Trikru almost everywhere and only in the distance could she hear people continue the fight.

“Come on!” Ontari whispered with urgency as she spied an opportunity to make the dash across the road. They both sprinted with all they had and slid through the partially open doorway of the building.

Clarke ran through the plan in her mind. They would get their horses, ride north and then once Nia had control of the city, they would return. ‘Return to what, though?’ she wondered, her wheels already spinning in her mind on an alternate plan. She would go south, back to Camp Jaha. She could figure out the rest on the way.

The wheels came to an abrupt stop when she crossed the threshold of the building when she saw Lexa standing in front of her, warriors standing beside her and she was tapping the flat side of a familiar wooden-handled knife in the palm of her other hand. She was leaning against one of the wood-frame pillars supporting the roof with an amused look on her face.

“Wanheda.” Lexa said with a mocking bow.

As she did earlier, Ontari moved to stand in front of Clarke. Lexa watched and the action elicited a smile from the Commander.

“What do you want?” Clarke asked with little patience in her voice.

“What I have always wanted, Clarke. To bring peace to my people.” Lexa answered.

“Then why did you order your people to kill me?”

Lexa ignored her question and started to stroll around the large room as if it were hers, not paying the least of attention to Clarke or Ontari aside from the words she was speaking. “Nia has no interest in peace, Clarke. She wants to kill me and put her in my place.” Lexa pointed the tip of the dagger in Ontari’s general direction.

“I wasn’t going to let that happen.” Clarke argued. “Roan and I had an agreement.”

Ontari turned and the look of shock on her face spoke volumes. Clarke returned the look with a mix of regret and apology.

“You weren’t going to negotiate with Nia?” Ontari asked, confused with admission that was just presented to her. “Why?”

“I’m sorry.” was Clarke’s meager response and the words made her feel smaller than she ever imagined she could feel. “I… it was for my people.” What was worse, is that in her mind she had become what she swore she would never be.

“So now do you understand, Clarke?”

A feeling of shock overtook Clarke, causing her to jump up in her bed. The blanket that was covering her body was now on the floor alongside the pillows that were once beneath her head. Her breath was coming in heavy forceful gulps and her body was covered with a thin layer of sweat.

The realization that she was still in her room took a few moments to set in. She was still in the twilight between the dream and being awake, even though her senses were aflame. She listened for
familiar sounds of fighting but none were to be heard. There was no Lexa standing in front of her. No Ontari looking confused at Clarke’s willingness to betray the Azgeda for her people.

“it was just a dream” she reassured herself, her heart racing in her chest.

Once she managed to reign in her sense of panic, she grabbed a shirt and put it on to cover the chill that wrapped her body now that she was no longer under the blanket.

Clarke walked over to one of the windows and pulled back the cloth to spy the street below. It was still cloaked with the cold of night and guards were spaced out in the street trying to remain warm with glowing, ember-filled braziers giving them a source of heat while they protected the city that slept. The dream felt so real, she wrapped her arms around herself for comfort as she turned around and fell against the windowsill. Her head tip backward against the glass with a sigh, trying to decipher the dream. She didn’t want to face the reality of the dream, that she would be capable of doing such a thing and she wondered, ‘That isn’t what I am doing, is it?’. Her head filled with frustration.

“There has to be a better way.” she said as a promise to herself and to those who were not present.
Forced Choices

Chapter Summary

Lexa and Octavia have an uncomfortable but unavoidable conversation about the past and Clarke.

Chapter Notes

Two chapter updates in one week?!

Hello to each and every one of you and thanks for keeping this story going with your kudos and comments! I am glad so many seem to be enjoying and continue to enjoy this story. :)

I am going to try to have the next chapter out by the 31st which means you will all have something to read in the new year so keep your eyes open for the update. Be sure to bookmark/subscribe to be notified of all the upcoming ones in the future.

See you all in a few more days and I hope you enjoy.

“Octavia, what do you know about Clarke?”

Octavia turned her head and studied Lexa for a moment in confusion but couched her reaction to the confusion question posed by the grounder leader.

‘What does she expect me to tell her?’ Octavia wondered. She looked straight forward at the road before them and contemplated her response.

“I know her about as well as I know you. You are going to have to be more specific.”

Octavia continued to keep her eyes forward, avoiding the gaze of Lexa who had been staring at her since she arrived in position beside her. She wasn’t sure what it was Lexa was looking for in an answer and she hoped by probing, she could start to understand what it was the Commander was looking for. Had she been looking at Lexa, she would have seen a small smile appearing on the leader’s face.

“What I mean is, aside from what we both mutually know about her. Clarke has gone into a very dangerous place and she does not know what is waiting for her in Queen Nia. I want you help me understand what we could be riding in to.”

“We both know Clarke will do whatever she has to in order to make things better for everyone, even at the risk of killing those she is supposed to care about.” There was a bite to Octavia’s tone.

Lexa frowned slightly. This wasn’t going to be as easy as she hoped and she closed some of the distance between the two by angling her horse slightly. Octavia noticed it immediately and lifted her chin as a response.
“Are you asking me if you think Clarke will betray you?” Octavia had to fight back a mocking scoff. “If she wanted to betray you, she would have done it in the Azgeda camp. No matter how good you think you are with those swords, you wouldn’t have beaten all of them.”

“I am more concerned about her penchant for improvisation.”

“We both know she will do what she has to and we both know what you’ve done.” Octavia’s words were a flesh wound and Lexa inhaled at the truth in the brunette’s words.

Lexa was silent for a while. Her body may have been travelling north but her mind was in the past and Octavia let her stew in it for a while. Her words had the intended effect and it was not often she would get the opportunity to chastise the leader of the Kongeda. After what she felt like she waited a suitable amount of time for Lexa’s self-reflection, she resumed the conversation.

“Lincoln explained it to me once like this. Clarke is like a puppy.”

“A what?” Lexa looked at Octavia with shock.

“Just, shut up and let me finish.” Octavia’s eyes opened wide as she realized what she just said.

Lexa stared at her and gave her a slight nod. “Continue.”

“Ok. Well, She is like a young pet, maybe not a puppy. Unless you like puppies…”

“Octavia.”

“Like I was saying, a young puppy. For some reason, you and her seem to work well together but you are like an older dog. Wait, not an older dog. But older than Clarke.”

“We are dogs, but I am an older.. dog?” Lexa was now amused but not letting it show.

“This isn’t coming out right.” Octavia took a deep breath and realigned her thoughts. “Forget the puppy thing.”

Lexa would have been lying if she wasn’t a little amused with the mix of frustration and nervousness appearing on Octavia’s face. She had been learning a lot about Octavia through her actions on this trip and how much she cared for Lincoln. In her mind, it was how she wished all Skaikru could find a life with those who were on the ground while they were living with the stars. Her skill with weapons, including her most recent act which greatly increased the respect Lexa had for her abilities. Her reflection on the Octavia ceased when she started speaking again.

“Ok. You and Clarke. You both lead your people and because of that, she trusted you but she didn’t grow up with that experience so she looked to you as one that would be best to help her people. When you did what you did at Mount Weather, you in essence showed her that no matter the cost, you would choose your people over ours.”

“Clarke understood that as a leader I had to choose as I did.” Lexa reflexively defended her actions and immediately regretted the words.

“You and Clarke kept us all in the dark about your actions and as leaders, I can accept that. I didn’t like you two choosing who could live or who could die. I may have even believed she deserved a taste of her own medicine, but when you walked away from Mount Weather, you betrayed her. She needed you, and you turned your back on her.”

Lexa’s face took on a sadness Octavia didn’t expect. She knew what he actions did and what they
cost. In asking Octavia about Clarke, she didn’t expect nor want to go down this road but it was inevitable. Had Octavia been close with the commander, she might have felt sympathy.

“I want peace, I just don’t know if Clarke wants the same thing.” Lexa suggested.

“If you can say that, then you don’t know anything about Clarke. Why do you think Mount Weather fell? Why do you think she is going into a place everyone has told her could lead to her being killed? Why has she agreed to a plan to remove Nia from power so Roan can bring his people into your coalition? For someone who is supposed to be so smart, you can’t see what is right in front of you.”

Lexa fixed Octavia with a glare that would cause most to cringe, but she was too far gone in her intent to be able to divert her words.

“I’m not stupid, Commander. Ask me the question you want to ask me, but don’t make me a pawn in whatever game the two of you are playing.”

Lexa turned to watch the two figures riding behind them. Octavia’s voice wasn’t loud, but it had aggression in it and she was still the Commander. She figured they would be too far to properly hear their conversation. When she turned back and looked at Octavia who was now glaring a hole into the Trikru girl, Lexa let her shoulders roll forward slightly and released a sigh.

“Does Clarke hate me?”

“She would be justified.” Octavia answered coolly. “I don’t know if she does or does not. After Mount weather, she came back to Camp Jaha with us and left. I’m sure you know about that.”

Lexa nodded her affirmation.

“Then what you know is what I know, aside form what your brother knows which I am sure he has told you more than he has told me. She might hate you, she could even despise you but whatever it is she is up to, I don’t doubt it is for all out people to have peace. It is the one thing about Clarke that is predictable. I do know before all this, she respected you.”

“I see.” Lexa said. What could she say? She had just been addressed in a manner only those who she truly trusted and cared for may have been permitted to do, and even then to be told to shut up was something that never occurred.

Feeling that the conversation was at an end, Lexa let some distance grow between their two horses signaling that it was over. Apparently Octavia wasn’t nearly as interested in ending their conversation. She guided her horse to the left and reclaimed the space.

“Now I want you to answer my question.” Octavia said, her eyes locked on Lexa whose eyes were now transfixed on the path forward down the road. “What is it with you and Clarke?”

Octavia saw a concerned look betray Lexa’s features and it was paired with the slight space that opened in her lips that allowed her to inhale sharply. The tightening of her hands around her reins would have been enough to betray Lexa’s emotions but Octavia was feeling lucky today and had pressed her on the subject of Clarke.

Lexa on the other hand was now confronted with the problem of trying to decide just how much she would share with Octavia. She opened this conversation by trying to gather information from Octavia and although it did confirm a little of what she already knew of Clarke, it left her open to Octavia asking what was likely the last question she wanted to answer.

“What do you mean?” Lexa asked with a mirrored curiosity. When Octavia shook her head, she
knew that wasn’t going to work.

“Afraid not, Heda. You’ll have to better than that.”

“Clarke intrigues me. It is clear your people respect her, and even though she left you all, you all follow her to the point you are willing to risk your lives to make sure she remains safe.”

“Just as you are now.”

“I’m going north in order to secure peace for the Kongeda. One that includes the Azgeda people with Prince Roan as leader of his people.”

“You didn’t once include Clarke in that explanation. I didn’t ask you about Prince Roan or the Azgeda people.”

Lexa’s frustration was visible but Octavia persisted.

“I’m risking my life to bring Clarke home and fight alongside you to get you peace. I’m not one of your people and as much as I’d like to live under a blanket of peace, I need to be able to trust those who lead. If you can’t be honest with yourself and you refuse to be honest with me…”

“Clarke is special.” The words escaped Lexa’s lips before her training had an opportunity to stop them and her eyes opened wide at the admission.

Octavia couldn’t help but sport a grin. This was a topic that she and Lincoln had discussed numerous times even before this trip to Toron. Lexa caught the knowing grin and understood that all Octavia was seeking was confirmation.

“I’m not blind, Lexa.”

Lexa felt both a sense of relief and concern wash over her. Aside from Levai, she hadn’t discussed Clarke with anyone else. Not in the sense of being anything more than leader to her people. How many people knew or had an idea of what she felt toward Clarke?

“When did you know?”

“At first? We all assumed that it was two leaders trying to do what was best for for our people. I’m certain that before Lincoln was dead in the drop ship, you would have killed us all. Clarke included. She told me about the Pauna and how you two managed to escape, after that things seemed to change between you two.”

Lexa thought back to the morning after they encountered the Pauna. Clarke was sleeping on the forest floor with her back to her. She had been up all night considering Clarke’s words about how she needed Lexa’s spirit to stay right where it was.

Clarke’s body rose and fell with each steady breath. She slept facing the fire that Lexa made because she was not used to the cold or the humidity of the forest. It took some time, but Clarke convinced her to make a very small fire that could provide a little warmth. It was then that Lexa understood that although the fire was a trivial thing, she wouldn’t refuse Clarke anything. The thought of that terrified her. There had only ever been one who could manipulate her mind into doing what her heart demanded.

“It was when I started to understand it.” Lexa nodded.

“But you couldn’t act on those feelings.”
“Love is weakness, Octavia.”

“It can also make you stronger, Lexa. I don’t know where I would be if it weren’t for Lincoln.”

“It is different.”

“You are telling me the leader of the coalition, the mighty Heda, is not allowed to be in love with someone?” Octavia questioned with a hint of amusement.

“You think me a fool for not chasing my heart, Octavia kom Skaikru?” Lexa looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

“I think that life on the ground has taught me you have to take what you want.”

Lexa shook her head. “You are still seeing things as if in shallow waters. I will be sure to speak with your Fos(First) when we return.”

“Then explain it to me. We still have three weeks before we reach Toron, or where ever you are leading us. I love Lincoln, but if I have to hear him explain how to track a deer or fire an arrow one more time, I’m going to lose my mind.”

Lexa looked at her questioningly. She still had difficulty trying to decipher Skaikru slang.

“Sorry. Trip raun.” (Get angry).

Lexa smiled and nodded her understanding. For a short while they rode in silence, enjoying the sound of birds flying above and not much else. Lexa was trying to put her thoughts in order but whenever it came to Clarke, only one thing was clear.

“There are expectations of Heda.”

Octavia’s eyes went from watching the blue sky above and the rather large honking curiosities that flew over head to the green eyes that were looking back at her.

“Expectations?”

“There are implications to my choices. If I were to choose Clarke, every decision I make and have made regarding your people will be weighed by my own and judged for their merit.”

“You lead your people. You could make them understand.”

“I am one person, Octavia. I was born with exceptional circumstance but I am not the only one and I will not be the last one. Were it to appear as though I was not making decisions in the best interest of my people, I would be replaced and a new Heda would be chosen by the spirit.”

Octavia was a little surprised at the bluntness that Lexa spoke of the possibility she would be killed and replaced so easily.

“Clarke had the same look when I told her my spirit would choose another when I die.” Lexa smiled when she saw Octavia’s unease discussing the inevitability of her death.

“But you are Heda now. Couldn’t you just allow Skaikru people into the coalition?”

“I could, and it was my intention to once your people and my people gained trust with each other. If I were offer the alliance during a moment of weakness and not from a place of power, my people would see it as such. But that is only a minor part of my reluctance.”
“Then what is truly stopping you?”

“Clarke.”

Octavia angled her head with a confused look toward Lexa. “What do you mean, “Clarke”?”

Lexa was standing on the edge of a cliff now. She could either jump and let out everything she had kept to herself or pull herself back from that edge, wrapping herself in the cloak of the Commander. She could feel her mind at war with her heart and was certain Octavia could see the conflict within her. She decided to take a step.

“She wields power over me and is like nobody I have ever known. The implication of that terrifies me.”

“I’m not following.” Octavia stated.

“I allow Clarke to challenge me in ways that endanger us both.”

“Like you riding north on a suicide mission to try to save her.” Octavia supplied.

Lexa didn’t want to admit it, but she nodded.

“If we were together, or it were made known that I had intentions toward Clarke, Nia wouldn’t hesitate to use her as leverage against me. She made a mistake last time and she would not make the same mistake again.”

“Last time? What do you mean last time?”

“Her name was Costia. We were together during my time as an initiate under the previous Heda. When I became Commander, we remained together despite the protests of Titus and various supporters I had from the ambassadors. They were concerned that my relationship may lead to war should someone use her against me.”

“So that was…” Octavia’s eyes were filled with sympathy for Lexa.

“When I sought to build a legacy of peace against the tradition of violence and retribution, Nia sought to put an end to it all by pulling me into a war as the coalition was young and I was inexperienced. She thought by using her against me that I would take my armies north, attempting to lay waste to her armies and ultimately fail. That would give her the opportunity to come north and force her will on the clans one at a time until she ruled and ultimately put an end to the Commander’s rule, replacing it with Azgeda control.”

“You didn’t take her bait and the coalition is stronger for it. All it cost you was everything.”

“Everything.” Lexa agreed.

“It still doesn’t explain Mount Weather.”

Lexa took in a deep breath then swallowed hard. She knew at some point this would be brought up and every time it was, she could see Clarke’s look of betrayal in the blue eyes staring back at her and her chest squeezed tightly making it difficult to breathe.

“Mount Weather used my people and the distance between ours as a means to divide us. They offered to free my people in front of the generals and I had little choice but to agree to their offer. Our people had an agreement, but you were and are not my people.”
“And if you didn’t take the agreement, your generals would have seen you not perform your responsibilities as leader to your people.”

Lexa nodded as Octavia continued her understanding.

“They would have seen you put Skaikru’s interests before your own people’s and you would be seen as a traitor to your own people.”

“Perhaps not a traitor, but a leader who was not placing the needs and priorities of my people before those of people who had been seen as stealing land, instigating conflicts and killing innocents.”

“That wasn’t how it…” Octavia defended but she was interrupted by Lexa.

“We know what happened, but my people do not. Not every detail as you are well aware of what would happen if it were to be made known. But that is why I had to make such a decision. I told Clarke it was for my people, but it was always much more than that.”

“We could have beaten Mount Weather together.” Octavia suggested.

“I have no doubt that would have been the eventual outcome. The problem was once the generals returned to their people, victorious or not, my time as Heda would eventually come to an end by those who feel I do not put the priorities of my people before that of invaders. Once I am no longer here to keep the peace, your people would become the target of retaliation for past wrongs.”

“So you did it all to protect Clarke and by extension all of Skaikru.”

“Yes.” Lexa answered plainly, as if she would make the choice every time the situation could present itself.

Their conversation ceased and they continued to ride alongside each other on the path to Toron. Octavia was left to consider what Lexa had explained. She had once again been forced to accept a circumstance she did not want for the sake of peace and there was nothing she could do about it.

“We will get her back, Commander.” Octavia promised, trying to lift the cloud that settled over them both.

Lexa nodded but her attention stayed on their surroundings. She knew the conversation wouldn’t be an easy one for her and she doubted Octavia fully understood what she was feeling. What surprised her was that she felt lighter. It was a feeling she hadn’t felt since before her conclave and her trip to Polis. Lexa leaned back in her saddle and took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

In that moment, she felt free.
Chapter Summary

A small group of Skaikru travels north with Trikru warriors and Raven begins to lay the groundwork for communications between Toron and Camp Jaha if things don't go as planned with the Azgeda and Queen Nia.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year to everyone!

I hope everyone had a great 2018 and that 2019 blows that one out of the water. :)

This chapter deals with the Skaikru/Trikru forces on the move from Camp Jaha and as they approach Azgeda territory, Indra wants to send a small group ahead in advance of the larger forces.

** Edit **

I have added some of the next Skaikru/Trikru chapter to this one because I think it is better suited here. If you have read the chapter, please give the end a re-read. Thanks and see you all soon!

The small force left during the early hours of the morning with the goal of riding through to the next evening and continuing that until they reach their destination. At first there were questions from the Skaikru where exactly that would be but Marcus quickly ended any speculation from his people stating that it was both he and Indra who would lead the group going north and that if any information was required, they would share it if and when it was the appropriate time.

Skaikru had only given ten of the guard to the mission which was seen by many of the Trikru going, an insult due to the much more sizable force of Trikru warriors, let alone travelling with Azgeda in their ranks. Indra followed Marcus’ lead by silencing any discontent, declaring this was a mission ordered by the Commander and any warrior who was willing to challenge it would meet justice at the end of her blade.

Having only been allowed to stop for a thirty minute break in the afternoon to stop for a warm meal to offset the cold, the large group kept a serious pace during their first day. Marcus could see Raven pulling out a small piece of technology every once in a while throughout the day then scan around the forest with her eyes and both Bellamy and Echo rode a distance from the central group and keeping to themselves, even during the lunch break.

Raven was now riding next to Marcus and this time after checking the small object, she put it away and rode up next to Marcus.

“This is where I’ll have to put the first one. If we go much farther, we won’t be able to get a signal. It
shouldn’t take me long. I’ll just need someone who can climb as high as possible, secure the box to
the tree and then aim the antenna in the right direction.”

“How long will that take?” asked Marcus.

“Not long. Ten or fifteen minutes. Tops.”

Indra was listening to the conversation and she stopped her horse, raining her hand and signaling for
all her warriors to cease their movement as well. “We should stop for the night. Our horses will need
the rest for tomorrow.”

Marcus was in agreement to Indra and he instructed the guard to dismount and prepare to camp for
the night, reminding them as Indra watched on that they would be up before dawn to continue the
trip so they’d better get as much sleep in as they could when it was possible. Indra then suggested to
Marcus that Trikru will stand guard tonight to allow the Skaikru who will need the rest after such an
unaccustomed long ride on horseback. He refused the offer but even he was feeling the soreness start
to build in his body which led him to accept her offer.

Skaikru set up their tents quite quickly and prepared to spend the night in shifts with their allies
throughout the night which was quickly approaching thanks to the sun setting in the west. When
Marcus informed them of the offer from the Trikru general, they were more than happy to accept it.
They all considered themselves in great shape, but a day on horseback forced them all to reevaluate
the notion.

They all worked together to set up the remaining tents, many of which were given by Skaikru in
order to cut down the weight they carried in order to move quicker and relieve the burden on some
hoses. Indra’s men started some small fires which they shared with their Skaikru allies. Kane searched
the groups but couldn’t see Echo and Bellamy among them. Instead, they were off to rear of the
group, starting a small fire closer to the tent Bellamy had set up.

“Echo, Bellamy. Over here.” Kane called out, directing them to the side of the path after Bellamy set
up a tent.

“What’s going on?” Bellamy asked as she was joined by Echo.

“You two are going to be responsible to help Raven set up the transmitters. She can’t climb up the
trees which means you are the lucky two who are going to be doing all the climbing for her.”

“Got it.”

Echo watched Raven pull out a small metal box with a few wires wrapped around it. From another
bag she retrieved a small metal rod from another bag and inserted it in the hole on the side of the
small box, articulating it in circles so the pair could see then she handed the box to Bellamy.

Raven explained that once they climbed the tree to it’s highest point possible with a clear line of sight
to the south, they have to secure it to the tree with some zip-straps that she held out to Echo. After
that, slight adjustment to the small rod so it was in the relatively in the direction of Camp Jaha and
she could find a trace of signal that. Once they had that, a slight adjustment and then they would
have a working radio.

“Why do you need so many?” Echo asked, looking at the bag that had many of the small boxes and
other various parts.

“The only power in these things is a small battery and the solar panels on the top of the box to charge
it. They’ll work fine but there isn’t enough juice to sent a signal very far, which is why the signal has
to hop from one to the next, and so on.”

“I see.” Echo said, trying to imagine voices bouncing through the little boxes but it was clear she didn’t quite understand. A lot of what Skaikru did she didn’t understand but if this meant it would help them stop Nia, she would be willing to use Tek to do it.

“I’ll do the first one.” Echo offered, taking the device from Raven and walking in the direction of the tallest tree around that met Raven’s requirements. Bellamy walked with Raven toward the tree that Echo had already started climbing.

“It’s going to work?” Bellamy asked aloud but he was met with a look of disgust from Raven.

“Of course it’s going to work. We’re good. Go get something to eat.” Raven said to Bellamy as she turned her attention to the girl that was skillfully climbing the tree above her. Bellamy thanked her and started to walk off toward his tent to wait for Echo to finish helping Raven.

“I have it secured.” Echo hollered down from the tree.

“Ok, now move the metal rod slowly to the left.” Raven shouted, reading the instrument in her hand. “A little more. More. Got It. Ok, leave it there. You can come down.”

Raven lifted the radio in her hand and powered it on. She clicked it over to the third channel and pushed in the talk button.

“Camp Jaha, this is Raven. Can you hear this?”

A moment later, some static returned and she could hear Abby’s voice.

“I can hear you, Raven. There is some noise on the speaker.”

“I’m afraid that isn’t anything I can fix right now. When I get stronger batteries it can be fixed but until then, this is all we got.”

“Can I speak to Marcus?”

“He’s talking to Bellamy at the moment. Can it wait until morning so the battery has some time to charge? If the battery in what I just installed runs dry before it can charge, we won’t be able to use it.”

“Alright. Please let him know I need to speak to him.”

“Is it an emergency? I can get him but it has to be really quick.”

“No. The morning will be fine. Thank you.”

“All good, Abby.”

“And Raven? Great work.”

Raven couldn’t help but smile a little bit. “Thanks, Abby.”

Approaching Marcus, Raven then handed him the handset which he accepted with a curious look on his face. Indra who was sitting beside him looked at the radio and then at Raven.

“It works?” Marcus asked.
“You are the second person to ask me that in thirty minutes. Of course it works! You people need to start trusting me when I say I can get something done.”

Marcus went to switch the handset on but Raven quickly protested his move by putting her hand on his to stop him.

“Easy there. We have to let the battery charge. Those panels still charge at night so it should be good to go in the morning. That will be the best time to radio Abby. She says she wants to talk to you but it isn’t anything urgent.”

“Thank you, Raven. Now get some sleep. I don’t know when the last time you slept was, but there is no excuse for you not to get some tonight.”

Raven turned and started walking with a much more noticeable limp in the direction of where she believed she could get something warm to eat but then spun around quickly and raised her finger to Marcus who was looking at the handset.

“If you kill that battery before it is charged, this plan won’t work. Don’t use it until the morning.”

Indra was suppressing a smile when Marcus looked at the radio in his hand and then back at Raven as if he were a child being scolded.

“No radio until the morning. Yes ma’am.” Marcus joked, now looking at Indra who found the situation as amusing as she did.

Raven accepted the promise and turned back around, returning to her search of the food that she thought was being cooked then climbing into her tent.

~*~*~*~*~*~*

Echo had watched watched Raven speak into the handset and shook her head deciding it would be best to just return to Bellamy and their tent and leave the technology Raven to her devices. Part due to her distrust of technology and knowing what it is capable of on a personal level, the other part was a complete lack of understanding how a voice from someone a full day away by horse could manage to have their voice be carried by the wind and end up in that little box.

“I don’t like those boxes.” Echo stated flatly as she sat down on the ground next to Bellamy who had managed to get a fire going while he waited for her.

Bellamy pulled her into his side as he watched the movement around camp. In response, she let her arm slide across his lower back and around his waist while letting her head rest against his shoulder.

“I know but they will help us be able to save people if things don’t go well. Technology can be used for good or bad depending on the people who have it.”

“We don’t have enough people to stop Nia.” Echo couldn’t help but feel a little deflated at saying the words aloud. The thought had crossed her mind the moment she learned that they were not going to have the might of the Commander’s army at their disposal.

“We weren’t supposed to be able to beat Mount Weather. Clarke is up there and she’ll figure something out.”

“You have a lot of faith in her.”

“It’s what she does. I don’t know how she manages to get through everything, but somehow she
always seems to.”

“Even after she ran away from your people, you all trust in her and rush to save her life.”

Bellamy threw a small piece of wood he had gathered on to the fire with a disapproving look from Echo. He knew she would want the fire to be kept low but Bellamy reasoned if they were going to be attacked, it would have little to do with his fire, more-so the 90 other people who were trying to fill their bones with a little warmth before going to sleep.

“Even after.”

“What do you think of the others? The Commander and your sister?”

Echo felt his posture stiffen when she mentioned his sister.

“I don’t know, but they are probably keeping out of sight and trying to stay warm just like we are.”

Bellamy didn’t want to think about his sister any more than he already had in the day. She was an almost constant source of worry for him when she departed with the group from the Azgeda camp and not being able to be there for her was getting more difficult by the day.

“Lincoln is skilled and so is the Commander. The one who was poisoned, Levai, seems like he is also capable so I think your sister is in capable company.”

“They shouldn’t have gone alone. We should be there.”

“But, we aren’t there. We are here and I think we should go in the tent.”

Bellamy grunted and took notice of the others who were starting to enter their tents to go to sleep for the night. They were fortunate that Indra suggested Skaikru all get rest the first night. The days ride took it’s toll on all of them and it was visible in the way everyone was moving slightly hunched over, their hands rubbing their sore lower backs.

When Bellamy tried to rise, he grunted and looked over to Echo who was already standing and offering Bellamy a hand. He accepted it and it even looked like he didn’t let it affect his pride too much that she was able to move freely and without soreness.

“Get in and remove your clothes.”

Bellamy couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows in question but she shook her head and smirked. “Then I want you to lay down on your stomach. I’ll stretch out your muscles and it will help you sleep.”

“A massage?”

“If that is what your people call it. Touching without expectation of more.”

Bellamy crawled into the Skaikru tent he had brought and once Echo climbed in after him, he removed his clothes. After a good thirty minutes of Echo kneading and pressing on his frame, Bellamy felt like he was floating. He was still a little sore, but in comparison to how he felt after the ride and when he tried to stand up after sitting on the ground, this was heaven.

He felt her press a kiss between his shoulder blades and her fingertips slid down his spine one last time before she climbed off and laid down next to him. He turned to look at her and she could see her efforts reflected in his eyes and with the content smile on his face.
“Do I get one of these every night?”

Echo laughed then gave him a poke in the side which forced him to jump a little in surprise.

“If you ever want another one, you’ll give me the next. I may know how to ride a horse, but I’m made of the same skin and bones you are.”

“And here I thought Azgeda were supposed to be hardened warriors.”

“You doubt my prowess?”

“That depends…” Bellamy said, closing the space between them and pressing a kiss against her lips and biting down softly on her bottom lip. When he pulled back, he rolled over on his stomach and watched Echo’s reaction to his words.

He had expected her to say something but instead lunged forward and smashed their lips together. For a moment he thought about the proximity of the other tents but when he felt her hand slide down his stomach, he groaned and began to pull at her shirt in an effort to help her out of her clothes.

Her hand gave a squeeze once it reached it’s destination and he moaned, leaning his head back which gave her the opportunity to sit straight up and remove the remaining articles of clothing she had on while he observed with darkened eyes.

Echo lifted her leg over him to a similar position she was in earlier as she had given him a massage. Again, she had total control over him and her hand found what she was searching for. He grunted again and when he looked up at her, she returned his gaze with the same want and lowered herself down, feeling his desire fill her completely.

He sat up and wrapped his arms around her and hers around him, their lips south the others while their tongues danced and their bodies moved in sync with each other. Echo’s breath began to catch in her throat and she let out a quiet whimper when Bellamy lowered his head and grazed her nipple with his tongue before taking it in his mouth. She was trying to keep quiet but there wasn’t anything she could to to stifle the loud moan that escaped her mouth.

Bellamy leaned forward with Echo holding on to his shoulders for support while he slowly lowered her on to her back. She let her hands release their from his shoulders once she was on her back and let them trail down his chest, returning the favour by pinching his nipples while staring directly into his eyes.

He accepted the challenge and lowered his head once more, but this time she lifted her chest from the floor, driving her need into his hungry mouth and relishing the feel of his tongue and teeth on her and letting out another moan. Bellamy’s mouth worked it’s way upward, along her collarbone and to her pulse point where he lingered, receiving an appreciative whimper from Echo beneath him.

Echo turned her head, pressing her lips into Bellamy’s shoulders while her hands wrapped around his upper back, pulling him in to her and allowing her to moan into his shoulder as their pace quickened.

“Teik ai, Bellamy. Jok ai.”(Take me, Bellamy. Fuck me.) she whispered in his ear, urging him on.

Her words lit a fire in Bellamy that matched the one burning in her. He leaned up slightly, placing his weight on his arms, causing his muscles to flex as he increased the pace he thrust into her, only to be matched by her rolling her hips to take him as deep as she could.

Echo cried out as she came, her body shaking at the sensation that ran through her. She pressed
herself upward onto Bellamy, urging him to cum. Her request was met by his moan and a slowing tempo of thrusts that allowed them both to savour the feeling that consumed their bodies.

Their breath began to relax and Bellamy pulled himself from Echo who immediately missed the feeling of him inside her but still basked in her post-orgasm glow. She bit her lip and let her hands roam over her body, closing her eyes and smiling then turning to Bellamy and pressing her forehead against his chest, unable to find the words.

She felt him kiss the top of her head and she slid herself over so their chests were pressed against the other then she threw her arms around him. When she felt him do the same she tried pulling their bodies even closer together if it were possible.

It wasn’t long before Echo’s breath had evened out and the arms that clung to him tightly began to loosen slightly. Bellamy smiled knowing she had fallen asleep and trusted him enough to do so in his arms. He kissed the top of her head once more as the pull of sleep began to take over in him, closing his eyes to sleep.

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"You should sleep as well. Your Skaikru bones aren't used to this kind of travel. All of you are wearing it on your bodies when you walk." Indra grinned at Marcus as they ate their dinners.

"I've fallen from the sky and I'm still here. I think I'll manage for a little while yet." Marcus replied.

"We are getting close to the Azgeda border, another day if we push hard and we will be there."

"Should we slow out progress so we spend one more night in Trikru lands?"

Indra shook her head and took a mouthful of the stew she was eating.

"We can not slow down. Every day we spend not moving is a day closer to winter. I have a plan."

Marcus lifted a full spoon of his own dinner and continued eating, waiting for her idea.

"I want to send Bellamy and his Azgeda north. They can scout for us, let us know of any trouble that might be waiting."

"You want them to go alone."

"They can travel light and fast. Faster than we can and she knows the territory better. If we fall into an ambush, we will be slaughtered and Heda's plan will fail."

"You think they would attack us? Even if I'm am going north as a representative of Skaikru?"

"People go missing in the winter. I doubt Nia would mourn the loss of a handful of Trikru warriors and a couple Skaikru ambassadors. People aren't the only animals that hunt in the woods."

Marcus watched as Bellamy and Echo started to make their way into their tent across the camp after Echo kicked dirt on the small fire in front of it. Indra's plan made sense and it would help to have them ahead of the larger group.

"Perhaps they could bring Raven and set the transmitters ahead of us. They could radio back to us if they come across anything that could pose a problem for us. The only danger is someone deciding they don't want Raven setting up those transmitters and informing the wrong people."

Indra agreed. It was a risk to send Raven with Bellamy and Echo but one that would benefit them in
that it would prevent the possibility of an ambush. If they didn't hear from the Skaikru girl on her radio, then they could prepare themselves for whatever might becoming for them.

"I think it is worth the risk."

"So do I." Marcus said, looking back at the tent they just climbed into. "I'll tell them in the morning. They will have to keep a faster pace than we do which will be difficult on Raven. Her leg is a liability for her."

Indra looked in the direction of Raven who was eating some stew with some Skaikru guards and laughing.

"It is a greater risk that Nia decides to travel south with her armies and forces you to give her control of Maun-de. She will kill your people if she gets it or not."

Marcus frowned but nodded his understanding. Giving Nia control of Mount Weather gives her control over everything and there would be nothing to stop her from demanding total obedience from Skaikru once she wields the missiles located beneath the mountain.

"Get some sleep, Marcus. We will find less opportunities in the future to be able to find peaceful sleep in enemy territory." Indra advised her friend as she stood up and rested her hand on his shoulder. "If you think you are sore right now, wait until tomorrow night." she grinned and walked away casually toward her tent.
Sharing The Burden

Chapter Summary

The last time we saw Clarke, she was confronted by a nightmare, brought on by her inability to do anything more than wait for others to act and she decided it was time to find her own opportunities.

In this Chapter, Clarke is confronted by the uncertainty of her situation of being alone and in hostile territory. Will she confide in someone she isn't sure she can trust and if she does, what happens if the trust is misplaced?

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!

I know, I know. It was WAY too long a delay in the updates and I’m sorry. Thank you for your patience and I swear updates will be done weekly(again) and I won't rush them, but the next few will be coming out in short order. There are a few changes I made which I'm really happy about and I hope you will enjoy.

This update is a little longer than the last few. It is pretty heavy but it leads perfectly into the next chapter where things get a LOT more uplifting for Clarke(well, as much as it can for being in Azgeda territory, surrounded by enemy warriors and under the thumb of Queen Nia).

Thanks for continuing to read this story, as well as comments and kudos for those who are enjoying(or not enjoying in the case of commenting).

See you all again soon!

Clarke stared at the the aged paint which was cracked and curled on the ceiling above her bed while trying to rub out the stress forming in the tense muscles of her neck. The tight frown she was wearing had begun to make her head throb in a painful rhythm due to being frustrated at the inability to come up with any rational idea to get beyond the situation she had found herself in. The flurry of ideas in her mind that came up wanting only emphasized how dependant she had become while waiting for others.


Lexa.

As Clarke’s thoughts so often did on the trip to Toron, she couldn’t escape the memory of the green-eyed Trikru woman. Lexa, Commander of the Kongeda who was bringing her army and travelling north. Travelling with the same army that was supposed to be there at Mount Weather but left her to face Cage Wallace, Emerson, and the faces of her friends who all hated her for choosing who got to
live and who got to die. Like Finn, like Tondc.

Roan had explained numerous times that Lexa’s army would be there to aid his allies if those who supported Nia began to get the upper hand which led to numerous questions Clarke couldn’t get answers to until Prince Roan returned because she couldn’t risk revealing herself to Ontari. There were just too many questions she could not answer.

‘Does Lexa have spies in Toron?’

‘How will they know when to attack?’

‘Is Lexa in communication with Prince Roan now?’

‘Where is she?’

‘Is she alright?’

Those questions consumed her thoughts and added yet another layer of frustration. Clarke grabbed a pillow and squeezed it tightly, pulling it over her face and letting out a scream in an attempt to break free from her cascading thoughts. She didn’t even realize that tears were escaping her clenched eyes.

Then Lexa’s voice filled her head.

“You’re doing what I did when I first took command. We can’t move forward and it’s giving you too much time to think.”

“Then tell me what to do!” Clarke shouted into the pillow. “I don’t know what to do!”

She removed the pillow from her face and rolled on to her side, squeezing the pillow tightly to her chest and bringing her knees upward to her chest. It was only when a knock on her door and a rough, sandpaper-like voice brought her back to the present that Clarke remembered there were guards posted right outside in the hall.

“Wanheda, do you require help?”

She wiped her eyes with her hand and sniffled softly, trying to hide the knowledge she had been crying.

“I’m fine. Thank you.”

“Ontari has been sent for. She will be here shortly.”

“That is alright, I don’t need her.”

“They are her orders.”

Clark groaned, sitting up in her bed then slid herself backward to rest against the lightly-coloured wooden headboard. She glanced toward the curtained window and took in that it was still dark outside. She had no idea what time of night it could be so she decided to ask the guard.

“Can you tell me how long before sunrise?”

The reply came from a much softer, feminine voice that sounded from the hallway. “In an hour.”

Ontari had arrived and with a sudden push that startled Clarke, Ontari threw the door open and entered the room with a startled eye, her movement deliberately slow. She walked in holding her
sword forward, guarding from any attacks yet clearly poised to strike should she find the need as her brown eyes devoured the room.

“Clarke?”

“I said I was fine, Ontari. I told them you didn’t need to come.”

Ontari’s posture relaxed. She let her arms lower but still walked over to the desk in the room, her eyes scanning the anyone who could be hiding in the shadows and if Clarke was just unable to warn her. Once she had decided they were truly alone, she returned to the door where a guard, the one Clarke presumed had told her Ontari had been summoned, handed her a lit candle. She walked back in Clarke’s room and proceeded to light the shorter candle that sat on the desk. The glow from both candles illuminated the room with a calming orange glow.

“What is it that could rouse Wanheda from her sleep under the protection of all Nia’s warriors?” Ontari asked with a hint of worry in her voice.

“I’m not used to the bed.”

It was all Clarke could think of to say. This version of Ontari bothered her more than she wanted to admit. She was free from her armour, wearing a thin shirt and a pair of leggings and her hair was tossed loosely as evidence she’d been awoken from sleep. Her voice even carried a concerned tone which seemed genuine. She figured Ontari didn’t believe her and when she turned around, she had a soft smile on her face that reached her eyes and told Clarke she was fine with the lie.

“They can take some getting used to. Especially after traveling north for as long as you had.”

Ontari lifted the sword in her hand and placed it across the desk, freeing her hand to pull out the chair that was behind it. With a candle in one hand and the chair in the other, she moved next to the nightstand and sat down.

She extended her arm and gently placed the candle on the nightstand. When her eyes caught sight of the postcards on the bedside table on top of Clarke’s sketch book, Clarke saw her eyes widen in surprise, then she looked at Clarke while pointing at the stack.

“May I?”

Clarke nodded, her eyes taking in the reaction of Ontari as she picked up the pile of cards. The drawings she made on the reverse side were facing upward and Ontari took her time examining them.

Ontari studied the colourful portrait side Clarke had drawn and then turned them over to look at the buildings in their former glory. Clarke could only watch the dark-haired girl flip the cards and wonder how she could go from a stone-cold warrior in one moment, to this girl who now had a smile as she examined her drawings. After a considerable amount of time, she finished looking at them and replaced them on the small stand.

“They are beautiful pictures, Clarke.”

“Thanks. I… They are for you.”

“For me?” Ontari seemed confused. “But I gave them to you. Clarke…”

Clarke raised her hand and shook her head, interrupting Ontari.
“I made them so that you can remember the progress that has been made since Praimfaya. Your people took a city that was in ruins and built it into a place where your people have a future.”

“My people…” Ontari whispered.

Ontari seemed to have something more to say, but instead she simply produced a big smile and reached over to pick up the cards again, glancing at them once more then thanking Clarke for the cards.

“Toron was once just like it is now.” Clarke said.

Clarke could see a puzzled look appear on Ontari’s face as if she didn’t understand.

“What I mean is, the potential is here for something great. Those buildings weren’t all built the moment the city was created. It took hundreds of years and many people to make them happen.”

“It was my grandfather’s dream.” Ontari mumbled, staring at the stack of cards in her hands. Clarke could hear the sadness in her voice.

“You were close with him?”

“He spent a lot of his time explaining his vision of Toron when I accompanied him on his trips to the outlying villages when I wasn’t training.”

“Maybe one day his vision can come to life through you.” Clarke extended her hand and tried to take hold of Ontari’s, but when she made contact, Ontari’s posture stiffened and she pulled back, rising from the chair and retreating to the desk to reclaim her sword. Clarke was taken aback by her sudden change of mood.

“Thank you for the gift, Clarke. I assume you won’t be going back to sleep so I will have breakfast brought now.” Ontari’s voice had become hard.

Clarke watched Ontari’s figure vanish from the room, sitting motionless on the bed and at a complete loss for what just occurred. She tried to reason out what she’d done this time to upset Ontari as she ate the breakfast that was brought by the servants and could only assume the she was uncomfortable with her grandfather being a topic of discussion.

‘But why?’ she wondered.

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Clarke had eaten her breakfast and received a visit from a guard, explaining that he was to escort her to Ontari who was waiting at the training fields. Eager to leave the room and step outside in the fresh air, it was not long before she was dismounting from her horse directly in front of the entrance of the training fields. Ontari stood there watching Clarke dismount from her horse.

“You are a lot better at riding than I originally believed.” Ontari commented, a smirk on her face. “Next I’ll find out you understand and speak Triegedasleng.”

Clarke felt it right to match her smirk with one of her own as Ontari directed her through the front gates to see the rows of warriors standing at attention. ‘There has to be at least two thousand warriors.’ Clarke’s eyes opened when she realized how many warriors there had to be at her assessment.

“Everyone keeps some secrets.” Clarke
Ontari nodded her head in agreement. “Truer words have never been spoken, Wanheda.”

Clarke stopped for a second and regarded Ontari who just continued to walk forward in the direction she was leading them. She did slow for Clarke to catch up without having to run.

“What are we doing here?”

“A display of strength. Nia wanted you to see her warriors as they train.”

“And you?”

“I could fight if you wish me to, though there won’t be a match. Roan used to be, but then I received training.”

“You are saying you are the greatest of Nia’s warriors?”

“Not a single warrior here would dare risk the offence to Nia if I were to become injured. Prince Roan and I train but even he is worried what his mother would do to him should he inflict a serious wound.”

“Then how did you get to be so skilled with a sword?”

The girl from Clarke’s room earlier returned when she turned and gave her a small grin. There was something else in her eyes and Clarke didn’t realize she was returning the smile.

“Secrets, Clarke.”

Ontari turned her head to look at the rows of warriors and the smile vanished from her face. Clarke saw it again, her ability to become someone completely different in a moment. Her thread of thought snapped when Ontari unsheathed her sword and shouted to the warriors that were assembled.

“Gona! Tich Wanheda kaina uf oso gada in?” (Warriors! Who will Wanheda how strong we are?)

The warriors all shouted in unison at her call for a display of strength. The sound reverberated in Clarke’s chest and her breath caught for a moment. She’d seen Trikru warriors, even been forced to kill three hundred - but this was something else entirely. Although Lexa had spoken of her army being large, she’d only ever seen a portion of it that had been brought to Mount Weather.

“Chon na throu daun gon Azgeda?” (Who will fight for Azgeda?) Ontari shouted once more, receiving replies from two men Clarke could only consider experiments gone completely right.

They were shockingly imposing warriors and as they approached, Clarke’s heart rate sped up. Their eyes weren’t like a typical warriors who took orders, they were calculating and hungry. Their beards twisted into a braid that Clarke later would learn were their rank of standing in the army and the two that approached were two of their most experienced combatants.

“Wanheda,” Ontari’s voice was quieter when she spoke, but as she continued, her voice lifted so the warriors present could all hear her words. “These two generals, Argan and Otek kom Azgeda will show you how a lifetime of training and dedication has given them the ability to become the finest warriors in Nia’s army!”

The warriors erupted and began chanting. Clarke couldn’t help but feel goosebumps roll up her arms and a slight shiver roll up and down her back. At a loss for words, she didn’t know what to say so she just nodded her understanding. Ontari gave a very slight grin knowing the sensations that were assaulting Clarke’s body because she was feeling it too. Turning to her warriors, she ordered the
combatants to begin.

The chanting and cheering gradually slowed and then stopped. Aside from the two warriors who began to circle each other, not a sound could be heard other than the large birds that flew overhead in a southward direction. The ground beneath their feet was hard and their feet scraped lightly on the brown earth below. Thanks to the cold that seemed to wrap itself around everything, white puffs of air escaped everyone’s lips and noses as they breathed. Everyone tense, waiting for the first flurry of movement.

The first clash of steel nearly made Clarke flinch but she held herself steady until she got used to the sound. The two warriors swung fast, teasing and testing the other to draw them into exposing the a weakness in their movement. Neither willing to fall into a trap set by the other. Their skill and patience on full display.

Clarke leaned over, whispering to Ontari who seemed surprised by the Skaikru woman’s actions.

“Should they be using swords for an exhibition?”

“There are no exhibitions for Azgeda, Wanheda. A gona would take risks they would otherwise avoid if the possibility of death is not present. This ensures complete dedication to the task at hand and what will keep a gona focused and alive when they require it most.”

Clarke frowned at the news that one or both of these warriors could become injured as spectacle in her honour. Her words struck a nerve in Clarke, knowing exactly what Ontari meant. Her people were hard for a reason. They trained this way for a reason and that understanding took her back to a place she had fought to forget.

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Lexa stood in front of her table, sorting her maps and when Clarke entered the tent Lexa ceased her actions and focused on the new arrival. She could see the conflict in the jade-green eyes beneath the black warpaint, and the restless movement of the Commander which indicated some nervousness.

“You sent for me?”

“Yes. Octavia has nothing to fear from me.”

For the first time, Lexa looked down and away from Clarke in their discussion. It wasn’t the first time she didn’t allow her wall of being the Commander down, but it was the first time Clarke found her uncertain of her words.

“I do trust you, Clarke.”

“I know how hard that is for you.”

Clarke could see a part of the Commander reappear when Lexa turned and stepped closer to her, trying to recover the part of her in control, showing Clarke in her actions and in her words who she has to be in order to lead her people but Clarke refused to move back.

“You think our ways are harsh, but it’s how we survive.”

“Maybe life should be about more than just surviving. Don’t we deserve better than that?”

“Maybe we do…”
In that moment, a loud thud snapped her from her daydream. Rather than it being Clarke who pulled away, it was the disappearing image of Lexa’s ghost replaced by the crashing thud of a body being driven into the earth and the sight of a sword being swung violently downward at the warrior who was still grimacing from being knocked down.

“Stop!” Clarke called out, watching the sword come to rest mere inches from the face of the defeated gona.

Ontari looked over at Clarke, frowning at her calling the fight to a premature end.

“He has won. It is his right to claim victory.” Ontari explained.

“He is not going to kill that man. Nobody is going to die for me.”

Clarke turned and walked in the direction of the training yard entrance, leaving Ontari stunned and unsure of what to do aside from dismissing the two combatants and ordering the warriors to their daily routine of training. Clarke could hear the rapid footfall of someone running behind her and assumed it to be Ontari.

“Wanheda.”

Clarke continued, ignoring the voice while increasing her pace away from the training yard. She hadn’t chosen any direction in particular, she just needed to get away. She had managed to travel nearly a block from the training ground and she turned a corner trying to create more space. She could hear Ontari a few steps behind her.

“Clarke.” Ontari implored.

Clarke refused to acknowledge Ontari until she felt the brunette’s hand wrap around her bicep and lightly requesting she stop moving away. Clarke yanked her arm free, spun where she stood and glared at Ontari.

“You were going to have someone kill just to try to impress me?”

“I didn’t want to.”

“Then what the hell was that, Ontari?”

Ontari let out a sigh and Clarke could see a familiar battle in the Azgeda girl’s eyes.

“Nia. The rules of combat are hers and all warriors must adhere to them.”

“Well maybe Nia shouldn’t be the one making the rules.” The words slipped from her lips before she had a chance to evaluate them and the look on Ontari’s face as she processed the words was a mix of anger and shock.

Before Clarke knew it, Ontari covered Clarke’s mouth with her hand and forcefully shoved her into the door of a building that was in the process of being re-purposed and thankfully empty. The look in Ontari’s eyes gave Clarke the realization that she had threatened the life of the Queen. Ontari pushed Clarke all the way to the back of the brick walled room and Clarke felt her back slam against the hard surface. The only thing that stopped her head from whipping back and cracking against it was Ontari’s hand which cradled between them. Ontari leaned forward and hissed her next words.
“If you threaten Nia, it won’t matter if you are Wanheda. It won’t matter if you can give her Maunde. It won’t even matter if you presented her Lexa’s head as tribute. She will kill you.”

Clarke had regained her senses and she attempted to shove Ontari off her. Unfortunately, Ontari was much stronger than her and she shoved Clarke back against the wall. Clarke seemed to want to try again but the look in Ontari’s eyes was enough to prevent it.

“You think I don’t know why you are here, Wanheda?”

Clarke’s appearance was stiff and she refused to take the bait of Ontari’s words. She was fishing. Trying to provoke a response by using her words as bait.

“I was there that night in the woods. Heda is skilled, there is no doubt of that but her assumption she could sneak into the middle of an Azgeda camp to speak with you and not be seen is laughable.”

The colour in Clarke’s face disappeared with the realization that Nia may know everything that has been planned by her son and the Commander of the Kongeda and by coming north, Clarke has led them all into a trap. In a slight panic she lifted her hands in surrender, startling Ontari.

“Ontari…” Clarke began but she was cut off by Ontari’s hand reached up and grabbed Clarke by her throat, shoving her back against the wall. Once she realized Clarke’s intention wasn’t to be aggressive, she let go, lifting her own hands in apology.

“You need to be more careful. You are Clarke kom Skaikru, destroyer of Maunde. You killed 300 of the Commander’s finest warriors.”

“I can’t justify people killing for sport. Not for me or for anyone.”

“You have no idea what she is, Clarke. What she is capable of. You may be Wanheda, Commander of Death, but Nia doesn’t fear you like many who whisper your name.”

“Then why am I here? Why aren’t you taking me away to sit in a cell until Nia returns?”

“Nia is already back, Clarke. She returned last night. The reason I am not taking you prisoner is I am still trying to decide what it is you want. If I hand you over to Nia, I won’t get answers and you’ll be telling Nia whatever she wants to know moments before she kills you.”

Clarke let the words settle. Again, the feeling that she was just a pawn in a game that she was not in control of unsettled and frustrated her. She decided it was time to take some control back.

“If you want answers, I expect some in return.”

“That is only fair, but not here.”

Clarke watched Ontari turn her head slightly, her attention on the entrance of the building.

“If anyone asks you, Nia in particular, why you stopped the combat I want you to explain that to let one of Nia’s generals die in an exhibition would have been a waste of experience as well as a loss of a skilled sword on the battlefield.”

“What?”

Clarke could hear the sound of feet approaching and as two gona stopped directly outside the building and looked inside, Ontari pressed herself up against Clarke. The intrusion left her wide-eyed but out of view of the two who were observing the pair in the building. What startled Clarke even
more was when Ontari leaned in without warning, kissing Clarke with passion and pulling her body even closer to her own if that were possible. She was about to try and push her away when she heard one of the men at the door.

“Let’em be. Probably wound up from the fight, need to work it off.”

Clarke could hear the words but didn’t hear the men walking away. She recognized what Ontari was trying to do and in response, lifted her hands so one rested behind Ontari’s back and the other behind her head. In one swift motion, Clarke spun Ontari so her back was against the wall and took the role of aggressor, surprised to hear a slight moan escape Ontari’s throat.

“C’mon. Stop staring or she’ll have us both in a cell when they get done.”

When Clarke was certain the men were gone, she pulled back, gasping for air. Ontari was likewise out of breath with her chest heaving as she pulled in air. When she opened her eyes, Ontari’s were still closed and her hands were pressed flat against the wall behind her.

“That was an impressive display at improvisation.” Clarke smirked. Once Ontari opened her eyes and stepped forward from the wall, her face flushed.

“It was all I could think of.”

“All you could think of was kissing me?”

“Nia would question us for being alone in here. It would have appeared suspicious.”

“So the alternative is to lie to her and say we were making out on purpose?”

“It complicates things, but now our fates are entwined. No doubt our display will be shared among the warriors because gona thrive on gossip, especially if it involves Nia’s daughter. If anything, it strengthens your position with Nia.”

“How could that possibly strengthen my position with Nia?”

“If she thinks we care for each other, there is less of a chance she would present your head to the Commander.”

“My WHAT?”

Ontari frantically motioned for Clarke to keep her voice down, glancing past Clarke toward the door. She lowered her voice to a whisper. “Nia’s spies have informed her that Heda is not in Polis, nor is she in Tondc.”

“What does that have to do with Nia killing me?” Clarke’s tone lowered to match.

“Nia knows the Commander cares for you.”

“She doesn’t. She wouldn’t have left me at Mount Weather if she cared.” Clarke’s shoulders dropped slightly at the words, even though she was trying to remain as deflective as possible to the emotion that had begun to bubble up in her chest. “If someone cares about you, they don’t leave you alone.”

“That is the only reason you are still alive.”

“The only reason?”

“Nia doesn’t fully believe you will give her what she wants in Maun-de, but she knows there is no
way you will offer her all that she wants. That Lexa left you to deal with Maun-de on your own makes the case that she doesn’t care for you, or that she doesn’t care about you enough to want to save your life.”

The words hit Clarke like a punch in the chest. “she doesn’t care about you…”

After a moment of staring forward, Clarke could see the concern building in Ontari’s eyes that perhaps she had made a mistake. She opened her mouth but nothing came out.

“Clarke, I just shared information that would get me killed by the woman who calls herself my mother. If I am going to risk my life with yours, I think you had better share something with me before I change my mind.”

Clarke closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. She could hear Ontari’s uneven breath, tense as she took in and released the air from her lungs. ‘Is she lying? How can I trust Nia’s daughter?’ When she opened her eyes, Ontari stood there, her arms down at her side and the look on her face had concern that was repeated in her nervous brown eyes.

“You are right. I will not give Nia possession of Mount Weather.”

Ontari frowned at the information Clarke offered. “I already know that.”

Clarke tried to think of any detail about her agreement with Roan that she could share that wouldn’t reveal the reason she was in Toron, but everything she knew from Lexa’s trip north with her army, along with those who supported Roan in his quest to overthrow Nia would lead to complete and utter defeat should word reach Nia. Clarke fought with her herself and the notion she could trust the girl in front of her. Ontari was fully aware of a struggle that was being fought in Clarke’s mind, but what she wasn’t privy to was Clarke’s how much she wanted to trust Ontari and to have an ally to confide in.

There was no escaping Toron if Ontari was setting her up. She would be killed, and likely used as an example or even worse, leverage against Abby who would do everything in her power to try to save her. If Abby surrendered Mount Weather, she doomed the Kongeda because Lexa would be killed. Not killed by a missile, but by Nia after giving herself up to save as many of her people as she could.

Nia certainly wouldn’t give Lexa the luxury of a quick death.

Clarke stepped back and her walls started to go up but Ontari walked forward, keeping their distance near. Clarke raised her hands and they were shaking slightly, Ontari reached out and grabbed them, urging her with her words.

“Trust me, Clarke.”

When Clarke’s eyes glazed over and the first tear fell from her eye, down over her cheek to her chin, Ontari sighed with sympathy. She’d seen this before in warriors who had their spirit full to the point it overflowed with fighting and death. Whatever war was going in in Clarke’s mind, Ontari knew that the weight of it was as much if not more than Clarke could handle. The truth in Clarke’s tears spoke volumes as they ran down her cheeks.

Ontari released Clarke’s hands allowing them to fall to Clarke’s side. Clarke was in a daze, staring at the ground and unmoving, without a thought in regard to what to do next. The familiar feeling of being trapped, unable to stop what was happening washed over her. She didn’t know when Ontari had let go of her hands, only that now the girl was wiping the tears from her face with her thumb, the palms of her hand resting gently on both sides of her cheeks. Ontari exerted a little pressure urging
her to look up into her eyes. She let her head tilt upward and she looked into Ontari’s eyes. Her brown eyes that confused her with signs of assurance that was followed by Ontari’s calm, whispering voice.

“You’ve come to kill Nia.”
Heda's Awakening

Chapter Summary

The group of Lexa, Octavia, Levai and Lincoln have been travelling north for weeks, surviving the cold temperatures and avoiding the occasional Azgeda scouts who patrol the lands by order of their Queen.

Lexa has been sacrificing her health in order to protect the group but concern from the trio regarding her lack of sleep and her agitated demeanor. After a particularly difficult night, Levai decides to take matters into his own hands and confronts a Heda who he believes has lost her way.

Chapter Notes

Chapter update time!

I hope everyone is enjoying their day and enjoys this update! Thanks as well for comments and Kudos, letting me know you are enjoying the story. :)

Chapter explanation:

Lexa has a crisis of character and Levai helps her wade through the swamp that is her emotional swamp by reminding her of who she has always been, even if she deviated from it for a little while. By doing so, she will hopefully find clarity in purpose.

Upcoming chapter details:

Chapter merges!

Skaikru and Lexa chapters will be combining which means tighter chapters and less waiting for chapters.

Lexa startled forward from the tree she was leaning against, ripping herself from sleep and instinctively let her fingers find the leather-wrapped hilt of her sword that she slowly freed it from it’s sheath. Her eyes weren’t as sharp as they normally were and she was scanning the forest around her with frantic eyes, devoid of the usual calmness that that always defined her.

Scolding herself for falling asleep, she rose into a crouching position. Lexa promised to herself at the beginning of this journey to keep them alive and now she’d endangered them all by falling asleep. The smell of a fire to her right pulled her senses closer and she turned to see Lincoln and Octavia crouched around a very small fire a fair distance away and Levai a few feet behind and beside her.

“You fell asleep during my watch.” Levai said. “I decided you needed it.”

“You should have woken me up. And I said no fires.” Lexa’s words had bite, but it wasn’t meant for him.
This morning was exceptionally cold. So much so, Lexa stood up and joined them to take advantage of the heat the tiny fire provided. When Levai threw another broken branch on the fire, Lexa frowned. Everyone who might be travelling by may smell their fire and seek it’s warmth which meant they could be discovered.

“Keep it low and when we leave, nobody is to know it was here.” Lexa said, rising and walking away from the group into the forest.

“What’s got her more upset than usual?” Octavia whispered.

The trees in the forest were silent thanks to all the leaves falling earthward and leaving branches free from the rustling that once hid their conversations. Their voices carried which meant the closer they got to Toron, the greater number of Azgeda and the likelihood they could be found.

“Nothing I haven’t seen before.” Levai answered, watching his sister walk off with her arms linked across her chest.

Octavia was adjusting herself to stand up but Levai shook his head, motioning her to remain seated next to the fire.

“Twenty minutes and we will be on our way. Take advantage of the fire because it doesn’t look like the sun will be making an appearance today.” He said, pointing skyward at the thick layer of dark gray. “If it begins to snow, our travel will become very slow. We will need cover as much ground as we can before it starts.”

“It’s going to snow?” Octavia couldn’t help but be excited at the prospect of seeing snow for the first time. All her time on the Ark, she never had the opportunity to see the earth blanketed in white as the other children had. Here on earth, it was something they would all be experiencing for the first time.

“Let’s hope it decides to stay away a little while longer.” Levai smiled, standing up and brushing off the bark off his hands after having thrown another branch on the fire.

“Whatever you see happening over there, don’t come over.” Lincoln and Octavia watched him tuck his hands in his coat pockets and head toward Lexa who was now leaning against a tree roughly fifty feet away.

“Why would it be bad if it snowed?”

“Snow melts and turns the ground to mud, especially so early in the year. We would have to move slower to make sure of our footing, and so would the army that is moving north.” Lincoln explained. “That is before the air gets cold enough to freeze fingers and toes, turning them black.”

Octavia looked at her hands while she listened to Lincoln’s declaration of what was to come and now she fully understood the dangers they faced and why they were travelling so quickly. She extended her hands toward the small fire, flexing her fingers to remind herself of the sensation.

“Maybe it will wait until we’re home.” Octavia said, more of a request than speculation while leaning into Lincoln and burying into his side. She sighed with contentment as she felt his arm wrap around her in an effort to comfort her, both watching Levai and wondering what prompted his warning.

*~*~*~*

Lexa’s moods had become erratic over the last week and they were certain it was because she wasn’t sleeping. To Levai’s knowledge, the last time she’d slept was back at his home and that was nearly
three weeks ago. Her sleep today was short and far too fitful for it to have been useful and he decided it was time for him to address it with her. His problem was figuring out how to get the most powerful person in the lands to talk about what was bothering her.

Lexa was never one to shy away from her feelings in her youth and she was a caring girl who did whatever she could to help those who needed it. She was a lot like her mother in that regard but this Lexa was different and he knew when it started. Just after she’d formed the Kongeda. It was as if she had become another person.

He had the conversation with Lexa about Clarke and Nia the night before they left for the long journey ahead of them. Lexa seemed to have become a little of her old self when she met her niece and nephew and for a short while, she was the Lexa he knew and the one he decided Lexa needed to be reunited with again. The farther their journey took them, the further she seemed to be losing herself.

“Lexa.”

“Don’t.”

“We need to talk about it.”

“There is nothing to talk about.”

“You are doing it again. It’s not healthy and you need to rest.”

Levai was standing next to her and staring off in the same direction. Everything was so still in the vicinity, the only thing that seemed to be moving was their breath that puffed out little clouds of hot air from their lungs. He knew Lexa was going to make this difficult.

“I slept last night.”

“Last night was the first time in weeks you’ve slept and it was barely more than an hour. All you did was twist and turn, mumbling something about “stopping it”. You are pushing yourself too hard.”

“I can handle it. I’ve been through worse.”

“You’re fatigue is getting starting to affect you and the weather is turning. This isn’t like travelling to build your Kongeda. As skilled as I am, we were lucky with Octavia’s recovery. I you get sick... none of us are proper fisa(healers). We will have to turn around.”

“We will not turn back. Whether or not I survive this, it has to be seen through. If I die, the spirits of the Commander will find another.”

Levai let out a frustrated huff. She was fond of reminding people of this who disagreed with her occasional recklessness. He was determined to get through to her.

“You may be Heda, but you are as stupid and as stubborn as you ever were. There won’t be anyone to replace you once Nia eliminates the flame, or worse finds a Nightblood and forces her rule on the clans.”

“She has to be stopped. She won’t burn to the ground what I have worked so hard to create.”

“You’ve been in wars before and you were willing to attack Maun-de. They could have killed everyone without ever coming to the surface. Did you have troubles sleeping then?”
She scowled at his words as they stood there in silence for a few minutes, both using the silence as a weapon. Little did he know she was having troubles sleeping, but for completely different reasons. Reasons her mind wandered to which he confused as stonewalling their conversation. But she had a daydream-like look in her eyes that he’d seen when they talked in his home.

Before he believed Lexa would call an end to their stalemate and order them to continue travelling north, he decided to change his tact.

“This is different.” he suggested.

“What do you mean?”

“Wanheda.”

“What about her?” Lexa squinted, as if she saw something in the distance.

“It wasn’t so long ago you absolutely refused to take your army north and fight Nia for the sake of the coalition.”

“Be careful.” Lexa warned in an even voice, her scowl vanishing from her face and her lungs began to pull in deep, even breaths.

“Or what?”

Lexa sighed, and started to walk off. She knew what Levai was trying to do and the only thing she could think of doing was what she always used to do. Not surprisingly, Levai matched her steps. He was never one to give up.

“I can’t do this with you, Levai. You shouldn’t be here. You should be with your wife and children.”

“Someone has to get you to start making proper decisions and you are going to before you get us all killed.”

“I’m fine, there is just a lot to consider.”

“I don’t care about strategy. We both know you are a brilliant strategist and see things three steps before everyone else. I’m not talking about that. I want to know why can’t you sleep at night.”

“Levai…” her voice was pleading and her feet pushed her to walk in a hurried pace. In any other circumstance she’d intimidate her way out of a situation or declare she was Heda and that she answered to nobody.

“You are being reckless, Heda.” Levai reached out and grabbed her arm, forcing her to stop moving forward. It didn’t stop Lexa from yanking her arm away from his touch and spinning to face her brother.

“I’m not going to let anyone else die because of me!”

“So you risk all the warriors of the kongeda, their families and their children to pursue some misguided effort to strengthen your legacy?”

“You don’t understand.” Lexa defended.

“Then you are going to have to explain it to me, because I’m not letting you go another step toward Toron until you do.” he declared, stepping forward and grabbing Lexa’s biceps.
“Levai, we are not children anymore…” lightly twisting her arms but not breaking free.

“Not until you explain to me why. Is it because of Costia? Because…”

Lexa’s eyes flared and she wrenched free from her brother hands, lifting hers before he could react and brought it across his face with a sound that echoed through the forest around them.

He winced at the contact, testing the corner of his mouth after the familiar taste of iron appeared. When he turned back at Lexa, her eyes were a mix of surprise and tears, silent apologies and regret. She had never once struck her brother in anger.

“Levai, I’m sorry. I am so sorry!” she said, rushing forward and trying to pull him into a hug. Her surprise in his stepping back and creating space between them before she could succeed in her attempt hit her harder than anything physically he could do.

“Levai…”

He shook his head and lifted his hands to make sure space remained between the two. Lexa stared forward at him and she appeared broken because of what she’d done. Her shoulders were turned forward and her arms were hanging limply at her side and had anyone else seen her standing there, they would have laughed at the notion of her leading an army, let alone being Leksa kom Trikru.

Levai directed her over to a tall tree and helped her sit at the base of it, then took a seat so they were leaning against each other. He didn’t shy away when Lexa pulled herself in closer and she watched him as he produced a small pouch from inside his coat and held it out to her. After a moment of surprise, she took it from him and opened it up as he directed.

“Is this…?” She reached into the small pouch with her long fingers and pulled out a small, round object.

“It is.”

“How did you find it?”

“That is not important.”

Lexa spun the silver object in her hand. It was something from before Praimfaya and her mother’s most treasured item. Levai had given it to Lexa and she kept it with her at all times, right up until she lost it when she was hunting with Anya. It wasn’t so much because of what it looked like, although the lustrous silver combined with the beautiful flower patterns etched around the trinket were captivating, what she always loved about it was inside of it.

After letting her finger trace the pattern as she always did, Lexa pressed down on the small button at the top of it like she remembered. The latch released and it flipped open revealed the small picture of her father, mother and Levai who was holding her in his arms when she was a baby.

Lexa closed her eyes and tilted her head back against the tree behind her and released a shaky breath. She closed the pendant, wrapping it in both her hands and brought it protectively to her chest.

“Do you remember how this all started?”

Lexa nodded and couldn’t stop herself from lingering in the memory that unfolded behind her closed eyes.

~*_~*_~*_~*_~*
A young Lexa kom Trikru sat defiantly on her bed, refusing to sleep because of the growing sadness within her. She looked around and understood that this room was now hers because her brother would be required to spend most of his days and nights training in the forests and learning the ways of becoming a ranger. To her, that meant she was losing her best friend.

He no longer be there to tell her stories at night to calm her nervousness about the people from Polis coming and stealing her in the middle of the night, like they did to all natblida children. She would live in the basement of a tower and never see her family again, and he wasn’t going to be there to protect her any more.

“Lexa. You have to go to bed. Tomorrow is your brother’s big day and we will to be up early to see him off.” her mother’s voice filled the room.

She had an almost musical quality to her voice that somehow always soothed Lexa’s nerves.

“I don’t want him to go.” Lexa stated firmly.

“This is a great moment for our family, Lexa. To be selected to train as a ranger is great honour for your brother. He has worked very hard and because of it has an opportunity to become one of Heda’s most skilled warriors.”

“He doesn’t even want to be a Ranger.” Lexa mumbled, her eyes downcast at the floor and her hands fidgeting in her lap.

“You know that’s not true and you know he will miss you.” her mother walked from the door and lowered herself on her knees in front of Lexa so she could take her hands in her own. “Do you want to know the real reason why?”

Lexa sniffled and slightly nodded.

“He is joining them because of you.”

The look of sadness on her face broke her mother’s heart, but she was quick to correct her daughter.

“No, Lexa. He is joining because of who you will one day become.”

“But I want him here now and I don’t want him to go!” Lexa cried, not understanding her mother’s explanation. She quickly sat up on the bed and wrapped Lexa in her arms, kissing her young daughters dark brown hair.

“He is becoming a ranger so that one day if the spirit of the commander chooses you, he will always be there to keep you safe.”

Lexa wiped her face free from tears and sniffled again, looking up at her mother through water-logged green eyes.

“He wants to keep me safe?” Her voice small and hopeful.

“It has all he’s talked about since he put forward his request. You didn’t know that did you? That he went by himself to Polis and demanded at the tower that he be allowed to train as a ranger.”

Lexa remained silent and shook her head.

“Your brother…” her mother laughed at the memory of how she learned Levai had made his way to Polis. “…he had taken the horse belonging to Anya and was determined no matter the chance he
would face her wrath when he returned, that this was something he had to do.”

“Come. Lay down and I’ll tell you the rest.”

Lexa nodded again and crawled up to the head of her bed, letting her mother lay a fur over her small frame. After laying down right next to her daughter and curling up so she could fit on the bed, she continued.

“He’d taken her horse and vanished without a trace. It wasn’t known until a day had passed and she went in search of a horse thief that we discovered your brother was missing. We had assumed he’d been taken by thieves or worse, Azgeda.”

She reached forward and tucked some hair behind Lexa’s ear, smiling at the sigh of contentment in her daughter.

“She’d taken another horse and a group of rangers to track your brother. Little did they know their path would take them all the way to Polis. They stabled their horses and she saw her stolen horse being tended to, she was told a young boy had dropped it off and stated that it belonged to “Anya kom Trikru, the fiercest warrior in her clan and that it better be taken care of or else.”

Lexa chuckled, imagining her big brother making such a declaration. He was her big brother but he was still much smaller than adults.

“They said he demanded to know who was in charge of the rangers and they told him that it was Heda Nodain kom Sankru and the set him off in the direction of his tower. When they arrived at the tower, the guards on duty explained that the boy had been taking into the tower by order of the Heda.”

“Levai met Heda?” Lexa was shocked at the news.

“More than that. They had dinner together.”

Lexa was in awe of her brother’s courage. Although what she knew of Heda was subject to a child’s imagination, she was certain the man was a large and terrifying man who could never be beaten in a fight. He was also the one who was going to defeat Maun-de and save all the clans.

“It seems your brother was convincing in his declaration that he would become the greatest ranger to have ever lived. Heda was impressed with his conviction but from what I heard from Anya, he refused your brothers demand.”

“Why?”

“He wanted to know what put such a fire into your brother to become a ranger. When he told Heda about you, he refused.”

“Then why is he going tomorrow?” Lexa’s face scrunched up with confusion.

“Heda spoke to Anya and the rangers that accompanied her to Polis when he was informed of the lengths Levai went to in order to try to be a one. She told him that of all the young men in Tondc it was your brother that showed more promise than any before him and that his gifts would be a loss to any Heda if he wasn’t trained.”

To hear the Unit leader of Tondc make such a declaration of her brother filled Lexa with pride. Anya was a cruel, mean woman who had no sense of humour and loved to yell at everyone and yet after her brother stole her horse, she spoke highly of him and to Heda nonetheless.
“From what little I know of their conversation, they came to an agreement but she was forced to accept a compromise that included you and they made your brother agree to it.”

“Me?” Lexa asked, curious but also a little nervous.

“Your brother would be trained as a ranger but he had to agree, that no matter who was Heda he would have to show as much devotion to them as he has to you. He also had to agree that whatever was asked of him by any Heda, he must obey as long as it does not betray the Ranger’s Oath.”

“Did they make him agree go away?”

“That is required of anyone who trains to be a ranger, even if it wasn’t your brother. They must learn every facet of the lands around them. How to track, how to hunt, what dangers exist and what will keep him alive.”

“Then what are they going to make me do?”

“Tomorrow, after your brother departs Anya will come and declare you as her seken(second).”

Lexa shot upward so she was no longer laying down.

“I don’t like Anya. She’s rude, and angry and she hates everyone!” Lexa shouted.

“If it was not for Anya and her agreeing to take you as her seken, you would be leaving for Polis in six months time and your brother wouldn’t be trained as a ranger.”

Lexa still wasn’t happy, but she uncrossed her arms and fell back on her bed.

“Anya is one of Heda’s finest warriors. She convinced him that it would be beneficial for you to train as he did before going to Polis. That it was important to learn what it is you will risk your life for and what you will fight to protect if you are chosen to lead.”

“But what if I don’t want to lead?”

“We all see it in you, my beautiful daughter. You are strong and you are smart and you care so much for everything and everyone. It isn’t in you to refuse helping others and some day if you become Heda, you will have to chance to help not just our clan but all the clans.”

“I don’t want to hurt people. Heda’s have to hurt people.”

“Sometimes, but that is a decision that you would get to make.”

It got quiet in the room for a while and her mother got up from the bed telling Lexa she should rest. Lexa nodded and closed her eyes as her mother leaned over and kissed her forehead. She got up from the bed and blew out flames on the small candles her father had made for her. As her mother walked through the doorway to the hall, Lexa yawned out her mother’s name and getting her to wait a moment more.

“Levai is leaving to be a ranger to protect me if I become Heda?”

“Mhmm.” she hummed from the hallway.

“If I train with Anya and become strong, does that mean he won’t have to fight?”

“That would be up to you.”
She took Lexa’s silence as the end of the conversation and walked away from the room and leaving her daughter in the bed to go to sleep. Little did her mother know, Lexa’s mind moving a mile a minute with what it could mean to become Heda. Roughly two hours of laying awake in her bed, staring at the ceiling she came to the conclusion that if her brother was willing to protect her, it was in her best interest to become Heda so she could protect him too.

The next morning Lexa sat outside her home on a weathered wooden bench. She hadn’t stopped searching for the first sign of her brother and when he turned the corner, she jumped up from the bench and ran straight for him and taking him down in a tackle that was meant to be a hug. She hadn’t even seen the taller woman standing next to him who was now observing the two children locked together on the ground until she heard her stern voice.

“I expect that kind of effort from you every day.”

Lexa glanced up and thought she saw a smirk on the woman’s face, but if she did it was lost to the scowl that appeared as Lexa turned her eyes upward.

“Gather your things and meet Ryder at the west gate. Do not make him wait long.” Anya said, turning and walking away in the direction of where she told him Ryder would be waiting.

From beneath Lexa, Levai acknowledged her order.

“You have to do what she says now?” Lexa asked, getting up and helping Levai to his feet and then brushing the dirt from their clothes.

“Yeah. I owe her a lot.”

“I know.” Lexa said, frowning at her brother.

“I’m sorry, Lex. It’s just. If you were going to go to Polis I was never going to see you again.”

“So you were going to leave me and mom and dad?”

“Not on purpose! I talked to Costia and she said her brother was trying to be a ranger and that rangers were the best and worked for Heda. I thought if you were going to be Heda, I could fight for you and then you could have family with you.”

“Mom told me.”

“I… she did?”

“Last night. I couldn’t sleep and she came in and told me.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there to help, Lex.”

Lexa stepped forward and hugged her brother tightly, squeezing as if she’d never have the opportunity again. They stood outside for some time like that as if they were never going to see each other again only separating when their father called them both back to the house.

Lexa turned and headed toward the house but Levai placed his hand on her shoulder.

“Lex. Here.”

Turning around, she saw the round silver object in his hand and he was holding it out for her.

“That’s mom’s.” she said.
“She gave it to me when she found out I had to go away for a while. Take it.”

Lexa picked it up from his hand and inspected it. She’d never been allowed to touch it before and now that she was, she was in awe of the detail. She traced her fingertips around it, feeling the texture of the carving but then looked back up at Levai and tried to return it.

“She gave it to you. You keep it.”

“Open it.” he said, but as her face scrunched up with a puzzled look, he smiled and explained how it worked. When she pressed the top down, the pendant opened and she nearly dropped it in surprise.

She saw a picture in it and was speechless. She’d seen pictures before, but was at a loss how one looked back at her with her and her family in it.

“How did they do this?” Lexa asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t remember. Here, keep it in this.” he handed her a small leather pouch that was lined with a soft material.

“You should keep it.” Lexa tried to hand it back to him but he refused.

“Anya told me when you go to Polis, you’ll have to stay there. Natblida don’t get to go home and visit their parents. They don’t even get to see their friends.”

“What?” Lexa began to feel alarmed.

“I wasn’t even supposed to come back to Tondc. Anya set it up so I could leave from here with Ryder and say goodbye to you and mom and dad. I came to give this to you.”

“You don’t want it?”

“I want you to have it. Lex, I know when you are upset you have nightmares and I can’t be there to sit with you for a while. When you do, I want you to open it and know I’m doing everything I can to keep you safe. Even if you can’t see me like you can right now.”

“I’ll keep it safe.” Lexa stated, tucking the locket in the pouch and slipping it in her pants pocket.

He smiled and hugged her once more, leading her toward the house where their parents stood in the doorway watching their children as they approached.

“Levai?” Lexa whispered.

“Yeah?”

“I’m going to be Heda and one day, I can make you and everyone safe too.”

Lexa took a deep breath and opened her eyes. Her back straightened against the tree and there was a calmness in her expression. She opened her hands in front of herself and after taking a look at it once more, she held it out for Levai to take.

“Nope.” Levai shook his head. “Same as before but please don’t lose it this time. I don’t have any intention of ever coming this far north again and I don’t want to spend twenty years looking for it. Just to give it back to you.”
Lexa opened the pendant once more and kissed the picture within, whispering “I miss you” to her parents who were smiling in the picture. She tucked the pendant back in the pouch but before slipping it into her coat pocket, she examined the pouch a little closer.

“You couldn’t find the original pouch?”

Levai laughed and then rocked against Lexa with his shoulder. She sighed and put the pouch in her jacket pocket while sporting her familiar grin.

“It feels like it was so long ago.”

“In some ways.” Levai agreed. “You’ve been busy.”

“I started this trying not to get people hurt. To protect the ones I love.”

“Nobody can control everything. Not even the mighty Heda, Leksa kom Trikru is immune to the fates conspiring against her from time to time.”

“Father used to say something like that.” Lexa smiled, hearing her father’s voice in his words.

“They would have been proud of you. The woman and the leader you’ve become.”

“It doesn’t change the fact I failed the people I loved most.”

“I’m still here, and so are the clans who no longer wage war on each other because of what you’ve been able to accomplish for your people.”

Lexa nodded, but the smile that had been on her lips since she thought of her father melted away.

“But that’s not enough anymore, is it?” he asked.

Heda weren’t supposed to find love in anything but duty to their people and it was the first lesson taught to natblida that were brought to Polis. They were to make all people in the various clans who would need her protection and her guidance their family and their responsibility. The concept of only caring for your parents or siblings was buried beneath tradition of what it was to be Heda.

Had it not been for Anya’s insistence she become more than a just vessel for the Flamekeeper’s tutelage, she may have been just another leader without vision or purpose beyond forcing order on the clans through warfare. What shocked Lexa the most was the woman who was so stern and angry all the time was as compassionate as she was hard and Lexa swore that is who she would be if she became Heda but somewhere along the way she changed and took on the cold persona, adopting Titus’ philosophy of tradition; Love is weakness.

She knew Levai was was right - being Heda wasn’t enough. It never was but she’d become so accustomed to the comfort of the wall she built between herself and the world around her that when the wall began to fall in front of her eyes, she panicked. She hid behind her title, tradition and her people and used them to protect herself from the danger of losing herself again. She’d turned her back on Anya’s teachings and become someone she never wanted to be and now, she had a choice.

She stood up from her spot on the ground and extended her hand to Levai, accepting her help to hoist him up from the ground and brushing the matted leaves and dirt from their clothes.

“No, it’s not enough. Not anymore.”
The combined forces of Skaikru and Trikru continue north, but the increased risk in hostile territory lead Indra and Marcus into making a decision that carries both risk and reward for their effort. Raven discovers a secret that one person in particular didn’t want to share.
“Fine! Fine! I’m getting up.”

The pair set themselves to gathering up their clothes amid quick glances at each other and small smiles. They stuffed them into their bags once they changed from what they slept in and Bellamy then rolled up the sleeping bag into a tight roll clicking the latches in place. Once they were done preparing their things, Bellamy opened the tent, stepping through and offered Echo a hand as she made her way out.

“I’ll come back and take down the tent after we talk to Marcus and Indra.” Bellamy offered.

“Alright. I will try to track us down something warm to eat before we leave.”

The pair walked toward Indra’s tent which was nearly taken down by a few of her warriors. It appeared they were the last to wake up this morning and it stuck in Echo’s side like a thorn. She was more disciplined than that and scolded herself for it.

Both Marcus and Indra observed their approach and walked toward them to meet them but changed direction after Indra directed them with her hand to a spot away farther away from the camp. Echo and Bellamy exchanged a curious glance as they walked toward Indra’s directed meeting place.

“We are heading into Azgeda territory which means as we make our way north, the danger increases beyond the threat of wintam(winter).” Indra stated. “We have chosen to send scouts forward to watch for Azgeda scouts or spies who would send word to their Queen of our approach.”

“And you want us to go.” Bellamy stated, staring at Kane who nodded.

“Yes. Echo will provide you with a convenient cover because she is Azgeda and can travel freely in their territory. You will take Raven with you and if you come across a threat to our forces, you can radio us.” Kane said.

“Raven? Won’t she slow us down if we are to get a message back to you in case we come across Nia’s warriors?”

“Not if she is able to do it with one of your radios.” Indra explained.

Bellamy’s expression of seriousness changed with the realization that although the trio heading to Toron alone would be beneficial, and that setting up a radio in advance would be beneficial there was a significant risk.

“What if we are caught and captured by Nia’s warriors? If they take Raven’s transmitters?” Bellamy asked, but it was Echo who answered his question.

“Then I will inform them by order of Prince Roan I am escorting two Skaikru leaders north to join Wanheda in Toron. Raven will offer her Tek as a gift for Nia.”

“Will they believe you?” Kane asked.

“Many of the warriors know I am one of Prince Roan’s friend and adviser, if not more.” She gave Bellamy a look meant to assure him, but she could see his mind processing a specific portion of her words. “They won’t be a problem.”

“And if they decide otherwise and have strong loyalties to Nia rather than the Prince?” Indra wondered aloud.

“I will tell them to escort us north. The three of us won’t appear like much of a threat to a number of
Azgeda warriors. Worst case, we have them bring us north and when we reach our destination to meet Heda, we kill them.”

“A good plan.” Indra confirmed, though Echo guessed her agreement to her idea had more to do with Azgeda being dispatched. Indra let her eyes scan the camp behind Echo and Bellamy which was nearly taken down and stowed for travel. “You should leave as quickly as possible to make as much distance as you can over the next week from our group.”

“We only have to pack our tent and gather our horses. We will likely be half a day ahead when we stop tonight and three to four days ahead by the end of the week.” Echo explained to Indra.

“Raven is ready and waiting for you.” Marcus pointed in the direction of Raven who was already atop her horse, pulling a second which had the equipment the needed in order to set up the receivers and transmitters.

“If it comes down to it, do what you have to.” Kane suggested to Bellamy and Echo, receiving their nod. “You had better get going. Be careful.”

“May we meet again.” Bellamy said, hearing the same words in reply from Marcus.

Echo and Bellamy split off with Bellamy hurrying to take down their tent and bring their bags over to Raven’s location and Echo after abandoning the notion of something warm for breakfast, instead head off to ready their horses and stating she would meet him over by Raven who seemed to be impatiently adjusting herself in the saddle she was given.

Marcus and Indra watched the trio embark on their journey to Toron, ahead of the larger and slower force of Trikru warriors and Skaikru guards. They were being sent into hostile territory and were aware of the risk but like they have discovered numerous times since they had arrived on the ground, the notion of risk keeps getting more and more dangerous.

They discussed the three of them going north on their own late into the night and it was Indra who decided that there would be a scout to follow behind them should they run into hostile Azgeda warriors. They agreed that Koma would ride a short distance behind Bellamy, Echo and Raven. It would give the appearance that he was following them and that he was tracking them, possibly to prevent them from reaching Toron. Still, there was a hint of concern in Indra’s expression.

“They’ll make it. They are all too stubborn to fail.” Kane suggested.

“They better, or we are all going to end up dead.”

Their journey from camp began with Echo driving them forward with a hurried pace. They had pushed the hoses and their increasingly tired bodies hard through mornings, days and sometimes nights. Unfortunately, the ride was more difficult on the one who was suffering in silence, almost always taking up the rear. She’d initially hoped to become accustomed to the position her leg rested in, but as they rode the increased jarring contributed to the ever-present throbbing and now Raven couldn’t stop herself from wincing in pain.

“Bell…”

She didn’t want to be the reason their progress slowed. They’d made great time and managed to set up six of the transmitters, but she also didn’t want to fall off her horse in an effort to avoid the pain because she knew the drop to the ground could only add another layer of it. When he turned to look at her, he could see why she called his name.
“Echo, we have to stop for a while.”

“We have only been travelling for a few hours since we had our lunch.” She countered.

“And Raven is about to fall off her horse. Besides, our horses could use the break. We’ve pushed them hard the last couple days.”

Turning to glance back at Raven, Echo nodded with minimal resistance.

“If we are stopping, we should have something to eat. I’ll make sure the horses get some water.” Echo suggested.

Bellamy and Echo both helped Raven down from her horse, watching her try to stretch out the knot that had formed in her leg by flexing her knee as much as she could. Bellamy suggested she try to walk, using him as a crutch which gave Echo the opportunity to lead them to a steam roughly thirty meters from where they stopped on the trail.

“I’m slowing us down.”

“Echo wanted to see how far we could go today before we needed to take a break. If it was this bad, you should have said something. How long have you been in this much pain?” he asked, taking a seat next to her and resting his hand on his weapon and scanning the forest around them.

“So it was your girlfriend’s idea to torture me and you decided to go along with it?” Raven asked, frowning at him. “What’s eating at her, anyway?”

Bellamy glanced back at Echo who was stretching out her sore limbs. “Rae, that isn’t happening. Just say when your leg is bothering you and we will adjust. The entire reason we are going ahead is because of what you can do to warn Indra and Kane of Azgeda.” She couldn’t help but notice he ignored her query involving Echo.

“Speaking of being needed, you and Echo. What’s going on?”

“What do you mean?”

“A story as old as time. Boy meets captive girl in a cage, boy rescues girl, boy helps kill 350 people who imprisoned her, girl falls in love with boy.”

Bellamy laughed, observing a grin on Raven’s face then turning to take a look at Echo who had been observing the pair from her spot by the creek.

“Don’t tell her.” Bellamy’s smile grew as he took in Echo, who turned her attention back on the horses when Bellamy looked down the hill in her direction. “She might not know how often it happens.”

“Secret is safe with me. She’s just looking really tired. Think she is pushing herself too hard?” Raven shrugged, her grin turned to a smile as she rubbed her sore leg. “We shouldn’t stay here too long” she added, looking up into the sky and trying to decide where the sun might be. The layer of thick grey clouds made it difficult for her to determine how long they’d been traveling.

“Maybe. I’ll see. We can wait until your leg starts to feel good enough to continue.”

“Fifteen minutes.” Echo stated, leading the horses to a small patch of yellow-green grass which they promptly began to eat having had their fill of water from the stream.
“And if her leg is too sore?” Bellamy asked.

“I’ll be fine. We should get as far as we can today.” Raven suggested, but her leg was the focus of both Bellamy and Echo’s attention.

“You have to tell us if your leg becomes too sore to continue riding, Rae.” Bellamy tried to make it sound like an order, leading Raven to question his self-declared authority with an eye roll.

“Are we going to run into trouble?” Raven asked, digging into her own pack for something to eat.

“Nia’s patrols have pulled in closer to Toron to match the weather and it has made it easier on us. I am sure we’ve been seen by at least two scouts but they are alone so they won’t confront us. Strictly watch and report.” Echo restated as she had in the briefing she gave at Camp Jaha, and shortly after they began their journey north as scouts.

“Shouldn’t we have seen more the closer we get? We have been travelling for almost a month now.”

“Usually. Like I explained, she doesn’t believe anyone would be dumb enough to endanger their warriors by bringing them northward when the weather changes.”

“I don’t mean to be late in asking this, do you think it will work this time?” Bellamy asked.

“It will if we remain focused because Nia’s leadership is questioned. It is another reason we will see less patrols than we usually would. She won’t have as good a warning to prepare her warriors before we reach Toron. Questions of her leadership have filtered down through the ranks.”

Bellamy nodded and it was Raven with the next question.

“Will everyone who supports the Prince still support him when they find out he doesn’t have the full support of the coalition or the strength of the Commander’s armies?”

“That, is the only concern I have. As long as Wanheda doesn’t offer her public support for her cause, it will cause her generals to see signs of weakness in the Queen. A public declaration in support of Prince Roan would convince those who waver to choose their allegiance. As for the army, that is something I have yet to figure out. I hope your warriors will be able to help with the tek you created.”

Raven took a glance at her bags. She’d left most of the larger explosives with Indra and Kane after explaining how to arm them, leaving them with just ten of the bombs.

“Then I’ll just have to make them count.”

They finished their small meal of dried meat and fruit, the entire time Echo refusing to allow a fire to be built because, “They are leaving before it would have a chance to be worthwhile.” Bellamy took the opportunity to refill their water bottles at the creek and leaving the pair to get ready to leave.

“Can you?” Raven asked Echo, pointing at her horse.

“Of course.”

As Raven stood up with a groan, Echo followed suit mimicking her but not out of mockery. Raven’s eyes lifted in surprise because of the trip, she expected to be the only one in discomfort enough to audibly complain about it. Even Bellamy managed to refrain from complaining about the conditions of their hard travel and cold nights.
“Echo? Are you OK?” Raven asked.

“I’m... I’m fine…”

“Bellamy!” Raven cried out and moved forward at Echo who was now teetering with her eyes closed and her hand fingertips squeezing the bridge of her nose until she finally lost her balance.

Rushing forward, she caught Echo but as a result lost her own balance, twisting to fall so Echo landed on top of her. Bellamy came rushing over to give the pair a hand, dropping the pack in his hand to the ground as he dropped next to them.

“What happened?” his hands were on her throat feeling for her pulse. It was there, but it wasn’t strong. Her skin was cold it drew a shiver from Bellamy, leading his mind to wonder if they should radio back to Camp Jaha to query Abby.

“I don’t know, she was going to help me on my horse and she just collapsed.”

“That’s it, we’re staying here tonight. We need to warm her up. I’ll start a fire. Can you stay with her until I get the tent set up?”

Raven knew Echo would have argued against the fire, but she wasn’t going to challenge Bellamy on this. Not with the look of worry that was consuming him.

“Here.” Bellamy reached into the pack he had carried over and pulled out a small blanket. “Help keep her warm and wrap her in this. Once I get the tent set up we can bring her in there.”

Raven nodded, watching Bellamy methodically go about the tasks he assigned himself with determination. He was having a difficult time starting the fire with the flint he retrieved from his pack because it was done hastily which in her mind, meant sloppy.”I’ll finish this. Go get the tent ready.”

“Thanks.” he offered, running over to his horse and grabbing he sack that housed their tent.

Once they had a decent fire, the tent set up and Echo beneath some blankets to raise her temperature, Bellamy and Raven sat out next to the fire as the sun began to disappear from the sky.

“I thought I was the one that was going to make us have to stop.” Raven joked, trying to lighten the mood.

“We should radio Abby. Find out what could be wrong.”

Raven shook her head in defiance as she concentrated on the weight of the handset on her jacket pocket to remind herself of where it was.

“You know we can’t do that, Bell. As much as I want to, if this radio runs out of battery everything we are doing here will be for nothing. You know That isn’t what Echo would want.”

“She’s unconscious, Rae. Anything could be wrong.”

Raven saw the frustration on his face, and his pleading eyes. He had no idea how to help her and neither did Raven but there was more at stake than the three of them. Raven felt herself almost wanting to throw up at the realization of her next thought that they had to do this for all their people. She was sick of hearing the justification, but it always seemed to make it’s way into everyone’s actions. Their excuse for whatever it was they felt compelled to do.

“I want to, Bell. Believe me.”
Bellamy set out a frustrated sigh and brought his hands to his face to rub his tired eyes. “The soup should help. She might just need some warm food.”

Raven gave him a soft smile and put her hand on his knee. “Rest will be the best thing for her. Maybe you should go in and…”

The sound of a branch snapping to their right drew both of their attention. Bellamy jumped to his feet and had his rifle at the ready, studying the surrounding woods for intruders. Raven slowly let her hand fall to the sidearm that hung on her hip.

“Beja, nou treig op. Sis osir au.” (Please, don’t shoot. Help us.) Begged a feminine voice from the woods.

He saw her and trained his gun on the woman and her group. He stared at them as if he had nothing to say so with no response coming from Bellamy, the woman tried again.

“We’re not armed. Please. We don’t mean you any harm.”

The woman was standing there with a small boy who was wearing very little to protect himself from the elements along with a man roughly the same height as she. With Bellamy watching the trio, Raven continued to scan the forest for anyone who may have wished to remain concealed.

“How many of you are out there?”

“It’s just me, my husband and child. Please, we have been travelling for some time and were robbed of everything we have.”

Raven looked at Bellamy, shaking her head and reminding him with her eyes that this could be an Azgeda scout. When she turned and looked at the trio in the woods, she saw the woman in tattered furs standing in the open with a young boy standing in front of her, and a man who they assumed to be her husband to her left. It was clear they had been in the cold for some time because the boy was shivering violently.

“We can’t help you.” Raven said, surprising herself.

“Please. Just a few minutes at your fire. My boy, our boy is freezing.” she begged. “We will be on our way as soon as he warms up. My husband and I will gather wood for your fire.”

With Echo in the tent, Bellamy wanted to avoid any confrontation with these people and as he considered the possibility of letting them stand by the fire, he lowered his weapon slightly and indicated with his head for them to move forward toward the fire.

“Five minutes, then you are on your way.” Bellamy kept his eyes on the husband while Raven continued to look around the forest.

It was after a couple minutes of the two groups staring at each other wordlessly, the Azgeda woman spoke.

“You are the people who fell from the sky?”

Neither Bellamy or Raven said a word, even though it was against their nature. Echo had warned them that they may come across people like this and that everything they say will reach the ears of Nia. The only measure of comfort in their actions was that the boy had stopped shivering but he looked malnourished and Raven did the only thing she believed right in the situation. She stood up and took the few steps over to her pack and pulled out a small pouch of dried meat, then returned to
“Here.” she handed it out a piece for the young boy to take. When his father stepped forward to take it, Raven pulled back with the offering and Bellamy raised his rifle in response. A glare in his eyes and his index finger sliding over the trigger.

“It’s for the boy.” Raven explained to the man.

“How do we know it’s not poisoned?”

Bellamy scoffed, “If we wanted you dead, you’d be dead.”

The man eyed them with an appraising gaze as he did when they first met. “What brings Skaikru into Azgeda territory? That tek is forbidden. If the Queen finds you here, she’ll kill you.”

“Is that a threat?” Bellamy asked, not lowering his weapon from where he’d aimed it moments ago. Raven undid the clip on her sidearm and felt the cold of the metal against her palm as her fingers wrapped around the handle so she could draw it.

“Ai laik Echo kom Azgeda.”

Bellamy spun his head around to see Echo foist herself from the warm comforts of the tent to the cool outdoor air. She walked up to Bellamy with a slight stagger but her eyes focused on the newcomers and her hand holding tight to the knife in her hand.

“Yo gada Azgeda? Echo kom Azgeda?” The man raised his eyebrows in surprise, the woman used her hands to hold the young boy in front of her.

“Sha, ai laik.”(Yes, I am.) she stated with a note-so-hidden tone of finality.

“You sou nou hounon?”(You are not a prisoner?) The woman asked.

“Ai nou hounon. Du ste lukot kom Haiplana. (I am not a prisoner. They are friends of the Queen)

The pair that wandered into the camp shared a silent message in a glance and nodded, offering Echo, Bellamy and Raven a bow.

“Oso na bants. Gothru klir.”(We will leave. Safe passage.) The woman said, directing the boy with her hands that they were to leave. The boy’s eyes seemed to linger on the meat Raven held in her hands so Raven did what she thought was best.

“Wait.”

Everyone in the camp froze, everyone but Raven who took a couple powerful strides toward the boy and kneeled down in front of him, offering the piece of meat in her hand and seeing the boy try to devour it all in seconds.

When they were gone the trio sat around the fire, taking in the warmth. Bellamy insisted he would take watch tonight while Raven and Echo both caught up on rest they both obviously needed. Until then, they decided on making the soup they intended before they were interrupted by the visitors.

“You should not have talked to them without me.”

“You spoke to them. Nothing bad happened.” Bellamy suggested. “Besides, there was only three of them.”
“Three of them who would have likely killed you had I not woken up. You had no idea that the woman had two knives in her hands behind the boy and that her husband had one in his hand?”

Bellamy’s silence was admission enough he did not and it was clear he was upset with himself at her explanation of what he had missed.

“They use children to kill people?” Raven asked with a mixture of shock and disgust.

“Nia will use anything she can in order to get the upper hand. The one that was protecting Clarke and was poisoned should have been proof of that. There is nothing she won’t do in her quest for power.”

Raven shook her head and stirred the small pot they’d thrown some stock in, along with some meat and cut up potato.

“You two need to understand that this is not a game. We could all be dead right now and your people could fall into a trap that gets them all killed. Nia could get control of the weapons she seeks and kill anyone who opposes her without so much as a fight. It is clear that I will have to... that I’ll...”

Echo brought her hand to her head again and tried to shake the cobwebs loose.

“Easy.” Bellamy cooed, slipping next to her and wrapping his arm around her to steady her. “Take it easy. We’ll be more careful. We’ll shoot anyone else we come across, ok? Just breathe.”

Raven almost laughed at Bellamy’s words and normally she would have, but seeing Echo in the shape she was worried her. She’d noticed something off with Echo over the last week but assumed it was the stress of heading north and trying to figure out what they were supposed to do when they run into Lexa and wind up inevitably giving her the bad news of not having an army to help Prince Roan. It wasn’t until a thought clicked in her head that all the pieces moved into place and Raven gasped.

“What?” Bellamy asked, watching Raven stare off in one of her ‘Eurika moments’ as she liked to call them when she figured out something that had frustrated her.

She glanced between Bellamy, Echo and the pot of soup on the fire and shot forward, stirring the contents that were now boiling.

“Soup. It’s ready and I’m starving.”

Bellamy was at a complete loss as to what Raven was up to or thinking, but that was Raven Reyes. She seemed to operate on a different level than anyone else so they had all become accustomed to her quirks. She used one of her gloves to hold the steaming pot and pour the contents into three cups, dropping a fork in each. She handed Echo hers first, watching the Azgeda woman decide whether or not to eat it.

“Eat. You need to.” Raven stated without the usual sarcasm or snap in her voice that accompanied her insistence.

“Eat and then we can get some rest.” Bellamy offered her some encouragement.

Echo looked between Raven and Bellamy as if they were enacting some part of a conspiracy, but stabbed the meat in the broth and started in on the meal. Bellamy did the same after removing his arm from around Echo and Raven sat across from them, her attention focused on Echo who seemed to be purposefully avoiding her gaze.
Echo put her cup down half-full, telling Bellamy she needed to go lay down again. He was moving to help her but Raven scolded them both.

“Finish it!”

Echo glared at Raven, and even Bellamy seemed bothered by her insistence. “Raven.”

Raven had decided she would allow herself to be challenged. “We don’t know when we’ll have a hot meal again so eat. Your girlfriend there doesn’t let us have fires and whatever you’ve got needs the vitamins to help. Eat.”

“Bring me the cup and I’ll finish it in the tent.” Echo suggested, suspiciously spying Raven who offered her the same look in return.

“Better. And no watch for you tonight. You are sleeping until morning.” Raven added.

Echo laid in the tent listening to Bellamy talk about what they could do when they reach the Commander, but her mind was focused on other things. Specifically, the look Raven had given her when she handed her the cup of broth. She closed her eyes and Bellamy took that as a sign she wanted to go to sleep so he stopped talking, leaned over her and pressed a kiss to her forehead before leaving the tent and making sure she was fully covered in blankets.

She’d known it was just a matter of time but hoped they would make better time getting to Toron. With Raven’s imagination, she feared it wouldn’t be long she shared what she knew with Bellamy. She was a talker.

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“We have to send word north. I know she’s one of the prince’s consorts, but travelling north with two Skaikru and tek? That is reason enough to.”

“Fine. Send your message but I doubt anything will come of just two Skaikru in our territory, guns or not. They will likely freeze to death before they make it to Toron. You can meet us at the next shelter after sending it.”

The pair of Azgeda adults and the boy walked through the trees and entered an A-frame cabin that was roughly a thirty minute hike from where they encountered Raven, Echo and Bellamy. They’d tracked them from just after the morning to where they stopped for the night and presumed they were simply traders trying to make it north before winter. That was, until they saw the firearms that traditionally belonged to the mountain men or Skaikru which meant they had to discover who they were. Any tek seen in Azgeda territory had to be reported.

“Get us some wood for the stove.” the woman said, grabbing the arm of the young boy and throwing him toward the front door which was opened by the man who mocked the child by planting his boot on his back to force him outside onto the hard ground. It also knocked the cap off his head showing a significant patch of scarring. “You’ll be lucky if we even feed you tonight after getting that treat from the branwada. Get moving.”

By now the sky above was dark and the boy had to search around a bit for his cap. Once he had found it, the boy set himself to the task of picking up as many sticks as he could carry without reaching the point of dropping them all to the ground. He wasn’t wearing any proper winter clothing and remained visibly cold, his teeth clicked together on occasion encouraged him to try to work as quick as he could to get back to the cabin. As he bent over to pick up one last stick and when he felt a hand warp around his mouth to prevent a shriek, he heard a deep voice that offered a warning.
“Ai nou na bash yo op.” (I mean you no harm.)

The boy was now shaking for two reasons but through the involuntary motions, he nodded his understanding and did not run away. The man behind him stood up and removed a fur, offering it to the boy who dropped the bundle of sticks and happily took his offering. His smile vanished when he looked back at the cabin when he realized he couldn’t keep it or he’d find himself at the mercy of their abuse.

“Chit yu gaf?” (What do you want?) The small boy asked.

“Ai’s hon yu in osir sisplei.” (I’m here to help). he answered.

The boy nodded, but stared at the large man curiously. The man asked if these were his parents and the boy explained that he was found stealing food and that he was told he could work with these two or he would be killed. He was young, but he knew the difference.

He explained that this was one of many places they stay, along with others who scout the lands for Queen Nia. After telling the large man he did have a place to go if he had to opportunity, he told the boy to pick the sticks back up and take them to the house as he intended. Once he knocked on the door, to step back.

“I can’t get the door open.” the boy called out, kicking his shoe against the hardwood of the door.

“About time, you little wus…”

The door opened and the man outside thrust his sword forward stopping his ability to finish his sentence. He held it there for a moment, staring forward into the man’s eyes and preventing him from falling down by holding his sword still. Red painted the tip of the blade and rolled down it’s length to the hilt which remained unmoving until until the life left his eyes. Once the strangled gasps ceased, the stranger kicked forward into the dead man’s chest and launching the man into the house. His frame was thrown on to table behind him causing it’s legs to give way and sending splinters of wood throughout the room.

“Chon yu bilaik?” (Who are you?) the woman in the small cabin asked, running over to a table and picking up a knife and holding it before herself in a pitiful display of defence.

“Ai laik Koma kom Trikru en yu gonplei, ste odon.” (I am Koma of the Tree people and your fight is over.)

The woman barely gave him the opportunity to finish his explanation, lunging forward at him as she released a knife from the hand that was free of the one she picked up from the table. Koma jumped forward and deflected her own lunge with the knife, spinning and landing the only swing he needed to in order to finish the fight.

The young boy stood in the doorway, staring at the man in furs who moved like no other he’d seen before and ending the two who had tortured him on a daily basis. “Mochof.”

“You should leave before others come.”

The boy nodded his understanding, grabbed a few articles of clothing, some furs and stuffed them into a sack. Koma watched him empty most of the food containers and then scramble from the building, out into the darkness.

Koma walked up to the containers he saw the boy retrieve food from and emptied the remainder into a couple bags he’d stored his dried provisions in. He glanced around the room and after nothing
caught his eye, he decided it was time to leave. He walked into the kitchen where the small wood stove still burned and he gave it a kick that was hard enough that it’s contents onto the floor around it. He then turned and into the darkness as the boy did moments ago.

Koma had managed to keep Azgeda scouts at bay, but they had only been individual scouts. Burning down the cabin was going to raise some suspicions, but better that then future scouts finding two bodies on the floor of a cabin as a result of a fight. A fire seemed to raise reasonable doubt in the possibility of foul play.

He began to walk in the opposite direction of those he’d been charged to protect with the hope of circling back after an hour or two of travel. Things were only going to become more complicated as they moved forward, and with the number of scouts he’s had to deal with it only elevated the risk they all faced because it was like drawing an arrow directly to Toron.

It was just a matter of time before someone would eventually figure it out. The last thing they needed were any further complications.
Clarke stood a foot from Ontari and leaned her back against the brick wall, trying to think of what to do next. She didn’t know what to do with Ontari’s revelation and she fought to keep herself from shaking.

She wondered if Ontari playing her. Was she fully aware of the plan she has with her brother, the Prince? Clarke wasn’t even sure what the plan was with Roan, but last night she considered having to make her own plan. With Ontari here and her suggestion she was here to kill Nia, she wasn’t sure what to say. All she knew is if she didn’t come up with something, she would likely find herself at the mercy of Nia or whoever it was that did her torturing.

She recalled nearly a couple months ago she wanted nothing to do with this. She walked away form her people, from Lexa, from everyone for a reason and yet here she was with the girl everyone warned her about, in Toron. Alone. Only this girl didn’t seem like the terror everyone warned her about. Yes, she seemed cunning and her eyes were always weighing every decision she made, but that was no different than any other grounder she’d met.

Clarke reigned in her emotions and fought down the fear that consumed her. Fear that the only reason her head wasn’t in a box and on it’s way to Polis was because Nia wasn’t sure if Clarke was an honest broker or not and that left her feeling alone in the wilderness without a friend. Ontari was there, though. She was standing in front of her.

She had to make the decision quickly and she prayed to whatever power might be listening that it was the right one. After a moment she looked up at Ontari and wiped her cheek clear in an attempt to regain her dignity.
“What would you say if that was my plan?”

Ontari’s lips cracked a slight smile as she replied.

“I’d say you are either brilliant at looking like you have no idea what you are doing and have fooled everyone, or you truly have absolutely no idea what you are doing and hoping that at some point things will start to go your way. Because you’ve come up here with my brother, and what you’ve done to Heda’s armies and Maunde, I am inclined to believe you have a lot more going on in that pretty blonde head of yours than you are letting on.”

Ontari saw her frown at her compliment and before Clarke could start again, Ontari raised her hand to signal Clarke to stop talking then extended it toward Clarke.

“Let’s not do this here. Take my hand.”

“I’m not holding your hand.”

“Do you want to sell this, or do you want to end up in Nia’s dungeon? Trust me. I’ve seen what she does in there, what she’s made people do. You want no part of it Clarke.”

Clarke intended to continue her refusal but the look of shock and sadness that filled Ontari’s eyes led her to slowly lifting her hand and letting their palms touch. She hoped placing her trust in Ontari was the right decision because Ontari was right. She had no idea what she was doing aside from trusting the right hand of the Ice Queen.

They walked from the half-repaired building they’d been in and as Clarke looked around, she saw soldiers moving about in their regular patrols through the streets. There were some knowing glances, but nothing appeared to her as being out of place.

“Come with me.” Ontari suggested, giving Clarke’s hand a pull and leading her off in the direction of what appeared to be stables.

Clarke couldn’t help but shiver at the memory of her nightmare. When they walked through a large open door, she felt a shiver roll through her body at the possibility the memory in the night might be coming to pass. When her steps slowed as they crossed the threshold, Ontari looked back at her.

“We’ll be back for lunch. Unless things go well.” she winked, causing Clarke to fluster slightly.

Ontari’s eyes jumped slightly to the left to where the stable hands who had begun preparing a couple horses when they saw Ontari and Wanheda approaching.

“Keep dreaming, Ontari.” Clarke stepped forward and let her fingers brush lightly under Ontari’s chin playfully while releasing her other hand. She certainly noticed Ontari’s breath catch. “This one is mine?” Clarke asked, pointing at the brown horse before her and receiving a confirming nod from the boy who extended the reins to her.

“Just going to stand there and gawk or did you have somewhere you planned on taking me?” Clarke asked as she slipped easily on top of the horse, her eyes falling downward to Ontari who was just standing there. Clarke decided she could play that game too.

“I, yeah. We can go.” Ontari hopped up on her own horse with similar ease, staring it forward toward the exit of the stable. After having collected herself, she hollered as she shot past Clarke.

“Think you can keep up, Wanheda?”
Clarke spent the next ten minutes of the ride trying to sort through everything that just happened and all the information Ontari shared with her. She saw Lexa in the Azgeda camp. She told her Nia was back in Toron. She didn’t threaten to arrest her when she accused Clarke of being in Toron to kill Nia. Ontari is willing to fake feelings for her to keep her alive and out of Nia’s cross-hair.

‘Where the hell are we going?’ She wondered.

“Ontari.” Clarke called, trying to get her attention.

Ontari continued to ride on until they entered an area where ruins of buildings remained in hulking piles of brick, stone and concrete. Metal re-bar twisting out from the ruins of what was once Toron. This section of the city was much more difficult to traverse and unlike the region they’d just come from. Clarke was able to make up the ground and move her horse alongside Ontari who was busy scanning their surroundings.

“Where are we going?” Clarke asked.

“Away from prying eyes and straining ears.” Ontari answered. Clarke saw her quickly glance her way then back on the environment around them. “I think we are far enough, but we will keep riding. The ruins will make it difficult for any of Nia’s spies to be within earshot without making noise and alerting us of their presence.”

“I’m not going to kiss you if the guards come around.”

Clarke could have sworn Ontari was going to fall off her horse with how quickly she spun to face her after the declaration. Instead, she just started to laugh. A laugh that filled Clarke with frustration which oozed out of every pore she had.

“I’m not joking.” Clarke reinforced her statement.

After a moment, Ontari shook herself out of her laughter and raised her hand to Clarke in peace.

“You have come up to Toron, planning on doing who-knows-what with or to my mother, and after I’ve said all I have to you this morning, the first thing you say to me aside from “where are we going?” is “I’m not going to kiss you”?“

“I don’t feel comfortable with it.”

“I’m afraid as the merchant says, “Our carts are hitched”, Clarke. There will be an expectation of displays when we are in Toron otherwise my mother won’t believe it.”

“Ontari.” Clarke warned.

“Fine. I wasn’t planning on doing much more of it. Though, it might help relieve some of that stress that has you all wound up.” Ontari playfully with a wink but seeing as Clarke turned her attention away from Ontari, she decided to put an end to her teasing.

After a good thirty minutes of silent riding, Ontari let out a puff of air that was visible in the cold air and turned her attention back on Clarke. “Ask your question.”

Clarke looked at her through sideways eyes and sat up straight on the back of her horse. She felt rather proud of herself getting Ontari to break first. Clarke had no intention of speaking first and in this silent exchange, she discovered something about Ontari.
“Why aren’t I sitting in a cell in Nia’s prison cell if you think I’ve come to kill her?”

Clarke could see the wheels spinning in her head in an effort to find a way to answer her. Clarke decided she couldn’t let her stew too long on an answer and spoke again because Ontari didn’t seem able to fill the silence.

“For someone who wanted me to trust her…”

Ontari frowned and Clarke could see she was getting to her. This morning Clarke had been a mess from the nightmare she had and in combination with the lack of sleep, the stress of the situation had worn her down.

“You aren’t in her cells because I am still trying to figure out exactly why you are in Toron. Ever since Heda wandered into my brother’s camp, I’ve been trying to figure it out why you would agree to come north.”

“Because I agreed I would come north and discuss peace with Nia.”

“If that were the truth, you wouldn’t be here with me right now.”

“I came to negotiate peace. It’s all I’ve wanted for my people since we first met the commander’s people. If talking to you lead to peace between Azgeda and my people, I will listen.”

“That I am more likely to believe and it’s a good start.”

Clarke grunted in frustration. She couldn’t understand how it was this woman seemed to be able to look beyond her words and pick them apart for truth.

“So what do you want me to say, Ontari? Should I just I’m working with your brother and the Commander, the one who betrayed my people at Mount Weather and left us all to die? And instead of trying to actually find peace with your mother, I’ve come all the way up north to Toron to take her place?”

Ontari was quiet as she listened to Clarke’s small rant and Clarke watched her to see if anything registered in her eyes. Unfortunately, the only thing she could see in her brown orbs was the Azgeda trying to determine how much truth Clarke was offering her. A moment of silence between the two passed and Ontari nodded to herself.

“Well? Nothing to say?” Clarke asked.

“I’ll let you know soon enough.” she answered simply.

An answer that left Clarke concerned. She recalled the was Ontari was when she met her. A snide girl who appeared quite full of herself at the banquet table. Her words were sharp and she was full of disinterest in the presence of her mother and brother. The two different personalities made it difficult for Clarke to pin her down. ‘Is this an act?’ Clarke was left to wonder in silent frustration.

About thirty minutes later after many lefts and rights through the northern ruins of what was once Toronto, they arrived at remaining of a collapsed building and when they were what appeared to be a pile of rocks, Clarke watched Ontari slide off her horse.

“In here.” She motioned for Clarke to follow. “Bring the horse.”

“But there’s no door. How do we get in?” Clarke asked, watching Ontari grin as she stepped through a very thin entrance that couldn’t be seen from the angle they approached.
Clarke followed Ontari’s lead and slipped off her horse, approaching what at one time she believed wasn’t a very tall building. To her surprise when she approached, there was a very thin entrance, barely enough for her horse to go through as long as it lowered it’s large body. As she walked through and studied the frame, she noticed it had been reinforced to keep it standing and wooden bracing on the interior held it from falling apart. Clarke couldn’t help but embrace her curiosity.

The room darkened considerably, even with the small amount of light that flowed through the entrance. Clarke proceeded toward Ontari who walked them both into the growing black of the room and watched her slide a board off a pile of rubble and retrieved what appeared to be a small torch. With a quick strike of her flint, she lit what appeared to be a rope wound at the top of the wooden stick, illuminating the path before them. Clarke let her eyes adjust once more from the darkness and saw a tunnel that angled downward then seemed to flatten out after roughly thirty meters.

Ontari stopped moving forward and seemed to be listening for something. All Clarke could hear were the sounds of skittering mice or whatever creature might be scurrying around in the dirt below. she shook her head, worrying Clarke that something was wrong. When Ontari turned and faced her, she could feel her heart rate quicken and with it and braced herself for a fight.

“That’s not why we’re here, Clarke. I need to know that I can trust you.”

“You can, Ontari. I’m here, aren’t I?” Clarke rebuffed the insinuation she couldn’t be trusted.

“What you are going to see, what I’m showing you will get me killed. Nia’s daughter or not. I’m trusting you with this because I have to. I can see what is coming.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“I am taking you to to see my secret, Clarke.”

“And if I don’t like what I see?”

“A problem for another time.” Ontari said as she picked up a second torch to light it, then extended one to Clarke to carry. “Just make sure you keep one hand on the torch and one on the reins.”

Clarke looked at Ontari, then down the tunnel. There was a small path to the right of the ramp and Ontari started to lead her horse in that direction. Clarke decided there wasn’t much more she could do than follow Ontari, who was holding her torch high and leading her down into the tunnel and through the darkness ahead.

~*~

Koma stopped moving forward and lowered himself as low to the ground as he could. He he closed his eyes and took measured breaths in order to to focus.

He could hear the slight breeze from the West as it rolled through the limbs of the leafless elm trees and around the heavy coat of needles that covered the spruce trees in the vicinity. It was there. Quiet, but present and he took a slow and deep breath in, then held it at apex in an effort to determine the location of the unnatural sound.

The sound was there, but never long enough for him to get a good read on precisely where. A couple short, sharp chirps from above and to his left led him to slowly release his breath, stand up, and turn in the direction of the sound.

“You weren’t easy to track.”
“The same could be said for you, Heda. A clever trail but a little predictable.”

“I couldn’t have my group being followed. I’ll have to spend more time in the woods when we return to Polis if it’s predictable. I wasn’t to make it difficult for you.”

“How long did you know?”

“That is was you? Not until I recognized your gait from your trail. You favour your right foot when you walk. It digs into the earth a little more than your left. As did your brother. I am certain it was not visible to Azgeda scouts.”

Koma frowned at the mention that his footfall was so noticeable. “I’ll be sure to take better care of it in the future.”

Lexa threw him a pouch of water and Koma accepted it, removing the cap and taking a couple small sips, then returned it to his Commander. They both continued to scan the forest assuming that there may be eyes out there. Lexa was certain there was not, but being as close to Niagara Falls as they were, it never hurt to air on the side of caution.

“Are they far?” Koma asked.

“A few miles to the north-west. You can answer my questions as we head that direction.”

“Sha, Heda.” Koma nodded.

They starting off in the direction Lexa directed and as they went, he explained the situation with the council and their response to her request, as well as the small force that Indra had managed to assemble to come north. Lexa had remained quiet during their return to Lincoln, Octavia and Levai but he could tell she had become tense.

“And when will they arrive?”

“Two days. Echo and the two Skaikru have made good time, even with setting up their tek. Indra and the Skaikru forces will be here in two weeks.”

“That doesn’t give us a lot of time.”

“It does not. Heda, if we will not be able to confront the Queen’s armies it might be best to turn our warriors around. The snow will begin to fall soon and we may be able to return before the freeze comes.”

“I am not going back.” Lexa stated without reservation.

“Heda.”

“I am not going to allow the looming threat of Nia’s army to remain the reason that peace remains an uncertainty in the Kongeda. I will see this though not matter the outcome.”

The remainder of their journey back to the three she had left behind was made in outward silence. Unfortunately, inwardly Lexa was trying to work through various scenarios in her head and how she was supposed to come to Prince Roan’s aid if she didn’t have the forces she promised. It was likely Nia knew of her intention to come north some time ago thanks to her spies in Polis.

Her knowing was evident in how the patrols she expected as they moved north had been few and far between. Even after the incident in the farm house when they were forced to fight Nia’s warriors.
They hadn’t seen many scouts since that day and something seemed ‘off’. At least she had time to figure some of it out before before Indra and Marcus would arrive with her forces.

As Lexa approached, the sound of a bowstring being slackened from it’s taut position gave Koma the understanding they’d arrived.

They walked into the small, naturally sheltered area and after greetings were exchanged, Levai suggested they warm themselves by their coals. An offer neither Lexa nor Koma refused with the cold biting at any exposed flesh. Octavia was full of questions but Koma only stated their friends were not far behind and would be joining them soon.

It was not his place to share information unless Heda deemed it necessary.

“Koma.” Lexa called for his attention. “In the morning I want you to find Echo and the others and lead them here.”

“Sha, Heda.” He said, rising from the small log he was sitting on near the coals.

“Where are you going?” Lexa asked, observing his decision to stand up.

“Patrol for Azgeda, Heda.”

“No today. You will get some rest and some warm food in you. We watch in pairs until you have rested.”

He looked at his Commander about to protest, but like his suggestion earlier that she consider the possibility of telling her warriors to retreat, it was clear she would not allow a challenge on this subject either.

“Sha.” he said, lowering himself back down on the log next to the pile of glowing coals. He wouldn’t admit it to anyone but himself, but it felt good to rest his aching body. He’d been travelling on foot, a combination of running and walking since Indra ordered him to follow and protect Raven, Bellamy and Echo. Not to mention the numerous Azgeda scouts he’d faced. The bruises and cuts beneath his clothing were evidence of a hard-fought journey.

Koma watched as Lexa leaned forward and put a small branch on the coals, letting the small flames grow and reveal themselves as they reached upward into the sky. She took the small metal pot Octavia had taken from the farm house and put it over the coals, filling it partially with water. She then took out a small pouch of herbs and after pouring the contents into the pot, she threw in some dark meat.

“Heda…” he warned. Obviously concerned the smell of whatever was in the pot might bring curious and hungry Azgeda to their location.

“Yu sou jus laik yu bro.” (You are just like your brother.) Lexa smiled, glancing up at Koma and making him question the reason behind her words.

“He would warn me every time we went on a hunt that this soup would attract unwanted attention. He wouldn’t admit it, but I think he rather enjoyed the notion his Heda made him a meal. I hope you won’t be as stubborn when I tell you to eat.”

“I’d never known my brother to turn down a meal.” he said, enjoying the slight aroma that had begun to rise from the pot. It wasn’t boiling yet, but the promise of it made his stomach rumble in anticipation.
"I would put more of the spices in, but unfortunately we aren’t in Trikru lands and your warning is understood. A shame we aren’t because with some fresh meat and the right plants, this soup could really be great.” She said with a hint of sadness. “I make sure you have the opportunity to try it when we return to Polis and we go on a hunt.”

“It would be an honour to join you on a hunt, Heda.” He bowed slightly at her offer.

“It would be more your responsibility than an honour, Koma.” She said.

“I do not understand.”

“As the bodyguard of a Heda, is it not the paramount responsibility to ensure his or her protection?”

After a momentary pause to consider her words, Lexa recognized that his grey eyes registered his understanding of her offer he stood up before her and lifted a fist to his chest.

“Heda, em bilaik ma koma.” (Heda, it would be my honour.)

“No, ai lukot. Em bilaik ma koma. (No, my friend. It would be my honour.) Lexa said as she stood and extended her arm to for him to take which he did with enthusiasm while trying to remain as stoic as possible under the circumstance of being declared her personal guard.

“I swear to obey and protect Heda from all danger, without question until the end of my days.”

“I accept your vow from this moment until that day. You are now Heda shilkru.”(The Commander’s guard).

She released his arm and sat down once more, directing him to return to his seat. She portioned out three small cups of the soup from the boiling pot and then called Octavia to join them in the small meal. She had been watching Lexa and Koma’s interaction with curiosity and wondered how long Koma had been following them. As she approached, Lexa handed her one of the cups.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet.”

“What does that mean?” Octavia questioned, taking a sip of the broth in her cup and closing her eyes and humming as the warmth of it made it’s way into her body.

“I would like you to go with Koma and bring your brother and the two others he is travelling with back here.” Lexa explained.

“My brother is here?”

“Yes. He has come north and is currently with Raven and the Azgeda woman you know as Echo.”

Octavia couldn’t help but frown when she heard Echo’s name. “Can we trust her? She was working with the same people who poisoned your brother in the Azgeda camp we found Clarke at.”

“A camp she was imprisoned in as well.”

“For a completely different reason than trying to kill your brother.”

Lexa was well aware that Koma’s eyebrows lifted at the mention of Lexa having a brother. He’d not been made aware of Levai’s status and she was not interested in allowing that information to become public knowledge.
“That doesn’t change our current situation. She has led your brother and your friend north and they have survived this far. I have no reason to believe she would betray us. Her life is in as much danger as our own.”

Octavia wished she had the same faith in the Azgeda woman as the Commander did.

“In the future, the sharing of my personal matters will not be spoken again. I will not have anyone endangering my family.” She added a glare to assert the possible consequences should she continue to speak freely of what she considered a sensitive subject.

“Understood.” Octavia confirmed both the vocal order and the silent warning. “But why do you need me to go if they will be coming here?”

“I thought you might like to see your brother.” Lexa answered simply, then lifted her cup to take a sip of her quickly cooling soup.

Octavia sipped her soup and agreed she would go with Koma to bring her brother and the others back tomorrow morning.

“Be sure to make the most of the heat and your rest tonight. When you return, we will be continuing our journey north.” Lexa stated as she stared into the tiny fire.

After she threw another stick on the fire, she looked upward beyond the tree tops to see the grey canvas above. She decided it wouldn’t be much longer before the first flakes began to fall from the sky and the thought led her to instinctively extended her feet forward beside the coals in an attempt to seek their warmth. With the news Koma had given her today, she considered that it was likely the only comfort any of them would find for the foreseeable future.
A Whole New Problem

Chapter Summary

Ontari gives Clarke a glimpse into her biggest secret with the hope Clarke will do the same, while Bellamy, Echo and Raven run into a little trouble en-route to Toron.

Chapter Notes

Hello to you all and I hope you are having an awesome day and week. :)

Here is the next chapter and I am working on the next. I hope to have it by the end of the weekend but it all depends on how much family stuff I have to do. The weather here is FINALLY turning and it's not -30 degrees Celsius every day. That was a remarkably cold February here.

Anyway, enough about that stuff. On with the story! Enjoy the chapter I will see you all again soon.

“Where are we going?”

The tunnel stretched out for as far as Clarke’s eyes were permitted to see, thanks to the light from their torches. They’d been walking for roughly thirty minutes and the only sounds they heard were the slight crackle from the torches, the horses as they walked along beside them and the footfalls of herself and Ontari who continued to walk forward. Clarke was feeling herself getting more on edge the longer they walked.

“Not much farther. I’ll let you know when we get there. We will have to leave our horses but they will be taken care of.” Ontari answered.

They walked for another five minutes and Ontari instructed Clarke to take her torch so she could tie the horses to a silver metal bar that was affixed to the crumbling structure of the tunnel.

“They’ll be fine here?” Clarke asked.

“They will. Someone will be along to make sure they are fed and have some water.”

The mention of others being in the tunnel raised a number of red flags in Clarke’s mind.

“There are people here?”

“Yes, Clarke. There are people here. There have been eyes on us since before we entered the tunnel and there have been eyes on us as we’ve made our way to this point.”

“And it’s safe here?”

“Safer than on the surface. We still have a way to go, but the next part I think you will enjoy. After
all, you fell from the sky. Didn’t you?” Ontari flashed her a grin.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see. C’mon. This way.” Ontari said, hopping up on top of a rock and then taking a seat. Before Clarke knew it, the brunette slid herself forward slightly and she slipped downward and out of sight.

Clarke was startled at the sudden disappearance of Ontari. She was left holding two torches and nervously glancing around the tunnel which to her eyes appeared empty, aside from the two horses that were just standing there watching the human in front of them. After Ontari explained that there were people watching them, she felt a nervousness begin to take hold of her and before she knew it, she climbed on top of the rock to see where it led and half-expecting Ontari to just jump up and startled her.

Instead, Clarke saw a tunnel and what appeared to be a slope heading down and into a small hole just enough for a person, maybe two to squeeze through. It took a moment for her to steel herself, but she put the torches down and slowly hopped forward on her butt as Ontari did moments ago, slid forward and to the edge of the ramp. She expected to bring a torch with her, but before she knew it, she found herself sliding downward unexpectedly, letting out a sharp shriek as she moved forward. She moved slowly at first, but her speed began to increase and increase. She was unable to see as she slid faster and faster in the darkness and her heart was racing, consumed with the thought that something terrible was about to happen.

Something changed and Clarke could feel the ground beneath her start to level out. Her speed slowed and although she couldn’t risk opening her eyes when she was flying along, she gradually slowed and came to a stop and her eyes remained clenched tightly closed.

“You can open you eyes, Clarke.” Came Ontari’s familiar voice.

“I’m done falling?” Clarke asked, still refusing to open her eyes, laying on the ground.

“You never fell. You slid, but yes you are done.”

Clarke stood up and the first thing she noticed when she scanned the room was that it wasn’t a room at all. There was a man standing there with a sword-like weapon in his hand. He wasn’t a large man, rather lanky and he was wearing a path over one of his eyes. The other eye remained on Clarke who was now turning around to look behind herself to see the reason for the noise she was now hearing. What she saw caused her jaw to slacken and her eyes to open in surprise.

“Ontari. Where are we?”

“The people who built it called it Haven.”

Clarke stepped forward, taking her a couple feet from a cliff-edge. What she could see below was a small city seemed to extended far into a cavern and lit by numerous torches due to the lack of sunlight from above.

It was easily the same size as the inhabited areas of Toron, possibly a little larger. There were buildings that were constructed from salvaged rubble from the surface and easily thousands of bodies moving around from place to place. There was even a small river Clarke’s eyes could see that flowed through a make-shift channel on the far side of the city.

“It’s even more impressive when you are down there. Come on. This is the fun part.” Ontari couldn’t help remember the first time she saw this place as she observed the look on Clarke’s face. She was of
both shocked and amazed at the hidden city.

“How do we get down?”

“You put on this harness and attach it to this.” Ontari pointed at the mechanical device that was attached to a metal cable. The cable itself sloped downward from the landing where they stood, all the way to the ground that was roughly 200 meters away.

“You are kidding me.” Clarke stepped back from the edge of what she perceived to be a significant cliff.

“Don’t tell me the leader of the people who lived among the stars is afraid of heights.” Ontari laughed.

“She is afraid of falling to a certain death if that thing breaks.” Clarke eyed the contraption that Ontari had given her with suspicion.

“We’ll both be fine. I’ll be down right after you. If you feel you are going too fast, just squeeze this lever and the brake will slow you down.” Ontari explained.

“And you are sure it’s safe?”

“I promise. If you make it down to the bottom and you don’t die, I’ll give you my last maple candy. Fair enough?” She reached into her jacket pocket and took it out as proof she did, in fact, have the candy.

“Fine. Hook me up to the cable and let’s get this over with.”

“You say that like you won’t be begging me to come back up here and do it again right after.” Ontari laughed.

“Ontari…”

“Fine! Fine! Let’s get you moving.”

Ontari helped Clarke into the harness and made sure it was nice and tight. She clipped the harness to the pulley and as Clarke started to brace herself for what was to come, Ontari shoved her forward leaving Clarke to scream in horror due to her being unprepared for flying down the metal cable. Roughly half way down, she remembered Ontari’s explanation of the brake above her head and she squeezed the lever, slowing her descent enough that it stopped being so horrifying. In fact, the small amount of control made the descent quite enjoyable.

Before she knew it, the trip was over and the pulley slowed and stopped when she reached the ground. There were two people waiting for her and they unclipped her from the harness and she was just about to thank them when the two grabbed a hold of her arms and twisted them behind her back then shoving her face-first against a wall.

“What the f…” Clarke shouted, seeing stars surround her for a moment. The last thing she thought she heard before everything went dark and her body fell limp was the sound of an approaching pulley and Ontari shouting. If she wasn’t so dizzy, she might have been able to make out what she said.

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“You’ve been following them for the last four weeks?” Ontari asked.
“Yes.” Koma answered as straight forward as ever.

“Did they run into any trouble?”

“Nothing significant. They had the Azgeda woman with them and she did a sufficient job making sure they were relatively safe.”

Octavia regarded him with a curious eye when he tensed up discussing Echo and wondered if it was a remnant of the constant strife between the Azgeda and Trikru clans. Whatever it might have been, she abandoned the thought when they both heard loud voices through the trees ahead. They couldn’t see the commotion due to the thick cover of the pine trees around them, but it also meant they were not visible to whoever was ahead.

“Stay low and move slowly. Ready your bow.” Koma whispered. “I’m going to the left and hopefully draw their attention. When you see me turn my left hand inward, release arrows.”

“When? Don’t you mean ‘if’?”

“I did not misspeak.” Koma grunted, staying crouched and heading off in the direction he indicated he would go. That left Octavia to get into position, staying low to the ground as she moved while preparing an arrow but not drawing the string back as she moved.

“Why are you here? Why are you travelling with two Skaikru?” One of the men shouted at Echo who was on her knees alongside Bellamy and Raven in similar positions, in front of the trio of men who appeared to be holding them captive. One appeared to be doing all the talking while two others held their bows up, ready to draw and release at a moment’s notice.

“What are these… things?” another man shouted from one of their horses that had a couple bags. Octavia could see him dig around in one of them and pull out what appeared to be some sort of machine.

Raven insisted they were gifts for their Queen and that they were from Skaikru leaders to Nia but the man didn’t seem to care. He threw the device at the ground so they could watch it break into numerous pieces. Raven cried out for him to stop breaking them but her protests only seemed to spur the man into taking the bags from the horse and throwing them as far as he could into the surrounding woods. The sound of the objects crashing down to the ground led Raven to collapse into a sitting position.

“You think we need your Tek to defeat Polis?” Asked the warrior before them. They continued to hold their hands up showing they were not trying to fight but when he stepped in front of Raven, he threw his boot forward to catch her in the chest, slamming her her to the hard ground so she lay flat on her back while gasping for breath.

He turned back to the two who remained upright and their heart rates increased when they witnessed him draw his weapon and place the tip of it under Bellamy’s chin. The man exerted some pressure on his blade, forcing Bellamy to lift his chin, exposing more of his vulnerable throat.

The sound of the metal weapon scraping against his short beard led Echo to consider slowly dropping her hand to slide the small knife she kept in her sleeve into her palm, calculating in her head how long she would have before the man realized what it was he intended. Bellamy could sense her intention and he closed his eyes and shook his head ever so slight.

Echo understood what he was saying, realizing she may be able to stop the man from killing Bellamy, but it wouldn’t take much for the two with the bows to kill them all. When she saw the
small trail of blood trickle down through the dark beard Echo took in a few short, staggering breaths. She felt helpless but swore to the fury building in her chest that if that warrior hurt Bellamy, she would bring his life so much pain that he would beg her for a death of one thousand cuts.

The warriors action with his sword wasn’t lost on Octavia who was watching from her hidden position. The moment the man drew his weapon and placed it under Bellamy’s neck, she nocked her arrow and slowly drew the string backward while steadying her breath with the thought that if she could kill the one with the sword, Echo or Bellamy could take it and kill one of the archers while she killed the other. That would just leave one. ‘Easy.’ she thought.

Ahead on the trail the sound of a man coughing could be heard, drawing the attention of the two men with the bows. Octavia could see Koma approaching with his hood drawn up over his head and a scarf over his face and it appeared he’d drawn the attention of the group of Azgeda that had forced their friends to their knees. Octavia slackened the string of her bow so she wouldn’t tire her arm.

“You there! State your business.”

“Trying to get home.”

“Stay where you are. Remove that scarf and show us your face.”

Koma shuffled forward with a stagger, dragging his feet and coughing rougher than he had on his initial approach. The man who was moments ago holding a sword to Bellamy’s exposed throat gave an order to the man who threw Raven’s electronics to the ground as he returned.

“Frag em op.”(Kill him).

“Please, Just let me pass. I need to get home. My family…”

“Shut-up. You chose a bad day to try to get home, old man.” laughed the Azgeda man who approached a hunched over Koma.

Octavia watched Koma’s subtle movement as the man approached him. She’d anticipated his signal when she heard the command and drew the string back and steadied her breathing as Lincoln had shown her. A moment later, chaos erupted in the small clearing.

Octavia let loose her arrow and hadn’t even paid attention to where it hit on the man, a clean shot into his side, deep through the winter coat and into the man’s lungs. His shriek and subsequent choking for air as the arrow pierced his lung was proof enough she hit her intended target. She had another arrow drawn on the bow string to release before the second archer had the opportunity to locate where she was crouched, tucked in tightly to the side of a large oak.

The man in front of Koma didn’t surprise so easily and suspected this was a trap. Koma stood straight up and removed the cloth from his face, brandishing his sword and stared forward into the eyes of the man before him who stood a near equal in size.

“Good. I didn’t want to have to kill a cowering old man.”

Koma didn’t mince words with the man. Rather, he lunged forward trying to catch his opponent off guard and dictate the combat. Unfortunately, the Azgeda warrior was also well skilled. Their weapons found no flesh, only metal and air as they deflected or just missed an opportunity to dig into their opponent. Both relied on their physicality in combat to gain an edge over opponents and this was quickly turning into a stalemate between the two warriors who circled in an attempt to find an opening.
Echo, on the other hand was not willing to allow her opponent such a luxury. She saw the second arrow bury itself in a second target. She jumped up and at the man in front of Bellamy with her small blade. The look of a man trying to understand what was happening turned back to his prisoner and felt the sharp sting of metal pierce the flesh of his neck, and then the full impact of Echo’s weight as she tackled him to the ground.

Bellamy watched on as Echo vaulted herself up off the ground and in one fluid motion buried her knife in the throat of the man who moments ago held a sword at his throat. He moved next to her and could see she had him handled and he said he would go check on Raven to make sure she didn’t suffer any serious injuries. Once Raven declared herself uninjured beyond superficial pain, she asked him to find the bag the man threw in the woods.

Octavia by this time walked from her spot behind a tree and pulled out another arrow, drawing it back and taking in a short, half-breath which she slowly released to steady herself. The thrum of the string directed the arrow from the bow and planted it in the leg of the Azgeda man locked in combat with Koma. Seeing the opening Octavia created, Koma knocked the sword from the warrior’s hand and plunged his sword into his chest with a thrust. Once the man fell to the ground, he pulled his blade out, wiping the red from it on the fallen man’s furs.

“Looks like you were lucky we came along, big brother.”

“Octavia?” Bellamy asked with shock in his voice. He’d just picked up the bag and spun around quickly to see Octavia emerge from the tree-line covered in grey-brown furs and a victorious smirk on her face. He returned to Raven and helped her up, handing her the bag of electronics. Raven let out a groan when she saw that nearly all of the receivers and transmitters had some sort of damage to them. Her only comfort - if that was what she could call it - was that the man grabbed the bag of radio tech rather than the other, smaller bag of explosives that were tied to the other side of the saddle.

“Everyone is ok?”

“Raven might be hurt.” he suggested, but was quickly rebuffed.

“I’m fine. My receivers on the other hand are going to take some time to fix, if I can even repair them.” she growled, moving around and gathering pieces of radio that the Azgeda had thrown at the ground.

“We need to get rid of the bodies.” Koma declared. “You can repair your tek when we reach Heda and the others.”

Echo stared down at the Azgeda warrior beneath her and frowned. She never enjoyed killing her own people, not even those who she felt endangered her life but this one was different. She studied his face for a moment but there was no recognition of who he was. He was just another dead man she’d killed but everything about it felt different. It wasn’t lost on her than rather just sticking him in the neck once, she stabbed the side of his neck numerous times.

“I’ll help you with this one.”

Echo snapped to, realizing that Octavia was talking to her. She wiped the small knife in her hand off on the man’s clothes and tucked it back into the sheath in her sleeve, looping the small string around it to keep it in place. Rather than say anything, Echo just nodded and acknowledgement then reached down to grab his arms while Octavia grabbed his legs.

“You alright?”
Echo looked up at Octavia, trying to mask what was going on in her head.

“I’m fine. Just tired.” She lied, but Octavia seemed to buy it.

The five made quick work of cleaning up the area and collecting the parts that were scattered all over the ground. Once they were all satisfied with the area, both Octavia and Koma led the others toward their destination and explained that Lexa was waiting for them, along with Levai and Lincoln.

~*~*~*~

The sound of something scuffing against the ground was what woke Clarke up. She could feel a soft surface beneath her and realized it was a pile of furs. Rather than open her eyes, she kept them closed in order to listen to the conversations around her. She also focused on her lungs keeping an even breath so everyone would think she was still asleep. The closest conversation wasn’t too far away and she could make out Ontari’s voice along with one other. A man’s voice.

“I warned you about bringing them here. If the Queen finds out…”

“You didn’t have to get your people to attack her. She is here because I invited her. Do you think she’s going to be interested in helping us if you attack her? As far as Nia goes, she has no idea we are here. We weren’t followed and you know it. Your people tracked us the entire way here.”

“You are fortunate the council wants to speak to her. If it were up to me, she’d have died before she touched the ground. She had brought nothing but death since she and her people arrived. Not even Heda has been able to stop them.”

“They think I’m a killer? Clarke wondered, understanding the man’s hesitation in wanting her or her people around them. She had to fight the urge to stand up and start arguing with the man as to why events have unfurled the way they have, but Clarke had the feeling Ontari was involving her in the middle of yet another conflict.

“If you tried, her people would never help yours. They defeated Maunde and they have the power to bring us all to heel with their technology but she is here with me, alone. Imagine what they could do for us as an allies. What Wanheda could do.”

Clarke didn’t like the notion of Ontari making offers in her name to people she didn’t know and she found herself making an exhibition of groaning while trying to sit up and lifting her hand to the spot on her forehead that was swollen and sore.

“She’s awake. Consider yourself lucky.” Ontari scolded the man, moving to Clarke’s side and helping her sit upright.

“If Wanheda could be killed by being shoved into a wall, she doesn’t deserve the name.”

“What, what happened?” Clarke feigned some confusion and accepted Ontari’s help to stand.

Ontari couldn’t help but allow a small grin appearing momentarily on her mouth that was no longer in view of the man who was talking to her.

“Your arrival scared him.” Ontari directed her attention to the man standing behind her over her shoulder with her thumb. “We’ve sorted it out. Are you well enough to speak to their council?”

“What council?” Clarke asked, looking past Ontari to the man standing there.

She saw an older man with shaggy brown hair that had a few streaks of grey throughout that reached
all the way down to his patchy, short beard. What caught her attention was that the man had one strikingly blue eye and one that was brown. Clarke recognized it as heterochromia because a couple people on the ark had a similar condition. She was always fascinated by how beautiful she thought it was. She realized she was staring and that there was, in fact, a man looking back at her with an amused look on his face.

“Who are you?” Clarke asked.

“Bader. You are the mighty Wanheda?”

“I have been called that.” Clarke nodded, then looked up at Ontari for answers she felt she was owed. As she still starred at Ontari, she continued, “Tell your council I would be happy to meet with them, provided I won’t be thrown into any more walls.”

The man scoffed at her words, turned and walked away in a direction Clarke assumed was in the direction of his council which left her to ask; “Where the hell are we, Ontari?”

Before answering, Ontari walked over to a chair and directed Clarke to sit down as she sat in the one across from it. Clarke huffed out a breath and moved with large strides to sit in the chair so Ontari would provide her with answers.

“This is Haven. I told you.”

“No, Ontari. What are we doing in a hole in the ground and why am I being taken to talk to a council when I don’t even know why you brought me here.”

“These people need your help, Clarke. There are a lot of sick people and your people have medicine. You could help them. You could cure them.”

Clarke went from a rigid posture to a slightly deflated one when she saw the sincerity on Ontari’s face. There had to be thousands of people down here, she couldn’t possibly help them all. Not with what was to come on the surface above.

“Ontari, I can’t help all these people. I don’t know what is happening to them. I’m not my mother and I’m not a doctor. I wouldn’t know how to help them.”

“You could speak to them on behalf of your people. You are Wanheda.” Ontari argued. “You have medicines. You’ve healed ripas (reapers). You have a power that can bring people back from the dead.”

Clarke sighed with a note of sadness when she saw the earnestness in Ontari’s in her belief that Clarke could save them.

“Ontari, it’s not that simple.”

“Come. I’ll show you and then you’ll see.” Ontari was pleading, and suddenly she was on her feet, grabbing Clarke’s hand but not as aggressively as she’d done in the past. Clarke decided if anything, she would go to be able see where it was they had brought her, and if needed a way to escape.

To her dismay, she saw no immediate way for her to escape if things went south. Every route through the make-shift buildings all seemed to blend together, make it seem like she was running one giant and unending maze.

Ontari led her through a few left and rights, and every time they seemed to draw closer to the people who lived here, they scattered in order to avoid Clarke’s attention. She heard utterings of “Wanheda”
and “Commander of death” that left her feeling unsettled. Those who did not run, hid themselves by covering their faces in loose clothing. She thought it extremely odd behaviour and tried to have Ontari explain, but Ontari would only say, “You’ll see in a moment.” and tugged her along, eventually arriving at their destination.

“This is what I wanted you to see.”

In front of Clarke stood a tall, well-made structure of intricately carved wood framing with metal siding that was easily as large as some of the three-story buildings in Toron. Clarke imagined how long it must have taken them to get it to look the way it does, let alone find and bring the material down to create such a beautiful piece of art. When she heard the cries from inside the building, she understood why Ontari brought her here.

“Look inside.”

“I don’t think this is a good idea, Ontari.”

“You just need to see why I brought you here. It will help.”

Clarke watched Ontari disappear through the entrance and decided she had little choice in the matter. One foot in front of the other, Clarke stepped forward and through the front door and to her surprise, Ontari was in the arms of a man, kissing him passionately. She froze in her spot for a moment being left to wonder how many people Ontari may or may not have kissed in the past twenty-four hours but discarded the notion. She had bigger questions she needed answered and she would get them answered before she allowed Ontari to being her to speak to the council.

As interesting as that spectacle of Ontari and the man was, what truly captured her attention was the numerous beds in the room that were filled with young teens and very young children. There had to be at least fifty of them, all various sizes and constructed like the buildings outside. With whatever material was available. She stepped in the direction of some of the beds and even without medical expertise of her mother or Jackson, she knew what she was looking at. Many of them exhibited radiation sickness symptoms and the few that had no outward evidence were either coughing, having troubles breathing or were asleep. At least, Clarke hoped they were simply sleeping. She saw a taller woman heading toward one of the beds and Clarke realized what she was doing.

“Stop. Where did you get that water?” Clarke rushed forward, taking the cup from a woman who was about to give it to one of the children. To drink. “Stop giving them water right now.”

“Who are you and why should we stop giving them water?” asked a middle aged woman who had numerous patches of grey in her hair who turned to look at Clarke. The first thing she noticed was one of her eyes was completely devoid of a colour, the iris and pupil turned a clear white but aside from that, she wore a very visible frown on her face.

“I’m Clar…”

“This is Wanheda.” Ontari interrupted, rushing from where she was moments ago to Clarke’s side, stepping between the two. “She’s here to help.”

“They are dehydrated. They require water.” The woman resolutely stated, stepping forward and trying to give what appeared to be a six-year old girl the cup.

“If I am right, and you are giving that girl water you won’t be helping her, you would just be killing her slowly.”

The woman stopped extending the cup to the girl and pulled it back slightly, telling the girl it will just
be a minute before she can give her water.

“Here. Give her this.” Ontari said, taking off her pack and handing the woman her container of water.

The girl sipped at the strange looking container in her hands after it was given to her and she smiled brightly, laying on the bed and offering a quiet “thank-you” through dried lips.

“Come over here.” The woman directed Clarke and Ontari to a room not far from where they were. In it was a table and a few chairs which led Clarke to assume it was her office. She was their fisa (healer). Once they were all seated, she stared across at Clarke expectantly.

“My name is Suri. Now, can you tell me how you know what is happening to my people by just looking at them?.”

“Because I was trained to see the signs. All my people are. There is radiation somewhere in here is making you all sick. Many of the older children in that room have radiation burns and some of the younger ones do too. If it’s on the skin it means that they are coming in contact with it regularly.”

“This is an affliction our people have. This is not new to us.”

“I think your people's problem is not one of your making. Rather whatever is down here is slowly killing your people off. It won’t be long until all of you become too ill that you can’t be helped. The first thing you can do is stop drinking the water until I figure it out.”

Suri let out a long sigh at Clarke’s news and seemed to be trying to decide how much truth Wanheda was speaking. Being the ‘Commander of Death’, she likely had greater insight with her technology and if anything she knew could help her people, she decided to listen.

“So what can we do? This is our home. Is there a way to fix this?”

Behind them, the man who was holding Ontari in his embrace earlier joined them, walking into the room. Clarke saw Ontari brighten slightly, even in spite of the conversation that had just begun. Clarke wished she had better news, but decided to share all that she knew, and the likelihood of progression if things remained as they did.

Clarke explained the signs and symptoms of radiation poisoning, the impact it has on their bodies and the likely sources of it in their ecosystem. It was all a basic and crude understanding, but the earth skills class taught by Pike covered most of the basics on what to avoid if ever they made a return to the ground, chiefly the consequences of drinking water contaminated with radiation. The more she explained, the more horrified Suri became.

“But our people have always had deformities or illnesses, ever since Paraimfaya. It is not always passed down through the generations but of late, our youngest have become impacted in much greater numbers.”

“You need to leave this place.” Clarke explained. "That is how your people have a chance."

“And be hunted? We tried many years ago but became the favourite sport of people above. If we were caught, we were often burned alive in fear we could get others sick. We can’t risk that, which is why we go out in few numbers to hunt. We can’t let that happen, not again. This isn’t something that I can decide for my people. With winter coming, food is scarce and many of our people will die from the cold, along with starvation. Any who might manage to survive would be caught by Nia’s armies. We have to find a way to make life here work.”
Clarke then suggested that they check their source of water immediately. That they should travel up stream as far as it took to discover any technology or metals from the old world that might be in the stream that feeds their city and to remove it carefully. She also suggested that if there is a way to bring water from another source, they should focus their efforts on that before winter. She would do what she could and bring samples of both water and soil they used to Camp Jaha to make sure, but that would take time - time she may not have if everything with Prince Roan and Lexa were to fall apart.

Clarke’s thoughts went to Ontari and she found herself wondering how many layers there were to this girl, and how much of it was all a show to deceive or manipulate her into give in and doing as she asks. Clarke was trying to piecing things together but she needed time alone to sort it all out. Roan, Ontari and Lexa. All of them had a part to play in this great game.

“I need time to rest, to figure out what I can do to help your people.”

Through the entire explanation of various illness symptoms or radiation poisoning, troubling living conditions, the worsening of symptoms if they continued to live as they have been underground, Ontari was silent. They all were. Clarke was sharing knowledge they’d never heard, and could barely understood now as she explained it. What they took from the conversation is that things were only going to get worse before they got better. Ontari agreed it was the right time to take a break.

“I think that is a good idea. We’ll have people bring water down from other places for the time being. We can get rid of all the bad water and inform everyone to avoid the river until it is determined safe. Come with me, Wanheda. I’ll take you where you can rest for a while.”

“Thank you.”

Ontari led her back to the building she was first brought to and Ontari explained it was her house when she visited. She told Clarke to treat it as her own and that some food would be brought to her for lunch. That was something Clarke was quite happy to hear because she was fairly hungry. Just before Ontari excused herself, likely to return to the man she was with earlier, she reached in her pocket and pulled out a tiny, plastic-wrapped candy and put it on the table in front of Clarke.

“As promised. I’ll be back before the council calls for you.”

"I want answers from you Ontari." Clarke stated, but her will wasn't in it. Her body was betraying her and her head was still throbbing from the incident with the two men earlier.

"And I will give you all the answers you will need. I think it is time you answer some of mine as well but it can wait until later. You need to sleep."

Without another word, she spun and left the tiny shack and with it, Clarke to her own devices and assumed she had a lot to consider. She also knew it wasn’t going to get any easier later in the day when she was to meet the council.

Clarke looked over at the soft bed she was on earlier and decided she would take Ontari’s advice and lay back down. There was a lot for her to consider in trying to figure out a way to help these people when she had so much to do before then.

She felt like the proverbial ‘hamster-on-a-wheel’ and she needed a break to try to settle things down for both her body and her mind. She’d had so much thrown at her this morning and the lack of sleep the night before hadn’t helped. When her head came to rest on the small pillow she could feel her eye lids getting heavy and she let out a sleepy yawn, promising herself that she would just have a short nap before Ontari returned. Then she would get some real answers from a girl who appeared to her
to be playing two different sides and she wanted to know why.
The trio of Raven, Bellamy and Echo join with Lexa's group where they begin to see Echo's condition worsen, concerning them all. Down in Haven, Clarke discusses the few options the people of Haven have and is met with resistance, only to learn they would prefer her to do something she swore to never do again.

The trip back to the camp for Koma, Octavia and the others due to the difficult terrain and the understanding that they needed to erase any chance an Azgeda tracker could find their trail and track them back to the Commander's camp. Both Koma and Echo were adamant after their confrontation that they pay close attention to leaving no visible path that led to their destination.

Lexa had watched them pass below her, sitting still on a stout branch as close to the body of the tree as possible while keeping her bow at the ready and impressed with their effort, even that of Bellamy who seemed to have learned a few skills during their time on the trail. She’d always regarded him as clumsy but this version of him was different. Rather than just paying attention to where he was going, he seemed to be listening around them as well. ‘They both seem to be quick learners.’ She thought, thinking back to the change that enveloped Octavia as well.

She waited a while longer against the body of the tree to determine whether or not they had an Azgeda who were lucky enough to pick up on their trail. When she was certain they weren’t being followed, she started her descent down the tree. Her body feeling the slight flex of a thinner limb, she quietly scolded herself for stepping on it in a manner making it bow with her weight. It was her quick reflexes and her muscles tightening in response to her error that stilled her body so she could lift the weight from the foot and avoid making the possible noise. It wouldn’t do if she was discovered by her own scout.

The last time she caused a branch to crack, it was under Anya’s tutelage resulting in a punishment that had Lexa to climb trees from sun-up to sun-down. Lexa tightened the grip of her hands in memory of needed significant bandages on her hands and nearly a two days to recover from the sore muscles in her body, even with her increased healing ability. Anya only gave her one.
She smiled at the warm feeling in her chest that Anya was still reminding her of lessons from the beyond. She wished Anya was here today, able to tell her what to do. Of course, Anya would have little sympathy for her situation and scold her for not seeing what her actions had led to.

It was another twenty minutes before Koma, Octavia and the others reached their destination with Lexa returning shortly after. She arrived to no fanfare, only a few glances from the weary group. She walked over to take a seat next to Koma near the small fire, each of them huddling around it for warmth with their hands extended forward.

“Thank you all for making the journey. Any issues?” Lexa asked, glancing around at the group of newcomers to survey their well being. They all appeared tired, and it was obvious Echo was doing her best to mask any underlying exhaustion. Unfortunately, she was doing a terrible job at it leaning into Bellamy and barely keeping her eyes open.

“Four, but easily handled. We should be fine for now.” Koma answered. “We should not spend longer than a couple days here. The fight with the Azgeda will raise an alarm once they do not return.”

Lexa hummed her understanding. With the group looking as they did she decided they would spend the next couple days recovering their strength. Koma would no doubt protest, but in her mind the matter was settled. Reaching down beside herself, Lexa picked up the pot she used a couple days ago to make Koma his soup. He could see what she was doing so he handed her his container of water.

“Thank you.”

“Heda, we have news…” Echo started, forcing herself to sit up straight but was cut off by a wave of Lexa’s hand.

“I already know.” Lexa answered, drawing questioning looks from the trio. “You should all rest. Did you bring one your radios?”

“About that.” Raven said, pointing to the bags she’d hung on a tree branch upon their arrival. “The group of Azgeda we had the run-in with did some damage to my transmitters. I’m going to have to try to put some of them back together, if it’s even possible.” She then pointed upward into the sky which was starting to quickly darken. “I need good light to work on them and unless you let me have a roaring fire so I can see what I am doing, it’ll have to wait until morning.”

“Very well, Raven of the sky people. I have faith you will be able to do as you’ve explained.”

“Just Raven.”

“Pardon?” Lexa looked up while patting her pockets for a small pouch but coming up empty.

“Just call me Raven. Or Reyes. I think everyone here knows who my people are.”

“Very well, Raven. Can you hand me that small pouch?” Lexa pointed at a small pack suspended from a tree behind her. Raven’s stiff body nearly gave way and she waved off Bellamy who started to stand to give her a hand. She placed an increasing amount of weight on her good leg to compensate but she managed to grab the bag and return to her spot next to the fire.

“You are injured?” Lexa asked, taking out a small pouch containing various spices and noticing it was nearly empty which caused her to frown slightly.

“Old injury.”
“Very well.” Lexa accepted the explanation without further question, but it didn’t stop her from thinking about it. “You should all rest and sleep by the fire. We will keep it burning low tonight to ensure you have a good rest. This soup will be ready for you all soon and there is meat in the bag beside the fire for you to eat.” Lexa stated, overturning the small pouch in her hand to empty it’s remaining contents into the pot of water. It had not started boiling yet, but their mouths began to water at the medley of spices in the pot that had started to fill their senses.

“Where is Octavia?” Bellamy asked, looking around the camp.

“Scouting with Levai. They are returning soon and then I will take their place with Lincoln.”

“How is she?”

“She is well. She is likely the reason we are all here rather than in one of Nia’s cells in Toron.” It wasn’t an absolute truth but when Bellamy’s face brightened with pride, Lexa nodded at him. “She is a fine warrior.”

“We can keep watch tonight.” Echo suggested, placing her hand on Bellamy’s knee even though she leaned on Bellamy as though she were moments away from passing out.

“You will rest. The three of you will not be doing anything for a couple days.”

“I’ll bring you your soup when it’s ready. Let’s lay down for a little while.” Bellamy suggested to Echo. “I’ll set up the tent as well.”

Echo agreed and it surprised him. He was expecting her to protest as she always did but he could see her exhaustion had become a fight she could no longer run from. He guessed it might have been because there were more of them now and she didn’t feel as much pressure to keep them all safe.

“No tent.” Lexa said as an order, causing Bellamy to look up at her with a frown.

“She needs protection from the cold.”

“She needs to be able to move quickly if Azgeda find this camp. No tent.”

“Bellamy, she’s right.”

He turned to look at Echo and was about to protest but he knew she was right. Echo had said it numerous times on the trip northward that the tent was more of a liability if they were set upon by thieves of Azgeda scouts. It was only his fervent insistence and her occasional inability to say no to him that resulted in the use of the tent. At least at first. Over the last few weeks, her bodies inability to keep such a rigorous pace combined with the onset of her condition had led to her relenting to his push to use the tent.

“Fine. But I’ll make sure the fire stays warm enough.”

Bellamy moved quickly over to one of the horses and removed some furs and a blanket from a pack, placing them on the ground next to the fire so Echo would be comfortable. He grabbed a few for Raven at the same time, leaving them beside her so she could set it up as she liked.

By the time they had set themselves up for the night, the soup had come to a boil. Bellamy portioned out the soup handing a cup to both Raven and Echo, both of whom seemed ready to pass out next to the fire. Raven watched all the while with curious but tired eyes the change in Bellamy. She too could see something different about him as the Commander had. Roughly a month ago, he’d have challenged Lexa on setting up a tent rather than just going along with what she ordered.
“Why aren’t you eating?” Echo looked up at Bellamy, her heavy eyes fighting to stay open while hiding beneath her blanket. She’d been in and out of sleep for the last couple minutes with him reminding her to finish her soup. Little did she know he’d been slowly refilling her bowl with his share while she nodded off.

“I’ll eat soon. I just want to make sure you finish yours then I’ll put more wood on the fire.”

Echo finished her soup, and most of Bellamy’s with his insistence. She mumbled something in Trigedasleng he didn’t understand and pushed the cup away with her hands so she could lay down and fall into sleep. When he looked over at Raven, she too was out like a light, laying on top of a couple furs and beneath their other blanket in a curled up little ball close enough to the small fire to absorb it’s heat but not enough to be in any danger.

He too was exhausted, but he was determined to remain awake until Octavia returned. He decided the best place to wait would be under the blanket next to Echo. He downed the couple of mouthfuls of soup and threw a couple branches on the fire to keep it burning warm then crawled in next to Echo in a way to prevent the cold from invading as best as possible. It wasn’t long until the combination of exhaustion and the steady breathing of Echo lulled him into falling prey to sleep, joining Raven and Echo in much needed rest.

Lexa and Koma both watched the trio finally nod off and after a couple minutes, Koma decided it was the right time.

“Heda. We should speak.” He said, standing up from his seat on log and walking off from the camp after taking a look at Echo who had been helped to the ground by Bellamy.

“I agree.” she replied. After a minute of walking from the camp, she looked up at her personal guard. “Is it the sickness?”

Koma nodded. “She has kept it to herself for a while, but it will start to become something she can not hide for much longer.”

“And she won’t remove herself from the conflict.” Lexa reflected on the notion she might, but discarded it immediately. These were Echo’s people and Lexa knew she would do the same thing in her place.

“No. She wishes to speak to you about a matter as well. She says she has a possible solution to our problem but she refused to speak to me about it. I thought she would have requested it when we arrived.”

“She looks undernourished as well as exhausted. I’m surprised she didn’t collapse next to the fire when they arrived. As much as I would like to send her back to Polis or Tondc in her condition, if she has a solution to our current dilemma I have no doubt it will involve her participation and she will need her energy. Be sure she eats extra rations.”

“We don’t have much left, Heda. Echo informed me their diet had become reliant on hunting and their supply of food is nearly finished.”

“We can kill one of the horses. They won’t be much use from this point forward and that will solve our problem for the interim. After the meat is prepared, we will move on to find a new camp. There she will have plenty of time to rest provided if we manage to avoid any Azgeda who may come looking.”

“Sha, Heda.”
Koma turned to head back to the small camp they’d created but when Lexa’s hand came to rest on his shoulder, he stopped and turned toward her.

“Do you trust her?”

Koma paused for a moment, looking back in the direction of the well hidden camp and then back to his Commander.

“I trust that she will do what she must for the child.”

Lexa released her hand from Koma’s shoulder and dismissed him so he could return to watch over the group. She also reminded him to make sure Echo eats more than the others when she wakes up.

Lexa remained apart from the group and continued to pace around the camp. Her mind toyed with the belief that whatever Echo was going to offer she believed it was unlikely that it could tip the scale in her favour but whatever it was, it would have to wait until Raven fixed her radio and she could speak to Indra.

~*~*~

Clarke woke up to the sound of Ontari calling her name. She turned her head and cracked open her eyes, taking little time to adjust to the candle light that filled the room and looking toward Ontari who was sitting in a chair behind a table. Once the clouds lifted from her eyes she sat upright, releasing an audible yawn while rubbing her eyes free from sleep.

“You were quite tired. I had to yell your name to get you to wake up.”

“Is it time to go to the council?”

“Not yet but soon. I believe we have some things to talk about before we go talk to them.”

Clarke was still crawling from the restful comfort of sleep and she nodded, trying to gather her thoughts. She started with the most obvious to her.

“What is this place? Why are there so many people here?”

Ontari pointed at the chair opposite to suggest Clarke join her. Once Clarke forced herself up and from the comfort of the bed, she walked over to the table and sat down to see a plate of steaming food waiting for her. When she started eating the food on the plate in front of her after a thorough inspection, Ontari began her answer.

She explained that this was a safe-haven for people who have physical abnormalities and have been targeted by Nia since she ascended to power. The community also included those who were sickly or simply considered too frail to survive. If Nia determined them too weak to be useful to society, they must be eliminated to make sure only the strongest survive. This is where they had always been safe from her until everyone started to become sick.

“And you think I can cure them so you brought me here to see for myself.”

“Maybe not cure them, but help them understand why they are getting sick. Your people have medicines that might help them.”

Clarke thought back to the boys and girls, laying in the make-shift infirmary Ontari showed her. The ones who weren’t sleeping were coughing and wheezing in their weak states and covered in patches of radiation burns. The scene brought her back to the control room room in Mount Weather and
watching the dining hall filled with families.

Clarke could feel her fidgeting the fork in her fingers without having to look down at her hands and Ontari could see the sudden change in Clarke’s demeanor. It could be so easy for her to lose herself in them again. The memory of what she did to those innocent people, watching them choke on the air that once gave them life. She closed her eyes, put down her fork and took a deep breath to fight the turbulence just below the surface.

“Clarke?”

“I’m fine. It’s fine.” she said, taking in a couple more deep breaths then opening her eyes again to look across at Ontari. ‘I can help these people.’

“If you can’t help them…”

“I’ll do what I can to help, but they can’t stay here. Whatever is down here, aside from the complete lack of sunlight, is killing these people slowly. The sickest will need my mother to help them and the equipment back at Camp Jaha.”

“That isn’t possible.” Ontari shook her head. “With winter almost here, even the healthiest of us wouldn’t survive the trip. If Nia’s warriors didn’t kill everyone first, the sickest here would die within a week.”

“I heard you say they were “our people” to the man earlier when I woke up. Who are these people to you?”

“They are like me. Forced to live a different life because of Nia’s actions and paying the price for it every day she remains the Queen of Azgeda.”

“But you live in Toron and are Nia’s daughter.”

“Adopted, daughter” Ontari emphasized, glowering at the notion. “I wasn’t born in Azgeda territory and I am definitely not her daughter. I’ll never be her daughter.”

“But you still show your support for her.”

“I’m not stupid.” Ontari scoffed. “Nia may call me her daughter but only so long as I do what she says. You’ve met her, but you don’t know her. She has a way of making you do things for her and making it seem like there is no other option. As I grew up, I didn’t know who she was - what she is. I was alone and I had nobody.”

“So she used you. Why didn’t you run away?”

“I tied many times. I was young but not too young to forget what she and her warriors did to my village. They massacred everyone and there was nobody left. I was just about the feel the steel that killed my father but at some point I’d gotten cut on my cheek and my blood caught Nia’s eye and she did what I thought was protecting me. I guess she thought it would be good to have a nightblood to do her bidding when she became Queen.”

“Why now?”

“Because my people need me. I’d never thought you would come to Toron but it’s an opportunity I could not pass on. I can see you aren’t like her, Clarke and that is why I brought you here.”

“I’ve told you I can’t help your people immediately, aside from what I’ve already suggested. What
other use can I be to you?”

“You can tell me what my brother has planned for my Nia.”

Clarke’s silence spoke volumes, but it wasn’t because she didn’t want to explain to Ontari. She’d shown her enough to likely end up in Nia’s prison and put to death for what she’s done. Rather, she was trying to sort it in a manner that would sound believable. She could see the longer she kept quiet, the more angry Ontari was becoming. Likely with the thought Clarke still refused to trust her.

“What will it take for you to trust me? Do I have to directly attack Nia before you share why you’ve come to Toron and how my brother is involved?” There was a steadily rising anger reflected in Ontari’s tone.

“I am here to help your brother.” Clarke enjoyed the moment. It felt like she finally had someone to confide in but she still didn’t know Ontari and she had to fight the urge to deflect Ontari’s inquisitive brown eyes.

“And…?”

“And he wants to claim the throne as his own. He says he has support of many of the generals but if I offer him my support in public, it would be enough to have the people of Toron turn against Nia.”

“That’s it?” Ontari looked at Clarke with surprise at the startlingly simple plan. “There has to be more.”

“There is.” Clarke affirmed her suspicions and leaned forward in a quiet breath to say, “The Commander is supporting your brother’s attempt at overthrowing of Nia. In return for that support, he will be joining the Kongeda as a full member. Once he does, he will allow free movement between the clans as well as open trade.”

“I see.” Ontari leaned back in her chair. “Is that what Heda said to you in the tent?”

“No. That was what Roan explained to me as we travelled north. I told her I had a plan and that she would have to wait for Echo to remain behind and she would tell her the following day after I left with Roan.”

“So you don’t know what his plan is?”

“He just said his supporters would be there for him when the time came for me to declare my support for him. Your moth...” Clarke swiftly re-evaluated her choice of words. “..Nia, sent him away from Toron before he had the opportunity to discuss his plan the following day.”

“Perhaps it is time for me to confront my brother. It doesn’t surprise me that Echo is mixed up in all this. He’s always had a soft spot for her, ever since he saw her in one of Nia’s cells.” Ontari sighed.

“Echo was your mothers prisoner?”

“Like many who grow up poor and underfed, she was caught stealing food shortly after Nia took power. Crimes of food theft are crimes punishable by death.”

“And Roan freed her?”

“He was young and he made a decision to piss off Nia in what he called, “one of his youthful acts of defiance”. He said they were friends and Nia spared her life on the condition Echo spied for her. I never got to know her very well. People down here knew her, though. Her parents died when she
was very young.”

Clarke’s eyes opened in sudden realization that their Roan and Echo’s banter in the Azgeda camp between the borders of Trikru and Azgeda was little more than an act. Roan had no intention of ever turning her over to Nia for giving her a black eye during their fight.

“What?” Ontari asked after watching the surprise then amusement wash over Clarke.

“That bitch.” Clarke started to laugh.

“Echo?”

“Yes. Roan let her go because he said Nia would kill her for punching me in the eye, and gave her the option of helping my injured friend back to Tondc or going with him and dying at Nia’s hand.”

“There is no way he would have killed her. Especially for just hitting you with a single punch.”

“Then he did it for another reason. My guess is he sent her with a message to the Commander.”

“I suppose he didn’t tell you what the message was?”

“No. When we left the camp, it was the last time I’d seen her. When we got to Toron, Nia sent Roan away in the night before he could give me any details. All I know is that she supported him move to take power.”

Clarke watched Ontari sigh and tap the table in front of her with her index finger. She was lost in thought for a moment and Clarke quickly ate some of the food on her plate. She was actually quite hungry and made short work of the shredded meat that was covered in a sweet sauce.

“I guess we won’t know more until Roan returns. He should be back today or tomorrow. We should go to speak to the council now. If we don’t, it will be very late by the time we get back to Toron and Nia will be suspicious.”

“Alright, but need you to tell them I can’t promise anything.” Clarke said. “If we can’t get back to Camp Jaha, then we’ve done all I can do for now.”

“I’ll make them understand. Just be as clear as you can about their situation down here. I’ve tried, but it’s the only place they’ve been where they are safe. They won’t want to leave.”

“I’ll do what I can.”

~*~*~

“If you don’t leave, you’ll all wind up dead. Parents, children, all of you.” Clarke shouted at the six people sitting behind their long table in their high-backed chairs.

They’d all listened to what she had to say, but every time she suggested they leave, to try to go elsewhere, the answers were always the same. If they leave, Nia would hunt them down and kill them or that winter was far too close to attempt any journey from a place where they could survive the cold.

Clarke asked why they didn’t fight back and they scoffed at the notion. Their answer was that less than half their people would be capable of fighting, and that would be the equivalent of sending children to fight adults due to Nia’s well-trained forces. That would be if they could even arm that many people.
Clarke understood their concerns, but a chance was something while staying in a place not suited for life was simply delaying the inevitable. They were all going to be dead and their unwillingness to do anything but let it happen infuriated her.

“Then we’re done here.” Clarke stated, spinning on her heels and walking straight through the door and out into the street.

Ontari was quick on her heels but it took her a while to catch up, trying to get Clarke to stop but she refused, even when Ontari caught up to walk beside her. She recognized the route that Clarke was taking and they were nearly there when another figure ran up to join them. It was one of six who was present in the council hall.

“Wanheda, wait. Please.”

Clarke yanked the door open, only slightly worried she was going to yank the door right of the frame. The two women that were with her continued in with her and Ontari slowly closed the door while examining the hinges.

“Wanheda, Remar doesn’t speak for the entire council. There are those of us who see what is happening to our families, to our children and we want to leave. We just have nowhere to go.”

Clarke looked up at the red-haired woman once she’d taken a seat at one of the chairs by the table. She considered the possibility that Remar was just the most vocal dissenting voice but when nobody challenged him she questioned how much weight this woman had in speaking for others.

“My name is Petra, Wanheda. Please give me a few minutes. I’ll try to explain.”

“It seems your people have made up their mind, Petra. I don’t know how to help you if you all can’t agree on what to do.”

“I can see it is difficult for you to understand why our people don’t want to leave this place. When we lived above and Nia refused to allow hunting in her territory unless it was approved by her. As retribution, sometimes she would kill half a village and burn it to the ground, only to send those who survived into the surrounding forests as sport for her scouts.”

Clarke couldn’t help but feel embarrassed about how she handled her conversation with the council but her frustration had forced her from the room. It didn’t matter what she suggested because they refused any and all offers of help. It wasn’t until one of the council members suggested she use the power of Maunde to turn Toron to dust. A request Clarke flatly refused.

That was the crux of the stalemate. They were afraid of Nia, and they wanted Wanheda to rain down death upon Toron and with it, consume Nia in it’s wake. They didn’t care who paid in blood because she’d taken so many of theirs. Clarke still couldn’t justify killing thousands who did nothing more than be forced to live under the rule of a tyrant.

“I can’t use Mount Weather to bring Toron to it’s knees. I’ll never allow it to be a weapon that holds people in fear again.”

“But if…”

“I think we’ve discussed that as much as we are going to today.” Ontari interjected, seeing little more than a continuation of what happened earlier with the council. “We have to return to Toron before Nia becomes concerned about our disappearance. The last thing we need for us, or for everyone down here is for her to send out a search party.”
Petra let out a sigh as though she had more to discuss but they were at an impasse that would not be solved with this one meeting.

“I will talk to the council and try to convince them of leaving. If it is as you say, then I will do everything I can to sway the other council members into doing something, anything, that will save my people.”

Petra words were laced with desperation. She’d seen this coming and originally when they settled down here it was to be a temporary measure. They’d all become complacent in their safety and became blind to the danger under ground out of fear of what might happen should they try to escape the reach of Nia and her army. Here they had a life, above Nia could take it from them in whatever manner she chose.

“We need to go.” Ontari stressed to Clarke. “We can discuss this on the way back to Toron if you want.”

Clarke gave her a nod and said her farewell to Petra, promising her she would think on what she asked, but reiterated she could not and would not use Mount Weather as a weapon. She thanked Clarke for being willing to help her people and for what she’d already done in warning them of their water supply. Ontari then motioned for Clarke to follow her so they could leave this place.

“How are we going to get out of here?”

“See those metal ropes?” Ontari asked, pointing to a wall that had a number of ropes that stretched what must have been one hundred feet in the air. Clarke nodded when she saw where Ontari was indicating.

“They will pull a basket upward to the level we will be able to reclaim our horses and ride back to Toron.”

Clarke registered a small amount of concern when they got closer to what appeared to be a small wooden basket with a metal floor that was attached to those cables. Thankfully, Ontari explained the mechanisms they would use to get to their destination and although she was nervous, she didn’t let it show. She stepped onto the wooden box and glanced to the right, seeing two horses that had begun to step forward at the command of a young man. They pulled the cables which started them moving upward and initially it lurched from it’s resting position causing a shriek to escape from Clarke as she grabbed at the waist-height railing.

“Try not to move around too much” Ontari grinned. “It makes it more difficult on the horses to pull us up.”

“You could have warned me.”

“I forgot Wanheda is afraid of heights.” Ontari said with a chuckle while receiving a glare from Clarke who had yet to release the railing.

The pair reached their destination and a man reached out, placing a hook over the edge of the railing and securing it to the cliff face so there was no gap between the box and the rock surface. Clarke quickly stepped off and moved in the direction of two horses that had been waiting for them.

“We caught and cut up a deer. The meat is in that bag there so you can say you took her on a hunt to explain your time here.” The man said to Ontari as she joined Clarke beside the horses. He then proceeded to release the hook that held the lift to the cliff while letting out a sharp whistle, indicating the lift was safe to begin lowering back down to the ground.
“Thank you.” Ontari said. This was a typical excuse she used when she spent any significant time away from Toron to visit. After Clarke and Ontari climbed on their horses, Ontari directed her to follow and explained they would have to hurry back to Toron. “Nia will be suspicious so we need to get our story straight.”

They exited through some ruins that were quickly covered back up two men standing outside of it, making it appear as though the exit was simply a large pile of rubble that had collapsed in on itself. It was clear they were quite practiced at it by the speed they worked because Clarke and Ontari’s eyes took a moment to adjust to the bright light of the late afternoon sun and by the time they could see clearly the men had done their work and disappeared.

Ontari left Clarke to her thoughts and intended to for a while longer but it was Clarke that broke the silence. It was evident she was considering more than what Ontari had shared with her today.

“What do we tell Nia?”

“We tell her I took you on a hunt to the north and I refused to return until I’d killed something that was worthy of Wanheda.”

“Anything else?”

“You can tell her I took you to a small lake I’m fond of. It’s surrounded by trees and there is a small house on the edge that I like to stay at when I have the chance. It was a fair day which means I would have tried to keep you out as long as possible.”

“This is something you do often?”

“As often as I am able to. With the weather turning, less often than I’d like.”

After a short pause and after wondering how to phrase what happened between her and Ontari earlier in the day.

“And the other thing from earlier?”

“What other thing from earlier?” Ontari smiled but kept her attention forward, waiting to hear Clarke’s description of what she was asking.

“Us. As in what the guards saw earlier. You are with someone already.”

“Someone that Nia doesn’t know about and I’d like to keep it that way. That means we’re going to have to be convincing if Nia is to believe us.”

“Just don’t push your luck. I’m telling you now I’m not going to end up in your bed no matter how much convincing Nia requires.”

“That hurts, Clarke.” Ontari teased. “Even with the threat of Nia discovering our deceit which could and would lead to a most unpleasant death for both of us, you won’t even give me a chance?”

“Not on your life.” Clarke laughed.

“Or yours, apparently.” Ontari joined in on the laughing.

Just as they broke through into a small clearing, they heard the approaching gallop of horses and the shout of an order telling them to remain where they are as two of Ontari’s scouts rode up toward them.
“Is there a problem?” Ontari asked, looking at the man with indifference. Clarke noticed a change in her tone from the casual one she had moments ago.

“Ontari, my apologies.” The man bowed his head. “Your mother has dispatched a considerable number of us to find you and escort you back to Toron.”

“Why would I need escorting? I could have killed you both before you knew either Wanheda or I were here. I’m more than capable of protecting Wanheda.”

“Of course. It’s just that the Queen…”

“I have no interest in hearing you any further. Do you job and escort us or is it your intention to stand here and wait for us to show you the way?”

“No. You are right. This way, please.” The man requested, tugging on his reins and turning his horse to head south toward Toron. Clarke was certain she could see a considerable amount of fear in the man’s eyes.

“After you, Wanheda.” Ontari grinned, throwing a wink at Clarke when both of the scouts escorting them could no longer see them.

Clarke answered with a smirk and rode her horse alongside Ontari’s so that their proximity could be construed as something a little more personal. If Ontari wanted them to play a game, she was certainly willing to play along.

‘Game on.’
The Calm before the Storm

Chapter Summary

In the last Chapter, Bellamy, Echo and Raven were escorted to Lexa's camp after their fight with the Azgeda warriors. The trip north had been rough for the trio, especially Echo who finds herself carrying a burden of two. Meanwhile in Toron, Ontari shares her secret of Haven and it's people with Clarke, resulting in Clarke opening up about Roan and her true reason in Toron.

In chapter 43, Bellamy decides to take matters into his own hands when their silence regarding their situation becomes too much for him to ignore. Further north In the Azgeda capital of Toron, Nia has summoned Clarke and Ontari and plants a seed of fear in Clarke while making her question some of the truths she'd come to know about her newest ally.

Chapter Notes

Update day!

Wow, this took a while to get out but finally here it is. Thanks to everyone for waiting patiently. :) 

This chapter addressed two scenes that are pretty important, and one in particular because it plays immediately into the next chapter. I'm afraid this is not an action packed chapter but they lead into the next which certainly shoves story with very little remorse in that direction.

I hope everyone enjoys and I will see you all again soon!

“Bell.”

Being half-in and half-out of sleep, he slowly lowered his hand to the side of his pistol, clicking the safety off as slowly as he could. He heard the voice again and through the sleep induced fog in his mind he recognized the voice as his sister’s. resulting immediately in a less cautious clicking of the safety back into it’s ‘on’ position.

With a slight moan in displeasure, he pried himself away from Echo which led to an immediate loss of body heat. Echo mirrored his sentiment by whimpering slightly which caused Bellamy to lean over and kiss the top of her head. In order to keep as much of the heat under the protective layers of cover, he tucked the furs in tightly to keep Echo as comfortable as possible.

“Hey, O. My turn to keep watch?” he asked, rubbing his eyes free of sleep and keeping his voice low.

“We need to get everyone ready to start moving at first light. Commander’s orders.”
Bellamy looked up to the sky above and the cloud cover obscured his view. It was still dark and without the stars and the moon, he was still having trouble figuring out his bearing in regard to what time of night it was.

“I thought we were going to stay here for a while.” He asked when he had given up trying to figure out the time. “When did that change?”

“About an hour ago.” Octavia said, puffing some warm air into her hands then quickly rubbing them together before tucking them into her jacket pockets and hunching her shoulders forward. “I took your shift on watch so you two could sleep.”

It was well into the night and by the looks of it, the fire had burned itself out a long time ago. Bellamy felt the chill hanging in the air creep into his bones and decided he would start a new fire to take the edge off of the cold air. As he leaned over to pick up a few of the small branches, Octavia warned him to stop.

“We can’t.”

“Why?” Bellamy argued. “It’s freezing out here and we have good cover.”

“She told me to come back and put it out - something about there being eyes in the area and it had to be put out immediately. The light of the flame and the smoke would tell everyone exactly where we are.”

Bellamy glanced around the forest and then back to Octavia. “Then let’s pack up.”

“We will, but we shouldn’t rush. That’s why I waited a while before waking you up. She says right now whoever it is, they are just watching.”

“She doesn’t know?”

“I asked, but she said they probably are not Nia’s warriors. They would have attacked already with the cover of night.”

“Unless they are setting an ambush. I doubt she has any idea who is out there.”

Octavia shook her head hearing Bellamy’s declaration. He had a knack for acting like a blow-hard and although he seemed to have learned a few things from Echo, it appeared she couldn’t help him lose his attitude. “I trust that she knows what she’s talking about.”

Bellamy was moments from asking what she meant but before he could get the words out, Octavia lifted her hands to ask for silence. She glanced at Echo who wasn’t as asleep as it seemed when she turned and looked up at Octavia, nodding that she too heard something in the woods - something very close to their position.

Echo took hold of her sword under the blankets and furs then carefully and quietly moved to a standing position. She held her sword in front of her in a defensive position while scanning through the trees in an attempt to find the source of the sound, hoping whatever movement her eye might catch wasn’t that of an arrow or spear being launched their direction.

Octavia was just as ready, flipping the bow that was on her back into her hand and nocking an arrow on the taut string. She crouched down to one knee while scanning the forest where they heard the sound. Bellamy had his gun pointed in the same direction a moment later, his finger hovering alongside it’s trigger.
“There is no excuse for all of you watching where the sound came from.” Lexa’s voice dominated the silence and she walked out from the trees and toward them from the rear. “You would all be dead if I were Azgeda.”

Octavia closed her eyes in frustration and let out a slow breath. It was a simple thing but sloppy of them and had it been anyone else, they could all be dead right now. “We will not make the same mistake again.” she said.

Echo bent over and picked up the scabbard, frowning as slipped her blade back in it’s protective covering and nodding at Lexa. This close to Toron, she should have been smarter. There were numerous times she had been present when Nia’s military leaders reprimanded warriors for similar mistakes and it always went far beyond a simple verbal reprimand.

They all began to move about the camp when Echo let out a small groan when she felt her stomach flip, resulting in her hand shooting up to her mouth and taking wide steps forward. She didn’t want to take a quick look in Bellamy’s direction, but when she did, she could see a look of worry in his eyes.

“I’ll be right back.” Echo said, her silhouette taking off into the darkness away from camp, all eyes on her as she excused herself.

After a moment of silence and the three looking at each other, Bellamy let out a sigh. “Me too.”

There was a note of resignation in his voice, as if he was about to do something he should have a long time ago and he slid his pistol into it’s holster as he took his first few steps in Echo’s direction away from camp. As he passed by Lexa, she lifted her hand and stopped his movement by wrapping her hand around his bicep. He glanced down at her hand then up at her with a scowl on his face.

“Get your hand off my arm.”

“I need to speak to her about what comes next.” Lexa explained.

He offered her a grunt and yanked his arm from her grip, speeding his way past her and fighting the urge to shoulder her as he walked by. “It’ll take as long as it takes.” his voice trailed off as he disappeared into the night as Echo did moments ago.

Lexa turned her attention to Octavia who was back to sitting on the stump she was on earlier and what she saw was a brunette shaking her head with a grin on her lips.

“He doesn’t like you.”

“That much is clear.” Lexa shrugged. She didn’t need him to like her, just follow her lead.

Octavia nodded her agreement, then reached for her water bottle to take a small sip from the top then looked back up at Lexa who was looking over her shoulder in Bellamy and Echo’s direction.

“No doubt he blames me for all of this. For Clarke leaving your people and likely for everything that is happening now.”

“At least you get it.” Octavia said as she placed her bow on the ground next to her, alongside the make-shift quiver she put together after fighting the Azgeda warriors a few weeks ago.

Lexa raised an eyebrow at Octavia’s words about her ‘getting it’. It helped when Clarke was around when these questions arose in her. There were many phrases that Skaikru people used that she didn’t understand and she sought Clarke out so that she could explain them to her.
She remembered vividly the way Clarke would laugh after explaining a phrase she would ask about and the way Clarke would tilt her head back and letting loose the happy sound when she could see the look of confusion on Lexa’s face.

It didn’t matter that they might have been planning the attack on Mount Weather, or that they had a life-threatening encounter with Pauna, Clarke always sought the good in things and celebrated them with bright blue eyes and a smile on her face. Clarke had even suggested he looked cute when she scrunched up her nose and furrowed her eyebrows as she argued that how nothing Clarke explained had anything to do with the words that were spoken and that it was better to just say what they meant.

Lexa’s eyes turned downcast when she thought back to the woman in the tent she’d seen about a month ago. Her usually vibrant eyes were missing their familiar light and seemed a shade closer to grey than blue. She also was devoid of her smile and bombarded her with a loathing so strong that she could never have imagined resided within the Skaikru woman.

Now that was all she saw every time she forced herself to sleep. That was the Clarke that awaited her when she closed her eyes and that was the one she deserved. The Clarke she created when she walked away.

Lexa shook her head slightly and closed her eyes, drawing in a slow deep breath and reminded herself that it wasn’t over.

‘No. Clarke deserves better than that.’

~*~*~

“Echo?” Bellamy asked as he approached her, his voice having lost all the hardness that he’d used moments ago with Lexa. It wasn’t difficult to find her in the darkness because all he had to do was walk toward the sound of a woman throwing up.

“I’m fine.” Echo said, staring down at the ground in front of her. “You should go back and talk to your sister. You haven’t seen her in over a month.”

“And talk about what? That you’re pregnant?”

Echo glanced up from her kneeling position, one hand on her stomach and the other wiping her mouth. It occurred to her that perhaps he’d known all along.

“How long have you known?”

“Long enough. I was waiting for you to say something.”

“I didn’t want to fight with you.”

“You thought I would be upset you are pregnant?”

“That you would demand I go back to your people where it is safer.”

Bellamy nodded and left out a puff of air he had been holding in his lungs. He walked closer to Echo, extended his hand to help her stand upright but she didn’t take it which caused him to frown.

“I thought about it and I almost brought it up a couple days ago but I knew you wouldn’t go even if I asked.”

“So what do you want?” Echo asked, standing up straight from her crouching position. Her hand still
on her stomach.

“I want to make sure you are safe and if that means making sure this whole…” Bellamy waved his hand back toward Lexa and Octavia’s position. “…stupid plan works, whatever it is, I’m going to do everything I can to make it happen.”

“Once this over and if we survive, don’t you think you should go back to you people?”

Bellamy was surprised by her question.

“You don’t want to come back with me?”

“Your people don’t trust grounders.” Her voice was thick with frustration, knowing they all didn’t hate her people. In fact, she’d come to quite enjoy Raven’s company even if she talked a little too much or liked to flaunt her knowledge of all things technological. “We both know this child doesn’t have a place among your people.”

“Our child, will be the first child between Skaikru and anyone from the clans. This is a good thing. They can show that our people can come together.”

“It will make the child a target.” Echo argued. “There will always be many who hate your people for what you’ve done and the lives taken by Wanheda.”

“Not if there is peace. Isn’t that why we’re here? Why we’re risking our lives? Our child can be a symbol of hope for both our people.”

“You can’t promise me that he would be safe in your village.”

“Then we could live with you in Toron. Do you think I care where the four walls and a roof are located? My home is where you and our child will be.”

“It would be easier for you to just go back to your people.” Echo stated, but her heart wasn’t in her words and they fell from her lips without conviction and she let her eyes fall toward the ground between their feet.

“Hey.” Bellamy said, reaching forward and lifting her chin with his fingertips to look into her eyes. “You are my people now. You and this child. Where I live doesn’t mean a thing because this is what matters to me and I’m not going to let someone I care about, let alone the mother of my child face the world alone.”

Echo didn’t say anything, but the tears that welled up in her eyes spoke volumes. She let herself fall forward, pressing her face into his chest and then threw her arms around his frame with a silent promise that they would make it through this. All three of them, and that they would have the life she dreamed of as a child.

After a short while and many small shared kisses, Bellamy found himself reluctantly creating a small amount of space between the two. In response, Echo looked up at him in silent inquiry.

“Lexa said she needs to talk to you?” He sighed as he said the words.

Echo nodded and released Bellamy from her arms, lifting her hands to her eyes and wiped what she could of the remaining moisture away and decided to explain to him why she had to talk to Lexa. “I told her guard that I had a solution to her problem.”

“That she doesn’t have an army?”
“No. Her other problem. There is no way for her to get us into Toron as we are going without getting us all killed. I know of a way to get her and the army she does have into Toron without everyone getting killed.”

“Everyone?”

“Maybe. But it isn’t going to be a simple thing. She’s going to have to negotiate to use the tunnels that we need to use to get into the capital.”

Bellamy’s eyes lit up at the possibility of getting everyone through and into Toron safely. "There are tunnels that run underneath Toron that can get us into the city? That sounds simple enough. If we can get in and head straight to wherever Nia is, we can take her out before anyone knows what is going on.”

Echo smiled and nodded as she reached down and took his hand so they could walk together back in the direction of camp. “It might sound simple, but we don’t rule the Kongeda. What she might have to do in order to secure our passage to Toron could leave her without an ally in her coalition.”

“Even Roan when he becomes king?”

“For him to keep the peace after Nia? Yes. Especially Roan.”

~*~*~

Clarke walked behind Ontari as they entered Nia’s throne room. This was much different than the banquet hall and everything about it screamed a confirmation of who she thought Nia was.

On every wall, heads of animals hung as ornaments and various weapons, all of them shining and jeweled rested on racks below the trophy heads. Next Clarke became aware of Nia’s guards. There had to be at least twenty of them, all staring forward and motionless in front of large concrete pillars that stretched upward to the ceiling. The closing of the large wooden doors was the last sound they heard until Nia’s voice cut through the silent room when they stepped into the middle of the large room and on to the deep-red Persian carpet.

“Welcome home my child!” Nia said, rising from her throne as Ontari and Clarke entered the room. The smile on her face was unexpected and it even drew a curious look from Ontari. “I trust your outing was enjoyable?”

Clarke looked Past Nia to the throne she stood up from and to say it was impressive was an understatement. It was carved from stone, a black and white stone that she’d forgotten the name of and there were furs that lined the seat and the lower portion of the back. It also had a large Azgeda symbol carved on the upper portion of the back rest and it appeared to be filled with a golden inlay making it look completely breathtaking. Her eyes continued to roam the chair and she could see intricate designs carved in both the arms and the legs that made her wonder how such detail could be possible on such a hard surface. She wished she could have a longer look but Ontari’s response to Nia’s question brought her back into the conversation.

“How was your trip?”

“Hello, mother. It was quite enjoyable.” Ontari answered without revealing any details of their trip. “I trust your outing was enjoyable?”

“It was very enlightening and dare I say world changing. I think that it might just give our people a chance at a future that until recently unsure we could have. I have no doubt that the next few weeks will be ones that will be remembered forever by the people of Azgeda.” Nia was still smiling and it was like Clarke was thrown back into the ice-cold water at the bottom of Mount Weather’s water
Watching the exchange between the two, all Clarke could think was; ‘What does she mean?’

“Forgive me,” Nia said as she took slow steps down the stairs in front of her throne, her eyes looking back and forth between the pair. “I did not give either of you time to get cleaned up after your day away, but with increased sightings of Wuskripa to the North and West, I was concerned for your safety and sent my scouts this morning to keep you safe.”

“We were never in any danger but thank you for your concern. I’m sure Clarke feels the same way.”

“I do. I don’t believe we were ever in any danger.” Clarke confirmed.

“I am relieved to hear that.” The indifference in Nia’s tone combined with the way her shoulders offered an almost imperceptible shrug indicated to Clarke a sense that Nia didn’t really care and resulted in a significant amount of alarm bells to go off in Clarke’s head. This was not to say she hadn’t maintained a guard around Nia from the moment they first met.

“Ontari, inform your brother I’d like to speak to him immediately. You’ll find him at his home. As for Wanheda, I’m interested in hearing what she thought of my city and my people.”

“Sha, nomon.” Ontari gave her mother a quizzical look, wondering why her mother was sending her on a messengers errand. “Clarke, I hope to see you later.” She bowed to Nia then gave Clarke a short bow of her own before she strode from the room.

“I have heard my daughter did an adequate job for your tour of Toron during my absence?” Clarke confirmed that Ontari had been a good guide, giving Nia the details of the last couple days and going over the carefully prepared script she had prepared with Ontari in order to make their story believable. She made sure to alter just enough in order to make it believable that it was coming from two differing perspectives.

After Clarke finished explaining, Nia let out a puff of air as if it were done with surprise, tilting her head and took a moment to regard Clarke. “I’m surprised she spoke of her grandfather.”

“She did. She explained that he wanted to build a capital city equal to that of Polis, a monument in the north to celebrate Azgeda and its people.”

“My father was a visionary - one that was taken from us far before his time.” Nia said, leaning back in her throne and seemed as though she was truly saddened by the memory.

“She only had good things to say of him.”

“My father was a proud man and everything he did was with the purpose of building a strong Azgeda society. His goal was that it be reflected through the strength of his people and it’s willingness to find common purpose through all the clans.”

“If you don’t mind my asking…” Clarke hesitated on finishing the rest of her question, worried she might offend Nia who rightly guessed what her question was.

“You want to know how he died? He was murdered be an assassin in the night. One sent from Polis by Heda to take control of Azgeda territory.”

“From Polis?” Clarke asked with some surprise in her voice.
“Not only that, but from the village where Heda was born. It was one of her most trusted friends, and if the rumours were true, her consort.”

‘Costia?’ Clarke remembered the words Lexa said as they enacted the ritual in Tondc and Finn was burned on the pyre before them. “They tortured her, killed her cut off her head.”

“So you know of her.” Nia offered Clarke a smirk, watching her guest as she fought to regain her composure.

‘Lexa wouldn’t have sent Costia here to assassinate someone, would she?’

“Forgive me,” Clarke said, putting her hand to her chest. “I have heard of her but I’d not known that she was an assassin sent from Polis to kill your father.”

Nia waved her hand with indifference to Clarke’s emotional display. In fact, she seemed rather disgusted by it.

“She was not the first and I promise you she won’t be the last. I’ve survived numerous attempts which is why I am forced to keep Toron under such heavy guard. The only surprise regarding Costia was that the Commander would send someone she cared so deeply about, knowing that she would likely be caught. She won’t be satisfied until she has full control of Azgeda.”

“How did you find out Costia was involved in the murder of your father?”

“She arrived with a lie about aiding Toron and it’s surrounding towns on behalf of the Kongeda. My father had accepted her offer of help but it was late and they’d been travelling well into the night to reach Toron. My father had even offered her accommodation in his own home to ensure her safety.”

“If she was the Commander’s consort, why would she send her knowing she may be caught?”

“The Commander feared the possibility of an Azgeda uprising and who better to send than someone everyone knew she cared about and would never put in harm’s way? She was someone father could believe was here to act in good faith. Azgeda had and still has the largest army - One larger than all her coalition combined. She wouldn’t stand a chance against his warriors so she sent her to take him from our people.”

After a slight pause and more of what Clarke assumed to be theatre from the older woman, Nia continued.

“The banquet dinner that night was the last time I would see him alive. By the time I’d arrived with my guard, Costia had been caught trying to flee the city. It was later that we found the poison she used in the room my father had so graciously provided to his murderer.”

“She was the one who poisoned your father?”

“She claimed her innocence but the only ones permitted in the company of my father were his most loyal guards and they had almost all been killed, all but one who succumbed to his injuries shortly after. He informed me that Costia had spoken to my father in private, just minutes before he died. It was my belief is that she poisoned him during his evening tea. Thankfully my daughter was the one who was able to pull the truth from her.”

“Ontari?” Clarke asked, but instead of feigning surprise, the astonished look on her face was an honest one.

“She has a wonderful talent in getting to the truth, even if she is a little aggressive in her methods.”
The grin reappearing on Nia’s face as she stared back at Clarke. “It was my intention to send Costia back to Polis with a message for the Commander with a warning her to leave my people alone and that we would join her coalition only if the attacks on my people were stopped. Unfortunately Costia was weak and her body succumbed to what was required to pull the truth from her.”

“Weren’t you afraid she would come north and attack your people if Costia was killed?” It took every ounce of strength within her to not use the word ‘murdered’.

Clarke wasn’t listening to Nia’s words anymore because of the spiraling thoughts in her head. She didn’t want to believe that Ontari would be capable of doing what Lexa described and reminded herself of the Ontari she’d met over the last couple days. Ontari who showed her Haven, handed out candies to children and the one who appeared to dislike Nia’s rule as much as anyone.

“Wanheda, are you alright,?” Nia asked with the same fake concern she had earlier when she stated she was worried about Wuskripa finding them.

“I’m fine.” Clarke wracked her brain for a decent excuse to offer Nia. “It’s just been a long day and we’d ridden the horses for much longer than I am used to. Ontari can ride a tough pace to keep up with.”

“It has been some time since she’d shown an interest in something other than her training.” Nia explained. “Speaking of my daughter, there are certain rumors regarding the two of you. Is there be something her mother should know?”

Clarke was prepared for this question. Well, as much as she could possibly be. “I’ve come to enjoy Ontari’s company. She is a very remarkable woman.” Clarke let a smile smile appear, only to remove it a second later with the thought that Ontari was hiding the truth from her.

“She has a way of making you do things for her. Things you don’t want to do.” Clarke could recall Ontari telling her when they discussed Nia, but she didn’t elaborate any further.

Nia once again produced her obnoxious smirk and spun on her heel to walk back up the to her throne. Seeing her back, Clarke found herself wishing she could just settle all this right here and now. One quick thrust of a blade to put an end to this woman’s reign. When she took her seat in her throne, she had the look of a cat that had become bored after catching the mouse.

“Perhaps I might ask you to stay here in Toron for a while. It has been difficult for her to find someone she can trust. I’d like to believe that her trust has not been misplaced.”

“I like to think I’ve given both of you no reason not to.”

“There is the matter of Maunde we need to discuss, but as the pair of you seem to have had a long day, I suppose we could give you one more evening to rest.”

“I would appreciate that. If it isn’t too much trouble, I’d like to speak to Prince Roan this evening.” Clarke asked.

“My son? That can be arranged.” Nia lifted her hand so she could rest her chin on it, her elbow supporting her on the arm of her throne. “If you like, you can speak to him here after I meet with him if you’d like.”

Clarke didn’t need to give her offer more than a moment of thought. There was no way she intended on discussing what she wished to in front of Nia.

“I’d like to get cleaned up before speaking to him if that is alright.”
“Very well. I’ll send him to visit you after we have finished our business.” Nia scrutinized Clarke who pulled at her clothing as evidence that she could use a change of clothes. “I’ll have my guards escort you back to your chambers.” Nia said, waving her hand to the guards to open the door to the throne room and take her back.

“Thank you.” Clarke said, offering a slight bow similar to what Ontari had done when she left the room to go find her brother. She didn’t look back at her after turning to leave, but Clarke was certain Nia was staring a hole through her for the full duration of her walk out of the room.

Clarke slowly closed the door behind her once she returned to her room, releasing a much needed therapeutic sigh and letting her shoulders fall forward. It wasn’t much but it did release some of the stress that had led to her stiff back.

The entire walk back to her room, her mind wrestled with even more questions that she had no answers to. Not that she was surprised because every second she spent with Nia led to an ever-increasing number of questions. The one issue that stuck out like a sore thumb more than the others was that Ontari might have been involved in the death of Costia. Was she helping the girl who was responsible for nearly emotionally destroying Lexa?

The guards stated they would have a meal brought to her and Clarke accepted the offer. Not because she was hungry, but that perhaps Ontari would bring it because she need to clear the air. She wasn’t ready or willing to take Nia at her word.

She walked over to her bed and collapsed on to it, trying to figure out how to explain to Roan what Ontari has shared with her. She would certainly ask him about Ontari and her role in Costia’s fate as well, but finding a way to have these two work together might be difficult. Roan had already warned her about Ontari and it was clear he didn’t trust her.

She looked around her nearly empty room and yawned in response to what had become a very long and trying day. It was as if she hadn’t rested for a single minute in Haven, but that was because the pounding in her head never really stopped. With the soft bed beneath her coaxing her to rest, Clarke found herself fighting against the urge to close her eyes. Her body was tired, but not half as much as her mind had become. Now she had to deal with Nia and her declaration that the next few weeks would be ones for all Azgeda to remember.

Whatever it was Nia had planned in her time away from Toron, they had to figure it out. Clarke’s patience was wearing thin, always waiting for Roan or Ontari. As she drifted between being asleep and being awake, all she could do was hope either of them could figure out what was going on before it was too late for them to do anything about it.
Chapter Summary

In the last chapter, Lexa became aware that they were being watched and decided that it was time to move on as Bellamy told Echo he'd known she was pregnant for quite some time, which gave them a chance to discuss her concerns going forward.

In Toron, Nia returned and had some unnerving news for Clarke and Ontari which didn't sit well with either of them. Clarke was separated from Ontari and escorted under heavy guard to her room where she was told to wait for Prince Roan.

Chapter Notes

Happy Update Day, everyone!

Thanks for spending some of your time with me and my story. :) I hope everyone is enjoying (or had enjoyed) their Sunday. Thanks as always for your Kudos and Comments, and I hope you enjoy what I have for you today!

In this chapter, we get to learn a little about Ontari and her past in Toron, and in another part of Azgeda territory, Lexa has to figure out how to make the impossible happen.

See you all soon! :)

Clarke leaned forward in her chair and let her eyes stare aimlessly through the large window in front of her. For the last thirty minutes she puffed her onto a section of the glass in order to watch the condensation build then freeze so she could then draw a little design with her finger with it’s warmth. At first it was a fun thing to do but boredom quickly spoiled her fun.

She’d been waiting for roughly five hours if the markings on her candles were correct, and two of them after the sun had gone down yet no visit from either Ontari or Roan. Her mind had been given far too much time to indulge itself with any number of scenarios, most of which she dismissed as paranoia. That was until she noticed what appeared to be a number of guards taking up positions throughout the streets. Far more than the previous two nights.

After what must have been a hundred breaths on to the window and a numb finger tip thanks to being in nearly constant contact with a thin film of ice, a solid knock on the door signaled the arrival of a visitor. Clarke nearly jumped from her chair in celebration with the promise of something more than just staring out a window.

“Come in.”

Roan stepped through the doorway then slowly closed the door behind himself, pausing for a moment while listening to the guards discuss something that Clarke couldn’t quite overhear. He
looked up at her and signaled for her to remain quiet until they’d finished speaking and only then did he walk over to the table to sit. He looked over her tray of food she’d been given for dinner then glanced back at the door when he heard the lock click.

“Tell me what you did while I was away. Everything.” He whispered his words which caused concern to rise in Clarke’s mind.

“Ontari showed me around Toron, then we went to a hunting spot she frequents.” Clarke shrugged.

“You are a terrible liar, Wanheda.” Rather than the usual smirk that accompanied his playful yet mocking demeanor, he leaned forward and slid the tray to the side of the table. “We don’t have time for games. Nia knows something.”

Clarke tilted her head and scrutinized him through half-closed eyes. She knew she would have to tell him about Ontari and somehow have them on the same page and when Clarke glanced back at the door behind him, his features hardened knowing she wasn’t telling him everything and what she was keeping to herself was significant.

She leaned forward and frowned, wishing she was able to do this on her own terms. After drawing a breath, she lowered her voice more and went on to share everything with him, minus a few details like being forced head-first into a wall and being knocked unconscious.

Once she finished her tale, he sat back in his chair and appeared deep in thought. He looked past Clarke and through one of the windows that showed signs of frost appearing at its edges.

“My mother didn’t leave Toron without a purpose. She never…”

“I don’t want to talk about Nia right now.” Clarke cut into the conversation. “I want you to tell me about Ontari. I need to know if I can trust her.”

Roan seemed taken aback by her statement. “Ontari?”

“Yes. Her role in Costia’s murder.”

“This isn’t something we should discuss right now. There are more important things we need to talk about.”

“She asked me to trust her and to do that I need to know everything about her. Everything she won’t tell me.”

Roan frowned, glancing back at the door then back at Clarke.

“She killed Costia. It seems like you know that part.”

Clarke crossed her arms in front of herself. “I want you to tell me the other part.”

“Do you want me to tell you she tortured Costia for months? That she cut her over a thousand times? She broke her bones, then broke them again once they healed?”

Clarke’s crossed arms loosened and her jaw slackened in order to hang open slightly. ‘Ontari could do that?’ She wondered. The understanding set in that she only knew Ontari for a period of two days, and this being the second.

“There were worse things she did to that poor girl that I won’t repeat because I never want them to happen again. If they haunt my memory, I can’t imagine what it has done to her mind. When she
finally drove her knife into her after the third month of what must have seemed like hell, it was a mercy.”

“Mercy? What she did to Costia was something only a monster could do.” Clarke was furious and it took everything within her to bite down on her urge to shout out the accusation at the top of her lungs. Even Roan thought it was coming because he had leaned forward slightly in preparation of reaching forward to cover her mouth if it was required.

“It was mercy because her torture came to an end. Even Ontari knew what had happened. What she’d done.”

“Three months isn’t a mercy.” Clarke spat out. “If that’s something the Azgeda believe, maybe I shouldn’t have come to Toron.”

“I say a mercy because it was Nia’s command that it continue for months more. She wanted Costia’s death to take as long as possible. Nia isn’t just cruel, Clarke. She looked for new ways to draw out torture on her enemies. Poisons to destroy her body and mind only to cure her as she teetered on the line between life and death. She forced Ontari to do everything that could cause someone the maximum amount of pain.”

“Why didn’t?”

“Costia wasn’t who she wanted to break. Nia knew Costia’s value and how she could use her to destroy the Commander. She was new to the role of Heda and assumed her inexperience would lead to an immediate war and Heda bringing her troops north.”

“But Lexa didn’t.”

“No. She had the wisdom of all those before her and she likely listened to their council. When she kept her forces in Polis. She was able to take control of Toron by killing her own father and convince enough of the generals that it was the hand of the Commander that made it happen.”

Clarke gathered that was the likely scenario after hearing Nia’s version of the events. The tone of her voice and the tempered enjoyment she had when she told Clarke in her throne room about how she’d secured her rise to the throne was enough to tell Clarke she was lying. It wasn’t like Clarke was in any place to accuse her of it, and if she did she’d likely end up dead too. As he continued, Clarke’s attention fell on the Prince’s story once more.

“With Costia refusing to admit or share any details of her purported attempt to overthrow my grandfather and seize control of Toron, Nia spent her days dreaming up ways to inflict the most pain she could on Heda. One day she called Ontari and myself into her throne room and what she told Ontari to do changed everything. That was the day I knew she had to be removed from her throne.”

Clarke was leaning over the table now, studying Roan for any possible deception. Were it not for the tears that threatened to roll over his lids, she might have thought him capable of lying. But this was something entirely different. She’d never seen one of the grounder men cry. It seemed to be the complete antithesis of what she’d known warriors on the ground to be.

Roan looked down at the table and scratched at it with his fingernail for a moment, trying to figure out how to continue. After a long pause he swallowing hard and looked up at Clarke and she felt the waves of remorse pour from his eyes.

“She ordered Ontari to begin separating Costia, piece by piece over the coming months so she could send her to her lover in Polis with the goal that she would destroy Heda. If she was going to be the
Commander, Nia wanted her to be weak.”

Clarke’s face had long since drained of colour and the shock in her face returned. She couldn’t believe that anyone was capable of such a thing and swore a silent promise to the memory of the girl that Nia and all those responsible would pay for her actions.

“But Ontari was willing to do those things…” Clarke stammered, picturing the absolute hell that Costia must have endured and the impact that it must have had on Lexa.

“Nia tests everyone around her and this was her test for Ontari. If she didn’t do as she was told, she would have been put on the wall next to Costia and received the same torture. The exact same for me had Ontari refused and she ordered me to do her bidding. Nia placed no more value in Ontari’s life than she did Costia’s. Ontari is Trikru, no matter what her scars and tattoos say. Nia cares about her power and nothing more.”

“Couldn’t Ontari have freed Costia? Ran with her to Polis or Tonde?”

“There was the possibility and I’m sure she considered it but Costia was under the eyes of Nia’s private guard every moment she was in that cell. She even may have been able to surprise a few of the guards, but she would not have escaped the city. Costia was in no shape to travel and certainly could not have survived the trip south.”

“She could have taken her to Haven.” Clarke argued quietly.

“Perhaps she could have, perhaps not. If she knew of them at the time, perhaps they didn’t trust her, or her, them.” Roan reasoned.

“A mercy would have been finding a way to not torture Costia. Finding a way to set her free.”

Roan shook his head. “Clarke, Nia wanted her to remove her head while she was still alive. That was to be the last thing she sent to the commander. Feet, legs, hands, arms… piece by piece. The first day Nia ordered one of Costia’s feet be cut free, she plunged her knife into the girl.”

“She still murdered Costia.”

“She did.” Roan nodded. “Ontari was ordered to tell Costia why she was having her foot removed and why her hands would be removed and what the purpose of it was. There was nothing Nia could get from Costia but tears, flesh and blood. She demanded them all.”

Clarke could feel her stomach turning, threatening to spill what little of her dinner she had eaten on to the table. *How could any person be so cruel?*

“After receiving the order, Ontari walked straight from the throne room, into that cell and ordered the guards to leave. A few minutes later, Ontari walked out of the cell and when they saw that Costia was dead they immediately informed Nia.”

“She must have been furious.”

“She was. Initially she wanted Ontari’s head alongside Costia’s. It was only when I reminded her that killing Ontari would prevent her the opportunity of using her as the Flame’s vessel when she defeated the Commander that she calmed down and spared her life. Not to say she didn’t put Ontari through her own hell.”

“What do you mean?”
“Ontari was under guard for the next two years. Nia decided she submit to trials of combat in order to be able to best the Commander in single combat. Those fights continued daily and stopped only a few months ago. Every day she would rise, find herself in a fighting circle and fought until her legs could no longer support her and and her arms could no longer wield a weapon. That was unless she was knocked unconscious first.”

A second later, the click of the door lock informed them that someone was about to enter the room. As it swung open Ontari stepped into the room, flanked by Nia’s guards. Both Clarke and Roan remained seated for the moment, surveying the scene before them. Ontari remained still, her hand on her sword and her posture rigid. The only thing out of place was something in the way her eyes looked back at Clarke. She’d not taken them off her since she entered the room.

“Ontari?” Clarke questioned, waiting for an answer while rising from her chair.

“By order of the Queen Nia, you are both now her prisoners and charged with the crime of treason against your Queen. Should you be willing to confess to your crime now, she may consider leniency in the form of a quick death for whoever speaks first.”

“Ontari, what the hell…? Clarke shouted as the guards moved forward quickly to seize them. Roan managed to draw his knife from his belt and plunged it into the throat to the nearest guard to him but things were happening too quickly, there were too many guards.

Ontari cracked a wicked grin while watching Roan catch the guard unprepared for the defence of their Prince. The other two guards were much faster, tackling Roan while he attempted to draw his sword. A fourth guard ran forward and grabbed Clarke’s arms, twisting them behind her back. Clarke was able to witness the guards that tackled Roan had him pinned to the ground and were landing blow after blow into the face and body of the man who they once called their Prince.

“Enough.” Ontari called out over the ruckus. “If he dies before Nia gets what she need, she’ll put you both on the wall and I could use the practice.”

The two men got up and wiped the blood from their knuckles on the Prince’s shirt then lifted him so he could try to stand on his own two feet. “Traitor.” accused one of the men who cleared his throat and proceeded to spit in Roan’s face, backhanding him and sending blood in a spray against the wall.

“That’s enough! Take them to the cells.” Ontari commanded, leaving no room for misinterpretation.

Clarke felt the guard who had her arms squeeze tighter and shove her forward to walk in the direction of the door and in Ontari’s direction.

Ontari stared forward at Clarke and knew what was about to happen. Clarke’s eyes opened wide and she used the guard’s grip in holding her upright to launch a series of kicks at her. Nearly all missed but one and that one caught her in the nose, forcing Ontari’s head to snap back.

The look of satisfaction on Clarke’s face at the sight of black blood trickling down to her lip and the subsequent displeasure on Ontari’s made the strike worth whatever price she’d be made to pay. Unfortunately, she was still held by the guard and Ontari simply walked forward and brought her closed fist up and across the side of Clarke’s head with a punch that should have dropped her to her knees if the guard behind her wasn’t holding her up.

“When you put them in the cells, gag them. I don’t want her scheming with the Prince. I’m going to go inform the Queen they are now in custody. There is always to be two armed guards in the room unless otherwise ordered. No matter what the prisoners do or try to say, do not engage them in any manner. Is that understood? They could be dying, they are to be left untouched.”
“As you command.” the guards stated, taking their prisoners past Ontari who remained standing in the room. She looked around, noticing Clarke’s backpack hanging on the farthest bedpost and made her way over to collect her belongings. For a second she considered opening the bag and sorting through it’s contents but instead threw the pack over her shoulder, securing the strap so it would sit comfortably on her back then strode out of the room in order to close the door behind her.

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“Koma tells me you have some information that will help us?” Lexa asked from her seat, watching Bellamy and Echo return after their conversation. From the look of the pair and their hands being held together, it must have gone well.

Echo nodded, giving Bellamy’s hand a slight squeeze and then separating so she could go sit down next to the Commander. She looked over at him and saw concern but she shook her head to suggest there was nothing to be worried about.

“There are tunnels that have become home to people who have been forced to flee from their homes thanks to Nia. Those would be the best way to get in to Toron. Probably our only way.”

“There have been rumors of those tunnels in Polis for as long as the spirit of the Commander has ruled, yet no scout has ever returned with evidence they exist. Have you seen these tunnels?”

“They are how I was able to get around when I was a child, before Nia became queen and filled them with debris.”

“How do we make use of them if they are blocked?”

“There are many tunnels but only the larger ones are blocked because Nia believed getting a large force like an army through them would be impossible - and it would be. An army wouldn’t stand a chance against the force she has in Toron, especially trying to funnel through a small entrance. We would be able to get a group of us into Toron to do what we need to do, but we would have to be fast.”

For the next hour, Lexa and Echo discussed the location of the tunnels, which would get them closest to wherever Nia was and where Clarke would most likely be found. The difficult part was trying to figure out how they could avoid as many of Nia’s warriors as possible and getting to their targets before anyone knew they were there.

“A diversion.” Called out a muffled voice which had everyone glancing around their small camp for the source of the speaker. Raven started to move and all their eyes glanced down at the cocoon of blankets and furs on the ground. When her head popped out one of the edges, her sleepy eyes looked around at everyone. “We cause a diversion. Some of our people remain outside Toron and create a ruckus and draw the attention of her warriors.”

“Nia won’t send all her warriors to deal with a minor disturbance.” Lexa stated. “No doubt she will only tighten her lines in Toron to ensure she remains safe.”

“Then we’ll have to make it big.” Raven couldn’t help buy grin at the ideas that bloomed in her mind. “I brought a few things that will help in that regard.”

Lexa nodded and then turned her attention back to Echo. “Can you show me these tunnels?”

“I can. It will take us a couple days to reach them but there is more than just getting to the tunnels..”

“More?” Lexa asked with an annoyed look on her face. There was always something more.
“The tunnels are the home of people everyone commonly refers to as Wuskripa. They won’t allow you through their tunnels without offering them something. If they don’t get what they want, it’s going to make getting in to Toron much more difficult.”

After a moment of deliberation within her thoughts, she decided what she was going to do. “You know these people?”

“I used to know them. It has been a number of years since I last spent time among them. The last time anyone saw me was when Nia’s warriors arrested me for stealing food and dragged me off to one of her prisons.”

“What could they do if we just decided to use the tunnels without their permission?” Bellamy asked.

“They could try to capture us and hand us over to Nia. That or inform Nia’s guard that we are in her tunnels and we are killed as we enter Toron.” Echo explained.

“It’s not going to come to that and I will negotiate the use of their tunnels in good faith.” Lexa stated matter-of-factly. “Echo, you and I will leave in an hour and when we return I hope to be able to discuss the situation with my General.” Lexa’s latter request addressed to Raven who continued to hide beneath her warm fortress of cover.

“They’ll be fixed by the afternoon. Just need enough light to see what I need to fix.” Raven confirmed.

Lexa nodded an understanding to Raven. She had absolutely no clue how it was her technology worked aside from being able to carry voices far distance on the wind. “When you get your tek working, please give Koma one of the radios to speak to our people. Koma, I will leave it to you to determine who will patrol and when.”

“I’m coming with you.” Bellamy stated, eyeing Lexa to dare and disagree with his intention of accompanying them.

Lexa’s sharp green eyes fell on Bellamy and he did everything he could to not shrink under her gaze. “I will not risk more lives than required. The only reason I am asking Echo to accompany me is she is familiar with the people I will be negotiating with and has used the tunnels. She can tell me if those I deal with speak the truth.”

Bellamy seemed as though he was about to object but Echo reached over and took his hand and shook her head, resulted in an immediate tempering of his agitated mood. If there was one thing in the world that could reign him in, it was the way her hand fit perfectly with his and how her usually hard brown eyes softened when they looked into his.

“I know these people because they are my people. We will be back in four days time if not earlier.” Echo said then offered him a smile as assurance. They both knew she couldn’t promise that but he knew there was no way to prevent her from going.

“Fine.” Bellamy grunted. “But if anything happens to her, I’m holding you responsible.” he added while trying to throw a glare at Lexa but was able to shrug off his attempt at intimidation. She fully believed his intent but he had a long way to go if he wanted to intimidate anyone, let alone someone who has faced death numerous times and walked away victorious as the Commander had.

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“You can stop where you are.” Called a voice from behind one of the trees on their right.
Both Echo and Lexa froze in place and surveyed the movement around them. Lexa had known they were being watched for quite some time but chose the best course of action was to just continuing on following wherever it was Echo led. Now that they stood together in the middle of the forest with little cover, she was questioning her decision in not bringing more people with her.

“Your are far from home Heda and you have a spy with you. I assumed the wise leader of the Kongeda would be smarter than to wander Nia’s lands without a full compliment of warriors to keep her safe.”

This new taunt came from another voice directly in front of them belonging to a woman who stepped onto the path in front of them. She had a bow in her hand and it’s string pulled taut with the business-end of an arrow aimed directly at Lexa’s chest.

After her examination of the weapon that was pointed at her, she focused on it’s wielder. She stood about five-foot nine, thin but not because it was a lack of food. It was clear in the minimal armour that she was very fit, but that much was obvious in her ability to hold her bow steady and not shake at all. She wore minimal furs even though that air was crisp which meant she cared about the ability to move freely and without hindrance. Her eyes were the most dangerous thing about her as her green eyes walked the fine line of being willing to listen to them or letting her fingers releasing her shot.

“Too many people draw the wrong kind of attention.” Lexa answered.

“You’ve come all this was for some attention?” The woman let out a small laugh. “I find it hard to believe you’d come all this way for some attention. My guess is you need something.

“You are correct but I’m not sure who to talk to is which is why I travel with a friend.” Lexa tilted her head in Echo’s direction but realizing quickly her words were ill chosen when the woman turned her bow on Echo. For a moment, Lexa truly believed the woman was going to send Echo to the grave.

“You are aware she is one of Nia’s spies?” The woman growled. “She’ll turn one you the moment she’s given a warm meal.”

“That’s not what happened and you know it, Arie.”

“Not another word out of you.” The woman Lexa now knew as Arie shouted. Not more than a second later, an arrow became lodged in the tree less than a foot from Echo’s position. It came from somewhere to their right but both Lexa and Echo knew the real danger stood in front of them.

“If you weren’t Heda and the fact my curiosity has gotten the better of me, the pair of you would have been killed days ago at your camp. Now that you know the company you travel with, I will only give you a few more moments of my time. Make it worth it because even my arm will start to tire.”

“We have need of your tunnels to enter Toron.” Lexa stated simply.

“That’s it?”

“The pair of us and a small force that is coming north.”

“You are talking about the group that is coming north? The Trikru and Skaikru?”

“I am. Not all of us will require the use of the tunnel. Just a few of us.”
“What do you think only a few warriors could do in Toron against Nia’s warriors?” The redhead asked with mockery in her voice.

“I plan on putting her rule to an end and less of my people would die if we could access your tunnels.”

“Damnit, Arie. Point your arrow somewhere else and just let us use the tunnels. It’s not going to cost you anything to let us try to get rid of Nia.” Echo said with impatience dripping from her words.

The redhead tugged back the string and let it fly. As it flew past Echo’s head and off into the forest behind them Echo didn’t flinch. Lexa looked back and forth between the pair trying to gauge what was going on between them. When Arie didn’t nock another arrow and let her arm fall to the side, Lexa couldn’t help but feel a little tension lift from her shoulders. At the very least, she could stop thinking about where she was going to throw one of the knives she was prepared launch at the woman.

“Impatient as ever, Echo.” The redhead shook her head with disappointment. “I told you that was what was going to land you in Nia’s dungeons.”

“And you still like to tell people you told them so.” Echo remarked.

Though they seemed to be on a more cordial, Lexa watched their interaction with amusement. They are, or at least had been friends at one point in time.

“If we’re going to have this talk, I’m going to need you both to throw your weapons on the ground so they can be collected. As long as you do as you’re told, you’ll get them back when you leave. Don’t think I don’t remember about the knife you like to keep in your boot lining, Echo.”

Arie smirked when Echo let out a huff as she drew the small knife from the side-lining of her boot. She then ordered people to come collect their items and to Lexa’s surprise a couple of boys no older than twelve appeared to collect their things.

“Anything else I should know about?” Arie asked as she approached the pair with her eyes looking over the most likely places they could hide weapons.

“That’s all we have on us.” Lexa answered.

“It better be. After we get where we’re going, if they find any weapons on you it won’t matter if you are Heda or Nia’s spy. Your fate will be the same.” Arie warned, her attention more on Echo than it was Lexa.

“That’s everything.” Echo said.

Arie and a number of people escorted them for another hour off trail to their destination. From the look of it, it was an old graveyard and one of the places that to all the people in the land was considered completely off limits.

These were spirits from the time before Praimfaya, these people were buried and not burned which meant their spirits lived in the ground and were unable to join their loved ones because they had not been released by the cleansing of a pyre’s flame. Walking in this place was the same as someone stepping on their trapped spirits - a sacrilegious act and one of the greatest insults to the dead.

When Arie looked back and saw the concern on Lexa’s face along with how she’d stopped at the small gate near the entrance, she knew what the brunette was thinking.
“We use these places because of that very reason. Nobody, not even Nia is willing to risk offence to the dead.”

“You are willing to risk offending the dead?” Lexa asked feeling a shiver run up her spine as she took her first few tentative steps into the sacred space.

“That’s how we survive.” Arie answered, turning back and walking toward a large mausoleum at the center of the cemetery. “If you want an answer to your question, the one you need to ask is in here.”

Lexa took the steps she needed to reach the stone building and when she stepped through the door, she saw a flight of stairs that led downward in to the Earth and clearly not a part of the building’s original design. Arie was already heading down the stairs as they crossed the threshold so they followed suit.

When they got to the bottom of the stairs, Lexa took note of the seven men in the room all with swords on their hips. There was also a rather slender man sitting at a table that had four chairs in the center of the small room, a spoon in his hand and eating it’s steaming contents as they watched on.

“Gerald. Thought you might like to talk to these two. They want access to our tunnels.” Arie said, announcing their guests and walking over to his side of the table to stand next to him.

“Leksa kom Trikru. I see you’ve brought me a present.”

“This is your Heda. She has come here to help you.” Echo growled.

“Her? She’s not my Heda.” He laughed. “My people aren’t a part of her coalition. Did our invitation get lost? Maybe a raven ate it.” The man dipped his spoon in his bowl and took another mouthful of food then he waved it at at Echo. “As for you, I’m surprised you are still alive. Does this one know you are a traitorous bitch?”

“I didn’t betray anyone!” Echo argued.

“And it was a coincidence that Nia’s guards happened to know we were going to raid that farm on that day and waiting to ambush our people all the while you were a guest of the young Prince Roan? Tell me. Did you enjoy the fine meals in Nia’s palace after you stabbed your people in the back?”

“I didn’t tell Nia anything. I didn’t even know…”

“That’s ENOUGH out of you, traitor!” Gerald slammed the spoon down on the table which resulted in nearly everyone in the room to flinch. “We’ll get to the truth of it after your Heda and I have a conversation about our future and then I’ll decide the matter of whether or not you will continue to have one.”

Lexa heard the man make the order to take Echo away and she found herself stepping reflexively in front of her. If Echo was taken and anything happened to her, the uneasy alliance she felt she had with Skaikru could end and she wasn’t willing to risk making an enemy of the people whose leader she was trying to rescue. If they didn’t want to let her use the tunnels, Lexa decided they would just have to find another way.

Lexa moved into an aggressive stance which concerned the men who were moving forward, Lexa could see the nervousness in their eyes. Her eyes flicked to the sword on the closest man’s hip and assume he would draw it to intimidate her. She would use it to kill him once he drew it and continued to plan her route through her remaining opponents.

They stopped their progression to look back at their leader for word on what to do next and Lexa
risked a glance his way as well. It appeared that he was trying to figure out why Lexa would stand in
defence of a traitor. He couldn’t let this go on much longer so he waved the men back.

“Isn’t this interesting.” He said while he leaned back in his chair with a smile. “The mighty warrior
risking her life for Nia’s spy?”

“I did not…” Echo started to argue her innocence again but she was cut off by Lexa. Echo had been
given a reprieve and she didn’t have any intention of throwing it away.

“It is quite a story and I’d be happy to share it with you but I ask that she remains here with us. I’ll
explain why as I tell it.”

Gerald seemed like he was considering her condition but she already knew he was going to accept it.
He just had to appear like he was the most important person in the room to his people. If the stories
he’d heard about the Commander were true, she could have killed everyone in the room without the
need of a forged weapon.Noticing there was not going to be a fight, Aria sat down in the chair next
to the man in charge.

“Please, sit.” He smiled and waved his hand at two of the vacant seats in front of him. “Tell me why
it is you need access to the tunnels and then we’ll see what we can agree what would be a worthy
price for granting you access.”

Lexa and Echo took the offered seats and Lexa began to explain her their plan and how they were
going to remove Nia and put the Prince in her place. She knew what coming to this place was going
to cost her, and she could see it reflected in his eyes. It was the same demand they’d petitioned the
last Heda for and the one he had to refuse.

As Echo started to tell her story, Lexa set herself to the unenviable task of trying to figure out how to
grant them their request of territory within the Kongeda without turning it’s current members against
her. Any clan she approached would steadfastly refuse her request. These people were assumed to all
be beggars and thieves and no clan wished to invite that trouble into or next to their lands. Hey only
thing regarding these people they were all in agreement over was to let Nia deal with them however
she wanted.

A thought of possibility crossed her mind when she considered the rise of Roan to the throne of
Azgeda and how he could provide such an opportunity. He would owe her a great debt and if these
people wanted their own land, King Roan would be able to negotiate terms with them. What terms?
Lexa didn’t care as long as she got them in a room to discuss the matter. To ensure their negotiations
are trustworthy, she considered them taking place in Polis under her protection.

“An interesting story.” he said, his eyes going from Echo over to Lexa. “If we permit you and your
warriors to enter the tunnels you know we want what we are owed.”

“I think I have an idea on how to get you what you wish, but it will require the assistance of the
Azgeda King.” Lexa suggested.

“Aren’t you getting ahead of yourself?”

“If you want your people to live free from the threat of Nia and your children to grow knowing they
have a future within the Kongeda, this will be the only way it is possible.” Lexa said and making it
clear this was their only choice.

“Tell me what we need to do to make it happen.” Gerald said.
If anyone finds the Ontari situation a little confusing, don't worry! The next chapter gives some insight into the situation. :)

Making a Choice

Chapter Summary

After Nia sends Ontari to seize Clarke and Roan, they find themselves no longer welcome guests of Toron but prisoners in her dungeons. Once again Ontari is set to the task of extracting information from Prince Roan in order to determine who his allies are, and to learn the truth behind the Commander's now month-long disappearance from Polis.

Chapter Notes

Update day? Update day!!

Sorry to everyone who has been waiting patiently for the next update to this story. I like to think I've got most of my affairs in order which means I'll be updating a LOT sooner than once every month.

Next update? Sunday June 2nd!

Let me know what you think in the comments and thanks to everyone for your patience. It means a lot. Also, thanks for the continued Kudos reminding me to focus on the story more. I've left it for a LOT longer than I ever intended to.

I hope you enjoy and I'll see you all in a week!

Clarke’s body ached in every spot imaginable, but nowhere more-so than the constant throbbing in her face where she was struck. She shook her head in an attempt to clear the cobwebs from her mind and tried to figure out where she was and how long she might have been laying on the hard floor beneath her. Her body had become accustomed to the comfort of being back in a bed after the long trip to Toron but it was in full rebellion of her current circumstance.

Trying to bring her hand to her face in an effort to remove the gag that covered her mouth and made another stark realization that she was no longer a guest of Queen Nia’s but a prisoner with a pair of metal cuffs around her wrists that stopped her hands a couple inches away from her face. Upon further investigation, she could see both of the metal bracelets were attached to a chain and ran to opposite sides of the room preventing her from any significant movement.

The cuffs weren’t to the point where they hurt but she could see it getting that way in a hurry, especially as she kept yanking on them to draw the attention of one of the four guards who were seated at a table between their two cells for answers. The group seemed to be engaged in a quiet conversation and after a moment of several glances in her direction and what appeared to be a small disagreement, one of the four got up and left the room with a sour look on his face after having thrown on a fur-lined coat.

After ten more minutes of Clarke trying in vain to get answers from the remaining guards, she gave
up and chose to sit uncomfortably in the middle or her cell and wait for whoever she believed was on their way. Thankfully, she didn’t have to wait long until the door to the main room opened and Ontari and Nia stepped into the room, accompanied by the guard who had exited earlier.

Clarke’s heart rate nearly tripled when she saw Ontari stride forward and stare directly at her through the cell bars and offer her that arrogant smirk she’d almost forgotten about. Without thinking, Clarke stood and attempted to lunge forward as though she weren’t in chains. The stinging pain in her wrists reminded her of her situation and she stopped trying to pull herself free from her restraints.

“She has quite the spirit. You were right, my daughter.” Nia said, standing directly behind Ontari with her hands resting on her daughter’s shoulders. They both stood directly in front of Clarke’s cell and observed her like a trapped animal. Clarke “That pride will be her death.”

“My blade will be that cause of her death.” Ontari’s words were a promise that caused Clarke to still herself.

Clarke watched the pair interact in a quiet conversation but both hadn’t ceased staring forward at her in some frustrating game to elicit a reaction from her. She was determined to return a stare right back at them in response.

“Just remember what is expected of you. Neither of them is to die until I get what I want. I won’t tolerate another mistake.” Nia’s words were sharp and Clarke could see a flicker of something in Ontari’s face but one thing was certain; Nia’s message was received and understood. “Start with which ever one you would like but make sure the former Prince tells you what he knows about the Commander not being in Polis.”

“Yes, my Queen.” Ontari said, bowing slightly then watching as her mother turned and left through the same door they entered. She didn’t spare a single look to her son who remained motionless on the ground.

“Wanheda is fortunate that my talents will be occupied today by the traitor.” she teased, eliciting a few incoherently mumbled threats from Clarke which drew a grin from Ontari. “Oh, don’t be jealous, lover. You’ll learn everything I’m capable of and more over the coming months.”

There were a lot of things Clarke wished to share with Ontari but thanks to the gag over her mouth nothing came out intelligibly. She was certain the look in her eyes and the way she thrashed against the chains in her cell gave Ontari clear understanding of her feelings.

“Open the former Prince’s cell and stand him up. Secure the feet shackles as well.” Ontari ordered without looking away from Clarke. She assumed Ontari wanted her to know who was in charge and when Clarke frowned, Ontari’s attention turned towards Nia’s guards so she could watch them follow her orders.

Clarke watched Ontari wait until they’d all secured Roan so that his arms and legs could not pose a threat thanks to being securely positioned outward to his sides. She ordered the men from the cell and to wait outside but the oldest of them informed Ontari that due to an order from Queen Nia’s, they had to remain. Even if they were intimidated by Ontari’s commanding presence, none would go against Nia’s command.

“Very well.” Ontari growled, giving each of them a look that no doubt etched a fear into their souls. “Take your seats outside and leave me to my work.

Clarke watched on and saw Ontari take a couple deep breaths before she turned her attention to Roan who seemed to barely be able to support his own weight. Now that he was upright, it looked as
though he had taken a considerable punishment before Clarke had regained consciousness and his right eye was bruised and completely closed due to the swelling.

His clothes were nearly all removed and showed evidence of serious bruising which made her concerned that he likely had a broken rib or two. His staggered breathing only reinforced her diagnosis of his condition that he’d been worked over by the guards or by Ontari beforehand.

She couldn’t help but watch because of how she was chained up in her cell. Ontari stepped closer and closer until she was directly in front of her brother and she reached up and put her hand on his cheek, lightly inspecting the damage on his face, tracing the small cuts with her fingertips until she got to one on his jaw-line where she appeared to press firmly and drew a pained groan from the former Prince.

“You don’t have to do this.” Roan grunted through clenched teeth.

“Oso du chit oso souda.” (We do what we must.) Ontari replied. “I’ll make you the same offer every day until Heda is found and killed. Give me the names or this will only get worse.”

“I am not working to overthrow our Queen.” Roan defied her request, resulting in a punch to one of the lighter shade of bruises on his ribs. “Ungh!”

“You are lying. You are working with the Commander and have you have enlisted Wanheda to help you try and destroy what our Queen has built. Where is Heda?”

“You are lying.” Ontari landed another punch to the same spot as before, reinforcing her will on him and watching one of his knees buckle but not enough to force him to lose his balance completely. She followed up with several more precise blows that knocked the wind from his lungs or caused him to lose his balance and forced the tight chains to hold him upright. Ontari looked ta him and sighed,

“I think I’ll skip the questions for today so I can show you what you can expect from our time together. I hope it the silence will give you enough time to come to your senses and tell your mother what she needs to know.

“She’s my mother by blood. What is your excuse?” Roan spit a mouthful of blood that landed on Ontari’s face and chest.

Ontari growled and threw a very hard kick into his side as an attempt to answer his question. Roan groaned and again the chains held him upright and in position for the continued assault from the brunette.

The abuse went on for the next thirty minutes, and not once did Roan do more than let out the occasional grunt from her what Ontari referred to as “treatment”. She had progressed from punches from his ribs to a number of other places on his body which seemed to cause him am enormous amount of pain.

Clarke let out a few loud mumbles that nobody could understand but it was clear she was trying to mock Ontari with the tones she was using. She hoped if she could catch Ontari’s attention, she could give Roan some relief from her assault but her efforts didn’t seem to bother Ontari who just kept her on with her task of abusing her step-brother.
Unfortunately, one of the guards found her protest enough he take the matter into his own hands so
the man stood up and took the few steps to Clarke’s cell door, flipped the latch that secured it closed
and swung the door open. Clarke yanked on the chains that held her nearly in place and realized
there was nothing she could do to stop the man who was sporting a sadistic grin on his face.

His rough hands reached around Clarke’s throat and slowly increased their tightness and immediately
preventing Clarke from breathing. Clarke thrashed about in her chains as she was unable to defend
herself to stop the man from squeezing the life from her body and his sickening grin mocked her.

Clarke tried to make a vocal sound, anything to try to get assistance but she was unable to overcome
the burning sensation that was building in her lungs. Everything began to darken and all she could
see was the look in his eyes of a predator having caught his prey. Clarke could feel her body begin to
slacken and closed her eyes to wait for the inevitable. She almost wished that she had died in the
forest the many weeks ago before Levai had found her. At least she wouldn’t have to endure months
of torture at the hands of someone she thought was an ally.

“That’s right, Skaikru bitch. Let’s see how you like being the Queen’s prisoner.”

Clarke felt a lessening of pressure on her throat then the solid contact of a fist landing solidly in the
middle of her face. Instead of darkness, she saw the bright flash of stars and felt warm blood run
down over her lips in a steady stream from her nose. Assuming that the assault wasn’t anywhere near
over, she closed her eyes tightly in anticipation of what was going to happen next and braced
herself for contact.

After a moment of eternity, Clarke heard the sound of scuffling in front of her which allowed her
to slightly crack an eye open and hope that this wasn’t just a ruse to get her to see another punch on
it’s way. It took a second to fully regain her bearing, but she could clearly see the man who had hit
her now lay a couple feet away her.

Just as Clarke recovered enough to see what was happening, she could see Ontari that couple feet
away over the fallen guard with her knee in his side to prevent him from moving away. She had his
arm extended straight up and her own wrapped around it. It seemed as though she was waiting for
Clarke to gather enough of her wits to be able to watch and then Ontari looked from Clarke back to
the guard. She whispered something in Triegedaslang that Clarke couldn’t hear and then with a
quick twist of her torso, a sickening crack was heard and the man cried out in pain.

Clarke watched Ontari stand up, walk from the room and address the guards who were still seated at
the table. Each of them looked up at her with fear in their eyes that they could be next.

“I said nobody is to touch these prisoners. Nobody. No more warnings. If any of you consider doing
what this one just tried to do, you will find my blade in and through your chest. Your families will be
cast from Azgeda lands to survive on their own and they will be given the brand of a traitor.”

“Sha, Wormana.”(Yes, General).The guards all chanted in unison.

“You and you.” Ontari pointed at two of the three remaining guards. “Get that Branwada out of my
sight. Take him to a fisa to make sure he won’t be completely useless for the remained of his life.”

Ontari glanced back at the man who was rolling around on the ground, pathetically holding his arm
and wailing about it being broken. As he writhed on the floor in pain. Ontari walked back in the cell
with the two guards and leaned over him with a look of pure disgust. “I strip you of you position in
the guard. From this day on, you will spend the rest of your days until death cleaning the stables.”

“Thank you, General. Thank you.” The man groveled, his eyes red from tears that filled them after
the loud crack that clearly broke his arm.

Clarke was a mix of emotions watching everything unfold in front of her. She started by being mocked by Ontari and Nia, then she saw Ontari begin a round of torture Prince Roan. Now she’d come over to stop a man who was very likely about to inflict significant injury or possibly even kill her. She felt as though she was just arriving in Toron and Ontari had resumed being the riddle she was again unable to solve. For a moment, she considered that if the guard had killed her, it might have meant the end of Ontari as well. ‘Might have been worth it.’ Clarke considered for a fraction of a second.

Two of the guards came into the room and helped the wounded man to his feet and before he was taken from the room, he cast Clarke a glare as though his broken arm was her fault. He had no idea how much Clarke wished she was the one that caused him the pain he was currently in.

As if nothing was out of the ordinary, Ontari walked across to Roan’s cell while at the same time ordering the remaining guard to fetch a fisa for Roan.

“I am not allowed to leave. I’ll find one when the others return.” The guard declared. Unfortunately, his words wavered and betrayed his attempt at confidence as the older guard had earlier.

Clarke watched on as Ontari stopped on the spot, spun on her heel and glare at the remaining guard. He was definitely a younger guard and he couldn’t be much older than she was which meant that there is a possibility she could intimidate him into defying Nia’s orders. She just had to apply the right amount of pressure.

“You. What is your name?” Ontari asked as she took slow and deliberate steps toward him.

“Artek.” The young man replied.

“Well, Artek. When my mother was in here with me not more than an hour ago, do you recall her words?”

“I… I don’t…”

“For someone who says they wish to follow their Queen’s orders, you seem unable to remember the simplest of them. She demanded that neither of her prisoners are to die and if they do,” Ontari was now standing in front of the table the young man was still seated at. “Nia will hold us both responsible for either of them dying.”

“But they aren’t dead.”

“That traitor,” Ontari pointed at Roan, “is bleeding under his skin and it is affecting his breathing. If it continues, he will die. If he dies, you die. Do you understand?”

“But the Queen ordered…”

Ontari let out a sigh and in one fluid motion drew her small knife out from her belt and plunged it nearly an inch into the tabletop between them. The young man jumped out of his chair and scrambled back, nearly losing his balance in the process. For a moment, it looked like he was going to grab for his sword but went against his instincts and lifted his hands in defence.

“Your Queen, My mother, ordered that neither of them die. I cannot leave two prisoners of such high value alone with someone who would not be able to defend themselves should the prisoners manage to free themselves.”
With curiosity, Clarke watched the exchange between the two in the middle room, as did Roan. They could see the young man mulling over Ontari’s words. She’d seen enough to know the young man was going to give in to Ontari’s demand and Ontari knew just how much pressure to place on the young man.

“I’ll find one as quickly as I can.” The young man bowed before turning to leave.

“Find Grata. She will be in the fisa tower to the east.” Ontari ordered.

“The fisa tower is thirty minutes away.” The young man turned back to Ontari, halting his progress out of the room.

“She is the best we have at these kinds of injuries. We will need her expertise.”

“I can run to the training grounds. I could have a fisa here in ten minutes.”

“So you will not follow my orders?” Ontari asked, her voice becoming terrifyingly calm and she was no longer looking at the guard but the dagger she was twisting free from the table she plunged it in moments ago. Once it was free, she looked up at Artek with a cold stare.

“I only meant that if I could find a fisa closer, that…”

“I cannot allow an inexperienced fisa to kill the Queen’s son because of their lack of skill. Now go. Take a horse and return as quickly as you can.”

“Yes, General.” Artek bowed and then scrambled out of the room to make the long trip to the fisa tower.

Ontari waited a moment and when she was certain Artek was gone, she sprinted into Roan’s cell. Clarke could see that she seemed to be saying something with him but the combined throbbing of her head and the distance made it impossible for her to overhear. What occurred next surprised Clarke and added another layer of confusion in her mind that was swimming in a fog thanks to the injuries she’d sustained. Ontari reached out and wrapped her arms around the Prince and pulled him into a hug.

After the quick embrace, Clarke watched Ontari walk from Roan’s cell, retrieve a set of keys from the wall by the door and then walk into Clarke’s cell.

“Ontari? What the hell is going on?”

“This is my trying to save your life. Didn’t your people escape from cells in Maunde? Ontari was quickly undoing the cuffs on her wrists while Clarke looked on with continued confusion.

“How did you know about that?”

“Nia has spies everywhere, Clarke. Now, do you want to get out of here or do you actually want to be Nia’s prisoner? There won’t be a better opportunity to get away from here than we have right now.”

Clarke remained firmly planted in place, her voice starting to rise with the anger that found it’s way back into her thanks to the last thirty minutes of bearing witness to Ontari’s assault on Roan. She couldn’t believe what she’d seen and how quickly she switched from one Ontari to the next.

“What you did to Roan, how could you? Why aren’t you setting him free?”
“I will explain on our way to meet the Commander. My time in Toron is up for now and so is yours. We need to get moving before the guards return from helping that moron whose arm I broke.”

“You know where Le… the Commander is?” Clarke looked at her with astonishment. It appeared that Ontari was well informed and if she was well informed, it likely meant Nia was as well.

“No, but people I know do and they gave me an idea of where to go. We need to get out of here.” She explained, almost begging Clarke as she reached forward and grabbed Clarke’s wrist as she had done before and trying to coax her from her spot.

“We aren’t going without Roan.” Clarke declared, crossing her arms in front of her chest in defiance.

“We don’t have time for this, Clarke. If you don’t get out of Toron now, you will never leave. I won’t be able to get rid of the guards in the future and Nia will expect me to do what I did to Roan to you, only it gets worse. Much, much worse. I can’t and I won’t do that.”

“Free Roan.” Clarke ordered.

To both Clarke and Ontari’s surprise, Roan looked up at the pair who were currently in a stalemate of coming or going and his voice was as loud as either of them was ever likely to hear.

“Go. Find the Commander. Ontari will explain why it is important. Now go!”

Clarke’s mind was reeling. Now Roan was telling her to go? She had a hard time trying to figure out why the Prince would be willing to stay behind but if there was one thing she believed, it was that he was a wise and capable man who could take care of himself if need be. He wouldn’t tell her to leave if there wasn’t a way out of this for him. At least, that was what she hoped before Ontari continued to try to coax Clarke to leave.

“Clarke, let’s go!” Ontari shouted as she reached forward to grab Clarke’s arm, pulling her out of her cell toward the door. “If we are caught, we’re all dead and so are your people. If I do not bring you to the Commander, she’ll kill me before I have a chance to explain.”

That caught Clarke’s attention and she fell in step behind Ontari. She had many questions, but if she wasn’t hanging in Nia’s cells, she decided she could wait for those answers. “You’ll tell me everything.”

“I will. I promise.”

“Not just part of whatever is going on. Everything. You and Nia, you and Roan, You and your people, you and whatever the hell happened with Costia.”

When she said Costia’s name, the look that Ontari expression offered was as if she had plunged a dagger in her chest. It didn’t take her more than a mere moment to respond to all of Clarke’s demand.

“Everything.” Ontari promised again. “We need to keep quiet and you have to stay as close to me as we can. We’re going to get a couple horses and then we ride as hard as we can.”

“Let’s get out of here.” Clarke said with a nod, following Ontari to the only door in the room.

Ontari listened at the door for a moment then opened it enough to be able to get a view of the surroundings as best she could. It was a cold night and Clarke shivered at the invasion of cold air that rolled into the room hit what seemed to be every exposed piece of flesh she had.
“Let’s go.” Ontari’s voice was a near whisper. She didn’t need to see Clarke to know she was directly behind her and ready to move in a hurry on a moments notice.

Together they emerged from the building and moved with pace toward a nearby building and the one Clarke assumed had the hoses Ontari talked about. She couldn’t help but feel as though this was some sort of Game Ontari was playing with her and she kept trying to study Ontari as they approached the half-repaired building.

She was relieved when she followed Ontari into the building and saw two horses waiting for them, saddled and ready. Her eyes went to a small pile of furs and other cold-weather gear Clarke assumed Ontari had planned for them.

“Put on some layers and we will go.” Ontari explained. “The bag under those furs has food you can eat while we ride. We won’t be stopping until we get where we are going.”

“Do you know how far the Commander is?” Clarke asked as she hurriedly threw on the furs as Ontari checked on the horses.

“Five days of hard riding. We will only stop when the horses need rest, that way they won’t throw us and neither of us will get injured from it.”

“We can’t ride for five straight days.” Clarke argued.

“We can and we will.” Ontari said as she easily swung up atop her saddle, taking the reins and looking at Clarke expectantly to do the same.

After putting on enough to protect herself from the weather, she climbed up and into her own saddle and looked at Ontari expectantly. She was surprised when Ontari took out a mask from inside her fur coat and threw it to her.

“Wear this. And keep your hair under it.” she instructed.

“What? Why?” Clarke turned the mask and saw the cloth that would obscure her features. Around it, there were markings of Azgeda patters drawn in white paint.

“It may come as a surprise to you, but you don’t look like Azgeda.” Ontari would have laughed if the circumstances were different.

“Alright.” Clarke said, pulling the mask over her face and then she proceeded to pull the fur-lined hood up over her head so she could tuck away any loose strands of blonde that might be visible.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d swear you were one of Nia’s scouts.” Ontari suggested as they both exited the building, but not before Ontari had a quick look around.

“The guards will be returning very soon. We ride with ease until we approach the northern edge of the city. It will be less suspicious than if we rode hard immediately. Then we will ride hard to the west and south. We will run into some of Nia’s scouts on our way and we will have to make sure none is able to send word back to Nia.”

“Alright.” Was all Clarke could think to say.

Once again she found herself watching Ontari lead the way, even if they were riding side by side. She hadn’t stopped watching Ontari since they’d left the prison and was still waiting for something to happen. A betrayal which would prove her original suspicions about Ontari correct.
After ten minutes of nervous and steady riding, Clarke’s back shot up straight, drawing a tense reaction from her horse beneath her. The city guard had sounded the alarm and the Azgeda horn echoed throughout the city calling an emergency. Ontari’s head spun around in all directions and her eyes scanned the route she had chosen for their escape, then she looked over at Clarke.

“Are you ready?”

“Ready.” Clarke confirmed, but she couldn’t hide the nervousness that was creeping into her body at the long ride ahead and the consequences of what could happen if they are caught.

“Ride, Clarke!” Ontari urged, leaning forward on her horse and urging it forward.

Clarke watched Ontari urge her horse forward, tearing off in a streak and did the same by emulating her movement which caused her horse to follow suit, almost resulting in her being launched off her horse backwards. Thankfully she managed to hunch herself forward enough into a position a similar to Ontari’s which allowed her horse to break into a startling pace, catching up with Ontari who if she wasn’t mistaken, had a smile on her face at how much of a struggle Clarke was having.

It took her a while but she became used to the pace and the way her body moved in her saddle but after finding her balance in concert with her horse as it galloped along the trail. She found herself almost enjoying the ride. At least, the ride itself - not the notion that Nia’s scouts were likely on their trail and perhaps hot on their trail.

Instead, she focused on the way the wind blew past her. Wrapping around her and making her thankful for her mask and how it protected her face as she rode. It was cold enough she often had to close her eyes to stop them to watering due to the wind hitting the parts of revealed skin on her face. She had no idea how Ontari was able to stare ahead so resolutely without it becoming a problem but assumed it was because she’d spent so much time in the cold she’d become accustomed to it.

They rode well into the day after sunrise and only occasionally slowed for their horses to get some rest, but even then it was never for very long and they never dismounted from their saddles.

At first the pace was terrifying yet exhilarating but after the eighth hour Clarke’s body was well beyond the first signs of fatigue and and the first to go was her balance. She had begun to feel soreness after the third hour and managed to conceal it but now it was become too difficult for her to keep herself upright and the last thirty minutes had been her arguing in her mind whether or not to ask Ontari for a break.

Ontari had seen the signs of fatigue in Clarke and was impressed with how long she was able to ride at the arduous pace she’d set for them. When she saw Clarke starting to teeter in her saddle, that was when she decided t was a good time for both them and the horses to have their first real rest.

Clarke saw her pull on her reigns and she did the same in order to slow their horses to an easy trot then to a walk. When Clarke had a moment to look around, she wondered when exactly the sun had managed to rise so high in the sky when the last time she looked it had barely begun to creep over the eastern horizon.

“We will take a break up ahead. There is a place we can get some water and move around before we have to get moving again. We will have to go off trail and and lead the horses up hill a ways.”

“Finally.” Clarke groaned, trying to keep her back straight in her saddle. “You weren’t kidding about riding hard, were you? How long of a rest are we going to have?” Clarke’s mind immediately began to demand a short nap to try to regain some of her strength.
“Thirty minutes.”

“Won’t the horses need more rest than that?” Clarke asked, more for the sake of her travel-weary body.

“These horses can travel another thirty miles before they will start to need any real significant rest.” Ontari said. “The more breaks they take, the greater chance their muscles will tighten up and they will be unable to continue. If that happens, we will find the chances of running into Nia’s scouts that much greater. I’d planned on riding another four hours before we stopped but I think we could use the rest.”

Clarke knew she was lying. Not about the wish to ride longer, but that they both needed rest. Ontari had hopped down from her horse with minimal signs of fatigue in her joints, but when Clarke tried to do the same, Ontari had hurried to her side in order to make sure she didn’t fall from her saddle.

“I’ve got it.” Clarke said, trying to refuse Ontari’s assistance but the dark-haired girl was having none of it.

“If you fall off the horse and break your leg or worse your back, everything we’ve done so far and everything we still need to do will be for nothing.” Ontari helped Clarke to the ground and her legs nearly went out from under her, drawing a sympathetic look from Ontari.

“I’ll lead the horses. Lean on the trees if you need until your balance recovers.”

“I will. Thank you.” Clarke said, her legs beginning to tighten up on her as she took her first few steps.

“You rode well today, Clarke.”

“I’ve never ridden so much so hard before.” She replied, pulling her mask down so she could breathe unimpeded.

“You rode as well as most of Nia’s seasoned warriors. Many would be struggling more than you are now. You rode as well as I did on my first long ride.”

Clarke had a hard time believing her. Of course, she had the same nightblood travelling through her veins which meant Ontari could excel at nearly everything that required stamina and with her training she likely could ride those days straight and only experience minimal cramping. Clarke assumed her recovery time was reduced as well, but she wouldn’t know the truth of it unless Ontari allowed her to run some tests back at Camp Jaha.

“Do you think we have put enough distance between us and Nia’s scouts?” Clarke asked, now following behind Ontari without the assistance of the trees to support her.

“Not nearly enough.”

“That’s comforting.” Clarke joked as they weaved their way through some trees and up a small hill to their destination. Clarke was surprised to see a small hut hidden in among the trees. “How did you know this was here?”

“These are all over Azgeda territory. Some were built after Praimfaya, some still stand from before. They are used when the weather turns to freezing or if a scout needs a place to rest after a long ride.” Ontari explained.

She led the horses over to a long metal pipe that stuck out from the ground with a relatively long
metal lever at the top of it. Once she began to move the arm up and down, a few moments later water spilled out from the pipe and began to fill a metal basin underneath it which the horses immediately dropped their heads into and began drinking.

“Won’t Nia’s scouts find us here?” Clarke asked.

“We should be safe here. Nia’s scouts won’t assume we would use known locations while we try to evade her scouts. We will hide in plain sight. At least here we have water and a good vantage point over anyone who might be coming to look for us. We will drink all we can now and fill up our skins for the next part of the trip. I wish we could rest longer, but you aren’t just any random prisoner that escaped Nia’s cells. She will ride her scouts to their death to make sure you are brought back to Toron.”

“What about you?” Clarke asked, watching Ontari sigh then shrug.

“I can never return. If I am caught, I will wind up living a long life in one of Nia’s dungeons. That is unless she becomes bored of me.”

“What would she do then?”

“If I am lucky? She’d let me die in the cell or in a fighting pit.”

Clarke couldn’t help but scowl at Ontari’s revelation, but it did bring them closer to a subject she was unsure about how to bring it up. She figured now was as good a time as any.

“What is Nia referred to as the mistake that had been made?”

Ontari nodded and her eyes found their way to the ground. It wasn’t often Clarke could see remorse in Ontari’s eyes, but this subject was one that could temper this woman’s confidence.

“Tell me what happened.”

Ontari led Clarke over to a spot they could sit down and rest against a couple trees, and so that they could sit across from each other for their conversation. Once they were comfortable enough, Ontari studied Clarke for a moment and then began her explanation.

“What do you know of the one called Titus?”

“That is the Flamekeeper, right? I don’t know much other than what little Lexa told me a little about him. He is a kind of spiritual leader of your people?” Clarke asked, confused in the direction Ontari was taking.

“He is, but he also gives political guidance to the Heda. Titus has been the spiritual and political guide of the last three Commanders.”

“What does that have to do with you?”

“Do you know what life was like under all the Commanders before Heda Lexa?”

“Not really.”

“The clans were almost always at war with each other. Easy alliances and even easier betrayals depending on who was leader of a clan at any given time. One would be murdered, another would take their place. There was no stability in the clans, not like there is now. There are many who believe what our current Heda is doing now is wrong, and that hear peace will make the people of
the clans weak. Nia being her biggest critic.”

“What does that have to do with Titus?”

“Titus is one of those who believe that the strong survive and that whoever is Heda should be the strongest of them all. One of the unofficial tenants of being Heda is that a relationship creates opportunity for an enemy to get close and once a Heda lowers their guard, they can be killed by the one they trust most. For Lexa, Titus believed Costia represented that threat.”

“Love is weakness…” Clarke mumbled.

“If there is one thing Titus believes above all else, it is that his actions are in the best interest of the Commander. As Flamekeeper, it is his solemn duty to maintain the traditions of his order. In his mind, it was in Heda Lexa’s best interest that Costia not be that danger.”

“He gave Costia to Nia?” Clarke asked, shocked at the news she was hearing. Every time she asked Lexa about being the Commander, she always included Titus’ name and how important that she follow the traditions of her people.

“He made sure that Nia’s scouts had no problem finding her in the tower when the Commander was visiting Bouldalankru during a border skirmish which was conveniently engineered by Nia. Costia was then brought north to Toron.”

“Lexa had to know what was happening back in Polis with Costia gone.” Clarke argued. “She would have gotten word about it.”

“Not if the one who was responsible for sending her those messages didn’t want the messages to reach her in the first place.”

“Titus had the messengers killed?”

“With the help of Nia. It was simple enough to argue that Reapers were the cause of the messengers going missing. Titus stated he had no idea messages weren’t reaching the Commander and her loyalty, other than to her people were to Titus and his teachings. She wouldn’t believe he could do such a thing.”

“But that doesn’t explain why you need me there when you talk to Lexa.”

“First because I freed you from Toron and Nia’s cells. That should be some evidence I’m not working with Nia.”

“Unless you are using me to get to her.” Clarke suggested.

“The second being she knows what I did to Costia.”

“That you killed her?”

“No. That I tortured her before killing her.”

Clarke was quiet for a moment, trying to imagine what Lexa would do if they came face to face without her intervening. She’d never seen Lexa fight, but she assumed she was trained by the very best.

“She knows what you did?” Clarke asked, knowing that if Lexa wanted Ontari dead, there would be nothing she could do to stop it.
“Nia made it a point to explain the details of what happened and included other embellishments to try to provoke Heda Lexa’s fury.”

“If she lied, can’t you explain?”

“She didn’t lie about everything, Clarke.” Ontari said, her eyes looking down at the ground below her feet. Clarke could see guilt begin to deepen in Ontari’s eyes.

“I did almost everything she said. I broke her bones only to hear the young girl cry out in pain. I took my knife and slid it’s edge along her skin in order to pry secrets free that I knew she wasn’t keeping.”

“Then why? Why did you do it to her?”

“Because I didn’t know any better!” Ontari had nearly shouted the defence of her actions but her words were laced with regret. Once she managed to get control of herself, she continued.

“Nia told me Costia knew of plans that Heda Lexa and Maunde were working together on an agreement to kill the Azgeda people with their weapons. She made it my responsibility to determine what those plans were.

Every day I’d go into the girls cell and at first she was defiant, claiming her innocence and defending the Heda as I’d come to expect. After a month of… of… well, she continued to to claim that there was no agreement and that Maunde was their mutual enemy. Nobody had ever been able to withstand what she had and the last day I walked into her cell she was different.

Up until that day, I’d enter the room, order the guards to lift her body from the ground and place her in the chains so she could be suspended in the air and I would offer her the chance to admit what he knew, and that it could all be over if she would just give Nia what she wanted to know.

On that last day, I walked into the cell and she was standing in the middle of the room under her own power which was astonishing. Her feet had been recently broken and I was certain she wouldn’t have had the strength to stand on her own. I couldn’t imagine how much pain she was in but she stared forward out the cell door and waited for me to walk in. When I did, I could hear her having difficulty breathing but she stood straight up and her grey eyes watched me as I approached her.”

“Ontari.. you don’t have to…” Clarke tried, but Ontari waved her hand to dismiss Clarke’s concerns.

“That’s when she told me she forgave me for what I’d done.” Ontari’s eyes rimmed with moisture that began to crest and ran down both her cheeks while she continued.

“When I walked in the room, I had a plan I was certain would get her talking but the moment she said those words, I couldn’t lift the knife in my hand no matter how much I willed myself to do it. She… she should have been furious with me. She should have begged me to let her go, to free her and take her home to be with her love but she knew she was never going home. Nia wouldn’t let her.

She told me she knew I was just doing what I was ordered to do, and that it wasn’t my fault - not entirely. She told me that she hoped one day I’d see the truth behind what was happening and when I did, I should forgive myself for not knowing what I was doing. That my hands were instruments of another person will and not of my own.”

Clarke watched Ontari raise her hands while she spoke and studied them. If Clarke could see through Ontari’s eyes right now, she would see the the broken and bruised hands of Costia, the nails partially torn from the fingers in search of the answers that would never come. She squeezed her hands closed tightly then buried them in her furs to hide them from sight.
“I never got the chance to tell her I was sorry for what I did. Before I knew what I was doing, I lifted the knife in my hand and I… I just…”

“You had to protect her.” Clarke whispered, recalling her own not-so-distant past outside camp Jaha when they’d been confronted by Lexa’s armies. Lexa demanded Finn be handed over or everyone would be killed.

Her memory of Finn had not faded, but it had become a part of her, making her who she was today. She’d forgiven herself for what she’d done, at least she believed she had but Ontari was battling a different demon. One of her own making, even if Nia manipulated her into it.

“Even if it was far too late for such a thing. I killed her and she thanked me for the peace I could give her after what I’d done. How could anyone forgive me after what I’d done?”

Clarke didn’t have an answer for her. Hearing what she’d done to Costia was inexcusable and it was clear Ontari knew it as well because the tears that continued to stream down her face were evidence enough of her guilt.

“I’ll make sure Lexa listens to what you have to say.” Clarke made her the promise. “We just have to make it to wherever it is she is first.”

Ontari looked up at Clarke for the first time since she stared explaining her story. “I’m prepared to accept whatever she decides to do with me. She just needs to know about Titus and to make sure you can’t be used the same way. He needs to be stopped and so does she.”

Clarke never considered the possibility, but after hearing what Nia was capable of in order to provoke Lexa, she was determined to not let herself fall into Nia’s hands again. Her eyes went to the horses and Ontari understood what was on her mind.

“Think you can ride for another eight hours?”

“We’ll find out.” Clarke said, knowing that her legs were only going to get more sore the longer they rode. She really hoped that that lingering irritation in the small of her back was also just a temporary issue.

The pair filled their water bottles and skins, slinging them over their backs and leading the horses back down to the path they were originally riding on away from Toron.

Ontari signaled for Clarke to wait a moment before they walked out on to the path and after a minute of her scanning the forest, she waved Clarke forward so they could climb back up onto their horses.

“For the next two hours, we ride as hard as we did when we started. Don’t forget your mask.” Ontari reminded her.

Clarke nodded her understanding and pulled the mask up over her face so it only revealed her eyes once again. Before Ontari had a chance to start off down the trail, Clarke leaned forward and urged her horse forward with a knock of her heel into the animal. It started into a trot and before Clarke knew it, she was once again cutting through the wind thanks to the brown horse beneath her.

With the sun up in the sky above, it took helped to take the edge off the cold in the air and Clarke found not having to blink so often gave her more opportunity to look around now that things were more visible in the daylight. On the ground, large maple leaves littered the ground in reds, yellows and browns, and created a beautiful scene for the ride.

Ontari had caught up to her and they sped off side by side toward their destination and what they
both had hoped was farther away from the pursuit of Nia’s scouts. She noticed Clarke admiring the leaves on the ground and stated that the trees that those leaves fall from were the source of the candies she’d given her and that if they managed to survive this, she’d show her how to make her own one day.

Clarke shouted her acceptance of her offer over the sound of their galloping horses, but seriously doubted the possibility of it coming to pass. What she was more concerned about was how to convince Lexa not to kill the girl the moment she caught sight of her.

Clarke knew that if even half of what Ontari said was true and she was in Lexa’s position, and Ontari had put Lexa through the hell that Costia had experienced, she would have killed her the moment she made her presence known. She just hoped that Lexa was more Commander in that moment than she will be Costia’s former lover.
Clarke and Ontari try to avoid being captured by Nia's forces, only to fall short of their destination. Lexa and Echo return to their new camp with after negotiating the use of tunnels to enter Toron but during their return, they come across an unexpected ally and an even more unexpected enemy.

Chapter Notes

Update day!

It took a day longer than I had hoped but it's here! It's finally here! Thanks again for your patience and although I don't have a specific date for the next update, I'll try to have it up as soon as possible!

I just want to say thank you to everyone who is reading this story. It does mean a lot to me that you are all sharing your time with me and this crazy idea of a story I have rolling around in my head.

Until next time, take care and see you soon!

“‘You think Roan will give them everything they ask for? He never viewed Kilnronakru with anything more than being beggars and thieves.’”

Lexa nodded to Echo who rode the horse along side her as they made their way back to where they’d agreed to move their next camp to thanks to Echo’s knowledge of the area. She was happy with Echo’s adoption of their requested clan name of ‘Kilnronakru’, which meant River Clan. If everyone could be as accepting as she was being then the matter would resolve itself in a generation if they were lucky.

“He will. If he is telling the truth about wanting peace, he has no choice. Their willingness to negotiate with me is proof enough that wither their circumstances have changed, or they have.”

“What about the other thing? A lot of this will depend on Roan if he becomes King, but what about the other clans? There is a reason they live in the north instead of closer to Polis and the other clans.”

“Because the lands they want are in the north, many clans will continue ignoring them as they always have because they won’t see them as their problem. Unless of course their people require aid. With it being so close to winter, it would be impossible to offer assistance from the south which is why Roan will have to open his stores to help Kilnronakru.”

“And if he refuses? The people of Azgeda have suffered and starved under Nia. They won’t be happy to have to share what they believe is theirs and given away.”
“King Roan has to assert his ability to lead and convince his people that aiding Kilnronakru now will have benefits in the future. The only ones who would consider it a possible encroachment on their land would be the Azgeda. As Gerald stated in our negotiation, many of his people were at one time, farmers. The lands to the north will be good for farming and likely a benefit for all the clans.”

“If we can pull it off, it’s a nice dream.” Echo sighed as she leaned back into her saddle. “I would like to raise my child in that world.”

There were many times in Echo’s youth that she’d had to steal in order to survive and she considered this to be the biggest theft she’d ever been a part of. Having spent time in Nia’s cells before and if she were honest with everyone, including herself, there was a better-than-nothing chance she could end up in one again. She was determined that if she was going to have her child, it was going to be in a land where people didn’t have to steal to survive.

“This dream is one I’ve spent my life pursuing since before I was chosen and one I hope that will live on long after I am gone. For everyone’s children, including yours and those to come.”

Lexa spared a quick look at Echo’s stomach and thought that this could be the future beside her, Skaikru and Azgeda becoming allies and members of the coalition, and Kilnronakru being welcomed as a true clan within the coalition. A land of peace and prosperity which she’d spent years working for and sacrificed many lives in search of. It wasn’t done yet, and she prayed to the spirit that this unborn child would have a chance to know peace without the always-present threat of war.

Lexa and Echo broke into a steady ride, their recent success with Kilnronakru giving them a glimmer of hope in what was becoming a very long waiting game for news out of Toron. Not even Lexa’s spies had sent word to her which had her concerned.

She’d expected to have word at some point which led her to believe Nia suspected Roan of something. With her being very paranoid about maintaining her iron-tight grip on power, she would likely suspect others of aiding him. When she returned to camp, she hoped Raven had managed to fix whatever she had to in the tek so she could speak to Indra. They had much to go over before they could approach the tunnels and make their way into Toron.

She didn’t want her mind to head into wondering what could happen, but even her mind wasn’t shielded from “what ifs”, even if she was able to mask her emotions the majority of the time. Unfortunately she couldn’t fight the urge to think of the one subject she’d spent most of her mental energy shoving to the recesses of her mind. She’d let it consume her a number of times on the trip north and included her offering a shockingly embarrassing confession to Octavia.

‘Is Clarke safe?’

That was the only thing that seemed to occupy her mind. She knew Nia was capable of the most atrocious acts and her daughter being sadistic enough to carry out her orders. The most horrendous orders which caused a slight panic arise in her. She recalled just how depraved the girl could be and how Nia stood before her and laughed while describing how her daughter had come a long way as she followed her orders so precisely.

Lexa found herself fighting the urge to spin her horse around and ride the five hard days ride to the gates of Toron to tear the entire city to the ground with her bare hands. Echo watched the Commander stiffen in her saddle from the slightly relaxed position they’d been riding with and found herself having to speed up her horse to match Lexa who pushed her horse into a light gallop for no apparent reason.

Lexa’s mind was trapped in the past and her promise that Nia would never have the chance to do
what she did to Costia to anyone else. She once went so far as to sending spies north to try to kill Ontari after what Nia had told her.

She wasn’t thinking clearly back then and for every assassin she sent, the more their people became entrenched in their loyalty for Nia. Assassins to kill their leader’s daughter? It only emboldened Nia’s rhetoric against Lexa and her coalition. Even though she had no proof that Lexa had sent them, Nia was a masterful politician and used the events to their fullest potential.

When she stopped sending people to try to kill Nia and Ontari, that was when she had chosen to abandon the notion of ever finding love again. It was also the moment she felt like she betrayed the only person she’d ever truly loved. Choosing the coalition over her heart, even as shattered as it was built the foundation of her coalition and the peace they had with Azgeda, even if it was a fragile one.

Of course, Titus was more than satisfied with her change in attitude. Lexa’s discussions with the other Commanders as she meditated took on a change as well and they knew there was a difference in her when she didn’t seek out their advice as often as she once had. Not until a few month ago when things began to change. When she began to change.

“Heda.”

Lexa’s head snapped to the right to stare at Echo who had managed to cut through the deluge of thoughts that had cluttered her mind.

“Yes?”

“We are approaching a game trail ahead. It’s about ten minutes away and I was thinking we should find something to bring back for everyone now that there are so many of us. It would save the horses as well.”

“We can stay until the afternoon. Half a day and if nothing comes, we continue back to camp. I want to return before nightfall.”

“Sha, Heda.” Echo smiled, glad Lexa decided to return to an easy trot on the horses. She was finding that riding hard was starting to turn her stomach upside-down and the last thing she wanted to do was throw up as she rode.

“Are you feeling unwell?”

Echo shook her head, not responding vocally which told Lexa all she needed to know. No doubt Bellamy would be upset with her having pushed Echo to ride as hard as she unknowingly did moments ago.

“If you need to rest, we can stop for a while.”

“I’m fine. The trail is close and I can get rest when we stop at it.”

They rode their horses beyond the game trail and tied them to a tree and close enough to some vegetation so they could eat while they waited for their prey. Both Lexa and Echo made their way to a couple trees, crouched and leaned against them. They decided the two spots they’d found were fairly decent and they were far enough from the trail they’d rode on and the game trail that they could see both while remaining relatively hidden.

Now all they had to do was wait.

~*~*~
Ontari, We need to stop. I can’t… it’s…”

Ontari reached over and grabbed Clarke by her shoulder to steady her. They were at near full gallop and Clarke crashing to the ground now would result in both of them being overtaken by the riders no more than a minute behind them. Not to mention the injury that Clarke would sustain would make riding a horse nearly impossible. More times than not, a rider that fell at this speed would never walk again, let alone be able to ride a horse.

“Clarke, you can do this. Just hold on and keep riding!”

Ontari encouraged her on, but it was a losing battle. She watched Clarke’s determination pull her through the last couple hours but they’d ridden hard for three days. Clarke was not accustomed to nor able to handle the rigour that her body had been trying to withstand and her eyes were squeezed tightly together due to the aching pains that throbbed in nearly all the joints of her body.

The last two hours were sheer will against the idea she could end up in some cell in Toron and be forced to endure whatever punishments she could conjure up to prolong her life while putting her through hell.

Unfortunately they both knew she’d reached her limit and Clarke desperately yanked up on the reigns to stop her horse before she started to list sideways. It was only when she felt Ontari find a way to catch her that she felt a measure of relief.

Clarke was expecting her full weight to slam into the ground but guiding hands and a pained grunt from her exertion, Ontari managed to ease Clarke closer to the ground by clutching her fur jacket. She’d tried to lower her as far as she could, but Clarke fell the remainder of the four feet to the ground. When she managed to gather her senses, she looked up at Ontari who was climbing off her own horse.

“I’m sorry.”

“It isn’t your fault. If I can fight them off, then we’ll rest here.”

Clarke remained sitting as a heap on the ground where she unceremoniously fell and she cocked her head to the side, giving Ontari a questioning look.

“You are going to try to fight them all? We don’t even know how many there are.”

After Ontari retrieved what Clarke considered to be an arsenal of weapons from her horse, her bow and some arrows along with three knives and her sword, she walked over to Clarke and put one of the knives in her hand. She then grabbed the arrows and stuck them in the ground.

“There is less than ten. My guess is a standard scouting party of four but there might be five or six. Now, don’t let them know you have that until you get a chance to use it.”

Clarke wondered what she was going to do to trained Azgeda fighters if she couldn’t stand under her own power. The realization came to her it didn’t matter and she had to do something to help fight against the people who were trying to bring them back to Nia.

“Help me stand.” Clarke demanded, reaching her arm upward.

“Clarke, you aren’t in any condition to fight. I was thinking when they come at you, you could surprise them.”

After throwing Ontari a glare she tried to get up from the ground under her own power but failed
miserably. Her mind told her legs to help her stand up but they just wouldn’t move on their own, causing Clarke to growl at her fatigue.

“Damn it, Ontari. Get me up off the ground. We are not going to go back to Toron. We do this together.”

Ontari grinned a little at the outburst, but what caught Clarke’s attention was the look of admiration in Ontari’s brown eyes as she extended her arms and pulled Clarke to her feet so they could face the oncoming threat.

“Couldn’t have found that fight in you to stay on your horse for another day? We might have found people to help us fight them.”

Her words were ones meant to tease and it caused Clarke to roll her eyes and question how it was possible Ontari could joke at a time like this. Ontari gave a another grunt of exertion which told Clarke that their ride had taken a toll on Ontari as well, she gave Ontari’s physical appearance a once over.

“I can hear them.” Clarke stated, making sure she had her balance after looking away from Ontari and toward the sound of galloping horses.

“Here they come.” Ontari said, stepping in front of Clarke with her bow at the ready and an arrow nocked in place.

In quick succession, Ontari fired three of the arrows before she was forced to draw her sword. The first two planted themselves in the chest of the lead rider, the second in the torso of the horse behind him and to the left which caused it to collapse to the ground, throwing it’s rider to the side and lay unmoving on the ground.

Ontari spared a quick glance over her shoulder to Clarke and although the fight had begun, Ontari had her familiar smirk. “Two down. You can handle the remaining four, right?”

“Ontari…” came the growled response. Clarke found herself slightly amused by the way Ontari ignored the odds they still faced and could find some way to crack a joke.

“Fine. I’ll get the others too.”

“We’re not going to make it so easy for you.” The newest lead rider snarled as she hopped down from her horse. She wasn’t carrying a sword but a bow, and as the three remaining riders on horseback rode past her, she nocked her own arrow and let it fly.

Clarke flinched, turning her body in anticipation of the oncoming arrow, but a deft swing of her blade resulted in Ontari deflecting the arrow off to the side and away from the pair.

“Down!” Ontari shouted, pushing Clarke down and into a crouching position.

Clarke couldn’t see it, but the sound of both rider’s swords swooshing through the air above their heads as they rode by at break-neck speed filled Clarke with relief because there was no sound of contact on the swords. No thud or groan from either her or Ontari meant they missed them both. Ontari shot upright and Clarke followed her, even if it was a bit slower. She saw Ontari somehow manage to deflect another arrow from the woman who fired just moments ago.

“You know that will never work.” Ontari remarked, her sword in front of her in anticipation of having to block another arrow. She glanced at the rider who abruptly stopped beside the Azgeda archer who was stepping down from his horse. He seemed to be in no hurry to engage Ontari or
Clarke which told her that under his mask, it was Kurick. A battle-tested warrior who had long been one of Nia’s most loyal supporters.

“You know, everyone thought the pair of you would have riden south.” he stated, pulling off his mask while retrieving his sword from it’s sheath. “That’s where Nia commanded her riders to go. South. I figured you would be smart enough to do something different. Turns out I was right.”

“You could be smart enough to do something different too. Come with us, Kurick. You know what Nia is. What she wants. This is your chance to help bring real and lasting peace to Azgeda.”

The tall man laughed while swung his sword around in order to stretch and loosen his joints. He motioned for the woman to lower her bow. “We are taking you back to Toron and your mother doesn’t care how as long as you still draw breath.”

“She’s not my mother.” Ontari shouted at the man. It was the first time Clarke had heard Ontari shout in anger and it made her thankful she was on Ontari’s side.

“We both know that. After all, I remember your real mother.”

“What…”

“Who do you think found you that day, when the entirety of your village was slaughtered and you were left crying in your parents dead arms. A shame. You look just like her.”

“You were there?” Ontari asked with disbelief, her knuckles turning white as she gripped her sword.

“On Nia’s orders. I was about to put my sword in your crying throat until she stopped me. She saw your blood and realized you could be better used as her toy than as a sword holder. If she’d seen what would become of you today, I’m sure she’d have let me finish what I’d started with your family.”

“It was you? You killed my family?”

The calmness in Ontari’s voice scared not only Clarke, but it seemed to layer concern on to the two men who’d been steadily approaching them from behind. They’d even shared a nervous glance between each other.

“Yous, your neighbours.” the man shrugged with indifference as he stepped toward Ontari. Each step a calculated movement. “Trikru are our enemy and if it means following Nia in order to kill every last one of you, I pledge my sword to her.”

“Then by the end of this fight, Nia will have six less swords at her service.”

“Bold words for two people so outnumbered. Tell me how you plan on doing that?”

“I thought I’d start with her.” Ontari pointed her sword at the woman who was still holding her bow. “Then I’d make sure the two behind me are unable to fight. I might not kill them immediately, but they’ll definitely be incapacitated. Then I’ll show you what happens to the one who killed my family.”

“Then by all means, please.” Kurick gave a mocking bow in Ontari’s direction as his comrades all began to laugh at Ontari’s plan of action.

That was until Ontari swung her free hand in the woman’s direction. The result of her movement was utter silence from the remaining Azgeda as a glint of sunlight on a flat of the small blade that
rolled end-over-end until it bit into the flesh of her throat.

“One.”

Ontari then spun and though it took a couple steps to reach the two men who were in behind her, their swords made contact and the metal swords rang out in the silence of the forest, echoing through the environment. They danced and with each exchange, fighting for control as they stabbed and slashed at each other. It wasn’t happening as fast as Ontari wanted but they were scouts, not warriors. Their blade work was slow and occasionally sloppy.

Clark watched on, impressed at her skill in side-stepping out of the way of one slash and ducking under another, only to swipe her blade across a thigh or an arm. One of the men shrieked in pain and dropped his sword as Ontari’s razor-sharp blade ran itself from elbow to shoulder, cutting through the flesh easily until it met bone.

“Two down” Ontari gloated, her eyes scanning back at the large man who had begun to quickly approach the two of them.

“Clarke, you need to run.” Ontari advised the blonde, shoving her in the direction of the forest and away from the large man who was approaching her. “Run!”

Clarke’s feet weren’t as clumsy as they should have been and she didn’t know where the energy came from but she broke into a full sprint toward the trees.

The larger man swung his sword and it forced Ontari to pay attention to the newcomer rather than the scout. His swing was precise and filled with intent which forced Ontari to dive out of the way and into a roll so she could stand up in a defensive position. If she could, she’d distract these two for as long as possible so Clarke could get as far as she could.

“Get her.” Kurick commanded the scout and as he did, Ontari launched herself at the man. He managed to dodge her strike by jumped back and out of reach of what Ontari intended as her final blow, allowing him to heed Kurick’s order. Ontari slowly turned back to Kurick and let out a sigh.

“You should have kept him here. With him you might have stood a chance.”

“Overconfident, just like your father.” he grinned.

As expected, Ontari attacked the man with deadly intent. Each swing meant to be a killing blow which he deflected easily or sidestepped which resulted in Ontari becoming more and more aggressive. He occasionally threw in a taunt, stating how he’d managed to do something to her parents or something he’d done to someone else from the village he’d been a part of massacring, and Ontari let it fuel her swings. Swings that were becoming less precise and slower than when they’d begun their fight. When his fist flew up and landed on her jaw, Ontari stumbled backward and nearly lost her balance. She did however manage to keep a hold of her sword and as he began his offensive, swinging his sword like a club at her, bringing it down so that she had to deflect it away from cleaving her in half. These weren’t intended to be killing blows, Ontari knew it well enough to see that she’d been getting slower, and that every time she lifted her blade to block, the force of his strength meant she was struggling to bring her blade up enough to block it and they both knew it was a matter of time.

“Are you ready to give up this game? I’ve won, Ontari.”

“I’ll die before I go back to Nia.” Ontari spat out the name.
“That isn’t going to happen.” He said, walking at her with purpose and continuing to swing his sword at her. “When you are sitting in her cells next to Wanheda and you experience the torture you used to inflict on others for your betrayal of our Queen…”

“Your Queen!” Ontari shouted, swinging her sword in an attempt to kill him but failing miserably. He caught her hand by it’s wrist and wrested the blade from her hand by twisting her arm.

“It doesn’t matter any more. This game is over and it’s time for you to give up.”

“No!” Ontari closed her free hand into a fist and threw a punch into the his jaw hard enough to make him let go of her other wrist. In doing so she fell to the ground and tried to crawl away.

“This is what has become of Nia’s greatest warrior? You crawl away? What will you do next? Beg? Are you going to beg me as your mother did? As she shielded you with her body to try to save you?” The man’s accusations finding a home in Ontari’s heart as he launched them at her. She collapsed in a heap on the ground, her ace buried in her arms and her shoulders heaving as she took in deep breaths of air.

Kurick grew tired of her laying on the ground. He’d beaten her and she refused to do anything but crawl away like a sick animal. He slid his sword into it’s sheath on his waist and marched over to Ontari. He placed a solid kick into Ontari’s side, then watched with resentment as she curled up into a ball. “Pathetic branwada.” he said as he bent over to pick her up.

He did it with ease and threw her over his shoulder as easily as he would an infant, taking her back to his horse in order to retrieve a rope to bind her wrists. As they approached his horse, his feet shuffled slightly and Ontari fell from his shoulder as if she were a sack of potatoes. Kurick on the other hand fell to his knees with one hand holding his side and another on the handle of a knife that protruded from it. His eyes were wide with disbelief.

Ontari on the other hand stood up from the ground and glared at the man.

“You killed my mother, my father, my people. Today, you will feel what they did as your life slowly leaves your body.”

“But.. I…”

“Yu gonplei ste odon” Ontari stated as she drew the man’s sword from his own scabbard. She walked to stand in front of him and lifted it to the sky, then swinging it in a downward arc on order to relieve the man of his head. After watching the rest of him fall limply to the side she dropped his sword and pulled her knife from his side before moving to gather up her own sword. She looked in the direction Clarke and the guard had fled and started to run with the hope she could get there before anything could happen to Clarke.

Clarke’s adrenalin only took her so far and although she felt like she had been running for almost as long as she and Ontari had managed to ride, it was more like ten minutes before the calf in her right leg seized and she fell to the ground in agony, her arms reaching down to try to work out the knot in the muscle.

“You could have saved yourself the trouble and given up before trying to run off.” The scout that followed her gloated. “Kurick has likely already taken Ontari captive and now if you’ll just come with me…”

The man bent over and Clarke lunged up at him with the knife in her hand. With Clarke’s fatigue and the man’s belief she was likely trying to lure him in, he was able to kick away her hand and land
a blow which left Clarke seeing stars once again.

The scout produced a thin piece of rope from a pocket and quickly bound Clarke’s hands behind her, then set about checking her for any other weapons she may be hiding. Confident she didn’t have any, he aimed her in the direction of his captain’s position and shoved her forward.

Ontari came upon them in a spring with her sword in one hand and her knife in the other which caused the scout to pull Clarke back toward him as a shield and he had a dagger at her throat in moments after recognizing the danger he was in.

“Let her go.” Ontari commanded.

“If I let her go, I’m as good as dead.”

“You can’t kill her, and you can’t kill me.”

“I will kill her if I have to. Now, you let me get to my horse and I’ll let you both go. I’ll go my own way.”

“There is no way you leave here alive. Let her go and I’ll make it quick.”

“I’m not letting her go. I’ll kill her before I agree to that.”

Having heard enough of them trying to negotiate her life, as well as feel the cold metal of the man’s knife on her throat, Clarke took matters into her own hand and threw her head backwards which resulted in her seeing stars once again and a groan to escape her lips as she dropped straight down to the ground. The scout staggered back as he’d not been expecting Clarke’s initiative nor the back of her head slamming into his nose.

Ontari sprang into action, taking the opportunity to throw her only knife toward the man, finding purchase in his right eye and knocking him off his feet as he fell backward. Once he hit the ground, aside from a couple twitches, he remained unmoving.

“Nice move, Clarke.”

Ontari grinned ran over to Clarke and helped her up from the ground. Clarke was slightly unbalanced and Ontari steadied her and then turned her so she could remove the rope that was wrapped around her wrists.

As Ontari worked on untying the knot, a small whizzing sound was heard then the sound of something hitting something else. Then she felt the wight of Ontari fall with her full weight on to Clarke, her hands trying to hold on to Clarke to remain upright but it wasn’t enough as Ontari began to slide sideways and fell to the ground.

“Ontari?”

~*~*

The trail they’d left hours ago in search of game to hunt had become quite lively and both Lexa and Echo glanced in the direction of the well-ridden trail. They couldn’t see who was riding along it, but it appeared that there were two separate groups who were riding in a hurry and whoever they were, they had no intention of being quiet which they both concluded to be meant they were likely to be Azgeda.

Lexa tried to listen for any game that might be coming along the trail but they’d been sitting in the same spots they’d first sat in for nearly seven hours. It was beginning to become futile and although
the Commander might be physically able to stay there for another seven without discomfort, she wasn’t immune to boredom.

“We should leave. Those riders were loud enough to scare away anything nearby that we may have had a chance to kill.” Lexa suggested, part out of her fit of boredom and another being she was right about the animals being chased away.

“Those riders were on the same route to the camp. We’ll have to take our time or we’ll run into them.” Echo suggested to Lexa who nodded her agreement.

It didn’t take them long to be back up on their horses and begin their slow trek in order to stay far enough back from the Azgeda they believe had ridden by. Lexa wondered if they would come upon them setting up a camp, but the speed they’d been riding at likely meant they had somewhere to be.

After about fifteen minutes, Lexa raised her hand and leaned forward on her horse, squinting at whatever it was she could see in the distance ahead. She could make out a couple horses that were wandering around and occasionally bending down to eat at whatever happened to be on the ground.

“There are horses unattended ahead and they have Azgeda branding.” Lexa informed Echo.

“We should ride around. Try to stay hidden.”

“It’s not just the horses. There’s someone moving around slowly on the ground.”

“On the ground? Is he wounded?” Echo asked, squinting as the Commander was in an attempt to see what she could but she gave up when she couldn’t.

“I’m going to ride ahead.” Lexa explained to Echo as she flipped the hood up on her fur-lined jacket.

“Is that safe?” Echo couldn’t hide the sound of displeasure in her voice at the notion Heda ride forward toward what could possibly be an Azgeda camp.

“They won’t know who I am. I’ll ride past them if I have to. I doubt they’d make much of a fuss for one girl on horseback.”

“You don’t know how depraved some of Nia’s warriors can be.” Echo winced at the memories of the things she’s seen and heard.

“If there is a camp, I’ll try to distract them so you can ride around. I am prepared if things should become agitated.” Lexa tapped the swords that hung from her hips. “If it is alright to come forward, I’ll wave back at you.”

“Alright. I’ll be right here.”

Lexa urged her horse forward and she slowly headed toward the two horses who were watching her approach, ignoring the vegetation on the ground underneath their hooves. The closer she got, she could see that a fight that had taken place in a very small clearing next to the trail she was riding on. The man she’d seen crawling around on the ground was now sitting against a tree trying to tie something around his arm to prevent any further blood loss but it was clear he’d already lost too much blood. Whatever he did now was simply a way of delaying the inevitable because her knowledge on a battlefield and having seen such injuries she knew he was likely to be dead in another ten minutes.

Closer and closer she rode, looking at what at first appeared to be a small fight had turned into more.
There were a number of people on the ground who’d been killed. One had a knife plunged into her throat and a very large man appeared to have had his head separated from his body. One man had two arrows in his chest and laid on the ground and another was laying motionless and twisted into the most uncomfortable position on the ground next to a horse with an arrow deep into it’s torso.

Lexa waved back at Echo realizing there was no more of a threat here, telling her it was safe for her to come up. Lexa rode up to where the man was leaning against the tree, watching him come to terms with his circumstance.

“What happened?” Lexa asked from beneath her hood, making sure the man couldn’t get a good look at her.

“Wanheda. We were supposed to… to bring her back. It was supposed to be easy.”

Lexa’s lungs ceased to function the moment the man uttered the name and her jaw dropped so much even the man below could see the surprise on her face. Lexa jumped down from her horse with blinding speed and stood over the man and flipped her hood back to reveal her face and the man in front of her felt panic consume him.

“H… Heda?!”

“What happened to Wanheda?” Lexa shouted while reaching down and grabbing the man by his throat. “Where is she?”

Her grip tightened when he didn’t give her a response but she was evidently unaware it was because her hand continued to tighten, constricting his ability to speak. It appeared he hadn’t completely come to terms with his impending death because he pointed in the direction Clarke had run into the forest with the hope of having the Commander release his throat.

“What did you do to her?” Lexa continued shouting at the man who realized Lexa had no interest in releasing her grip. “Why are you chasing her?”

The man’s eyes rolled upward and his red face had turned purple. If Lexa would have noticed, her fingertips were now stained with the man’s blood after she released his lifeless body that remained pressed into the side of the tree he leaned against.

“Commander?” Echo asked from horseback, watching Lexa stand up straight and seeing what she’d just done. “What happened?”

“Clarke. She’s here.” Was the only answer Lexa gave before running over to her horse and grabbing the bow that was tied to her bag. She retrieved two arrows and sprinted in the direction the man pointed.

Echo frowned at not getting any more information about their situation but she considered that Lexa didn’t have any more to offer. Rather than dwell on the thought, she climbed off her horse and pulled her sword from it’s sheath in order to follow Lexa in the direction she’d sped off running.

Lexa could barely make out a conversation and she couldn’t see the participants but the words she could make out from the woman lit a fire in her as hot as Praimfaya.

“There’s no way you leave here alive.”

Hearing those words, Lexa’s legs found a strength she didn’t know she had. Someone was going to kill Clarke and she had to get there to stop whoever it was and she had a fair bit of distance to cover before being able to help. A sense of dread started to fill Lexa with the thought she might not make
it to stop whoever was trying to kill Clarke.

She was close enough to see the pair now and without breaking stride, Lexa lifted her bow and the first of two arrows flew forward as Lexa continued to sprint forward. She saw it land in the shoulder of the person binding Clarke’s wrists and watched her sag forward. It was clear she wasn’t expecting the impact.

Lexa stopped running and took aim with her second arrow. She fired it after a pause but cursed when her target slid sideways off Clarke to the ground. She followed the arrow and saw it miss her mark and plant itself in the woman’s side rather than the middle of her back.

“Ontari?” Clarke asked, spinning around when she heard her fall to the ground. She was shocked to see two arrows sticking out of her.

Clarke looked up to see Lexa break through the trees and come into full view, her brown hair being thrown side to side as she ran toward her. She wasn’t wearing her war paint, but she was a fearsome as ever and she had a sword in hand as she ran toward her. In Clarke’s mind, Lexa seemed consumed with whatever plan she had in mind and her eyes were locked on Ontari who was on the ground at Clarke’s feel, groaning in pain after having freed her from her binding.

It didn’t take many steps before Lexa was in front of Clarke. She hadn’t looked at Clarke as she crossed the distance between them, her sole focus was on her target and when she got there, Lexa’s eyes opened wide with surprise when she saw that the woman at Clarke’s feet was a nightblood, but not just any nightblood, a specific one. Clarke could see the Lexa’s face contort and the anger fill her completely.

“Lexa, Ontari helped me escape Toron.” Clarke explained. “She saved me.”

“This is… you…” Lexa growled out through clenched teeth while pointing her sword at Ontari then letting it’s blade come to a rest on her throat.

Clarke watched Lexa’s reaction with concern with Ontari on the ground and how Lexa was now lightly sliding the blade along her flesh and causing Ontari’s black blood to form a thin line on her neck until it dripped downward. Lexa continued to add pressure and Clarke realized she had to put a stop to this before Lexa went too far.

“Lexa. Don’t kill her.”

She stopped moving her sword when she heard the request, but the pressure of the blade was still on Ontari’s throat. Ontari was looking up and directly at Lexa as still as she could possibly be. Lexa couldn’t help but get caught up in the whirlwind of emotion that tumbled in her heart and in her mind and the hand wrapped around her sword had begun to tremble tightly. So much so that it caused it sword to begin moving ever so slightly on Ontari’s neck once again.

“Lexa, you need to stop.” Clarke said in a calm voice, reaching out and placing her hand on Lexa’s which was wrapped around the hilt. She gave it a little pressure, then pulled the blade off Ontari’s neck while Lexa stood beside her with a look that was mixed anger and shock. “Lexa. Look at me.”

Lexa dropped her sword and her mouth opened and closed but no words managed to come out. She just stared at Ontari, somewhere on the line of losing control of herself in anger or becoming devoured by the turmoil within herself.

“Lexa. Look at me.” Clarke urged the brunette, stepping between her and Ontari and severing whatever the visual connection was doing to Lexa to put her in the state she was in. She let go of
Lexa’s hand and brought both her hands up to Lexa’s cheeks to help her focus.

Lexa seemed to snap out of the state she was in for a moment, blinking a number of times and focusing on Clarke’s voice. It was the only thing in her mind that wasn’t trying to pull her in a thousand different directions. She could feel hands pressing softly on her face and hear her reassuring voice as she tried to guide her through the chaos of what she was feeling. After a couple more attempts to focus herself, Lexa lifted her eyes and saw the familiar crystal-blue eyes she'd seen every time she closed her own eyes. Now they were here and looking back at her which caused Lexa to let out a sigh of relief.

*She is here. She is safe.*

“Clarke.”

Chapter End Notes

Just adding this note to inform everyone that the story will be updated this weekend and Sunday July 7th is my target. I will try get it up as early as I can in the day!

See you soon!
“Lexa, we have to go. Nia has probably sent out more scouts to look for us and we have to get somewhere safe.”

The urgency in Clarke’s voice cut through the constant white noise that Lexa’s mind was producing, and she could feel Clarke urging her back with her hands on her shoulders. She allowed herself to be moved slightly, but there was a force holding her where she stood.

“We go after she dies.” Lexa’s anger resurfaced knowing that her retribution was close at hand while Ontari looked up at her with understanding in her eyes. It only served as her admission of guilt, a verdict Lexa was only too happy to provide.

“You need to listen to what she has to say. She has information for you. You can’t kill her.”

“I can do whatever I want, Clarke.” Lexa stated coldly, her eyes that were once on Clarke had returned to burning a hole in Ontari who was still on the ground and the two arrows that Lexa had put in her remained firmly in place and dripping the familiar sight of black blood. Her grip on her sword continued to tighten and loosen as she stared at Nia’s pet.

“She is the only reason I’m alive. If it wasn’t for her, I’d still be in Nia’s cells with Roan.”

Lexa hesitated for a moment and regarded Clarke, then Ontari once more. “Roan has been
captured?” Ontari didn’t say anything, only answering with a single nod of her head.

“He was in the cell across from mine. She was in charge of torturing him but instead, helped me escape and bring me here to you.”

“And how did she know where I would be located?” Lexa asked Clarke, but her eyes remained fixed on her downed prey just waiting for her to try to make an escape. Lexa had also begun to move, shifting her position so she could get between Clarke and Ontari. A movement Clarke was well aware of and countered to shield the downed girl.

“I don’t…”

“My people have scouts throughout Azgeda lands. They told me you had a camp not far from here. Maybe a day from here to the north west.”

Lexa growled and jumped forward past Clarke to take hold of one of the arrows lodged in Ontari and giving it a slight twist, resulting in Ontari to yell out in pain.

“Nia has spies in the woods? Where are they?” Lexa twisted the arrow again to yell out once again. She was not negotiating.

“They aren’t Nia’s people. They are my people. They will be Roan’s people.”

Lexa released the arrow and stepped back, extending her arm and pushing Clarke a short distance back from Ontari.

“Kilronakru?” Echo asked, emerging from the woods, her bow still taut and arrow nocked on her bow. It was aimed directly at Ontari and no doubt would be a killing blow with the intent in her eyes. “They will still work with you Heda. We don’t need her.”

Clarke spun to see Echo’s figure walk like a ghost from the forest and into the small clearing they were in. “Echo?” The last time she’d seen the woman was in Roan’s tent with Levai. “Lexa? Who else is here?”

“Remove your weapons, throw them on the ground.” Lexa commanded of Ontari, who complied with the Commander’s order to mean that she might have a little more time to draw breath in the world.

The she threw her weapons, including the hidden knives Clarke knew she had on her person as hastily as she could with two arrows sticking out of her. She was starting to feel herself become light headed and she knew that if she didn’t get the arrows out of her body soon, she would likely be dead. As if she sensed the girls thoughts, Lexa turned to Echo and signaled her to lower her weapon.

“Remove the arrows, then bind her wrists. We will go back to where the Azgeda left their horses and use them to get to safety. When we return to our camp she will say what she knows, then she will accept her punishment for her crimes.”

“Lexa,” Clarke started once more, but it didn’t matter. She saw the familiar face of the Commander take control of Lexa’s features and knew this was not the time. She would not show weakness - not in front of her people and certainly not in front of Ontari.

“No, Clarke. She knows our laws and she knew what she was riding toward. One act of mercy does not excuse the lifetime of what she has done.”

“Sha, Heda.” Ontari grunted as Echo extracted the arrows from her body in a manner which did not
cause her wounds to worsen.

“We should go gather the horses.” Clarke suggested, but Lexa shook her head and placed her hand on Clarke’s shoulder to stop her from continuing.

“She will not leave my sight. Her mother trained her to try to kill me and even with her injuries she is still a threat. We go for the horses together. All of us.”

Although Clarke trusted Ontari, it was only to a point even with how familiar she seemed. She knew Ontari was full of secrets, and perhaps this is a part of Nia’s plan as well. Clarke had considered it numerous times on their rushed journey to try to find Lexa and her camp and conceded that were it her plan to use Clarke to get close to Lexa, it was a good one. Roan was already in Nia’s prison and now Ontari was here with Lexa.

Lexa approached Ontari and glared at the girl who stared right back at her now that Echo had helped her to her feet after wrapping something rope around her wrists which were firmly held behind her back. There wasn’t much more than a foot between the two and Lexa smirked at her.

“How many of Nia’s scouts are looking for us?”

“They aren’t looking for you. They are looking for her.” Ontari indicated to Clarke with a nod of her head.

“Because you let her escape from Nia’s prisons.” Lexa’s voice was dripping with sarcasm.

“Because she wants Maunde. Clarke is her key to the weapons.”

Ontari looked past Lexa and her eyes fell on Clarke and she shook her head. Clarke couldn’t help but frown at the news. Nia had suggested something to that effect, but she didn’t know what she mean by it.

“She doesn’t need her or her people to unleash the power of Wanheda.”

“What does she mean?” Lexa glanced back in Clarke’s direction to see the blue eyes trying to work out an understanding to whatever Ontari had just said.

“I don’t know what she means.” Clarke scowled at Ontari but she understood why she kept it from her. Especially now that Lexa had put two arrows in her and looked as if she would like to add a thousand more.

“Why does she not seek the power in Maunde? It is the only way she could possibly defeat the Kongeda.”

“If I tell you, I’m going to need assurances.” Ontari stated with all the confidence she could summon. She knew she was walking a fine line and when she said the words, she felt Lexa’s sharp green eyes pierce her as he arrows had done minutes ago.

“You want assurances?” Lexa laughed aloud and the sound put the fear of death in Ontari whose eyes widened as she watched Lexa’s hand fall to an empty spot on her belt. The spot where she usually housed a wooden-handled dagger. “You want me to spare your life.”

“It is something I’ve grown quite attached to.”
The smart remark earned her the swift and unforgiving reply of being stuck across the face by the back of Lexa’s hand.

“You have no right to that life after having stolen so many innocent ones. No! Right!”

Lexa continued to throw shots at the helpless warrior, and Ontari was determined to take them as long as she could. Echo wanted to intercede but she feared becoming the next target of Lexa’s fury so she simply held Ontari up hoping that Lexa would become tired or bored. Clarke on the other hand knew Lexa wouldn’t grow tired. She would beat Ontari until exhaustion set it, but that would be long after the girl could no longer give her answers.

“Lexa! You are going to kill her! Stop!” Clarke stepped between the two once more but Lexa was too consumed by her anger to stop. She’d swung her fist and landed a punch on Clarke’s chin, sending the blonde girl to the ground and along with it all of Lexa’s anger.

“Clarke!”

Looking down at the Clarke, she could see a trickle of blood start to drip from the corner of her lip, and a look of pure shock on Clarke’s face at what just occurred. Lexa looked at her hands and up at Ontari whose face was nearly covered in blood. She reached down to try to help her to her feet but the blonde swatted her hands away.

“Clarke… I…” Lexa stammered and stumbled a few steps back to create some space to try to regain her composure. She watched Clarke stand up and lift her hand to the already swelling, brushing it lightly and wincing when she felt a sting erupt under her fingertips. The anger in those blue eyes rivaled any she’d seen on a battlefield and what bothered her most was they were in the one person she knew could destroy her. “…I didn’t mean.”

“Can we go get the horses now? Or did you want to punch Echo too for no reason what-so-ever?” Clarke shouted, walking past Lexa and glaring at her the entire time. Lexa couldn’t recall a time where someone’s glare felt like a knife’s edge sliding across her skin so she remained silent and spun on her heels to watch Clarke head back in the direction with a noticeable hobble in her walk.

“Can you walk?” Echo asked Ontari who she gave a rather rough shove forward.

When she didn’t fall on her face, Echo took it as an indication she would manage and gathered up Ontari’s weapons. Only then did she allow Ontari to walk in the direction of the Azgeda horses. By the time Echo arrived with Ontari, Clarke had already mounted her horse and Lexa was climbing atop her own. Echo made sure to securely tie Ontari to her horse just in case she passed out during the ride back to the camp. If she did, they could just lead her horse.

“I’ll ride with her and make sure she won’t fall off her horse.” Clarke stated, leading her horse to ride alongside Ontari’s. Lexa wanted to suggest that she ride with her as she had a number of things she wanted to discuss but she knew with what happened, Clarke wouldn’t have anything to say to her that didn’t involve yelling and the last thing they wanted was the attention of any more Azgeda scouts.

Lexa decided that Echo should ride in the rear, and she would ride point. She had a lot to think about beyond Clarke being angry and that was the reasoning behind Ontari’s appearance and her apparent willingness to betray Nia. Was this an honest brokering of information or was it something that had been carefully crafted between the Girl and her mother.
The fight along the trail they’d traveled and the dead Azgeda suggested that she was trying to protect Clarke, but the lives of a few Azgeda meant little to Nia and everyone knew Nia felt her warriors were disposable as long as they served her purpose.

Aside from the occasional break for food, the trip was made in complete silence. A number of times Lexa turned to look back at Clarke who she believed was staring a hold in the back of her head but each time her green eyes sought out blue, they were looking in another direction or focused on Ontari. Not once did they look back at her and though she would deny it, it bothered her more than the knowledge Nia might not need Skaikru in order to wield the power of Maunde.

“Heda.” As they approached what Lexa assumed was near the new camp because Levai stepped though some think brush and smiled at the sight of his sister. “The negotiations went well?”

“As well as could be expected. We have our way in to Toron.”

Ontari raised her head at the news she’d just heard.

“The others are at the camp?”

“About twenty minutes North. You will have to dismount to get there but it is concealed and safe.”

Lexa nodded at Levai and turned the group to travel north. As Clarke passed Levai, she smiled and he returned the friendly gesture and said, “It is good to see you again, Clarke of the sky people.”

“You too, Levai. Come see me when you return to the camp. I’d like to hear about your trip north and what you’ve been up to since we last saw each other.”

“I look forward to it.”

It was only when he looked past Clarke to the girl who sat tied to the horse on her right that his friendly demeanor changed. His eyes went quickly to his sister who returned his gaze. She had a similar look on her that caused Clarke to look back and forth between the pair with confusion. It would be something she decided to bring up later when she was alone with him.

“Who else is at the camp?” Clarke asked, turning back to look at Echo rather than forward to Lexa. Of course, Echo didn’t answer until she received a nod from Lexa.

“Bellamy, Koma, Octavia, Lincoln and Raven. Though, one or two of them are likely out patrolling the woods for Azgeda.”

“Raven? What would Raven be doing coming to Toron?”

~*~*~

For the others, it was a short twenty minutes but if you were to ask Clarke how long it had taken based on how sore her body was, the last twenty minutes was closer to a year. She’d been riding nearly non-stop for the last week and she was ready to fall off her horse.

Thankfully, Lexa was aware of her struggle and dismounted in one fluid movement and ran over to assist Clarke who was having a hard time withdrawing her foot from the stirrup. Clarke wanted to protest her help, but Echo was busy taking Ontari down from her horse and Clarke wasn’t sure if Lexa wouldn’t have allowed Ontari to fall from the horse and sustain even more injuries than the ones that were visible.

“I’m fine. I’ve got it.” Clarke declared, once she got her feet beneath her, moving past Lexa and in
the direction she could see a large man marching toward her. Clarke stopped in her tracks but recognized the man to be Trikru, rather than Azgeda. He spared Clarke a glance but continued by her and toward his Commander.

“Koma. Take Ontari and tie her to a tree.”

Hearing that, Clarke turned and frowned at Lexa.

“Sha, Heda.” he said while accepting the rope from Echo and yanking Ontari to move in the direction he chose for her. Finding her to be moving too slowly, he hoisted her up off the ground with little opposition and marched the dark haired girl over to a tree near the camp fire. Koma dropped her unceremoniously to the ground and when she didn’t stand immediately, he yanked her up by the rope to tie her arms so he could tie her to the tree he shoved her against.

Echo walked past Clarke who was watching Koma and how he was treating their prisoner and found Bellamy tending the small fire and some food cooking above it.

“You’re back.” He smiled, standing and pulling her into his arms and placing a kiss on her lips.

“Mmm. I might have to come back more often if all my greetings are like this.” She grinned through another kiss.

“I’d rather we find a place where the three of us can all be safe.” Bellamy said, brushing his nose against hers.

“It wasn’t enough you two were like that the whole way up here, but you have to keep doing it right in front of me?” Raven asked, looking up at the pair who were embracing each other. “I assume

With a rather loud clearing of her throat, Clarke announced her arrival and Echo closed her eyes in the hopes if she opened them, Clarke might be gone. She stepped to the side and let out a small sigh to see Clarke standing there. “I think we found something your people lost.”

“Clarke? I thought you were in Toron. How did you get out of there?” Bellamy asked with astonishment. Raven peered around behind the pair to see Clarke standing there and offering the mechanic a simile.

“Hey, Rae. As for how I got here?” Clarke pointed to the bloodied and bruised woman who was now tied to a tree, Bellamy’s astonishment grew. “What happened to her?”

“Heda and Ontari have a history.” Is all Clarke could say. If Bellamy didn’t know, it’s likely he would press Echo for an explanation before the night was over. “Right now, I have to find a way to keep her alive. At least long enough for her to be able to tell Lexa what we need to know.”

“I’m glad you were able to get out of there. Maybe we can call off this suicide attempt we have begun to call a rescue mission.” He explained, drawing a sideways glance from Echo.

“We can’t turn our back on the Azgeda people. We have a chance to put an end to Nia’s ruile once and for all!”

“You know what I mean. Maybe we can get a more organized plan. Hit them hard with numbers rather than trying to sneak or way in.”

“We don’t have the numbers to attack Toron directly, with or without the Kilronakru.”

“Wait, who?” Clarke asked with confusion. She’d never heard of these people before.
“The people Nia has her warriors hunt down and kill for sport. My people.”

“So, wait. There isn’t an army coming from Polis to fight Nia?” Clarke asked, her tone incredulous. She’d seen a division of Nia’s warriors and they counted well over three thousand people - and that was just during the event Ontari had put on for her benefit.

“There are some Trikru coming north with Indra and the some of your people with one your people call Kane. The one fiddling with her tek by the fire is the one who says she will be able to create a diversion big enough to draw the bulk of Nia’s forces from Toron.”

“Ontari can get us in to Toron. She knows people who would have been able to get us into the city.” Clarke argued.

Echo shook her head and glanced at Lexa who was now walking in the direction of the fire where Raven was still tinkering with a transmitter in her lap and cursing the lack of any proper facilities.

“Heda has negotiated a way into Toron and the two groups coming north will be told about it when Raven manages to make her tek work again. Her plan will work.”

“Guys, I’ll be right back. Rae, when you get the radios working, please let me know.”

Raven nodded and went back to twisting wires in a small metal cube that had a small solar panel on the top. Clarke looked over to Lexa who had walked off into the woods roughly thirty meters away. She was leaning against a tree and staring outward into the forest so Clarke decided to continue the torture on her aching body by making her way over to her.

As she approached Lexa, memories of their time outside of Tondc filled her mind. They were waiting for Bellamy and trust was something that was in short supply with Lexa deciding for herself the best course of action. This time, Clarke decided to take a more proactive approach to her and her people’s destiny. She would declare the terms of their alliance this time before they made an approach into Toron.

“You should be resting, Clarke. You have had a long ride from Toron.”

“I’m fine. We need to discuss what comes next.”

Lexa let out a soft sigh and pushed herself off the tree, walking off and deeper into the forest without saying a word which left Clarke with the notion that Lexa was ignoring her idea. When she was ten meters away and Clarke had begun to simmer with anger, she turned back and motioned for her to follow. “I’m not having this conversation so close to Ontari’s ears.”

Clarke nodded and urged her stiff legs onward, over a few fallen logs and around leafless tree branches to follow Lexa who resumed her walk away but at a much slower pace. It was only when they could no longer see the fire or hear any commotion from camp that Lexa stopped and took a seat on a large log that had fallen. Once Clarke sat down, she immediately began to speak.

“First, You can’t kill Ontari.”

“You forget I am Heda and my decision in regard to my people’s laws is absolute.”

“She can be useful and she has information that can help us beat Nia.”

“She will give me that information, and then she will face the justice she is owed. She knew what would happen if she brought you here.”
“You said that before.”

“And I also mean it now. Her life was forfeit when she went against our laws and murdered people for Nia.”

“You mean Costia.”

Lexa winced when Clarke said the name and she threw a sideways glare at Clarke. “We’re not discussing Costia.”

“She told me what happened. You need to talk to her.”

Lexa took a couple calming breaths and closed her eyes. “Would it change what she did?”

“No. But it…”

“Then there will be no change in my decision about her fate. I will not discuss this further with you, Clarke.”

“Then what will you discuss with me?” Clarke asked, trying to avoid making the conversation any more antagonistic.

“That depends on your intentions.”

“My intentions?” Clarke scoffed, her voice raising an octave. “I want to stop Nia, not kill the people who want to help accomplish that.”

“My plan does not involve Ontari. It does however involve your people, Trikru and Kilronakru to make it work.”

“That’s the second time I’ve hear that name. They are Echo’s people? I thought she was Azgeda.”

“She’s Azgeda because there is no other choice. Not yet.”

“If these people can help you win, why can’t they just rise up and fight Nia?”

“They are too few in number and they aren’t warriors. They are farmers and likely ranchers and Nia would kill them all which is why they live away from prying eyes and travel through the tunnels built the people of the old world.”

“Tunnels? Ontari’s people live in the tunnels.”

Although Clarke brought up Ontari’s name which frustrated the brunette, the rest of her words piqued Lexa’s interest and she turned on the log to face Clarke. “What do you mean her people live in the tunnels?”

It took her a second to recall through a dim fog of exhaustion that was taking hold of her, but Clarke recalled the underground city where Ontari had brought her to visit. Though it was without any modern conveniences and many of the structures were constructed out of salvaged construction materials such as wood and metal, there had to have been nearly a thousand people living underground. Women, men and children all living day to day in a place that was slowly choking the life out of them. It is quite possible they see Lexa’s opportunity as their last one. Perhaps Ontari saw Lexa as their last hope as well.

“She brought me to an underground city. There must have been nearly a thousand people who were living in fear of Nia and what she would do to them if they were caught. They can’t stay there
much longer because their water is making them sick and if they didn’t leave, they would wind up
death thanks to poison in their only source of water.”

Lexa glanced back in the direction of camp then back at Clarke when she could feel the blue eyes
studying her expression. She felt the longer Clarke continued staring at her, the weaker her resolve
would become regarding Ontari.

“I am sure that will be something she will tell me about when I interrogate her.”

“She came here willingly, Lexa. I don’t think there will be a need to interrogate her for information.”

“We are not discussing what happens to Ontari, Clarke.” Lexa stated.

“Then how about we talk about your plan first, and then I’ll tell you why we will need her when we
get into Toron.” Clarke suggested, trying to shift the conversation. She didn't have the energy to
continue arguing with Lexa at the moment.

“I will agree to those terms but only tomorrow after you rest and eat a full breakfast.” Lexa said,
looking at the woman next to her who was swaying in her seat. Clarke wouldn’t admit it but she was
on the edge of being asleep and with the lack of food she’d been eating, her fatigue was two-fold.

“Fine. But will will discuss Ontari.” Clarke said, tired to the point where she didn’t protest against
Lexa’s help getting up from her seat.

She also didn’t protest Lexa’s insistence she drink some water from a skin she produced, nor the furs
that Lexa slid over her as she laid down close enough to the small fire to enjoy the warmth it
provided back in camp and as Lexa expected, Clarke fell asleep very quickly once the warmth had
wrapped itself around her.

After being certain Clarke’s even breath meant she was asleep, Lexa stood up and turned to look at
Ontari who was tied to the tree across from her. She wasn’t gagged and hadn’t made a single sound
after she’d been restrained. Ontari was looking directly at her and it was clear to her amber eyes
could see the anger in the molten-green eyes that threatened to consume her.

Lexa put one foot in front of the other and started walking in Ontari’s direction. Each step seemed
quicker to Ontari who remained focused on Lexa even through she wanted to look away. Lexa
reached into her belt and pulled out a small knife, spinning it in her hand and then stopping ten feel in
front of the Azgeda nightblood.

Ontari watched on as Lexa Lexa pulled the hand holding the knife back over her head, in position to
throw it forward so she closed her eyes and took in a deep breath and as she slowly exhaled, she
whispered, “Moba, Leksa kom Trikru”.(I’m sorry, Lexa from Trikru).

Chapter End Notes

I know there wasn't a massive interaction between Clarke and Lexa but that is coming
up in the next chapter. Things might get heated between the pair or maybe things might
cool right down. Who knows? Maybe both! ;)

See you all in a week and thanks again for putting up with the wait for this chapter!
Clarke groaned when her body protested, stretching out her sore joints in an attempt to work out the tightness in what felt like every inch of her body. She hadn’t opened her eyes yet, refusing to yield to her body’s demands to get up and instead relishing the warmth that being completely buried under furs and blankets and protected from the morning air. She wasn’t looking forward to feeling the creeping cold replace the warmth she’d created in her shelter so she remained hidden for the time being after deciding the day could wait a little longer.

The other reason was the inevitable conversation she was going to have with a particular leader of twelve clans. It was the last thing she thought of when she closed her eyes and it didn’t take long after she’d awoken that her mind filled her with a number of scenarios and many resulted numerous make-believe arguments.

A part of her wished she resisted the her bodies call to sleep the night before but when Lexa suggested that they discuss their situation in the morning, All Clarke wanted to do was sleep. She’d promised Ontari that she would do everything she could to have Lexa listen to what she had to say but Ontari shook her head and told Clarke she had freed her knowing what the consequences would be.

Clarke knew that there was no way she was going to be able to fall back asleep and now that her mind was spinning up with the thoughts of what was to come. But she wished in that moment she could remain hidden where she was, avoiding the day and all the things that inevitable. It didn’t help to hear Levai’s voice break the silence and yanking her out of her protective cocoon by calling her out on her procrastination.

“You are going to have to get up and face the day at some point, Clarke.”

Clarke smiled at the sound the familiar voice. So much so that she took his advice and pulled the edge of one of protective layers away so she could squit through the bright morning sun to see him.
sitting a couple feet away from her on a large rock. After blinking away the blurry morning view, she could see him whittling a piece of wood in one hand and a small knife in his other.

“Fine.” Clarke responded through a yawn. “I’m up.”

“You are still under the furs. I’m up. You are still in bed.” he mused.

“This isn’t a bed, I’m on the ground. A bed is comfortable place and preferably in a house.”

Levai laughed and put blade to wood once more. “I think that is more a matter of preference, not practicality.”

Clarke grinned and sat up, looking around at the other piles of furs which had people sleeping beneath them, as well as a tent off to the side of the camp that caused Clarke to look at Levai with a silent question. It was camouflaged with branches and other foliage but if anyone looked hard enough, they would recognize the out of place shelter.

“Bellamy and Echo.”

“I’m surprised Lexa let them set it up.”

“With Echo’s situation, we all agreed that she have the shelter. It is unlikely anyone will come across us here with the cover we have and the use of the branches. Heda did not approve but she has a heart.”

“Echo’s situation?”

“She is with child.”

Clarke’s face went from one exhibiting shock to one of happy surprise in a matter of seconds. “Bellamy?”

Levai nodded, his focus returned to the object he was carving in his hand. Clarke on the other had a mind that continued to race a mile a minute. She stole a quick look around and other than Levai and Koma, but nobody else. Ontari wasn’t tied to the tree she had been last night and Clarke frowned with thought that Lexa might have done something without thinking it through. She knew that was unlikely because if there was something Clarke believed she knew about Lexa, it was that she was rational. Sometimes too rational.

“Is Lexa here?”

Levai glanced up and after a second he shook his head. Clarke noticed a look of concern appear on his face when she’d mentioned Lexa. “She should be back in an hour and I will replace her on watch.”

“When do I take my turn?”

“She ordered that you were to remain in camp until she returns.”

“She ordered me to stay in camp? Am I her prisoner too?” Clarke regretted her words the moment they were stated and Levai threw a curious glance her way. Clarke immediately scolded herself and told herself to reign in her attitude. It wasn’t going to be an easy day and the last thing she wanted to do was to take her frustrations out on her friend. “I’m sorry, Levai. That wasn’t…”

“Did you rest well?”
“As well as I could. Is Ontari still here?”

Levai pointed across camp to where Koma was sitting. His eyes were staring directly at Clarke and it caused her body to shiver. She marveled with how familiar the man was to Lexa’s former bodyguard and it was very clear that he had no love for her either. Clarke craned her neck to look past Koma in order to see the woman in question. Ontari had been tied to another tree and secured by both her arms and legs now. Regardless of her bindings, she appeared to be asleep with her head leaning back against the white birch bark and her face still bearing witness to the beating Lexa had given her the night before.

“Isn’t she going to get sick? I am going to give her one of these blankets.”

“Heda has ordered that you not be allowed near the prisoner.” Levai frowned. “For your protection. She is a nightblood and can withstand the cold much more than we can.”

“She won’t hurt me. Besides, I’ve done alright so far, haven’t I?”

Levai seemed to become amused with her declaration. “If you don’t count almost dying to a pack of wolves, being forced to go to Toron with Prince Roan as his prisoner. That and being imprisoned by the ice queen. If I am right, all those situations could have resulted in a less than ideal outcome and required the help of others for your survival.”

Clarke regarded Levai for a moment, then stood up from her spot on the ground that had lost all traces of heat thanks to the protective layers had all been moved. “Yet here I am.” Clarke said with a smirk. “How did you know I was Nia’s prisoner?”

“As you slept, the Commander had a conversation with the prisoner.”

“Ontari? It looks like she didn’t kill her. That is a good sign.”

For a moment, Levai had the look of someone who wanted to argue the point but he managed to suppress it with a particularly deep cut in his wooden project.

“You hate her as well?” Clarke wasn’t mistaken and he glanced over to where Ontari was still sitting on the ground. She saw Ontari shift slightly and the movement immediately drew Koma’s attention away from Clarke and on to the Azgeda woman. Even Levai glared in the direction of the girl and the blade in his hand shifted slightly.

“You will need a words stronger than that to describe how I feel about her.” Levai answered.

“May I ask…” Clarke asked with a hesitant voice. She’d never seen Levai become so angry as she had when he first saw her on horseback the day before. She admitted she didn’t know Levai well enough to know many of his flaws, but she never believed anyone could make him so upset.

“She killed a friend and took something from someone I love.”

Clarke glanced between Levai and Ontari a number of times. She could see he was doing his best to ignore the bound prisoner but like having a splinter - Ontari being in the camp was a source of irritation for him as much as it was for Lexa. Clarke decided not to press him for more information and decided a change of subject might be a good thing.

“What are you carving?”

“It’s Heda’s tower in Polis.” he said proudly, holding it up for display.
“Really?” Clarke twisted her head and squinted her eyes in an attempt to try and see a tower.

“You can’t see it?”

“On the bright side, it is a really impressive carving of a stick.” Clarke grinned, watching Levai look to her in disbelief until they both heard a grunt of amusement from across the camp where Koma was sitting which caused them both to laugh. Had anyone been watching Ontari, they might have seen a small grin appear for a fraction of a second on her lips.

“I think you might be right.” Levai sighed as he examined his handiwork. Agreeing with Clarke’s evaluation. He casually flipped the mediocre carving into the fire pit. The hot coals did their work and the wood became consumed by amber-coloured flames as they licked around the edges of the carving.

After a short while of watching of sitting, Clarke stood up and stretched once more. “Is there a stream nearby so I can get cleaned up?”

“I’ll show you.” Levai said, getting up to lead Clarke on the way. “Besides, I imagine you have quite the story to tell me if half of what I heard it true.”

“Only if you tell me about your trip north.”

“Deal.”

~*~*~

Clarke and Levai had regaled each other with their stories and had been gone from the camp for what must have been nearly two hours. Lexa had arrived at camp and questioned Koma where the pair had gone. Koma explained they had left for the small creek for Clarke to get cleaned up but that was nearly thirty minutes ago. After giving Ontari a once over from where she stood, she told Koma she would send Levai back to replace him so he could rest. He suggested that she rest as well but Lexa just nodded an acknowledgement to his concern. She had much larger concerns on her mind and sleep was not high on that list.

Lexa walked around the camp, gathering some food along with the remainder of the dried fruit she had in her pack. She knew Clarke never ate much when she was under stress thanks to their time together leading up to Mount Weather and the food could also serve as a way to break the ice if required. Like Clarke, she assumed there would be some fairly difficult topics they would cover.

It wasn’t a long walk, maybe ten minutes to where she believed they’d gone and as Lexa got closer and could hear their voices, she slowed her pace and then leaned against a tree when they came into her view. The breeze was slight and she took a moment to savour how it felt, giving her just a few more moments to decide how to go about talking to Clarke about what was to come.

She closed her eyes and listened to Clarke’s depiction of Niagara Falls and it felt so real that Lexa could remember her own joy when she first looked upon the thundering waterfall, how the way the water crashed into the floor below, making her chest rise and fall with exhilaration.

Clarke spoke of the partially reconstructed buildings of Toron that Nia’s father had tried to rebuild during his tenure as King, a testament to his dream of rebuilding a city that fell to ash with the goal of being Polis’ twin. A beacon in the north and a welcoming place for any and all. It appeared Nia hadn’t destroyed all her father’s good work, only the spirit of her once warm and welcoming people.

Another thing that fascinated Lexa was hearing about a city named Haven under the earth where a significant number of people remained hidden from Nia’s warriors, forced to remain away from the
light in order to survive. Lexa tried to ignore that it was Ontari that had brought Clarke brought her there because every time she was forced to think of the woman, she could feel herself losing control to her anger.

It was when Clarke began to discuss Ontari’s growing role in her adventure that Lexa couldn’t listen to it any more. She found herself moving forward from her position, dragging her foot in the soil and making enough noise that they would know she’d arrived. Originally she intended on remaining in the tree line to hear the things Clarke would only tell Levai but her feet moved her forward before her mind could process what she was doing.

“Lexa?” Clarke asked in surprise, turning to see her appear out of what seemed to be thin air. She did notice that Levai wasn’t very surprised and shot him a look that held suspicious intent.

“Levai, I will make sure she is looked after. Return to camp and replace Koma for now.”

Levai stood up looked as though he was about to argue but the look Lexa threw at him made it clear she was in no mood to facilitate a debate which led to Levai’s shoulders dropping in defeat.

“Sha, Heda.” he nodded, walking past her and toward camp with long strides.

Any displeasure that might have laced his words was missing but the look the pair shared as he passed by her seemed to tell another story all together. Clarke was certain if any of her warriors would have looked at her as Levai did just now, she would have separated their head from their shoulders. Instead, Lexa’s hands remained at her side and she even looked slightly remorseful about ordering him to watch Ontari.

“Levai, Wait.” Clarke called out.

Levai stopped moving and turned around with a questioning glance at Lexa who nodded for him to wait a moment. Clarke found herself looking down to the ground in search for something that caused Lexa and Levai to share a confused look. After locating a relatively solid branch, she snapped some of the smaller dried pieces off. After pretending she had an eye for selecting the best material to care something from, she handed the dried branch to Levai who accepted the offering. “Here. Carve something with this.”

“What would you like me to carve from this?”

“That is up to you. A wise man once told me that the great thing about second chances are you can make anything out of them with the right amount of effort and patience.”

Levai looked at the branch again then over at Clarke who stretched her limbs, still stiff from the lengthy ride she and Ontari had taken as they fled from Nia and Toron. In part she stretched because she knew her conversation with Lexa was likely going to be just as exhausting.

“Who told you that?”

“My father.”

~*~*~

Lexa turned and watched Levai walk in the direction of camp, but Clarke’s eyes remained remained glued to the rigid form of Lexa in front of her. Before Lexa turned to address Clarke, her shoulders quite visibly rose and fell as she took a fortifying breath. She’d spent every night since seeing her in the Azgeda camp trying to prepare herself for the fire that would be Clarke’s anger.
“Clarke.”

“Yes, Lexa?” She told herself that she’d try to hear Lexa out, especially after hearing of their travels north from her conversation with Levai. He assured her that Lexa was remorseful and that what happened at Mount Weather weighed heavily on Lexa but all Clarke saw standing before her was a person she once trusted.

“I... I am glad you are well.”

Unfortunately, Lexa’s words were met with disbelief that rolled from blue eyes like tidewater crashing into the shore. At least, that’s how it felt.

“Thanks to Ontari.”

Lexa’s green eyes hardened as did her jaw which clenched tightly. After a more than appropriate silence where the two girls stared at each other, Clarke saw resignation appear in Lexa’s eyes. Her rigid posture slackened as she looked to the sky above. She knew this wasn’t going to be easy but she was losing hope they would be able to ease into it.

“How are you today? The ride must have been...”

“Lexa, we can skip the formalities.” Clarke sighed and Lexa felt a sense of relief. She was never good at small talk, even Costia used to tease her about it when they had private moments alone. She did get better at it.

“Very well.” Lexa sighed with resignation. She truly was concerned for Clarke’s well being and did want to know how she was feeling. She would do whatever she could in order to make Clarke more comfortable after what she’d been through. What she believed she put Clarke through.

“Did you ever wonder where we would be if things went differently?” Clarke asked with a hit of frustration behind her words.

“It is not be useful as the Commander to worry about things that might have been.” Lexa stated, her words dripping with the authority and certainty that only someone who leads might suggest. Clarke was about to call her on her belief but stopped short when Lexa raised her hand. “Sometimes, as Lexa, I wonder about a great many things that could have been.”

“Sometimes?”

“Yes, Clarke. Sometimes. Even I have my doubts and concerns just as any would. I am human and one day, I will die like everyone else.”

“You really need to stop talking about dying when we have these conversations.” Clarke joked, but Lexa only cracked a slight smile because her nerves still had a hold of her.

“I will try to work on it. May I?” Lexa asked, pointing to the spot Levai had formerly occupied.

Clarke glanced at Levai’s former seat and took in a deep breath and slowly exhaled. Instead of telling her she could sit, she nodded and slid herself to the side to allow for greater space between them. Her nerves were just as frayed as Lexa’s and found the closer they got to each other, the more she found herself unable to keep her thoughts in order.

“Levai told me quite a bit.” She said as Lexa slowly sat down beside her.

“Did he?”
Lexa’s eyes studied Clarke to see if there were another meaning behind her words and had Clarke been looking at her, she might have pressed her on the wary glance. After another moment of silence and Clarke trying to sort out what she needed to say, she tossed the bark to the ground before her.

“About the trip north. It didn’t sound like an easy journey.”

“It was difficult at times.” Lexa agreed. She wondered exactly how much Levai would have admitted to the Clarke before she arrived. Did he tell her about her nightmares? Did he say that she pushed everyone beyond their limits and risked Octavia’s life to come north as quickly as possible?

“You have questions?”

“I have a few.”

“Perhaps start with the easiest, and we will work toward the harder ones?”

“Alright.” Clarke agreed, but the look in her eyes seemed to be in full disagreement. “Are you going to kill Ontari?”

Lexa scowled at the question. She’d asked Clarke to start easy and hoped she would begin with something involving the journey north or having rescued Bellamy, Echo and Raven. Perhaps even the radio so she could speak to Marcus. Little did Clarke know she requested starting with easier questions to help her just as much. She sighed inwardly knowing that Clarke wasn’t one to mince words and she should have expected it.

“My people have a saying that it’s better to just rip off the bandage.” Clarke added, noticing Lexa’s displeased expression.

“Your people have some very odd sayings.”

“It means to get the hardest thing out of the way and save everyone the trouble of prolonging misery.” Clarke explained.

“That is precisely the opposite of what I suggested.” The scowl still present on her face.

“You are avoiding the question.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, you are going to kill her? Or yes, you are avoiding my question?”

“It is not easy for me to discuss her, Clarke. All I can say is she will remain alive as long as she proves useful.”

Ontari had told her exactly what she’d done to Costia, without giving her too many of the specific details of their time in Nia’s prisons. They were things Clarke believed Nia had manipulated her into doing and she could see the damage it had done to Ontari. She was certain Ontari was never quite the same girl after that. Ontari wore what she’d done and she was certain it was that which led to her betraying Nia. It also resulted in her bringing Clarke to the one person who she believed was likely to behead her the moment she saw her.

“She saved my life, Lexa. I might not be here today if she didn’t free me from Nia’s prisons and fight off those warriors before you arrived.”

Silence once again replaced their conversation and Clarke stood up from the seat with resignation in her mind that Lexa was not going to even consider her opinion. She turned and for the first time
looked at Lexa since she sat down. Before she could begin her defence of Ontari, Lexa looked to her with pleading eyes, asking her for understanding.

“Everything in me wants to take my knife and have it slide it over every piece of her flesh. She has information I need to defeat Nia and she will stay alive as long as she can provide it. That she saved your life is the only reason she can still draw breath.”

“I understand why you feel that way. I do, Lexa. She explained to me what she did.” Clarke admitted, kneeling in front of Lexa and taking her hands in her own and squeezing them in support. The talk of Costia and what happened had shattered the mask she’d

“She can’t return to Toron, not after freeing you from Nia’s prisons. She knows that if Nia is not defeated, she will be hunted for the rest of her life. Her interest in living is motivation enough.”

“That and her people in Haven.” Clarke added. “So what’s your plan?”

“I’m going to go into Toron, find Nia and kill her.”

“That’s it? That’s your plan?”

“You are still thinking too much, Clarke. The plan will work.”

Clarke smirked at the reminder she was given. If only Lexa knew how often she tried to tell herself that very thing since she arrived in Toron. “Can you give me some of the details?”

“Your people and some of my gona will be led by Indra and Marcus Kane who will be arriving in a few days time and create a diversion with the goal of drawing Nia’s attention. I will enter Toron with Koma, Octavia, Lincoln and Echo and kill Nia. As far as Nia is concerned, I have no reason to believe she is aware of my presence or my plans.”

“You think she’s just looking for Ontari and I?”

“At the moment, I believe the two of you are her largest concern.”

“What Ontari tell you?”

“She told me about your trip north, what transpired while you were in Toron, and… that you enjoy maple treats.” Lexa said, freeing a hand which was still being held by Clarke’s. The moment she pulled one free, she had the urge to put it right back but she moved her hand with purpose and hopefully one that would brighten her mood.

She dug into one of her jacket and produced a small pouch then with her fingers pulled the string holding closed. After she reached into the bag, she produced a small item that caused Clarke’s eyes to brighten. She handed it over to Clarke and watched with curiosity as she stuck it in her pocket rather than opening it and popping it in her mouth.

“For later.” Clarke explained. “Who knows if I’ll have the chance to ever enjoy another.”

“Then we’d better defeat Nia in order to make sure that my supply of them won’t be interrupted.”

Clarke laughed at the Lexa’s justification which caused Lexa’s lips to mimic the smile that appeared on Clarke’s. Neither of them wanted this conversation to be difficult and neither wanted to talk about what was to come or the possibility of failure but the silence was frustrating to Clarke so she changed the subject.
“Levai also told me Octavia got sick but it looks like she got through it.”

“She did. She has come a long way since your arrival to the ground. I have no doubt that when this is over, they will seek a formal union.”

The certainty Lexa spoke of what would come after fortified Clarke’s spirit. The blonde had begun to fall into the ‘what if’ scenarios that she’d been working so hard to ignore.

“That will be nice.” Clarke smiled. “It was what I always wanted for our people and I hope it opens up possibilities for everyone.”

“It is what we both want, Clarke. I doubt Lincoln and Octavia will stop with just the union. When she found out Echo was with child, I believe there both celebration and jealousy in her eyes.”

“OF course Octavia would view having a child as a competition.” Clarke grinned. “Levai tells me she is also quite good with a bow.”

“She prevented a scout on horseback from escaping even though she was ill. She managed to bring him down with a very accurate shot. It seems like some of your people might make it on the ground after all.”

Feeling the conversation going in a more positive direction, she decided to take out the other small pouch she had of food she’d gathered after returning to camp. She held it out to Clarke and gave her an apologetic look. “It’s not full of candies. I am afraid it is what’s left of our dried fruit.”

Clarke didn’t care because she was famished. She happily accepted it and as soon as she caught a whiff of the food, her stomach stomach rumbled. Other than the obvious benefits of eating, what she was going to enjoy most was that she wasn’t eating while on the back of a horse while trying to remain ahead of Nia’s warriors.

“You can’t believe how good this is.” Clarke exclaimed, working through the contents of the pouch in what must have been record time.

“You should slow down. If you don’t it will cause you to become unwell.”

Clarke abandoned the rationale and Lexa watched on in amusement at the way Clarke attacked the food. She had to remind Clarke to make an attempt at chewing her food but only received a nod from Clarke. It was clear she had little regard for her recommendation. The last four days she and Ontari hadn’t had anything to eat because of their hasty departure from Toron and Clarke was happy to try to stuff herself.

“There will be better food at camp.” Lexa promised.

“I am looking forward to it. Nia’s hospitality does not extend to her prisoners and neither of us has had anything to eat for days.” An admission that caused Lexa to frown. She didn’t much care about Ontari not having food but she wished she still had some of her seasonings to make Clarke some soup.

They both found a comfortable silence after Clarke handed her back the bag that Lexa had given her. Clarke apologized for not saving any for Lexa but she waved her off and explained she’d already had a breakfast. A lie which she gladly told after seeing Clarke’s improved post-breakfast. Lexa used the silence to sip at her water skin and handed it to Clarke who took a couple good mouthfuls before handing it back. As she did, she regarded Lexa curiously.

“You are risking a lot coming here without your army.”
“It wasn’t by choice. The ambassadors refused my request.”

“If the ambassadors know you requested an army to fight Nia, wouldn’t she know? Wouldn’t their ambassador send a message?”

“Not if her ambassador has been imprisoned before the vote took place. He is to remain there until I return. If I don’t, it won’t matter because Nia will bring her forces south in the spring. There won’t be anyone who can stop her if she manages to take control of Polis. Nobody believes I would risk going to Toron on my own.”

“What about Titus?”

The question caused Lexa to meet her eyes with a confused and questioning look. The moment Clarke realized Lexa had no idea what she was talking about, her eyes opened wide.

“Titus? What about him?”

“Ontari didn’t tell you?”

Clarke’s question was met with obvious skepticism from Lexa based where the information was attained.

“Lexa, he was working with Nia. He was the reason Costia was taken from Polis.”

Lexa didn’t say anything and as her mind began to process what Clarke just shared, she shot up from her seat with concern on her face.

“Lexa, what’s going on?”

“If Titus is working with Nia, she knows I’m here. She will know I have no army, and she be prepared.”

“But she doesn’t know you have a way into Toron. If we can get in there, Ontari can…”

“No!” Lexa shouted loud enough to startle Clarke. She’d never known Lexa to lose her temper in such a manner and it caused Clarke to shrink back from her.

Lexa closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. She didn’t want to believe her most trusted adviser, someone she had known most of her life and trusted implicitly could betray her in such a way. That he was a reason Costia had been snatched away, taken from her and tortured in the depths of one of Nia’s cells.

Lexa stumbled slightly and fell back down on to her seat. She hid her face in her hands, seeking some way to try to lessen the chaos between her heart and mind so she could piece together the possibilities.

She knew Titus had never supported their relationship and even advised that it was unsafe for her to have any sort of relationship as Commander, that it would endanger both of them and go against the tradition of a Commander. Once she told him that she would not chance her mind about Costia, he had never spoken of his opposition again and she assumed him to become accepting of her choice.

Lexa was certain Costia was safe in Polis while she was on a diplomatic trip to Sangedakru. It was a highly fortified tower and when she left, Costia was under the protection of those she personally trusted to make sure no harm could come to her. None of them had witnessed a thing.
She was taken at night according to Titus and the only evidence she had when word arrived from her spies in Azgeda territory that informed her Costia had been taken to Toron, and imprisoned by Nia. Lexa just assumed it was an Azgeda spy that managed to somehow get to Costia as she slept. That Titus was in full agreement with her assessment and had suggested as much when she arrived back in Polis.

“Lexa?”

The sound of Clarke’s voice pulled Lexa back into the present. She slowly lifted her head from her hands and stared at Clarke for a moment as if she almost didn’t recognize her.

“Lexa, what happens now?”

Lexa stood up and let her head roll from side to side in a stretch in an attempt to loosen up the stress that had found a home in her neck.

“The plan remains the same only after Nia is removed from her throne and I bring you safely back to your people, I will return to Toron to deal with this issue and the Fleimkepa. For now, I wish to question the natblida and make it clear any secrets kept from me regarding this matter will have consequences.”

Clarke wanted to remind Lexa that the nightblood did in fact have a name, but resisted the urge. She had no doubt Lexa was reeling at the news of Titus’ possible involvement in what happened with Costia.

“We should return to camp.” Clarke suggested, a little hesitation in her voice. She had a number of questions she wished to ask and many of them regarding what Levai had told her but it didn’t feel like the right moment.

“I should speak to the natblida again. She likely knows more about the matter involving Titus and if Nia has received word, it could be helpful to know.”

Clarke wanted to remind Lexa that Ontari has a name, but felt it best to not try to escalate the situation. Lexa was clearly working hard at containing whatever frustration or anger she was experiencing inside.

“It might help if I were there when you asked her questions. Perhaps I could get some answers as well.”

“Only after you have something more substantial to eat than the few berries that were in that pouch.” Lexa didn’t smile, but Clarke could sense an attempt at levity in her tone.

“I’ll agree only if we can continue this conversation afterward.” Clarke bartered. She decided she wasn’t going to let Lexa go to Toron without telling her everything she wanted to say, especially if there was a chance she wasn’t ever going to see her again.

“We will continue our conversation.” Lexa agreed. “There is much I wish to say as well.”

Chapter End Notes

I know!
They weren't making out or hooking up in this chapter! Clarke kinda screwed that up when she mentioned Titus. She assumed Lexa knew so don't blame me! It's all Clarke's fault!

And when is Raven going to get that transmitter/receiver working?!

Next Chapter Information:

The next update is on it's way but it's being a pain coming out how I want it. I'm doing what I can to get it up tomorrow(24th). It looks like I'm in for another long night of writing but I wanted to give everyone an update!
Revelation: Part Two

Chapter Summary

Lexa discovers that Titus may have played a role in Costia's murder and shares with Clarke some of her past which led to her becoming the commander she knows today.

Chapter Notes

It took a long time to get this update posted, but here it is!

To be honest, I'm not sure how I feel about it because this might be version 105. The amount of deleted paragraphs and dialogue as I went over it was surprising and it's gone through many changes from start to finish.

The next chapter will still have dialogue between Clarke and Lexa and it will become significantly more personal, in this one, I wanted Lexa to be working things out in her head/heart more than have the pair jump into expressing feelings for each other.

“Titus and Nia. Explain.”

Ontari glanced past Lexa to Clarke who was just now arriving in the camp and she could see the concern in Clarke’s eyes.

“DO NOT look at her. Look at me.” Lexa growled as she reached forward and grasped Ontari’s jaw, forcing the Azgeda woman to look into her eyes. “Titus. Tell me what his role was in her abduction.”

Ontari nodded as much as she could which gave Lexa reason to release her iron grip. Lexa took a step back and made sure she was standing slightly in front of Clarke, reflexively shielding her.

“It was his responsibility to have Costia taken from the tower and taken from the city. Once he had her outside of Polis, she would be handed over to Nia’s spies and brought north.”

“How did she get my Flaimepa to betray me?”

“Roughly five years ago at the welcoming banquet held by Nia’s father was when it all started. You were new to your calling as Heda and that was when she set her plan in motion. She became aware of how much Titus was unimpressed with your having seated Costia at the head table with his many frustrated glances at her. She decided he would be much more agreeable to her questioning if he were to become drunk.”

“Titus does not drink. As Fleimkepa, it is forbidden.” Lexa declared.

“She was well aware of that fact as he refused any and all offers of alcohol. Instead, she had one of the servants use a poison that simulates the effects of drink. It was flavourless and he had no knowledge of what was happening and the moment he started to feel its effects, he excused himself.
Lexa tilted her head in thought, recalling the events of the first night at the banquet feast. She did in fact recall Titus leaving, explaining that his body still had not recovered from the long trip north and that he wished to return to his room. At the time, Lexa thought nothing of it because many of her caravan had stated the same. Many of her seasoned riders were sore so she had no doubt Titus would have been in a significant amount of pain, which was why she excused him.

Ontari saw Lexa’s gears turning and continued her explanation. “After he left, Nia followed shortly after. She went into his room and used his state to manipulate him. At some point, she had discovered his dislike for Costia and your relationship with her. He told her he despised how Costia had your attention and that it went against the tradition of his teachings. Traditions held and maintained by all Heda before you and that it was a betrayal of your people to abdicate such traditions.”

“How do you know this? I do not recall you being present at the banquet.”

“I was there, but I was there in the role of servant. My role was to appear as inconsequential to everyone as I could to everyone, to watch and learn what I could from you because one day I would be Heda. I’d even given you your plate of food. She had me join her when she went to speak to Titus, offering to have me fetch food or a healer should he require it.”

Lexa frowned at the knowledge she’d ignored such a threat. In the years after becoming Heda, she’d taken a greater responsibility in knowing her servants and relied on them for their advice and occasional gossip in regard to her people. No doubt, her relationship with Deni being one of the most important to her.

“Anyway, Nia had begun to pour honey in his ear, telling him she believed in the old ways, the true ways of our people. Then she told him about me. A natblida who hadn’t been corrupted by emotion and trained as a true commander.”

“So she blackmailed Titus.” Lexa said, returning the conversation back on topic. “He had done nothing which could not have been forgiven.”

“His adherence to tradition told him otherwise.” Ontari explained. “Everyone knows that to even discuss the betrayal of Heda is a high crime. His drinking and plotting with Nia, even if he didn’t promise anything was a weight over his head. That was when Nia convinced him that his worst fear was a certainty, that perhaps it was her duty to inform you immediately. He was certain he would be killed for such a treasonous act.”

“I thought Nia said Ontari arrived in Toron and was there on a diplomatic mission on behalf of Lexa.” Clarke interjected, confusion taking hold.

“That was how Nia wanted it to appear. She used it as a reason to solidify her role as Azplana in the eyes of her people. If the Commander were sending spies and trying to kill our leaders, her people would form a protective shield around her. And they did.”

“This plan seems poorly devised. Nia is much smarter than that.” Lexa stated, her mind working through numerous scenarios.

Ontari smirked for a second but quickly removed it when she saw Lexa’s fists tighten into white-knuckled blunt objects.

“That is what everyone else thought as well. Only the Prince and I knew the truth. All it took was for
her to show people Costia’s body for them to believe it. That the girl that sat at Heda’s side at her welcoming banquet had come north to assassinate the man who had months before welcomed them warmly. Our people believed that you would try to kill Nia next, maybe even Prince Roan. It gave her the near constant support of her people.”

“Near constant?” Lexa asked.

“The Azgeda people are starting to feel the winters in their bones. They watch their children starve or freeze to death in the long and cold winters. Nia blames you and many believe her, but there are also many who don’t. Those are the people who support the Prince. He just lacks the courage to do what needs to be done. He always has which is why he brought her… *Ontari nodded in Clarke’s direction. ”…to Toron.”

“He brought me north to bolster his support to rise up against Nia.”

“Everything he wanted depended on you publicly disavowing his mother, something that was likely to get you killed in the process. He may be Nia’s son, but he is rash in his plans and his decision making. A trait both of you seem to share.”

“Does Nia know I have come north?” Lexa asked, pulling Ontari’s attention back to her.

“No. She would have had me prepare a defence against your forces. There has been no word by courier or by bird.”

Lexa nodded once, then let her hand fall to a knife on her hip. It wasn’t her familiar wood-handled blade but it cut all the same. They all did when she laboured to make them as sharp as they are.

“Do you have anything else to offer me?”

Ontari didn’t answer, but the hard swallow and the way she tightly closed her eyes gave both Lexa and Clarke an understanding of what she knew her fate. Lexa pulled out her blade with her eyes trained on her target and took a fist full of her hair, wrenching it back to expose her throat. She pressed the edge of the blade to her flesh, resulting in a small trickle of onyx blood trickling onto the silver knife.

Ontari couldn’t help but open her eyes and look to the grey sky above. She took in a deep breath through her nose and savoured the way the crisp air rolled in through her nose and down into her lungs. It was accompanied by the scent of pine and it lit her senses ablaze.

‘Ai gonplei ste odon.’ Ontari thought the words, expecting the feel the blade glide sideways and her mouth to fill with the familiar iron taste of her blood that she’d become familiar with after years of training with Nia’s best. That was until Clarke’s voice cut the stillness.

Clarke watched the pair but her mind scrambled in search for anything that might be of use to the girl and giving her a chance to prove to Lexa she wasn’t a threat. In a heartbeat, Clarke’s eyes opened wide and before she knew it she stepped around Lexa. And put her hand over the one holding Lexa’s knife, a hand that was shaking slightly. A moment later, Lexa broke her concentration on Ontari and looked over at Clarke with eyes starting starting to fill.

“She said something about not needing Wanheda any longer. In the cells. Tell her if you know why Nia left Toron!” Clarke told Ontari in an effort to help. She didn’t want Ontari to die out here, tied to a tree. She wasn’t sure she owed Ontari her life but the least she figured she owed was a chance keep her own.

Lexa pulled the knife back slightly, relieving the pressure and giving Ontari the opportunity to lower
her head. Ontari swallowed hard a couple times and shivered in an effort to shake the ghost of death that had wrapped her in it’s arms. After a moment and the realization that she had been given a slight reprieve, she looked at Clarke with apologetic eyes and shook her head.

“Tell her, what Nia said. She didn’t need me.”

“She did not tell me why.” She said to Lexa, but her eyes were on Clarke with a small sympathetic smile. She knew Clarke was trying to help her but she had nothing more to barter. “I am sorry Clarke. I came here with you knowing what would be waiting if we made it. That I made it out of that small clearing after she put two arrows in me is half a day more than I expected to be alive.”

“Nia made you do those things. Tell her. Tell her what you told me.”

Ontari smiled, but she shook her head. “We are responsible for what we do. I could have let Nia kill me but I valued my life more than… more than those I should have protected. I should have done for her what I did for you but I did not and there is a price to be paid. A life for a life.”

“But you saved me.” Clarke said, but she was looking at Lexa when she said the words.

“And you in doing so you gave me the opportunity to take back a little of what I lost years ago, Wanheda. I consider it a fair trade.”

Watching the exchange, Lexa was at a complete loss with what she should do. She knew what she wanted to do and every time she squeezed her hand around the tightly wrapped para-cord on her knife’s hilt, she envisioned herself driving it forward and into Ontari’s chest. She fought against the hesitation in her, and Lexa let out a loud growl of frustration.

To Ontari’s surprise, Lexa stepped back and shoved her knife blade back into it’s sheath. Without another word, she spun on her heels and walked directly out of camp which caused Levai to jump up from his seat and move in the direction Lexa had taken.

“Levai. She would want you to stay with Ontari. I’ll go.” Clarke said, not waiting for an answer as she too ran off into the forest along the same path Lexa had taken.

~*~*~

“Lexa, Wait!”

Clarke chased after Lexa to the best of her ability but as she watched Lexa break into a sprint, she knew she would be unable to keep pace. With every step, Clarke was losing ground and she cursed her sore body for how tired it was, not that she would have been as sure footed as Lexa in any type of wooded area. That didn’t stop the blonde from continuing forward through the woods and using the sound of Lexa’s footfalls to make sure she was heading in the right direction.

“Lexa! Please wait!” Clarke called, her lungs had begun to find it difficult to cooperate but she couldn’t stop, swearing to would run as far as she had to in order to catch up.

She ducked under tree branches and jumped over fallen logs in the foreign land but in doing so, slowed her forward progress even more. She climbed over a large log and couldn’t see hide nor hair of Lexa and for a moment felt nervousness wash over her with the realization that there could still be Nia’s scouts in the woods around her. Her only consolation was that Lexa had run this way because there was scuffling on the tree trunk she’d climbed over.
After a couple minutes of laboured jogging, Clarke almost ran straight past right past Lexa who was sitting on the ground unmoving, her back against a tree and her knees pulled back into her chest. She’d hidden her face in her forearms which were crossed over her knees in what was obviously her attempt to hide from the world.

“Lexa?”

After not receiving anything more than seeing Lexa’s shoulders rise and fall with a deep breath, Clarke walked over to her after taking a scan of the forest around them. She bent over so her hand could support her weight on the ground and then let her body drop unceremoniously to the dirt floor beside Lexa.

It took a good fifteen minutes before Clarke worked up the courage to disturb Lexa and shifted restlessly where she sat. She’d never seen Lexa like this, curled into herself against the base of the tree. Her movement caused Lexa’s head to shoot upward and she appeared startled to see Clarke sitting there but recovered enough to try and use her hands to rub over her reddened and water-filled eyes.

“Easy, Lexa. It’s ok.”

“Why did you follow me? It isn’t safe for you out here.”

“I’m sorry.”

Lexa took a deep breath and exhaled slowly as she looked upward to the sky. “You have no reason to be apologizing to me, Clarke.”

“I figured if I was following you, I was probably the safest I could be.” Clarke offered a small smile which resulted in Lexa letting out a small huff in amusement.

“You have given me an impossible choice, Clarke.”

“What choice?”

“I made a promise on the day I’d learned of Costia’s death that if I would gift Ontari that which she had done to her. I would have Ontari brought back to Polis and she would be put in one of my cells. Everyday, I would do what Nia’s ambassador had told me Ontari had done. She would have pieces of her flesh cut from her day after day. Her bones would be broken as she had done, only to let them heal and break them again.”

Clarke’s face whitened as she heard Lexa talk about what she intended to do to Ontari and the passion with which she spoke.

“She would learn that Costia was everything good in this world and her light was the greatest gift she gave to people. She was good and she was pure and Ontari stole it from the world.” Lexa looked to Clarke and the first tear Clarke had ever seen Lexa cry fell from her eye, down and over her cheekbone. In a whisper she added, “She took her from me and now you argue for me to spare her life.”

Clarke’s eyes filled as she watched Lexa come apart in front of her. She shuffled forward and pulled Lexa into a hug that for a moment she believed Lexa might try to pull away from. Instead, Lexa let a sob loose that nearly tore Clarke in two. She pulled Lexa into the hug, but it was Lexa that squeezed her jacket tightly in balled fists and pulled Clarke impossibly close to her in order to bury her face in the crook of Clarke’s neck.
They shared the hold her as long as Lexa needed to and Clarke felt the tears fall unimpeded from on to her shoulder. Clarke couldn’t resist being pulled into the maelstrom of Lexa’s emotions and cried for a time with her, rubbing her hand in circles on Lexa’s back without saying a word while trying to understand even a fraction of what could bring Lexa to the place she was now as she cried on her shoulder.

Time became irrelevant as they embraced each other. Even after Lexa’s crying stopped, the two remained entwined in the world they’d created around themselves. Clarke allowed Lexa to be the first to create distance between them and as she did, Clarke watched her wipe the tears from her eyes and give Clarke an embarrassed look.

“It’s ok.”

Lexa shook her head in defiance to Clarke’s words. She was sitting against a tree in Azgeda territory planning a rescue into Toron to save the girl sitting right next to her. Were it not for her obligation as Heda and her excuse of coming north to stop Nia from continuing her reign of tyranny, she would suggest without hesitation that both she and Clarke immediately head south. They would take horses and ride as quickly as they could to escape Nia’s reach and into the coalition-protected lands of Trikru.

“No, It’s not.” Lexa said, waving her hands around. “Nothing about this is ok.” Lexa let out a small laugh in disbelief.

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t trust her, Clarke. I never will.”

“I know.”

“Do you?” Lexa asked, but her voice was tired filled with doubt. The long trip north had given her substantial time to figure out what she hoped to be able to say to Clarke but now that Clarke sat across from her, patient blue eyes waiting for her explanation. The prepared speech in her mind had been wiped clean of her carefully crafted words.

“I was young when I was told Costia’s family had been granted permission to move to our village in Trikru territory. My parents explained their family had a young girl, roughly my age and she had an illness which became worse due to the arid climate of the desert. Her family had packed up their life and moved to my village with the hope she could have a life in a more accommodating climate.”

“The day Costia and her family were to arrive in the village, my parents told me that we were going to be sharing our home with them and that the room I had would be shared with their daughter. You might find this hard to believe, but I was a rather difficult child on occasion and believed this was an affront to my independence. I wasn’t Heda, but my declaration that as future Heda I would “in no way be my personal room with some Sangedakru branwada” carried absolutely no weight with my parents.”

As she listened, Clarke let out a small chuckle at the growing grin pulling at the corner’s of Lexa’s lips. Her mind then imagined a feisty, brown-haired girl who had yet to understand the weight of what her life would place upon her make declarations to her parents.

“When she arrived, Costia’s father had her body in his arms and he rushed her into our home. That was the first time I’d seen her.” Lexa paused and moved to wrap her arms around her legs once more. Her lungs constricted resulting in her voice to waver. “She looked so fragile. Her sandy-coloured hair was soaked from sweat and her father said she needed bed rest and that the ride had been very
difficult on her.”

“My brother was sent to fetch the fisa and his assistant and I directed him to my bedroom so her down on the bed. If you can believe it, he turned to me and apologized for displacing me from my own bed. That was when Costia interrupted him by a bout of coughing similar to the winter sickness.” She looked so frail, laying there on the bed.”

“But she recovered.” Clarke said, drawn into Lexa’s words.

“She never fully recovered from the physical impact the illness placed on her but the climate of Trikru lands gave her the strength her body needed. Once the Fisa had gone over Costia and determined she had what he called ‘desert fever’ and left us with herbs to make her a tea, my father made it my responsibility to ensure the tea was prepared and drunk by our guest, as well as to watch over her during her stay with us.”

“I’m sure you took good care of her.” Clarke stated, receiving a smile and a nod from Lexa before she continued.

“It was a more than a week before she showed any true signs of recovery and another three days before she’s managed to leave the bed without launching into a coughing fit that usually led to her coughing up blood. The first time either of us had said anything to the other in conversation was almost two weeks later. I woke up to the feeling of someone shaking my shoulder and I was shocked to see that Costia had gotten up out of bed under her own power and was now standing over me. She told me in her rough voice that I should sleep in my own bed and that she would sleep on the floor.”

“I hope you refused her offer.” Clarke teasingly scolded her.

“Of course!” Lexa offered Clarke a disapproving look for even suggestion otherwise. “I told her that in no way would I deprive her of the rest she required and that she should get back in bed. After what I assumed was her thinking for a moment, Costia kneeled and then laid down next to me on the floor.”

“Tell me You didn’t let her sleep on the floor?”

“Never. Besides, my father would have made my life much more difficult with extra chores or worse had he walked in the room and saw a guest who was still recovering from illness laying on the ground while his perfectly healthy daughter slept in a bed. I am certain I would have been unable to sit properly for a week.” Lexa stated with certainty.

Clarke let belted out a laugh when she thought of the woman in front of her who was a renowned fighter and leader of all the clans, a woman who intimidated just about everyone she came across, being worried about being disciplined by her father.

“So what did you do?” Clarke asked after composing herself.

“I tried my luck and told her that because I was going to become Heda, it was her duty to do as I command. That I would not allow my people to become sicker, even if it meant that I had to sleep on the floor.”

“You told that to Costia?”

Lexa nodded with a grin on her face.

“Did she listen?”
“Absolutely not.” Lexa answered through a laugh and a shake of her head. “After numerous hours of negotiations with her, numerous glasses of water and some snacks I’d managed to sneak from my parent’s cold cellar, she agreed to my demand that as a guest, she must not refuse my offering of the bed were I to insist.”

“You abused power you didn’t even have?”

“I did, but she only conditionally agreed.”

“The mighty Lexa was out negotiated?” Clarke could barely contain her amusement. She decided in that moment she would have to press Lexa for more stories of her childhood in the future.

“I would say we both got what we wanted. It was only after I agreed her declaration that because it was my bed, I had a traditional right to at least one half of the space on it and if I were to agree to sleep in it with her, she would continue to use the bed.”

Clarke lifted her hand to her mouth and slightly muted an ‘awww’ that escaped her throat. She acknowledged her heart’s sadness that she hadn’t had the opportunity to meet a childhood Lexa.

“That means the two of you shared the bed?”

“We did, but we didn’t sleep. Instead we talked about anything and everything we could think of. She told me about her people and I told her about mine and we talked about everything in between, including my being a natblida until sunrise.”

“So she knew you were a nightblood before she arrived.”

“Her parents knew and told her before they’d arrived. Many of our people have a fear of nightblood children because if anything happened to us and news reached Polis, any significant injury or even murder of one who had the blood if sentenced to death. Of course, in the imagination of children, things can get overblown. Any murder is subject to that outcome.”

“She wasn’t afraid of you?

“During one of our first adventures through the forests outside Tondc I showed her a small waterfall I liked to visit we discussed my being a natblida a bit more. She was hesitant and but eventually she told me all the rumors about natblida she’d heard that we kill people for sport.”

“I was about to argue the point that I wasn’t going to be like other Heda, but she stopped me from speaking by leaning her head on my shoulder and saying that she knew I could never be one of those bad Heda because my eyes weren’t angry or cruel and if they weren’t, my heart couldn’t be either.”

“I didn’t know precisely why at the time but the only thing I understood was that I didn’t want to disappoint her. I’d quietly promised myself that no matter what, I would do everything in my power to be who she saw that day if I were chosen by the spirit of the commander to lead my people.”

“Was that when you came up with the idea for the kongeda?”

“Our kongeda.” Lexa corrected. “People credit me for building the coalition but it was her idea and it came many years later after I’d become Heda. She had a way with words and her ability to show people the vision of true and lasting peace that could result in prosperity.”

“We spent many months working with ambassadors, Kings and Queens to get any inroad to peace we could and it often required trips to the outlying clans. In every instance, she was there urging me to do what was the best thing for my people. I’d stopped seeing them as my people long before we’d
started work on the kongeda because of her. They’d become our people and once we’d finished our work and all the clans were united as one, I had decided I would ask her to become my partner."

Clarke’s eyes saddened knowing their story and it’s end. She also became painfully aware that back in camp, the one who was responsible for it coming to a crashing end was tied to a tree.

“I knew Titus didn’t approve of how close Costia and I had become….“ Lexa said, interrupting Clarke’s thoughts. “…but I would never have guessed he could do such a thing. When I left for Sangeda lands to negotiate a trading agreement with a neighboring clan, I’d left Costia in Polis to advise the council on my behalf. I can only imagine now how much that must have frustrated Titus.”

“So you believe her?”

Lexa winced at the notion that Ontari could be right but she knew she didn’t have to trust Ontari for that to be the case. “It seems likely and it will be a matter I will discuss with him when we return to Polis.”

Clarke raised an eyebrow at Lexa’s declaration that she would be going to Polis but she didn’t challenge her on it. Instead, a comfortable silence overtook the pair for a while and Lexa spent much of it looking around the forest. Clarke knew Lexa enough to know her mind was working a mile a minute. She reached out after a minute of silence and nudged Lexa’s knee with her own.

“Penny for your thoughts.”

Lexa gave her a confused look and shook her head. “Another Skaikru saying? Your people have far too many of them.”

“It means I’d like to know what you are thinking.” Clarke said, reaching over and tapping Lexa’s knee with her finger.

Lexa let out a light puff of air and stopped scanning the forest to give Clarke her full attention.

“I am thinking that we come to Azgeda lands without an army in preparation to enter a heavily fortified city that I cannot take by force. I’ve made an agreement with people I do not know or trust which would make them full members of the kongeda in order to use tunnels which I had intended to use in order to get into Toron and prevent the possibility of Nia doing anything to you.”

Clarke’s eyebrows lifted at the casual way Lexa explained her thoughts. “You came north to prevent Nia from doing anything to me?”

“Is that hard to believe?”

“We didn’t part on the best of terms, Lexa. You left me standing in front of Mount Weather.”

“I did.” Lexa nodded. “After Maunde, I returned to Polis to informed the ambassadors of the coalition that I’d broken my alliance with you in order to save the lives of my people. I’d done my duty and though there was some opposition to what I’d done, nobody could argue that it wasn’t in the best interest of my people.”

Clarke could feel something begin to boil in her stomach. She didn’t want to revisit this subject and as soon as she opened her mouth to begin what Lexa believed would be a declaration of how as Heda, her duty was to her people, instead Clarke to remain wordless and waiting to hear what Lexa had to say after she lifted her hand.

“I had repeated that justification to myself more times than I care to admit on the trip back to Polis as
well in every mirror I looked into. For years it was enough to convince myself whatever action I’d taken, I’d done my obligation to my people. This time it wasn’t enough.”

“No? What changed?”

“I did.”

“You did?”

“Yes, Clarke. Because of you.”

Clarke was taken aback by her words and she regarded Lexa curiously. She tried to understand but she knew there was only one way to find out precisely what Lexa meant. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I am not going to let Nia continue to endanger the things I care about any longer.”
After Lexa explains her motivations for coming north to Clarke, the group separates in preparation for what is to come.

The ACTUAL chapter update?! I know. It's been far too long. I was shocked to see it was a little over a month and annoyed with myself as well.

Thanks to everyone for their patience(broken record anyone?) as well as continued comments/kudos. You are all awesome and I appreciate everyone for taking the time to ready this story.

Just a reminder that there are 6 chapters left.

I hope everyone enjoys and I'll see you all next Monday!

“Sorry to interrupt,” Called an approaching voice that both Clarke and Lexa recognized as Octavia’s. “Raven fixed the radio. She said you wanted to know right away.”

“Thank you, O. We’ll be there in a minute.” Clarke answered.

“Dinner is cooked if either of you are hungry, and Bell wants to talk to you before we leave tonight.”

Lexa smiled at Clarke when she heard the blonde's stomach rumble at the mention of dinner being ready. In Clarke’s mind, her stomach flipping was as a result of what Lexa just told her. She hadn’t taken her eyes off Lexa when Octavia arrived and spoke to them, and she still hadn’t now that Octavia was on her way back to camp.

“Do you want to have something to eat before or after talking to your people?” Lexa asked nonchalantly as though she didn’t just tell Clarke she came all the way into Azgeda territory to rescue her from the clutches of an evil queen. That she didn’t just admit she still cared for her. She thought this stuff was only made up in children stories.

“I... we should talk to them. To make sure everything is going to plan.”

It was the answer Lexa was hoping for in that it might give Clarke some time to think about what she had just told her. She didn’t expect to say as much as she did but once she started she didn’t know how to stop. Clarke had a way of bringing that out in her unlike anyone she’d known and as much as she enjoyed it, she found it slightly unsettling as well.

“That sounds like a good idea. Perhaps you can show me how to work one of those machines.” Lexa suggested.
“You mean a radio?”

“Yes.” Lexa answered as she walked alongside Clarke back to camp. She recalled the radio that Bellamy, Octavia and Lincoln had on them when they were caught lurking about in the forest. “Your people had one in Tondc but I did not know how to make it work to talk to others.”

“I’ll let Raven explain it. She loves to discuss anything that involves radio waves and technology.”

“Radio waves?”

“When we get back from Toron, I’ll have Raven tell you how it all works. If she tries now, we’ll need a few days just so she can explain the terminology.” Clarke explained. “Don’t tell her I said this, but she is probably the smartest person on the planet when it comes to that stuff.”

“I will not tell her that. Your secret is safe with me.” Lexa swore solemnly, raising her hand as if to swear an oath.

Clarke let out a laugh as they both started their way back to camp, and she decided it was her new favourite sound. The way it always makes her want to laugh along or give a mile at the very least filled her chest with something that she thought she would never feel again. Happiness.

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They returned to camp and broke apart immediately with Octavia heading over toward her brother and Echo who were sitting next to the small fire and enjoying some of the dinner they’d prepared. When he noticed Clarke had returned to camp, Bellamy stood up and moved in her direction. Clarke felt an overwhelming urge to turn around and walk back into the forest but she knew that wasn’t an option. She turned to Lexa and gave her an apologetic look.

“I’ll join you with Raven in a minute, okay?” Clarke asked. "I should speak to him."

Lexa nodded while lifting her hand and giving Clarke’s arm a slight squeeze in reassurance. “I will wait by the fire. Afterward we can radio Indra and Marcus.”

“Clarke, a minute?” he asked, stepping past her and nodding at her to walk back into the forest with him.

She followed him, albeit reluctantly into the forest where he had ventured. After a minute of walking on the leaves underfoot, he stopped with his back turned to her and waited for her to walk past him. As she did, his eyes followed her hesitant steps until she was standing in front of him. To her surprise, Bellamy pulled her into a hug and once she collected herself, she lifted her arms to his back.

“I’m glad you are okay, Clarke.”

“Bellamy, what you guys have done, what you are doing. It means a lot to me.”

“What happened? Where did you go?” Bellamy asked, his voice laced with frustration.

“It’s a long story.” Clarke sighed into his shoulder and then pulled back once she felt his arms loosen. She couldn’t go through everything right now, but she forced a smile to her lips. “Can we go over those details later?”

“Assuming we have a later.” Bellamy joked, but realized it was in bad taste when Clarke didn’t laugh. “So you think this crazy plan has a chance?” He asked, trying to lighten the tension between them.
“I think it’s the only chance our people have for peace. If Nia wins, we lose. Everyone loses.”

“Do you think the Commander will turn on us again?”

Clarke glanced past Bellamy to the where Lexa was seated so she could keep an eye on them. She shook her head and then looked back at Bellamy. “She has no reason to. There isn’t anything to gain by doing it.”

“That she’s told you about?” Bellamy added with a frown.

“She said this is different.”

“What makes this time different?”

“There is something about her that is different, Bellamy. It is clear that this will benefit all the clans, but she said this is about more than her people. I believe her.”

“O said the same thing. She said she got to know the Commander while they traveled but she wouldn’t elaborate. She says she trusts her.”

“What about you? Do you trust her?”

“I don’t know if I can. Not after Mount Weather.”

Clarke smiled at his answer, but the perpetual frown on his face was evidence of his frustration and distrust of the grounder leader. If there was one thing Clarke counted on Bellamy for, it was his honesty in how he felt about a person or a situation.

“We should talk about what happened after Mount Weather once this is all over.” Clarke suggested while cracking small grin. "If you are still offering that drink." 

“Only if you are coming home to stay.”

“Bellamy,” Clarke sighed, bringing her hand up to squeeze the bridge of her nose. She wasn’t sure she could go back there. Not yet and not with what it was they still had to do. After that? She wasn't sure she could even think about that with what was to come.

“No Clarke. You need to come back. Your mom needs you. We all need you. Things haven’t been the same since Mount Weather.”

Clarke stepped back from Bellamy and shot him a look of suspicion. “What’s happened? Is my mom…”

“She’s fine, Clarke. We can talk about it when we get home.”

“Does Raven know?” Clarke asked, starting to move back in the direction of camp only to be stopped by Bellamy’s strong hand on her arm. She stared at it for a moment then glowered at him until he released her.

“She doesn’t know. It's nothing. Not yet.”

“Is everything alright, Clarke?”

“Everything is fine.” Clarke answered, looking past Bellamy once more to see Lexa approaching with long strides and her hand on her small knife. Clarke shook her head and stated, “We’re just talking about Camp Jaha.”
Lexa glanced at Bellamy and his lack of eye contact annoyed her as much as it made her suspicious. She wasn’t interested in wanting to create a conflict between Clarke’s people and her own so she decided to leave it alone and hoped Clarke would explain what just happened.

“We should speak to Indra and Marcus and make sure they are aware of what their responsibilities will be.” Lexa suggested. “We must leave before nightfall to reach the tunnels without having to trouble the horses with a hard ride.”

“Alright.” Clarke said as she walked past Bellamy, offering him a look of confusion mixed with frustration about his cryptic news. “We’ll talk about this in Toron once Roan becomes King. We’ll have a drink there and you can tell me about it.”

She wondered if Lexa had any idea of what was happening back at Camp Jaha but realized that it wasn’t the time or place to think about such a matter. so she forced herself to put anything more than the matter of getting rid of Nia out of her mind. They had to focus on what was to come because if they failed, anything currently happening at Camp Jaha would pale in comparison to what would befall them should Nia ride south in the spring.

Lexa and Clarke walked together across the camp after leaving Bellamy where he stood, heading in Raven’s direction as she worked on what she hoped wasn’t an explosive.

“You managed to get the radios working?” Clarke asked, causing Raven to look up at her. She put down the metal cylinder in her hand she was working on and picked up the hand-held radio next to her foot.

“Of course I did. If I can get a rickety-old escape pod to the ground in one piece, I can get a radio working, Clarke.” Raven pursed her lips and shook her head at Clarke’s lack of faith. “Channel two is to Marcus and Indra, channel four is Camp Jaha.”

“Thanks, Rae.”

“Don’t thank me yet.” Raven shook her head while handing her the radio. “Your mom is waiting to hear from you and she said she doesn’t care if you are in the middle of a firefight, she says you have to call her before you talk to Marcus.”

“You talked to her already?” Clarke wore a look of nervousness on her face which caused Lexa and Raven share a grin.

“I had to test the radio, Clarke.”

“I can talk to my mother after. We need to talk to Marcus and Indra first.” Clarke stated as she looked at Lexa for a confirming nod.

She lifted the radio and took in a deep breath while clicking the dial on top to the second channel, then pressed the button on the side hearing a momentary hiss from the speaker then silence.

“Hello, Marcus? Indra? Can you hear me?”

“Clarke?” came the reply a few moments later. It was Marcus and for a moment Clarke let herself imagine Marcus’ surprise when he heard her voice come over the radio. “Clarke, you are with Raven? How did you…”

“We don’t have a lot of time and we need to keep the radio charged. Lexa and I want to go over the plan and we can go over what I’ve been up to when this is all said and done.”
Clarke stole a look in Raven’s direction and she had the look of someone who wanted to call ‘bullshit’ on her. Thankfully she remained quiet.

“Indra is here.”

“Hello Commander.”

Clarke handed the radio to Lexa and told her to press the button on the side and hold it down while she spoke.

“Hello Indra.” Lexa said, holding the radio in an effort to copy the way Clarke held the radio. “Hello Marcus Kane.”

Both Clarke and Raven shared a grin while listening to the formality of the Commander over the radio. With no reply coming back over the radio, she held it out to Raven apologetically. “It appears your radio is not working. I hope I did not break it.”

The moment Raven took the radio from her, she held it up and pointed to the side of the radio. “You have to release the button so people can speak back to you. Try again.”

Lexa reached forward and took the radio once more and pressed the button as she lifted it once more to her mouth. “This is Heda. I would like to discuss your responsibilities for what is to come.”

“What are your orders, Commander?” replied Indra’s voice.

They spent the next hour going over the logistics of their plan. Koma, Raven, Levai and Bellamy would be remaining behind. They would split into smaller groups and taking a number of Raven's explosives with them and setting them to detonate at varying times. They would set up a perimeter on the western side of Toron to create their diversion. Marcus had asked why they didn't come from the south and Lexa explained that due to the lake south of the city, the west was their one viable option to the heavily fortified city they could choose.

Clarke made certain that Marcus and Indra were clear on the point that if at any time they were threatened of being overrun that they order a full retreat in order to save as many lives as possible. It was the only issue that Indra had with the plan and though she promised Lexa that they would overcome any force they cam in contact with, Lexa commanded Indra to follow her order to the letter and that anything less would be met with a severe punishment when this issue was settled. Indra conceded to her order, though her tone was less than enthusiastic.

Lexa handed her radio back to Raven who changed the channel to four and then passed it over to Clarke with an expectant look. Clarke let out a slight groan and took it from her friend.

“You should talk to her. You never know when you'll have another chance.”

Clarke knew she was right but she didn’t lift her hand holding the radio. She didn’t know what she would say to her mother. How could she apologize and tell her mother in the same breath that she might not ever see her again? She stared at the radio for a second then switched it off which drew an angry sound from Raven.

“At least you have the chance to say goodbye.” Raven said as she struggled to stand from where she sat and limped across to where Bellamy, Echo and Raven were sitting.

Clarke understood that it seemed selfish to Raven. That she was putting herself first but Clarke truly didn’t know what she would say to her mother and just saying sorry wasn’t going to cut it. Not after running away like she did and knowing what it likely put her through. She clipped the radio to her
belt and decided now was a good enough time to get something to eat.

She realized Lexa had been standing there next to her the entire time she contemplated what she could say to her mother and it startled her slightly which caused Lexa to reach out and offer her a supporting hand.

“They are not wrong, Clarke. Family is the most important thing we will ever have. They deserve to know how much you love them because one never knows the last time you get the opportunity to say it.”

Clarke nodded and gave the brunette a pained look as she leaned forward into her with the result being that her head rested on Lexa’s chest. Lexa glanced around in shock momentarily but once she realized that everyone was occupied with their own conversations or activities, and Ontari appeared to have fallen asleep against her tree, she lifted her hands and pulled Clarke into a hug.

“I know.” Was Clarke’s muffled reply due to her face being buried in Lexa’s shirt.

Lexa had to suppress a smile from appearing on her face, managing to fight it down to a small grin with the thought that Clarke might just trust her if given enough time.

“Can I give Ontari some food?” Clarke asked. The question caused Lexa to pull back from her slightly.

“I will have Koma give her some food when he returns. I do not trust her and I worry you trust her too much. She could use that against you.”

Clarke wanted to argue but instead nodded and glanced over in Ontari’s direction. Her head was down but she could see her chest rise and fall with breath which told her she was likely alright.

“You should eat as well.” Lexa suggested. “Then you should speak to your mother.”

“Oh no you don’t.” Clarke whined, falling forward into Lexa once more. Her action caused Lexa to smile once again and consider the possibility that since her reunification with Clarke that she’d smiled more in the last day than in the last three years.

“You should eat and rest before we leave. I must still speak to Levai and I fear that talk as much as you do the one you will have with your mother.”

“You are not letting him join us, are you?”

Lexus shook her head. “He has too much to lose in coming with us and there is a problem I need him to take care of for me if we fail in our efforts.”

~*~*~

Clarke had been sitting around the small fire and enjoying some dinner with Raven, Echo, Bellamy and Octavia when Levai came storming back in to camp. He walked straight across and through the camp putting an end to their conversation as they all watched with concern regarding the usually calm man being so angry. He picked up his bow and threw his quiver over his shoulder in frustration, spilling a number of arrows to the ground. Lexa slowly walked into camp watching Levai with concern, her eyes on Clarke.

Understanding what Lexa was telling her, Clarke got up and took the steps over to Levai who was at this point picking up stray arrows on the ground and stabbing them back into the quiver. She knelt down and helped gather them up in silence before asking, “Is everything alright?”
He hummed out a sigh and then looked up at Clarke. “I’m sorry, Clarke. I can’t talk about this.”

“If Lexa wants you to stay behind, I’m sure it’s for a good reason.” Clarke suggested as she stood up now that all the arrows had been collected.

“I should be there to make sure you are both safe. She needs me.”

“Why does she want you to stay?”

Levai glanced over at Ontari who was watching everything unfold before her. He gritted his teeth and pulled Clarke farther away and kept his voice low, even if his frustration urged him to do otherwise.

“I have a family. A wife, a son and a daughter.”

Clarke’s eyes opened wide with shock. “But nobody was at your cabin. I didn’t see anyone else.”

“They don’t live in Trikru territory. My wife wouldn’t be allowed.”

“She’s not Trikru? That would mean…”

“She is Azgeda.” Levai acknowledged her guess with a nod.

“Then I agree with Lexa. You should return to your family if this doesn’t go as planned. You need to keep them safe.”

“I believe by going with you and seeing it through with what we have planned is the best way to go about that.” Levai argued.

“And if we all get caught by Nia? You know what she would do to us all if that happens. Your children deserve to grow up with a father.”

“They also deserve an opportunity to live in a world of peace. I can help bring them that.”

“You need to trust that your sister and I can bring that. She said she had a problem for you to take care of as well, and I imagine you are the only person she trusts enough to do that.”

Levai glanced back at Lexa who was currently gathering supplies and preparing for their trip to the tunnels that would lead them in to Toron. She had asked him to make sure Ontari would be taken care of should she fail in the attempt to kill Nia. If he didn’t hear the the succession horn in Toron in a weeks time, he would kill her and return to his family before Nia’s warriors began to search the woods for wounded or lingering enemies.

“Yes. She did.”

“Then trust Lexa and trust me. We will get in to Toron and we will make sure the people of Azgeda have a future brighter than war. That your children will grow up knowing peace with all the clans.”

Levai let our a frustrated sigh. He still believed that he should be accompanying the group to Toron but he also knew that Lexa was offering him Ontari. It wasn’t just Lexa’s life she had an impact on and Levai’s dislike for the woman was as great as Lexa’s. Maybe even more in that Lexa wasn’t required to forsake her family name in fear that he and his family would end up in one of Nia’s cells as Costia had so long ago.

“I will do as she asks, but I do not have to be happy about it.”
Clarke smiled and stepped forward to embrace her friend in a hug. “You are making the right decision. I will keep your sister safe.”

“She said the same thing to me about you.” Levai said, as he returned the hug.

“We must go, Clarke.” Called Lexa from her beside her horse. She nodded at Levai and he returned one of his own. They’d said their goodbyes before Levai had walked back through camp.

“Stay safe, Clarke kom Skaikru.”

“I will do my best. May we meet again, Levai kom Trikru.” Clarke said, then turned to walk away.

Octavia, Echo and Lincoln were all ready to leave as well. It was simple matter for them as they had very little to take with them aside from a few pouches of meat they’d prepared for the journey. The last two not ready to leave were Echo and Bellamy. Echo stood beside her horse in Bellamy’s arms, one forehead against the other while they stole small kisses between whispered promises.

After a short while and a few cleared throats, Bellamy and Echo both grinned while he helped Echo up on to her horse. She didn’t really need any assistance but stole one last kiss as a thank you for the help and in that time, Clarke had arrived and climbed atop her own horse.

“Kane will radio you once we are all in position.” Raven reminded the group about to depart. “If you don’t hear the radio you won’t be able to miss my entrance. I’m pretty sure the ground will shake back in Polis with how loud these babies are going to be.” she added, raising one of the explosives in her hand.

“Just be sure they go off when they are supposed to, Reyes.” Clarke scolded the mechanic.

They all turned their horses and began to follow Echo to their destination and as they left, Clarke could hear Raven mutter shout something about it only happening once and that it wasn’t her fault because the gunpowder was unstable.

~*~*~

Levai was frustrated at his sister’s decision that he remain behind to wait for the Trikru and Skaikru warriors. The reasoning that he has a family to protect if they should fail. That and provide assurance that Ontari meets the justice she is owed should the spirit of the Commander decide to seek a new home.

He sat in front of the small fire he was maintaining while Bellamy and Koma scouted in the forest around them. His eyes were fixed on Ontari who remained tied to the tree just far enough from the fire to not enjoy any of it’s warmth. She had a smirk on her face and no matter how hard he tried to ignore it, it only fueled his frustration about having to let his sister go without him.

“What do you have to be happy about? Your death will come soon after your Queen is defeated.”

“She isn’t dead yet and if you believe Nia is someone who will be easily defeated, you are a fool along with your Heda. She will not be able to simply walk into Toron and plunge her sword into Nia’s chest and if she thinks she can, she will be just another enemy Nia will put in the ground. She will be prepared for her.”

Levai looked up from the fire that he was throwing small pieces of wood into, curiously regarding Ontari for a moment and found himself wondering what it was she could know, if anything, about Nia’s plans.
“Lexa will be ready for anything Nia will have prepared. She also has Wanheda.”

Ontari let out a sharp laugh and shook her head. “She has to get into Toron to that to happen. Nia has two thousand troops surrounding Toron. She won’t make it ten meters into the city.”

“Heda has a way into Toron, you shouldn’t concern yourself with that. What you should do with the little time you have left in this life is decide whether or not you want to do any good with it. Don’t you think you owe it to those whose lives you’ve destroyed?”

“Everything I have done has been in service to my Queen.” Ontari shrugged with indifference.

“So you are fine with torture and murder because your Queen told you to do it?” Levai spat out the words.

“Just as your Heda tortured and killed Nia’s warriors in her cells beneath her tower. If you were any sort of warrior, you would understand you duty. Honour. You are naive if you believe Nia and Lexa are any different.”

Ontari had to fight back a sickening feeling in her stomach but she saw Levai’s face twist in anger when she equated the two leaders as being similar. She knew Lexa was nothing like Nia but what she was doing was working. She just had to push a little more.

“Was honour was there in torturing an innocent girl? Did you find honour in removing her head after knowing she knew nothing and then sending her head to Lexa to try and start a war?” Levai’s tone began to rise along with the red in his face.

“You Trikru are all hypocrites. You want peace under Lexa’s rule, as long as it’s by her rules. You invade lands and to murder it’s Queen? When you fail, I’ll be sure to ride through Azgeda lands and remove those who Nia has allowed to reside within it’s border.”

Levai’s demeanor changed instantly and he launched himself across the camp to stand before Ontari who stared up at him with defiance, hiding the real feeling of worry that had crept into her. She knew this was the only chance she was going to have.

Levai growled at her challenge, reaching down to grab Ontari’s chin to force their eyes to connect. She struggled against his rough hand but being tied to the tree she was unable to prevent the rough treatment she knew was coming. She glared back at the man standing over her and she swore she had seen the same anger in a similar pair of green eyes recently.

“The only reason I haven’t killed you is because Lexa wants to see you feel the pain of the cuts you deserve. If I were her, you’d suffer the same fate as you put upon Costia.”

Ontari didn’t look away from Levai and attempted to harden her amber eyes to withstand the fire that flew forth from Levai’s. His grip on her chin tightened which made her consider the possibility that she might just die here if she pushed too hard, but she had to keep pushing. He had to come closer so she swallowed and said the words she knew would cross that line.

“It seems the death of the Commander’s whore had an impact on you as well. Was she family? Your sister or something?”

Levai released his grip from her chin and with a swift swing of his hand his fist met Ontari’s face, splitting her lip open and causing her to head to snap back into the rough bark of the tree she was tied to. Nightblood or not, her head responded to the blow by blinding her eyes with a dizzying series of stars.
“Tell me, did I take someone who once warmed you bed? Shouldn’t you be angry at your beloved Heda for taking her from you first?” Ontari said, reapplying the smug look on her face while spitting out a mouthful of black blood and glancing back up at Levai.

She was expecting this blow and as his hand came down she twisted her position which caused his hand to strike the trunk of the tree behind her head. It was as solid a blow as his first which led to the sound of a crack in his hand which resulted in his leaning forward to regain his balance. As he did, Ontari launched herself upward in order to drive the top of her head into Levai’s own. She was willing to risk the momentary disorientation that she knew would result from it and although it stung, Levai was completely unprepared. He fell backward onto the ground a little more than foot away without any further movement.

She let out a slight sigh of relief while her eyes scanned the around the vicinity of camp. and it appeared that Levai was the only one who was charged with making sure she was guarded. She considered the possibility that one of the Skaikru might return from their patrol and if they had their weapons there was no way she would be able to free herself. Ontari’s skillful hands began their work on the bindings around her wrists and the moment one of the ropes began to slack, she let out a second sigh as she felt her hands free from the rough rope.

Ontari rose to her feet and proceeded to rub the irritated skin on both her wrists, then leaned over Levai to cover his mouth with her hand. Her cold hand felt the puff of warm air and a small smile appeared on her lips knowing knowing he would be fine. She didn’t know who Levai was to the Commander but she knew they had to be close. Shaking her head from those thoughts she set her focus on escaping.

With no sign of any resistance she cautiously walked her way across to the edge of camp and to where they had secured the horses to trees. Her feet took her straight to her horse where she lifted her hand to his nose then proceeded to rub his strong neck. Her actions were met with an intake of breath and a slow, sigh-like sound that caused Ontari to smile. It appeared they had taken good care of him.

“You aren’t going to like what I’m asking you to do, but I’m going to need you to ride hard again.” She whispered, giving him a couple more reassuring rubs with her hands.

A second later, she was atop her horse and urging it to ride north toward her destination and away from the camp. She had ridden her horse at a slow pace for some time after escaping camp in order to keep her noise at a minimum and it wasn’t until she saw the familiar trail she was looking for that she broke into a full gallop.

Thinking she was safe, her heart jumped at the sound of a shout from the Skaikru man whose name she had heard was Bellamy. A second later, a gunshot rang out and the bullet struck the tree she was riding and sent splinters of wood in a number of directions. Ontari leaned forward onto her horse and promised him that if he went faster, he’d never have to ride this hard again. If she knew where Clarke and Lexa were going, she had to get there before it was too late.

Chapter End Notes

Something is happening at Camp Jaha? ;) I wonder what that could be.

Next update will be on Monday September 09! I wanted it to be Sunday but family obligations got away from me and swallowed my entire day (birthday parties for children aged 1 to 5 is absolute chaos).
See you Monday!
Clarke ignored the pain as best she could but the stabbing pain in her back was only getting worse. For much of their third day, any attempt to trick her mind with other thoughts fell to the wayside. She was frustrated with herself and often reminded herself that she wouldn’t be a reason they would slow down. At first she had found a way to occupy her mind with things like the state of her people back at Camp Jaha or with what was to come but there were no answers to be had. Bellamy was not forthcoming with details and she neglected the opportunity to radio her mother which left her with nothing but even more questions.

She wondered about Monty and why he hadn’t come north instead of Raven. She was still clearly struggling and still in distress with her leg and she believed it was likely due to Raven stating that nobody could set up the radio as good as she could. As for Echo, learning that she was pregnant and that the baby was Bellamy’s was a shock but a good one because of the promise that it could bring in uniting the clans.

Octavia still remained rather quiet and kept herself a distance. Aside from her having short conversations with Lincoln or words with Echo, Octavia hadn’t said a word to her. She chalked that up to her still being angry about Tondc and perhaps a little to do with her having abandoned her people after Mount Weather and she hoped that once this was all over, if they survive that they could try to work through their differences.

Then there was Lexa’s declaration that she came north to save her from Nia.

“...prevent the possibility of Nia doing anything to you.”

What hit her was the way Lexa said the words and the way she stared into her soul. It was as if it
there was no other option available and that even if there was, she would have chosen to come north and face the threat of Nia alone. She was willing to risk everything. Clarke decided the least she could do was stay on top of her horse.

Unfortunately, Clarke’s head fell forward with her shoulders and she pulled her horse to a stop. She took in a deep breath of resignation and before she had a chance to give in to her fatigue, Lexa’s voice carried through the cold night air.

“We will stop here to rest.”

Lexa had been watching Clarke endure what could only be described as a form of self torture for the better part of the day rather than stop for rests. Right now, the only concern on Lexa’s mind as she hopped down from her horse was to make sure Clarke didn’t fall over sideways like she appeared moments away from doing and help her down to the ground comfortably.

“We are stopping?” Clarke asked.

“We have to stop, Clarke. We could all use the rest.” When Lexa reached up to help Clarke, the resulting attempt to climb down from the horse action caused her to wince. It wound up taking Lincoln’s help along with Lexa’s steady hands to guide Clarke down. Lincoln removed the furs from both Lexa’s and Clarke’s horses and placed them on the ground next to Lexa. They then helped Clarke into a more comfortable position on top of one of the furs.

“Liar.” Clarke tried to let out a laugh but her body constricted tightly with the nerves in her back turning to fire. “It’s because you think I can’t ride any more.”

“Mochof, Lincoln.” Lexa said, but when Lincoln didn’t move from where he stood, Lexa glanced up at him with a question in her eyes.

“Ai na ai raun, Heda.” (I will keep watch, Heda.)

“Nou. Yu na riden.” (No. You will sleep.)

“Sha, Heda.”

After a nod from Lexa, he turned and headed over to where Octavia and Echo were setting up for the night. They didn’t know how long of a rest they would have so they wanted to make the most of the opportunity Lexa had provided. They may not have been in as dire straits as Clarke, but they all showed signs of wear on their bodies.

“It is precisely why we have stopped. You have pushed your body very hard, Clarke. You deserve the rest.” Lexa reached her hand forward and brushed some of the blonde hair that had hidden some of Clarke’s cheek from her view.

“Fine, but only if the others need rest as well.” Clarke tried to argue but she knew there was no way she was going to be able to ride any farther.

“There are no objections.” Lexa assured her. “In fact, they are already under their furs. Let me help you so you can rest.”

Lexa prepared a place for Clarke to sleep and after a significant amount of groans and sharp intakes of breath due to her aching body, she was finally in a comfortable enough position that she no longer protested. That was when Lexa pulled the remaining furs over Clarke. She once again reached forward and brushed a lock of blonde that threatened to fall over Clarke’s face only as she did, her fingertip brushed lightly over Clarke’s cheek which led to a dusting of light rose appear moments
Blue eyes stared up at her and Lexa smiled at her, causing her to wonder ‘How does she do that?’ in regard to how much care she offer though a single look. It was the same look she’d seen before but only once from Lexa and it caused her breath to catch.

Lexa’s eyes widened with worry that she overstepped with her touch and everything in Lexa screamed for her to get up and create distance before she upsets Clarke. She shifted in order to try and stand but as she started her ascent, she watched Clarke shift uncomfortably and wince in pain. Lexa froze in a game of tug-of-war between her heart and mind until Clarke’s arm extended forth from under her furs. Her green eyes watched in slow motion Clarke’s fingers encircle her wrist and held her in place.

“Can you keep watch from here?”

“I can.”

“Will you?”

Lexa nodded, giving Clarke another smile and and lowering herself back on to the ground. When she found a comfortable position to sit, she could feel that Clarke still hadn’t removed her hand from her wrist. In fact, it felt as thought Clarke tightened her hold.

Clarke smiled and closed her eyes. The pull of exhaustion coupled with the way laying on the ground relieved some of the pain had begun to coax her to sleep which gave Lexa the opportunity to watch the Clarke succumb to her bodies desire for sleep. Up to that point, Clarke held a firm grip on Lexa’s wrist up and when she no longer felt the pressure of Clarke’s grip, she tucked it back under the fur and tucked Clarke in to best preserve her body heat and ensure as much of Clarke was protected from the cold as possible.

Sitting by Clarke’s side through the night, she scanned the surrounding woods for any sign of Nia’s warriors. She had expected to have come across some of Nia’s warriors by now but there hasn’t been a single sign of anyone. Not villagers, not scouts, not anyone making the trip to or from the capitol. Nothing about this felt right to Lexa, and it led to a frustration that there was something at play she hadn’t figured out.

She then began to wonder what Ontari’s role in all of this is. If her people were helping her get through the tunnels, why would Ontari have not mentioned it or even petitioned to join them? Why was she willing to remain behind, tired to a tree and await her execution?

Lexa let out a small huff in frustration. There were too many things she was not in control of. Too many things about this she didn’t feel comfortable with. She unconsciously shifted her body and before she knew it, a familiar but quiet voice called her name from underneath her protective layers of furs.

“Lexa?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

“You are welcome, Clarke.”

~*~*~
The next morning arrived and Lexa was true to her word. She stayed by Clarke’s side and kept
watch over the group. It didn’t surprise her there was no sounds of life but mice scurrying under
fallen leaves in search for food before they hide away for the winter or the gentle breathing of those
she watched over. As much as she wished she could allow them to sleep, they had a schedule to
keep and they could not afford to fall behind.

“Clarke.”

After not hearing a sound nor seeing movement from under the furs, Lexa tried again.

“Clarke.”

“Sleep.” came her tired reply from Clarke’s cocoon which led to a smile ghosting over Lexa’s lips.

“You must wake up. We have to be moving soon.”

A quiet groan of defeat reverberated from under her furs which Clarke had managed to curl up
underneath in order to hide from the freezing night air, furs Lexa may have constantly had to re-tuck
in order to keep the cold from disrupting Clarke’s rest.

“I’ll wait here. Come get me when this is all over.”

Lexa fought back a laugh and shook her head. “If you get out from under the furs, you can sit by the
fire.”

“Fire?” Clarke’s hear appeared from beneath her furs, her eyes adjusting to the early morning light.
There was a slight overcast so it wasn’t too much of a shock for her senses, allowing her eyes to
adjust quickly. She turned her head side to side in order to scan their surroundings and saw no fire to
speak of. “I can’t see a fire, Lexa.”

“That is because it burned down and there are only coals remaining. We are still in enemy territory,
Clarke.”

“That was mean.” Clarke squinted at Lexa through one eye as she rubbed the other with her hand. “I
thought you said no fires.”

“I changed my mind.”

Clarke’s attention turned from their immediate environment to Lexa with a raised eyebrow. “You
changed you mind?

“A Heda’s prerogative.” Lexa said as if there was no further need for an explanation.

“A Heda’s prerogative? Who are you and what have you done with Lexa?” Clarke teased.

“I had to change my mind in order to make you this.” Lexa explained, holding up a metal cup that
had a column of steam rising from whatever was inside. Clarke perked up immediately when it
 teased Clarke’s senses with a peculiar aroma. Clarke extended her hand for the mug and Lexa pulled
it away just out of reach and caused Clarke to fix her with a glare that led to Lexa to extend the mug
to her once more so she could take it.

Clarke lifted the cup to her nose and took a deep sniff of the drink then took a sip of it. “You made
me tea?”

“Yes. There is medicine in it that will help ease the pain you are feeling.” Lexa fixed her with a
serious look for a moment and Clarke could feel the shift from their relaxed banter a moment ago. “You should have said something about your back earlier. Promise me you will mention if it continues to bother you.”

“I know. I will.” Clarke promised, then took a sip of her warm beverage. Her eyes lit up at the flavour and she curiously peered at the contents within the cup.

“It is mint.”

“It is good.” Clarke smiled then took another sip. She tilted her head back while closing her eyes to embrace the warmth of the drink as it worked it’s way into her body.

The drink in itself felt like a blanket and Clarke let out a slight moan which caused Lex to blush and look in the direction of their traveling companions to see if they were beginning to stir. She let out a slight sigh in relief that they all appeared to be asleep.

“You didn’t get any sleep?”

When Lexa turned back to look back at Clarke, she saw two bright blue eyes studying her. She couldn’t help but feel as though they’d switched roles and Clarke was the one now trying to take care of her. It didn’t escape Clarke’s attention that she had dark circles under her eyes and

“You need rest as well. You might have a natural ability to heal faster thanks to your nightblood, but everyone needs sleep. How long have you been keeping this up?”

“Not long.” Lexa decided to keep the thought to herself that win or lose, much needed rest will find her either way. She knew a frown from Clarke was unavoidable with any answer she would give if she told the truth.

“That was why Lincoln wanted to stand guard overnight. You haven’t been getting any sleep.”

“I’ve managed more on less, Clarke.”

“You sleep the next time we stop, Lexa.”

“Very well.”

Clarke spied her while taking another sip of her tea and shook her head. “That doesn’t mean we will be riding the rest of the way without stopping. Tonight, you sleep.”

“Clarke…”

“Lexa, No. This isn’t a discussion. None of us has any idea of what is waiting for us in Toron and I’ll be damned if anything is going to happen to you. To any of us because we are tired.”

Lexa smiled and reached out her hand and rested her fingertips on Clarke’s forearm and nodded while offering her a smile on her face so warm that it rivaled the steaming drink in her hand. “I will.”

“You will?”

“Yes.”

“Great. Now that you two have that decided, would you mind keeping it down up so we can remain off the radar of Nia’s warriors?” Octavia asked, drawing both Clarke and Lexa’s attention over to where Octavia was laying partially upright on the ground and resting on her elbows while glaring at the pair.
Lexa and Clarke shared a knowing grin when they looked back at each other. Lexa took the break in their conversation to break their camp and now that Octavia was awake, Lincoln and Echo followed shortly after and took a minute to warm themselves by what remained of the coals in the small fire and take the opportunity to heat themselves a cup of tea while the chewed on their breakfast of dried meat. It might not have been much, but it was more than they expected.

The fire and the tea was a boon to morale and while they rode unlike the last few days. They now traveled with whispered conversations and causal smiles. Of course none of the words spoken were on the topic of what was to come, but on what would happen after and what they looked forward to most. It was agreed that the overwhelming consensus was a hot bath and a months worth of sleep was one of the top priorities when they returned home. At least, that was what they told themselves. Each of them kept what they truly desired locked away in their hearts, refusing to speak of it in fear that their dream might not come to pass.

As they stopped to rest the following evening, Clarke had to remind Lexa that she promised she would sleep. Lexa suggested that didn’t use the word promise but that she just wished to walk the perimeter of the area now that she’d put the furs on the ground in preparation for the rest. Clarke steadfastly refused the notion of Lexa doing anything but “getting her ass under the furs to rest”.

Clarke was about to argue her point further but Lexa stepped forward and covered her mouth which led to Clarke looking shocked at Lexa making the space between them disappear.

“Very well. We can sleep.”

Clarke mumbled something through Lexa’s hand which still remained over her mouth.

“Sorry.” Lexa stammered after pulling it away and allowing Clarke proper use of her speech.

“Good.” Was all Clarke could think to say. She’d not expected Lexa to give in so quickly.

Clarke might have felt considerably better after having more of Lexa’s medicinal tea but her body was still sore and Lexa had to help her lay down on the ground. She wished she had more of the medicine because there would only be enough for two, maybe three more cups before she exhausted what she had. That would mean she would have to losses the strength more than she had already been doing should Lincoln or Octavia require it’s assistance. She knew Echo would refuse any such medicine due to her being with child.

“Are you coming?” Clarke asked, looking up at Lexa.

“Yes.” Lexa answered, removing her swords from her back, along with the small knives that she had in various places on her person. All but a few she knew would not come loose in the night and injure Clarke as they slept.

It took a minute but once they were both under the fur blankets they remained apart from each other and the space in between them filled with cold air. The cold wasn’t difficult for Lexa to overcome thanks to her genetic gift, but that didn’t prevent her mind from thinking about Clarke being little more than a foot away.

She tried everything she could to relax her anxiety, focusing on distant sounds of birds hopping from branch to branch in the trees around them. She listened to the win as rolled through those same trees but she had no luck. Her eyes were wide open and sleep wasn’t anywhere within her grasp so she decided to focus on the sound of Clarke’s breathing. She hoped the rhythm would allow her to relax but as she concentrated on Clarke, it only exacerbated the situation by making her heart increase it’s dance within her chest.
“You are moving.” Clarke whispered.

“I apologize. I was just trying to get more comfortable.” Lexa offered her a lie. She wasn’t even aware that she was shifting her body.

Clarke grunted a sound Lexa believed was an agreement that the ground was not their most desired choice of location for a rest, especially when the temperature was nearing the point of freezing.

“So. Cold.” Clarke added, just before her entire body shook with a shiver that was big enough to result in Lexa rolling over to observe Clarke’s shivering body.

Clarke’s eyes were pinched closed and her body was curled up in a tight ball with the goal of donating as little of the heat her body provided to the world outside of their furs. Lexa observed her for a moment and nodded to herself after having made her decision.

“Turn around.”

“What?”

“I want you to face the other way.”

“Why?”

Lexa let out a huff in frustration and took action. She slid closer to Clarke and turned her so she faced away from Lexa then slid a little closer, eventually so she was the big spoon to Clarke’s little one. She then reached her arm over Clarke and pulled her in tight to her chest. It didn’t take long for her to feel Clarke’s reaction to her having been pulled flush to her Lexa’s as both their hearts raced to pump blood throughout their bodies. Lexa felt Clarke shift slightly and it led to Lexa’s eyes widening as the movement caused Clarke into grind into her.

Clarke’s initial reaction to the contact had been to panic. Her eyes blew wide and her chest tightened with Lexa positioned right against her. Lexa had flipped her over and she was about to object but anything she was going to say fell away the moment the ample warmth from Lexa’s body reached her own.

It might have been because of the contact alone but Clarke felt like she was burning up. Her body craved the contact and had to fight not to let loose a moan in order to save Lexa and herself the embarrassment. It felt like Lexa was on fire and it reminded her of the electric blankets they used on the Ark when a patient required their body temperature to be elevated quickly.

“Just sleep, Clarke.” Lexa whispered, pulling Clarke tighter against her body.

Clarke remained silent and nodded her head. ‘Yeah. That’s easy for you to say.’

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“We’re out of range of the radio.” Octavia informed Lexa, waving the handset in the air.

They’d been riding and were no more than an hour from where they were supposed to meet their escort, Gerald. He was going to meet them at their agreed upon location that Echo would lead them to and from there he would bring them to and through the tunnel.

They rode for another thirty minutes, Echo in the lead, Lincoln and Octavia in the middle, and Clarke alongside Lexa at the rear. Clarke was listening to and watching the world around her as she
believed the others were doing when to her surprise, Lexa let out a short, sharp whistle of a bird call which led to her turning her head in her direction.

“Keep looking around.” Lexa said calmly. She didn’t even need to see that Clarke had turned to look her way. A moment later, a short chirp of reply came from the front riders, though she couldn’t tell if it was Lincoln or Octavia that was responsible for the sound.

“Lincoln sees something?”

“We are being watched.”

“I can’t see anyone.” Clarke said, her voice as low as she believed she could whisper without being heard by anyone other than Lexa. “Are you sure?”

“For the last five minutes. They are not Nia’s warriors.”

“How can you tell?”

“We’re not dead.”

Clarke was slightly shocked at the bluntness of Lexa’s answer but her chest loosened at the understanding that whoever was watching them didn’t want them dead. At least, not yet. For the next fifteen minutes, Clarke scanned the forest around them trying to see what Lincoln and Lexa could see but to her untrained eye, it just looked as normal as it should.

“Welcome Commander! I’m happy to see you again.” Called out the voice of their escort as he stepped out from behind a tree.

“Gerald kom Kilnronakru.” Lexa acknowledged. “It is good to see you as well.”

As he continued to approach and walked past Echo, he could better see the rider on Lexa’s right and at first he displayed some confusion but then his eyes lit up. “And Wanheda? This is a true honour.”

he bowed somewhat awkwardly in Clarke’s direction and then winked at her drawing a noticeable frown from Lexa. “If you are here with the Commander, that means Ontari must be…”

“Dead.” Lexa said before Clarke could speak up. “By my hand.”

“I see. A shame because there was a lot of potential in that girl.” Gerald finished with a shrug. “I suggest you take some time to rest. Gather your strength and have a good meal before you go off and serve justice to the Azplana?”

“No. Thank you for the offer but we would prefer to go through the tunnels to our destination now.”

Gerald frowned and spun on his heel leaving his back to Lexa, talking as he walked. “A shame. We’d prepared a small feast in your honour and assumed you would be hungry. After all, you’ve probably been living on dried meat for the last week. I thought you might enjoy something a little more substantial.”

“We appreciate the hospitality, but must decline your invitation. Perhaps you will join us in Toron with King Roan and we can celebrate your people’s contribution to a lasting peace throughout all the clans.”

“Prince Roan? Rumour has it he’s going to be put to death in the execution square in three days.”

Clarke had been watching the exchange between Lexa and the newcomer and their conversation was
both diplomatic and polite. It was hard for her to get a good read on the man other than he appeared
shifty, leaving her with a feeling of unease. She certainly didn’t like the mention of Roan’s
impending death but she remained silent and observed the stranger. They would be in Toron before
the execution. They could still save him.

“I hope you won’t mind some company on the way to Toron. I spoke with my people and it was
decided you should have some support. We might not be able to go against Nia’s forces directly, but
we’d like to make sure you don’t face much resistance in Toron. Our future depends on what is to
come.”

“Any assistance you can offer is appreciated and welcome.”

“Unfortunately, you won’t be able to bring those with you.” Gerald pointed at their horses. “The
tunnel is unstable in a number of places because the roof has collapsed. We can get through one or
two at a time on foot at best. Through places we’ve cleared.”

“Very well.” Lexa said, climbing down from her horse and signaled for her compatriots to climb
down as well. After dismounting, she observed Clarke sliding off her horse with ease. She knew that
her back was still irritating her but she hid it well enough that it didn’t raise any concern in Gerald.

“We will keep them here if things don’t go as planned. If anyone manages to get away, they can
come here and try to return to your people in the south.” Gerald then raised his hand with a signal
and a number of his comrades emerged from the forest. “Gather their horses and keep them fed and
watered. Stay at the edge of the ruins until you receive word otherwise.”

They weaved their way through small neighbourhoods and Clarke’s imagination began to envision a
world before the world was set afire. There were some houses that weren’t completely knocked
down but it was quite clear the elements over a century had made them unlivable. She pictured what
it might have been like to live on one of these houses with Jake and Abby, to go to school in a red-
brick building or go to a baseball game and let the roar of tens of thousands of people wash over her.

Upon second glance she knew those dreams could never be. The earth was under the process of
reclamation but that too gave Clarke hope. What humanity had done in the past had been forgiven
and the healing was well underway and it promised a chance for the future. A future that she hoped
the peace they were fighting for now would embrace.

The longer they walked toward their destination, the more the everything around them began to
change. Houses with young trees and plant overgrowth became less frequent and the yellow and
green grass now had to fight for space through cracks of asphalt and concrete. Many of the buildings
that toppled were either multi-story brick or cement buildings with little opportunity for anything
significant to take root.

“We’re here.” Gerald said while pointing to a rather unimpressive pile of rubble twenty feet to their
left.

“How do we get inside?” Clarke asked while they approached the mound of metal and rock.

“Carefully. Very carefully.” he answered. “Follow me and stay away from the sides as you climb
though.”

Everyone watched him walk toward a sliver of an entrance that he had to crouch down to access,
then shift sideways to avoid brushing up on the sides of the passage way as he explained. As Lexa
passed through the slim entrance, she noticed there was a number of sharpened ends of rebar that
would cause significant injury to anyone who moved too carelessly in or out of the tunnel.
‘A very smart idea’ she remarked to herself while looking back to make sure Clarke was able to make her way into the tunnels safely behind her.

Once they were all through, they found themselves on a platform that was illuminated by torches that hung on the wall around them. The area was sufficiently clear of debris which was a relief to them all but Gerald explained there would be more difficult sections to traverse on their way to their destination.

“Did you know these were here?” Clarke asks Lexa, who like her kept busy by trying to take in as much of what they were seeing as possible. There were a number of incredible things that hung from the wall and the first thing that caught Clarke’s eye was the sign that read ‘Mystic Point Station’.

“I had heard about them but I’d never seen them.” Lexa said, walking up to one of the tiled columns and brushing her fingertips over the dusty surface to reveal the white tile below. Lexa had always been fascinated by the past and although everything in this tunnel was covered in dust and dirt due to time, her mind had done a wonderful job of imagining what it must have been like when it was in use.

“This way.”

Gerald’s voice broke Lexa’s fantasy and when she looked to find the man, he was at the edge of the platform they were standing on, helping others down the two meter drop to the ground. She nodded her understanding and proceeded to jump down to the ground without help from others. She avoided landing on the metal rail below and turned to offer her assistance to others who might require it. After helping Echo to the ground and Clarke afterward, Echo placed her hand on Lexa’s arm and gave handed her a canteen of water. Lexa took a sip and nodded, handing it back to Echo and suggesting that Lincoln and Octavia could use a drink as well.

Clarke threw questioning look of her own toward Lexa but the only reply she got was a smile. She wasn’t going to argue the offering but it did little in the way of answering her concerns. She kept her eyes on Clarke and turned her head to the side slightly and asked, “How much longer before we reach our destination?”

“About an hour.” Gerald said in reply. Lexa asked with the assumption that Gerald would answer her whether she was looking his way or not.

To Clarke’s surprise, Lexa held her hand out for Clarke to take hold of it. “Ready to go?”

Clarke took the offered hand and stepped forward over the rocky debris scattered all over the floor of the tunnel. “Alright. Lead the way.”

“Stay close.” Lexa suggested, her hand squeezing Clarke’s hand lightly and caused Clarke to look up at Lexa from the uneven ground.“I don’t want you to reinjure your ankle because you trip over a rock in the darkness.”

Clarke nodded her understanding and in any other circumstance might have made a comment about how her ankle was probably the only part of her body that currently wasn’t sore. She took a step closer to Lexa and a moment later they joined the trio who were waiting for them to disembark and head down the tunnel.

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They passed platform after platform and the farther they traveled, Clarke felt something continually shift around her. It was a feeling the same feeling she had when they first entered the tunnels. There
was a tension among the men who escorted them with torches and she was certain that if she was aware of it, the others were aware of it even longer. At first, Clarke assumed it was her given title that caused the men with the torches to divert their eyes when she looked at them, but it felt like something else.

They stopped for breaks at each platform and at the first one they passed, Clarke wanted to take the opportunity to explore the platforms. Lincoln stood up and placed his hand on her shoulder, telling her silently with a shake of his head that she should remain with the group. Instead of exploring, they sat together on fallen debris or the metal rails that extended farther than their eyes could see with the fire light of the torches and shared their water and occasional glances. Lexa was the only one to smile and when she did, it was always for Clarke.

Standing from where they sat and stretching in preparation for the continued journey, the group’s movement ceased when Gerald let out a loud sigh. “I think we’ve gone far enough. Don’t you?” Gerald suggested, walking a few meters ahead of them.

“We’re at the entrance?” Lexa asked, looking around for a platform like the one they’d used to enter the tunnels. Currently, there was no platform in sight.

“I think you know I’m not taking you in to Toron. That is unless you are bound and unable to present much of a threat to the Azplana. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to throw your weapons on the ground and make everyone’s lives a little easier, would you?”

Lexa’s response was to draw one of her swords, followed by mutual responses from her friends. That and a look of disappointment on Lexa’s face as she shook her head at him.

“How long did you know?”

“She’s known since you insisted they rest and have some food to eat. I told you that she would see right through that.” The voice came from a woman who was emerging from the darkness down the tunnel. As she approached, Lexa and Echo could make out the red headed woman they’d met when they first spoke to Gerald. Once again she had her bow in her hand as she approached them only this time there were a number of Azgeda warriors accompanying her. “Echo, we keep meeting like this.”

“I’m certain that it will never happen again.” Lexa said, quickly doing a count of the new arrivals. When she added them to the fourteen that were present, the numbers were overwhelming. Even if they somehow managed to fight off the fourteen untrained warriors, there were twenty more of Nia’s warriors waiting for them.

Gerald smirked, but the archer to his left didn’t. Those who had torches had dropped them to the ground and drawn weapons of their own and were awaiting word to charge forward.

“Last chance, Commander.”

Gerald had just finished making his offer as Lexa threw her arm forward. A small knife took flight across the tunnel landed in Arie’s hand and the knife sunk into her eye and continued on until little more than the tip of the handle was visible. She fell limp to the ground which resulted in her arrow launching into the ceiling above their heads and into the darkness beyond.

Chaos erupted in the small tunnel and Clarke felt Lexa’s hand take a fistful of her shirt and yank her into a position she could protect her. Echo had already loosed two of her knives resulting in one of their enemies being dead and significantly injuring another.

Lincoln and Octavia moved in tandem, their movements almost a dance as their swords blocked and
slashed, parried and stabbed anyone who dared get within reach of their blades. One defended while the other attacked with precision. They’d done so well that the initial wave of Gerald’s men had become hesitant in charging forward.

“Take my dagger, use it with your knife.” Lexa shouted over the commotion. Clarke noticed the knife on Lexa’s belt and quickly pulled it free. “When they swing high, attack low.” Lexa commanded. As if on cue, the inexperienced fighter started running at Clarke and raised his sword in the hope one hard swing could end Clarke’s life.

“Clarke, now!” The clashing of metal rang out above her head as Lexa blocked the man’s hope of a killing blow.

For a moment, the tunnel fell quiet to Clarke’s ears and all she could hear was the the pained gasp escape the man in front of her after she lunged forward and buried her knife in his chest. As he fell backward, Clarke yanked the blade to reveal the wound and witnessed his life pour from it.

Clarke didn’t have time to admire her work because a number of fighters were moving in their direction and they included seasoned warriors from Nia’s forces. Lexa moved her blades with ruthless efficiency, slashing and stabbing as many opponents as she could. Their movements may not have been as graceful as Lincoln and Octavia’s but Clarke and Lexa were doing better than holding their own against the inexperienced fighters.

As Lexa and Clarke stared down the last two who were having reservations about how exactly attack the duo of Heda and Wanheda, their attention was diverted to where Lincoln and Octavia had been forced to the ground by some of Nia’s warriors. The Azgeda had tackled them rather than try to best them with their blades.

‘They are going to overwhelm us’ Lexa realized as five Azgeda warriors ran right past Lincoln and Octavia. Echo tried to bring her sword down on her foe but the warrior had gotten too close. He tackled her to the ground leaving four warriors charging Clarke and Lexa. To Lexa’s surprise, the yell Clarke released before launching herself forward was nothing short of awe-inspiring and it led Lexa to charge forward to meet their enemies head on.

After shocking the warrior with her battle cry, Clarke buried both knives she had into the man’s chest and drove him backward and down to the ground. Unfortunately, it put her in a position where the second warrior was able to lunge at her and bury his shoulder in her chest with a tackle that forced every bit of air from her lungs along while sending her backward on to the rocky floor and the warrior on top of her.

The weight of the man who pinned her to the ground was restricted her ability to get in enough air. No matter how hard she struggled, she couldn’t get free. That didn’t stop her from trying to claw at the man’s face right up until his fist came in contact with her cheekbone. After that, Clarke had no recollection of how long the fighting had gone on for.

She also wasn’t aware how many times she’d been subjected to punches and kicks while she was on the ground. All she could think of was how this was her fault. They all came looking for her; Lexa, her people, Bellamy, and Octavia. They’d come north because she needed them and now they were all in Nia’s hands. She was the reason they were all going to die. That Lexa was going to die.

Clarke started to come back into herself when to her surprise she felt someone tying her wrists tightly together. She couldn’t hear the sound of fighting and considered that might be because of how much her head was throbbing. She guessed it was a minute later that she was lifted roughly from the ground. Her legs could barely keep her upright and it required the assistance of whoever lifted her to keep her standing. In her new position the first face she saw was Gerald’s and with the grin he was
wearing, Clarke could feel her anger bubble in her chest and the only thing she wished for in that moment was that she still had her knife so she could cut off.

Her second glance was to the right where she could see Lexa was laying on the ground and that she wasn’t moving. Seeing Lexa there, Clarke felt a surge within her and after taking in a deep breath of air, she threw her head backward. Her movement was rewarded with a sickening crunch followed by a groan and the sound of a body falling limply to the ground behind her. That wasn’t what her focus was on. What she wanted was revenge. She wanted retribution.

Clarke charged forward in an attempt to knock the man off his feet by slamming into him. The closer she got to Gerald, the more his fear of her reaching him became and his eyes widened with concern. He had even begun to flinch away in fear but before glorious contact with the treacherous man, she was tackled by two Azgeda. The result of which was to land with a crushing stop on the rocky floor of the tunnel beneath two warriors. She tried to open her eyes but all she could see were stars after her head bounced off the floor. At first, she didn’t even register the blows that were thrown to her stomach until she heard Gerald’s voice call out.

“You know Nia wants them as undamaged as possible for what she has planned.” He reminded the warrior who struck the downed woman.

“A bruise or two more won’t make a difference.” the man standing over Clarke said.

“It will if she dies from a punctured lung.”

Clarke may have been half-in, half-out, but the sound of that voice caused her eyes to widen and confirmation came in the approaching figure of Ontari. She was walking from the direction of Toron and Clarke fell herself succumb to defeat when she saw the brunette in her Azgeda armour. ‘How is she here? She was with Raven, Levai and Koma. She couldn’t have. No!’

Clarke felt her stomach tighten which resulted in the contents of her stomach leaving her body. She heaved and with the knowledge she’d been the one who trusted Ontari and that if Ontari was here, her friends were likely dead.

“There’s a reward for anyone that brings you back to Toron.” Gerald said, focusing on Ontari.

“Yes, yes. That was all my mother’s doing.” Ontari waved her hand in dismissal. “Convince Wanheda she can trust me, lead her to her precious Heda, in order to have them both be led by you back to Toron where our Azplana will make an example of them. Once Lexa kom Trikru is dead, I will take the flame and my rightful place as Heda. Then we will allow the clans to return to their traditions under Azgeda rule.”

Ontari made her way to stand over Clarke. Clarke was beyond the point of caring that Ontari was standing over her. Clarke didn’t bother to look up at her, but it didn’t stop her from trying to collect as much spit in her mouth and launching it on to Ontari’s shoe. As act that drew a small huff of amusement from Ontari while she witnessed Clarke’s small act of defiance.

“Fine.” Ontari said, spinning around and taking in the weasel of a man. “If you want your reward for capturing me, I’ll see Nia pays you what you are owed when we return to Toron. Aside from the crown she’s offering you that is.”

Gerald’s face twisted into a grin and he nodded. “If I’m King, don’t you think you should address me as such?”

“Be careful. If I can kill a Commander, what makes you think a little thing like being called a King
makes you any safer than her?” Ontari laughed then placed her hand on her sword. “Now pick up
the smaller girl and carry her. Nia is expecting us.”

“Me, carry one of them?” Gerald seemed shocked by her suggestion.

“Yes. If you are being king, you may as well do something to earn it.”

As the remaining Azgeda warriors began transporting their prisoners toward Toron, Ontari watched
and then followed as Gerald struggled to carry Octavia’s limp body over his shoulder.

“We don’t have all day, Gerald. I’m sure you don’t want that one waking up on you. Before we get
to Toron.”

Chapter End Notes

Ontari, what are you up to now?!

Update is taking a lot longer than anticipated due to life. :( I work a half day tomorrow
so I'll have the time to button up chapter 52 and get it posted on the 20th(MST). Sorry
for the broken record of delays this week.
“How could you turn on people who need you? This will start a war that will last years and result in the death of thousands.” Clarke tried to turn and argue with Ontari but was met with a stiff shove from behind, resulting in Clarke stumbling forward until Ontari yanked the rope which yanked her back and kept her upright.

“The same reason you killed all of Lexa’s warriors and an entire civilization in Maunde, Wanheda - to save your people. It is time for Azgeda to realize it’s full potential and nothing will stand in our way. Not Skaikru, not the Kongeda, and certainly not your Commander.”

Ontari’s sentiments were met with anger from Clarke but grunts of pride from the warriors around her as they continued their journey toward Toron. She tried her luck to turn and face Ontari once more but was met with the same treatment as before which only added to her frustration.

On the other side of the tunnel the combination of jarring movements produced as a result of being carried on the uneven tunnel floor and the affirming grunt from the warrior who carried her had brought life back into Lexa’s body. She managed to mentally blink the cobwebs from her mind and set herself to the task of appraising her situation.

‘We aren’t in Toron’ was her first and most comforting realization. She was acutely aware of being carried in an uncomfortable position over a gona’s shoulder and the smell of stagnant air indicated they were still in the tunnels. She next set her sense of hearing on the conversations around her. It was unlikely the warriors would speak, but she could hear Gerald mumbling about how it was beneath him to have to carry one of the prisoners.

Next, she heard Clarke’s voice laden with a mix of anger and worry. It took serious effort to fight the
urge to look in the direction of where it was coming from. As far as she knew, nobody knew she was awake and she wanted to keep it that was as long as possible.

“What about the people of Haven? You are going to turn your back on them too?” Clarke spat the words at Ontari.

“Do you mean my people?” Gerald asked, inserting himself into the conversation.

“Nia will never let you rule over people in her lands.” Clarke argued. “Lexa was going to give you what you asked for and you would have had peace. Your people would have had a future without being under Nia’s heel.”

“Nia was the one who is giving me the right to rule my people. If we joined her Kongeda,” Gerald nodded in Lexa’s direction, Clarke’s eyes following to the brunette hung limply over the shoulder of the large man beneath her. “my people would have voted for a different leader and we’d be under the rules of not one clan, but twelve other clans. Nobody is going to tell me how to rule my people.”

“Except for Nia - the one person who hunted your people for sport and forced you all to hide underground in a place that is killing you.”

The warrior shifted Lexa’s position on his shoulder and the result was Lexa’s head rolling to the left and her breath caught in her chest after letting her eyes slit open. Clarke wasn’t slung over the shoulder of an Azgeda warrior, she was walking under her own power. She had another limp, but she seemed able to support her weight. She could see Clarke’s wrists were tied behind her back and there was an addition of a rope that extended behind her. Lexa’s eyes followed the rope and when she saw the person whose hand held the it, she stiffened in the Azgeda man’s grasp as Ontari’s eyes stared right back at her.

“Look Clarke, Heda is awake.”

Clarke’s head swiftly turned in Lexa’s direction and it was evident she’d been crying. The tears that fell had created streaks through the dirt on her face. She suddenly came to a stop and let out a short yelp in pain as Ontari yanked on the rope to indicate she wanted Clarke to stop.

“She’s awake.” Ontari indicated to the warrior carrying Lexa. “Put her on a leash and let her wear herself down by walking the rest of the way.”

The man grunted his acknowledgement and unceremoniously shrugged Lexa from his shoulder resulting in her falling two meters. Groaning due to the unforgiving hardness of the ground but felt relief in her being able to twist her body and avoid cracking her head on the ground. She had to think of something, some way to free herself and the others and to for that to happen she had to remain conscious.

She considered trying to fight against the warrior who was tying the length of rope around her wrist but reconsidered because after her quick estimation she would have seventeen warriors to fight her way through. She might have considered it given her current circumstances with both her swords in hand but not while her hands still bound tightly by a rope. She looked to left in Ontari and Clarke’s direction and knew Ontari had come to the same conclusion. If it came down to it, Ontari would likely use Clarke as a hostage.

“You are smarter than I thought, Leksa kom Trikru. I truly believed you were going to try to fight your way out of here.”

“That’s Heda, to you.” Lexa growled.
“Not for long.” Ontari grinned at Lexa and shoved Clarke forward to continue their journey. “We have an appointment to keep and we don’t want to keep Nia waiting.”

Lexa was about to reply to Ontari’s glib remarks but the solid hand of the warrior behind her shoved her forward and caused her to trip on her words and over some rubble while trying to regain her balance. She spun her head around to study the man’s face as they walked forward which resulted in him forcing down a hard swallow.

She may be his prisoner, but she was still Heda. It was widely rumoured that if Heda looked at someone as Lexa stared at him now, the spirit of the Commander will in this life or the next and seek revenge. It was a pledge from one Heda to the next to avenge those who had wronged the spirit of the Commander. Lexa could see the fear in the man’s eyes and the slight tremble in his lip so she slowly turned away from him. The warrior then turned to Ontari with a look of concern.

“It’s just a fairy tale, you oaf. Get moving.”

They walked in silence for another twenty minutes and Lexa often stole glances toward Clarke who shrugged her shoulders when Lexa silently questioned whether or not she knew what condition their comrades were in. Of course, every silent question was in full view to Ontari who was content to observe their interaction.

It wasn’t long before they approached a brightly lit platform where they met another twenty people who were carrying torches. LExa counted ten on the platform that likely led up into the heart of Toron and the other ten others on the same level they were on. Many of them had bows in their other hands. As they approached, those of Nia’s warriors that weren’t holding prisoners all drew their weapons and took a defensive position as they approached. To their surprise, Ontari continued to walk forward and past the line of warriors, shoving Clarke to make she she continued on with her.

“Relax. These are just a few of his people.” Ontari pointed at Gerald as if to explain to her warriors. “They are here to ensure none of the Prince’s allies could try and rescue Nia’s prisoners.”

“I didn’t know they were going to be here.” Gerald argued after letting Octavia fall to the floor after shrugging her off his shoulder. A movement that stunned the girl to consciousness and a very audible groan after colliding with the ground.

“They are here because your Queen decided it would be best to ensure we had more than enough people to prevent Heda and her allies from causing any problems. Of course, if you have any disagreements with the Azplana, I am sure we could take them up with her when we arrive in her throne room.”

“No. No. Nia doesn’t need me to tell her what she should do.”

“I didn’t think so. Get the prisoners on the platform.”

Gerald continued his muttering about having to take orders from the young nightblood but knew better than to ignore her command. A moment later, Clarke could feel Ontari’s insistent hand press against her back and pushing her toward the rail platform. The guards carrying Lincoln and Echo made their way over and and rolled the still unconscious bodies on to dirty concrete ledge where the people holding torches then dragged them toward the back of the platform.

Lexa decided she wouldn’t go as easily as Octavia, Lincoln and Echo. Not while she could still draw breath so she threw a kick behind her in an attempt to free herself. She thought if she could get to Clarke, if she could free her she might be able to get away. She couldn’t allow Clarke to wind up in Nia’s cells and had no doubt in her mind that if they were taken up to the streets of Toron, Nia’s
people would be there waiting.

The kick landed with a crunch as Lexa’s foot came down on the knee of one of the two warriors behind her. She tried to jump on to the platform to get to Clarke but like earlier a number Nia’s warriors rushed forward and grabbed Lexa’s arms and legs to prevent her from her attempted revolt. After a number of hard blows from one of the stout men, Lexa’s movement slowed as did her resistance. Her specialized training aside, she could not escape their grasp and she was unceremoniously thrown onto the platform and collected by a number of Nia’s conscripts.

“Are you going to protest or make it easy on yourself?” Ontari asked Clarke, lightly tugging the rope in her hand as a reason why she should consider against it.

Defeat washed over Clarke’s face after having witnessed Lexa being thrown onto the concrete slab then dragged away alongside Lincoln, Echo and Octavia at the back of the platform. Her only consolation was that Octavia was now conscious and standing next to Lexa who was unable to fight back against the people who held her against the back wall of the platform.

Clarke took a step forward and when she felt some slack in the rope, she spun and caused it to slip from Ontari’s hands. Before almost anyone could react to the event, Clarke charged at Ontari with rage on her face. Had her anger at Ontari been enough, she would have taken her down but Ontari’s skills allowed her to sidestep then bring Clarke down to the ground with a tackle and causing a thick plume of dust to be kicked up.

Clarke kicked until she had no more energy left and eventually Ontari loosened the grip of her forearm which had found it’s way under Clarke’s neck and was applying minimal pressure on her windpipe. “When you are on the platform, stay down.”

“Wha..”

“Are you quite done? Nia’s not going to appreciate this little outburst.” Ontari said loudly.

“Nia can go float herself and she can take you with her.” Clarke shouted while trying to fight free from Ontari’s grip once again and resulting in more dust being kicked up into the air.


Clarke didn’t believe Ontari but then she felt something metallic being placed into her hands. Before Clarke knew it, Ontari was on her feet and hoisting Clarke up from the ground. She shoved the blonde toward the platform and two of Nia’s warriors grabbed her arms and threw her the five feet on to the concrete platform. Before she’d stopped sliding, two of Gerald’s people helped her to her feet and escorted her to stand between Lexa and Octavia.

“Stay down.” Clarke whispered so quietly she wasn’t sure either of them had heard what she’d said. To her surprise, the rope around her wrists had begun to loosen. She didn’t know who did it, but with a small flick of her wrist the rope fell to the ground freeing her stiff wrists.

“Now!” The sound of Ontari’s commanding voice filled the tunnel and the torches carried by the twenty men and women who were waiting at the platform fell to the ground. A second later, the sound of arrows zipping through the air filled the tunnel. Some landing with a solid thud into their targets, others bouncing off the concrete walls of the tunnel.

Clarke dropped flat to the ground and pulled Octavia to the ground with her, proceeding to cut her free. A moment later Clarke turned back to Lexa and set herself to the task of cutting the binding around Lexa’s wrists.
“Clarke, what is happening?” Lexa asked, feeling Clarke’s hands taking hold of her wrists and cutting her free from the rope.

“I don’t know. Ontari, she, I don’t know!”

After cutting Lexa’s rope, Lexa signaled for the knife and Clarke handed it to her because if there was anyone who would make the best use of the blade, it was Lexa. When their eyes connected, Lexa offered a silent promise in her green eyes that she would do everything in her power to get them out of this.

Lexa rose into a crouch and surveyed the chaos around her. To her surprise, a number of the Azgeda warriors had been taken down by the arrows and the few that remained were busy fighting with those who had run out of arrows. They’d managed to kill half of the Azgeda warriors, but now that it was a battle with hand weapons, they were outmatched by the battle-hardened warriors.

Her eyes scanned for one person in particular and when she saw her, Lexa’s hand squeezed the small handle of the knife. She watched on in shock as the woman swung her sword as though she were floating, cutting down Nia’s warriors with relative ease from one warrior to the next. None of them expected Ontari’s attacks and they were easy prey for the woman.

Lexa observed some of the remaining warriors abandon their weapons when they saw that the battle was taking a turn for the worse. They had begun to climb on to the platform in an effort to escape the tunnel and call for reinforcements. Lexa frowned at their cowardly actions and with a grunt of exertion, threw the knife in her hand to remove one of the threats. She stole a look back at Clarke and Octavia and felt a sense of relief wash over her when watching Octavia pick up a sword and take a defensive stance.

Knowing Clarke would be safe for the moment, Lexa took the opportunity to look around for a weapon of her own and it was just a matter of time before her eyes caught sight of her swords hanging off the hip of the same Azgeda warrior who had dropped her to the ground. She jumped off the platform and took a couple steps in the direction the warrior who had just relieved himself of an enemy combatant.

“You have something that belongs to me.”

The warrior turned and took in Lexa standing before him, appraising her through his white painted mask. His eyes were wide underneath it and Lexa could hear him saying, “It is just a fairy tale” over and over. Lexa’s face twisted into a grin as he broke out in a sprint in her direction. He continued running forward and when he was close enough he swung down diagonally where Lexa had been standing before moving to her left. His momentum had him continuing on past Lexa who simply threw out her foot and tripped the man.

The warrior stumbled forward off-balance, resulting in his head colliding edge of the platform. He then fell to the ground in a heap with an end result being a small but growing pool of blood to form on the ground beneath him. Lexa bent over the man and untied her swords from his side then freed them from their scabbards.

She turned back to the fight and stalked forward toward a number of Azgeda nearby. After each victory, her eyes would look to the platform to make sure Clarke was safe. Much to her relief, Clarke was busy leaning over Echo with her fingers on her throat. She had a look on her face that conveyed relief while Octavia remained sentry over them all and prepared for any threat that might materialize.

Lexa turned her focus back on the fight and the few remaining Azgeda Nia had sent were being taken care of. Ontari was occupied with two warriors which gave Lexa the opportunity to search for
Gerald. When she caught sight of him, it looked as though he’d unsuccessfully attempted to flee back down the tunnels and was currently pleading his case from his knees with some of his people. It was clear from the blow that had just landed, the defence of his actions was not going as well as he’d hoped.

Lexa started in motion toward Ontari and though Ontari wasn’t looking at her, the speed in which she dealt with the warrior before her told her Ontari knew exactly what was coming her way. When her brown eyes turned to regard the molten green eyes that moved with haste toward her, she reached down to picked up a second blade and nodded at Lexa with a warriors salute. Lexa’s reply was the lifting of her swords and a battle cry that echoed throughout the tunnel.

Everyone who remained watched on as Lexa and Ontari’s swords clashed, sending sparks in directions after every collision. Clarke found herself walking toward the edge of the platform after standing up but Octavia held out her arm to keep Clarke from getting too close.

Lexa onslaught was relentless and all Ontari was able to do while being driven backward was to concentrate on deflecting the barrage of of steel. Lexa masterfully countered and pushed back against every attempt of Ontari’s to alter the course of their fight. In Ontari’s mind, Lexa just kept coming and the strength in her limbs began to wain from having to deflect Lexa’s numerous attempts on her life.

Lexa’s eyes remained focused on one task and continued to press Ontari back down the tunnel they had come from. She was becoming frustrated at Ontari’s ability to deflect her strikes but she could feel her weakening. It was just a matter of time before Ontari would make a mistake and when she saw Ontari risk a glance toward the platform and she knew that was that moment.

She drove the sole of her boot upward in a kick and planted it firmly on Ontari’s chest. It was a just a fraction of a second but that was all Lexa required to send Ontari sprawling backward. Ontari tried her best to keep her balance but her heel tripped over one of the rocks resulting in Ontari’s weapons flying free from her hands as she crashed onto the tunnel floor with a grunt of pain.

“Yu gonplei ste odon, Ontari kom Azgeda.”

Ontari rolled on to her back so she could look up into Lexa’s eyes. She felt she owed her far more than that, but this was all she had to offer. What good were words with what she’d done? There was never a way she could make up to the woman who held the sword whose blade was pressed up against the side of her throat.

“Hod Op!”

Lexa’s eyes didn’t move from Ontari’s nor did her blade move from the brunette’s throat when the voice of a man called out. She watched as Ontari’s eyes widened in alarm at the man’s plea and curiously observed how a moment later, Ontari’s eyes were filling with tears.

“Heda, Ai beja gon daun. Beja. Sen klir Ontari.” (Heda, I beg you to stop. Please. Let Ontari go.) Begged the man who approached Lexa with cautious steps, his hands up and showing he was not a threat, not that he believed Lexa considered him one.

From the platform, everyone had a view of the man who slowly progressed forward. Clarke was surprised to recognize man as someone she had seen in Haven. The very same one Ontari had embraced and kissed when they entered the make-shift hospital in the underground village. With Octavia’s arm no longer blocking her way, Clarke moved forward to the edge of the platform and lowered herself down to the ground.
“Chon ge yu?” (Who are you?) Lexa asked without looking at the man.


Lexa took a hard pull of air into her tightened chest after hearing the man’s declaration. Her first instinct was to exact revenge, to take from Ontari what she had taken from her years ago. Ontari could see the war going on behind Lexa’s eyes and when her hand tightened on her sword Ontari’s breath stilled.

‘Did Costia beg like this before you killed her? All the times you cut her, you beat her.’

“She is guilty of murder. Blood must have blood.” Lexa explained, her voice as cold as the Azgeda winter. “Jus drein, jus daun.” Everyone in the room could see Lexa let her blade slide alongside Ontari’s neck to produce a thin black line of blood.

“Beja Heda. Take my life. Let her live. Our people, we need her. She is the only reason we’re still alive. She told me what she’s done. Please give her a chance to prove herself!”

“Warick, don’t.” Ontari pleaded with her husband, lifting her arm out slowly and urging him with the palm of her hand to stay where he was. The way the blade of Lexa’s sword pressed against her neck prevented her from turning to look at him and it forced her to say her words to Lexa instead of her partner. “This is the price for what I did. This was always the price.”

“She wants to fight against Nia!” He implored. “She did all this. She convinced these people to come help save you from Gerald. From Nia!” The man pleaded his case but Lexa’s eyes showed no sign of forgiveness.

Ontari closed her eyes and offered Lexa a nod of encouragement. Lexa accepted her offering by moving her sword from its position alongside her neck to Ontari’s chest and coming to rest over her heart. Lexa closed her eyes and swore she could feel Costia’s presence beside her. She was here and waiting for her to fulfil her promise so she could finally have peace.

Lexa felt the gentle touch of a hand on hers and she took in a short breath. She swallowed and took in a shaking breath while her hands tightened on the hilt of her sword.

“Lexa.”

The voice was trying to pull her from the haze of her dream. Her instincts told her to listen to the plea and open her eyes but she fought against it. She was so close.

“Open your eyes.” Clarke whispered while leaning in to Lexa’s ear. Her please went unanswered and Lexa pinched her eyes together even tighter.

“I can’t.” Lexa began to slowly shake her head. She had to focus on Costia and to do that, she had to remember. She couldn’t stop now.

“Yes, you can.” Clarke’s other hand moved to rest on Lexa’s forearm and applied light pressure.

“I have to do this, Clarke. I swore to her…” Lexa pleaded with Clarke.

“I know you did.”

Ontari watched on, remaining perfectly still beneath Lexa’s sword with the belief that moving might provoke the Commander into finishing what she had started. With Clarke’s warning glare at her
when she arrived at Lexa’s side, she had the thought that might do the job herself if she moved an inch so she was forced to watch her life hang in the balance between the two.

“She took everything from me.” Lexa said in a ghost of a whisper. Her eyes may have been closed but the stream of water that fell from her eyes were evidence of her current struggle. “Please.”

“She hasn’t taken everything from you.”

“She’s gone.” Lexa moaned.

“I’m not, Lexa. I’m still here.”

Lexa’s sword fell from her hand as dizziness began to invade her senses. It clattered to the tunnel floor while she turned to Clarke and looked at her with pleading eyes. Clarke could see Lexa’s knees begin to shake and moved to close what little space remained between them and brace Lexa just in time to support her weight as she fell into her.

Clarke realized she wouldn’t be able to carry all of Lexa’s weight for long and decided to lower herself and Lexa to the ground. Once they were still, she began to draw circles on Lexa’s back with a hand while throwing a glare at Ontari. Her eyes remained fixed on Ontari until she was certain her message was understood; If she tried anything, she would not stop Lexa again. Only then did she turn to look at Lexa.

“I’m here. I’ll always be here.” Clarke promised.

Clarke could feel Lexa’s hands take a hold of her shirt, balling her fists in the fabric so she could try to pull herself closer and refusing to allow any distance from coming between them. They stayed in that position for longer than either of them could guess, Clarke letting Lexa rid herself of the tears that refused to be held back. Once Lexa’s hands began to loosen, Clarke ceased rubbing her back and waited for Lexa to speak.

“Why did you stop me?”

“Because you’ve changed.” Clarke said, lifting one of her hands to Lexa’s cheek to give it a light caress.

Lexa didn’t say anything but she did pull back to stare at Clarke through her tear stained eyes. “Why couldn’t I do it?”

“Because she’s different too and I think you saw it.”

“It doesn’t change what she did.”

“Nothing can and it never will. There is no excuse for what she did. She knows that and she was prepared for you to take her life for what she’d done. Instead of letting us both end up in Nia’s cells, she came here knowing what waited for her whether she saved our lives or not. She did it anyway.”

Silence fell between them again and they could hear the movement of everyone else in the tunnel. It wasn’t long before Lexa let out a hard sigh in an attempt to relax the tension in her body. “Did you know she has a husband?”

“I didn’t. Not until just now.”

Lexa nodded with an assumption that Ontari was protecting him. “You visited Haven. Do you believe that Ontari is who he says she is to his people?”
“She brought me there to see how sick they were becoming and the water they drink is probably poisoned. If they stay there it will eventually kill them all. I don’t know why she would have brought me there if she didn’t truly care about them.”

“Was he there?”

“He was. I didn’t know who he was at the time, but I’d seen them together when I entered the hospital. I do believe him when he said Ontari came to help us.”

Lexa let out a groan in frustration and let her head fall into Clarke’s chest. A moment later Clarke began to run her hand through her hair with the hope it could ease some of her tension. Lexa couldn’t stop her mind from replaying Warick’s plea to spare Ontari’s life and the look on Ontari’s face of fear when he told Lexa who he was. No doubt she was worried that Lexa would find value in retribution.

“How can I trust her, Clarke?”

“I can’t tell you how to do that. Every time she says anything I find myself questioning how much of what she is saying is true and how much of it is a lie. I think she’s practiced living two lives for so long that nobody can tell the difference.”

Lexa let out a hum as she contemplated Clarke’s words and Clarke was willing to let her take as long as she needed to come to her own decision on the subject. In Lexa’s mind, the only thing she could think about was that Clarke was sitting across from her and how moments ago she told her that she would always be there for her.

“Lexa?”

“I’m sorry. I was just…”

“You don’t have to apologize. I can’t imagine what you are thing right now.”

“I was just thinking about you.”

“Me?” Clarke regarded Lexa with curiosity.

“I do not know about your life in the stars or the customs of your people but having met many of your people, I have never met someone like you. I don’t know how you are able to to see the good in people through their faults. I suppose that makes you the leader that you are and your people are lucky to have you…”

“Lexa.”

“I can never apologize enough to you for what I did to you. I need you to know that…”

Unable to get Lexa to stop, Clarke leaned forward the few inches between them and pressed her lips to Lexa’s. Once the initial shock wore off, Clarke felt her relax into the kiss, bringing her hand up to Clarke’s neck and pulling her in in order to feed the growing need within. Instead of pulling back as she did in Lexa’s tent, Clarke allowed Lexa to lead their kiss, taking it as far as she felt she was comfortable with and when Lexa’s tongue slid over her lips, Clarke let a slight moan escape. It was only when Lexa’s hand started to slide down her back that Clarke pulled back in an attempt to catch her breath.

Lexa was initially startled when Clarke pulled away. Their history couldn’t stop the nervousness that began to take root as it did after their last kiss and she feared that she’d pushed Clarke too hard but
when she saw the reassuring smile on Clarke’s face along with the look of need in her eyes, a wave of relief washed over her with the knowledge her concerns were misguided. When Clarke leaned forward and rested her forehead on her own, Lexa closed her eyes and sighed contentedly.

“I just, I needed to know. Before.” Clarke said, her eyes studying Lexa for her reaction.

“I am glad you told me.” Lexa smiled at Clarke while trying to regain control of her now elevated heart rate. “I never stopped. In case you were wondering.”

As Lexa finished her declaration, Clarke lunged forward and her movement took Lexa by surprise if her wide-eyed expression was any indication. Clarke wrapped her arms around Lexa and unapologetically laid siege to her lips, claiming them with her own. Lexa responded accordingly, allowing Clarke to have her way while fighting against her instinct to flip Clarke over and make her own claim as well.

“Clarke…” Lexa moaned when Clarke moved from her lips to her jaw line and on to her neck. The Clarke’s tongue grazed over her pulse point sent a shiver through her body and threatened to start a fire within her she knew she couldn’t control. In a moment of strength, Lexa placed her hand on Clarke’s chest and lightly pushed while repeating Clarke’s name again.

“I know.” Clarke reluctantly pulled herself away from Lexa, nodding to show she understood.

They both knew this neither the time nor the place for anything more than acknowledgement of what they felt. When they separated from each other, Clarke arose until she stood upright and offered then extended a hand to Lexa to help her stand but neither of their eyes left the other. That was until the sound of Octavia clearing her throat a few meters away. Reflexively Clarke and Lexa stepped away from each other and turned to their visitor who stood there with a smug look on her face while shaking her head.

“Too long enough.”

Lexa’s face turned a shade of crimson and Clarke followed suit.

“Everyone is waiting to know what is going to happen next.” Octavia pointed with her thumb back behind her shoulder. She hesitated for a moment and then directed her words at Lexa. “Ontari says her people have information about where Roan is being held.”

“How is everyone?” Clarke asked, referring to Lincoln and Echo. She saw the frown on Lexa’s face at the use of Ontari’s name and decided to aim the conversation away from the woman for the time being.

“They are fine. Echo says she feels okay, but I’m sure she could use a once over by Abby if we can get her back to Camp Jaha.”

“All right. We will be there soon. Thank you, Octavia.” Clarke dismissed Octavia who took the hint and walked back in the direction she had come. When Clarke thought Octavia was far enough away, she turned back to Lexa. “Are you going to be alright with this?”

Lexa took in a slow breath while lifting her chin so she could look at the ceiling above her. After a moment of thought, she put her focus back to Clarke.

“I will have to be. If she knows where the Prince is located, we will need her to show us his location. We need his supporters to rally behind him otherwise Azgeda will fracture into any number of individual clans. There is no certainty any of them would be willing to work with the Kongeda or even respect the current borders of the clans.”
“Then there could be war?”

“Then there would be war. Roan becoming King is the only opportunity we have for a somewhat peaceful resolution to our problem.”

“Peaceful?” Clarke exhibited the bruises covering her arms and legs, along with various cuts that were in the process of healing. “I think we need to redefine your notion of peaceful. We’re both covered in cuts and bruises, half of which we can’t see because of how dirty we are.”

Lexa smiled at Clarke looked at her from head to toe and back again. The act caused Clarke to feel self conscious and resulted in a glowing warm display on her cheeks.

“What?”

“I said somewhat peaceful.” Lexa grinned. “Besides, you don’t look so bad from here.”

Clarke let out a hearty laugh and moved forward into Lexa, squeezing her tightly then pulling back and placing a kiss on her lips. “I would trade that peace for a nice warm bath and some privacy right now.”

“Lets work on peace first, then we can discuss the bath.” Lexa suggested, urging Clarke to walk with her in the direction of the platform that would take them to the streets above.

Neither of them knew precisely when Raven’s signal was going to come, but when Lexa asked her if she was sure they would not miss the signal, Clarke assured her that it was Raven and whatever signal she had prepared that they would likely hear it all the way back in Polis.

Chapter End Notes

So that's who Ontari was with in the run down hospital in Haven!

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