Eventually

by April7739

Summary

Clarke Griffin wants a real relationship after months of being alone. Bellamy Blake has his reasons for never wanting to fall in love again.

Notes

My second Bellarke fic, and it's a doozy! This is the fastest story I've ever written in my life (an average of 7 pages per day). Since it is complete, updates will be very frequent. It's a long, massive story, and as the tags suggest, it's very explicit, though the plot is a big one. I'm very happy with/proud of the way this turned out. This idea literally popped into my head out of nowhere, and I took it and ran with it, so I do hope you enjoy! Feedback is appreciated!
Chapter 1

The blistering heat beat down on Clarke from the second she got out of her car. God, she hated to think of how hot her leather seats would feel after she finished up at the store. With that in mind, she marched forward quickly, determined to make quick work of her grocery shopping.

She zig-zagged through the parking lot, dodging kids with out-of-control carts and parents with out-of-control kids. Walmart. Ugh. She really did hate this store. But it was convenient and had more variety than all the other little food stores in Arkadia. The mission was to get in and get out, though, maybe get home and do some drawing to relieve her stress.

**Stress.** She slowed her pace as that stress started to creep back in. She’d managed to keep it at bay all morning, distracting herself with errands and catchy pop songs on the radio. But when she walked inside the big sliding double doors, she found herself reaching inside her purse for her phone rather than reaching for a shopping cart.

The Instagram tabs she’d opened this morning were still open, which must have meant she was a glutton for punishment. She looked first at the picture of Finn with a baby girl in his arms. All smiles. Proud new dad. And when she went to Lexa’s page, it wasn’t any better. She and Costia’s happy smiles still beamed from the screen, both of them holding up their ring fingers to announce their engagement.

*Be happy for them,* Clarke told herself, and large part of her truly was happy. It seemed to her that Finn had matured a lot over the years, so he’d probably be a good father. And Lexa . . . well, she deserved to be happy, and if Costia was the girl who was going to make her happy for the rest of her life, then so be it.

Putting her phone back in her purse without closing the Internet tabs, Clarke sighed heavily and rummaged around for what she really needed: her grocery list.

It was fairly easy to zip through the aisles of Walmart’s food center. She knew where most everything she wanted was at, and the frozen foods aisle in particular gave her most of what she needed. In the middle of a mental debate over grape Uncrustable sandwiches or strawberry, her phone rang, and she groaned.

“What?” she answered sharply without even checking to see who was calling. If this was another supposed friend from high school calling to see what she thought about the photos of Finn and his baby, or another person from her LGBTQ group ‘checking up’ on her because of what Lexa had posted . . .

“Well, hey to you, too, best friend.”

She breathed an audible sigh of relief. “Raven.”

“Miss me?”

“So much.” Clarke tossed both the grape and strawberry Uncrustables into her cart and continued down the aisle. “So how was Jamaica?”

“Beautiful, amazing,” Raven raved. “Well, the *place* was amazing.”
“Oh, no.” Clarke cringed. She knew this whole vacation had been a way for Raven and her boyfriend Wick to ‘figure things out.’ They’d cut themselves off from technology for an entire week, so Clarke had no idea how it’d gone. But Raven’s tone was a pretty clear indication.

“It’s just time, Clarke, time to end things,” Raven went on, sounding only the slightest bit sad about it. “And we both knew it. I mean, if Wick and I can’t recapture our spark sitting down on the beach sipping margaritas at sunset, what’re the chances we’re gonna be able to make it work back here?”

“Slim to none,” Clarke admitted, rounding her cart into the next aisle. Uh, cake mixes? No, thanks. She didn’t cook. “I’m sorry, though,” she apologized, backtracking a bit so she could swing over into the next aisle instead. “I know you really loved him.”

“I did,” Raven acknowledged, “and it was great while it lasted, but it just wasn’t meant to be, you know?”

Those two Instagram pictures seeped into Clarke’s mind again, and she felt a heavy, resigned feeling in the pit of her stomach. “Yeah. I know.”

“But it’s okay,” Raven insisted, sounding more bubbly than Clarke would have imagined possible. “We ended things on good terms, and he’s got a friend who offered him a place to stay, so it’s not like I have to find a new apartment or anything.”

“That’s good,” Clarke agreed, ransacking the crackers and cookies. “Well, I’m glad you’re taking it so well.”

“Clarke, you know me. I’m tough like an Amazon,” Raven boasted. It wasn’t an understatement, though. The girl really was that tough.

“That you are.” Clarke sighed, holding her phone in place with her shoulder, pushing her cart lazily forward, wishing she had her best friend’s same spunk and resilience in the face of a break-up. Raven and Wick had been together for over a year now—it wasn’t some meaningless fling. And yet here she was, ready to bounce back from it, and Clarke was still having trouble bouncing six months after Lexa.

“Well, I was gonna suggest we go out tonight so you can show me all your pictures and give me all my souvenirs . . .” Clarke segued.

“What makes you so sure you’re getting souvenirs?”

“But you’d probably rather just curl up with Thelma and Louise again.”

“Oh, no,” came Raven’s emphatic response, for which Clarke was grateful. “Let’s go out. Let’s do something fun. I’m not just gonna sit here and wallow.”

“Really?” Clarke felt a wave of relief wash over her. “Thanks, Raven.”

“Yeah, no problem,” Raven said. “I heard about . . . well . . . them, their news. And I figured you’d need a little pick me-up.”

“I need a huge pick me-up,” Clarke confessed. “Girls night?”

“Girls night it is,” Raven chirped. “No boys allowed. Unless they’re exceptionally hot.”

Clarke smirked. “Sounds like a plan.”
Perhaps her call with Raven slowed her down, or maybe she just got distracted in the arts and crafts section again, but Clarke’s trip to Walmart ended up taking her longer than she’d thought. By the time she was in the checkout line, she’d been there for forty-five minutes, and she knew those leather seats of hers were really going to be painful. It didn’t help that the couple in front of her was taking forever to check out. It was like they had to pause every three seconds to be nauseatingly adorable and give each other a kiss or a squeeze or playful nudge or something. They made Clarke roll her eyes because . . . well, because she was envious.

Get the fuck over it, she told herself as she pushed her full cart across the parking lot towards her vehicle. People can be happy. You can be happy, too, if . . .

No. She couldn’t even think about it, couldn’t entertain the idea. She’d let herself reminisce about it too much lately, about the way it felt to be in a committed relationship. She’d had exactly two of those in her entire life, and neither one had worked out for her. But . . . well, they had been pretty great while they’d lasted. And it had been six months. In six months, not only had Lexa started dating someone else and fallen in love again, but she’d gotten engaged. She had a whole life ahead of her, a whole future. With someone.

Down in the dumps, Clarke began loading all her grocery sacks into her car. (Really, why did Walmart cashiers put, like, one item in one bag? God, she hated this store.) She was almost done, backseat practically stuffed full, when she heard a man yell, “Watch out!”

She looked around, instantly on alert, but she didn’t know what she was supposed to watch out for. Seconds later, she felt something heavy hit her foot and ankle. “Ow,” she yelped, stepping aside. She looked down and saw a . . . watermelon? Why was there a watermelon by her feet?

“Sorry,” a dark-haired man apologized, rushing forward. “Runaway watermelon.” He bent down and picked it up and smiled at her.

Good lord, Clarke thought, smiling back dazedly. This guy was . . . hot. He had this whole bronzed olive skin tone going on, adorable freckles on his nose and cheeks, bulging biceps beneath the arms of his t-shirt, and a smile that literally made her knees feel week. “It’s okay,” she said lamely.

“Really sorry,” he said again in a gravelly voice, walking away with his watermelon cradled in his left arm.

Jesus Christ. For a second, Clarke felt shook. Since when did guys that good-looking exist? And in Arkadia of all places? She watched him walk away, unabashedly, pushing her cart a little further out into the parking lot to get a better glimpse of him.

Damn, he filled out those jeans.

Telling herself she didn’t stand a chance and it didn’t matter because she’d never see him again, Clarke turned to go put her cart away when she heard him swear, “Shit!” She took another peek and noticed that now he was having problems with a different kind of fruit: apples. He had at least seven apples rolling all around on the ground by his truck.

Abandoning her cart, Clarke scampered forward, eager to help. “Here,” she said, retrieving a few that had rolled an entire parking space away.

“Stupid sack ripped,” he muttered, piling the ones he could grab into his shirt.

Once it looked like they’d gotten all of them, she brought the three in her hands up to him and deposited them . . . into his shirt. Which was now hiked up enough to show off some pretty nice abs.
“Here you go,” she said.

“Thanks.” He smiled at her again, and this time, she managed to smile back.

He was gorgeous.

“I’m Clarke,” she introduced herself, surprised by her own forwardness.

“Bellamy,” he returned.

Bellamy. She let the name roll through her mind. Hot name for a hot guy.

“I have apples in my shirt,” he muttered, quickly dumping them into a sturdier sack. He hoisted that sack up into the bed of his truck, along with his watermelon, and said, “I’ll be lucky if any of this makes it home.”

She laughed a little, wondering why he didn’t just stuff it all in the backseat when she caught a glimpse and saw that it was already as full as hers was.

“Well . . . thanks, Clarke,” he said, and he was that type of guy who could say it and keep eye contact with her the entire time.

She kept eye contact with him, too, not because she had that same kind of confidence, but because she couldn’t look away. “Have a good day,” she said, feeling like an idiot the second she said it.

“Yeah, you, too.” He took hold of his cart and pushed it to the nearest cart station, and she turned and walked away, disappointed in herself. Have a good day? That was what the freaking Walmart greeters said when people left! She couldn’t have thought of anything better, anything flirtier or sexier? Raven would have. Raven would have said something like, ‘Let me know if you ever wanna check out my melons,’ because Raven was bold and brazen and uninhibited like that. Raven didn’t second-guess herself.

Clarke could barely even pay attention to the fact that her car door was hanging open, all her food practically falling out, because all she could think of was . . . that guy. That hot, hot guy with the incredible smile. Him and his runaway watermelon and his scampering apples and . . .

“Hey!” she called, whirling around.

He stopped just as he was getting into his truck.

“Do you wanna . . . hang out for a while or something?” she offered unsurely. Because she’d never done anything like this before.

He didn’t seem to think it was weird. In fact, when he grinned, he seemed sort of into the idea. “Sure,” he said. “I gotta get some of this food in the refrigerator, though.”

“Oh, yeah, me, too,” she said, trying to keep her composure, even though inside she was freaking out. “Maybe later, though?”

“Yeah, alright,” he said nonchalantly. “You know where Dropship’s at?”

She’d heard of it, couldn’t remember if she’d ever been there before, though. “Yeah, I think so.”

“Alright, well, how about I meet you there at 7:30 or something,” he suggested, pushing his dark brown hair out of his eyes.
“Okay.”

“Alright.” She could have sworn she saw his eyes kind of sweep over her for a minute, which was usually a good sign, and when he smirked and said, “See you later,” she felt that knees-go-weak feeling again.

Trying to play it casual, she headed back to her car as he drove off. Inside, her heart was pounding with excitement, though. Had that really just happened? Had she really just managed to channel Raven and be outgoing with a guy? With a guy who looked like he could be a male model, no less? Had she really just scored herself a date at Walmart? If so, then maybe she didn’t hate that store so much after all.

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Since Raven’s apartment was only a few blocks away, Clarke darted straight over there after getting her groceries put away. Using her key to let herself in, she barged through the door and shut it quickly. “Raven,” she said simply.

Raven was swaying around her kitchen in a towel, her wet hair held up with another towel around her head. She stopped singing Katy Perry’s “Last Friday Night” long enough to notice Clarke and remark, “Wow, you are really eager for girls night.”

“Raven,” Clarke repeated.

“I’m gonna need another hour, at least,” Raven said, taking the towel off her head. “Maybe forty-five minutes if I push it?”

“Raven, the most amazing thing happened to me in the Walmart parking lot today,” Clarke bubbled excitedly.

“Oh god.” Raven made a face and turned off her music. “Walmart?”

“Yes. I met this guy . . .”

“A guy you like?” Raven cut in.

“No, a guy I hate.”

“A hot a guy?”

“No, he’s four feet tall and bald. Raven!” Clarke exclaimed. “I actually met a guy.”

“Wow.” Raven sat down at her kitchen island, towel-drying her hair. “Does this guy have a name?”

“Yes.” Clarke had been wracking her brain trying to remember it the entire drive home. “Billy, maybe.” She cringed. “No. Benry?” That definitely didn’t sound right. “Bellagio?”

“Bellagio?” Raven echoed, making a face. “That’s a Vegas hotel.”

“That’s not it.” Try as she might, she just couldn’t remember, so she’d have to subtly try to get that out of him when she saw him again. “Well, whatever, he has a name, and this . . .” She smiled blissfully, leaning back against the door like she was made out of silly putty. “. . . this amazing skin tone that makes him kind of racially ambiguous, you know? And this dark curly hair that I just wanna run my fingers through, and these deep brown eyes.”
“Body?” Raven asked.

“On point.”

“Better than Finn’s?”

Clarke huffed. “Please, Finn was a boy next to this man.”

“Ooh, he’s a man now, is he?” Raven grinned and wriggled her eyebrows excitedly. “Well, Clarke, this is intriguing. Did you get his number?”

“No,” she replied, “I was too busy grabbing his apples.”

Raven squinted at her curiously.

“There were apples,” Clarke tried to explain. “And a watermelon.”

“Sorry, I didn’t know if that was code for something sexual.”

“No, nothing sexual.”

Again, Raven grinned. “Not yet.”

Clarke couldn’t help but blush and crumble over a bit just thinking about it. “Oh my god, Raven, I don’t even know how it happened, but all of a sudden I was just inviting him to hang out tonight, and he agreed to it. So now we’re supposed to meet up at Dropship later.”

“Really?” Raven stared at her in shock and slowly started to applaud her efforts.

“Yeah, so I was kind of hoping we could spend our girls night there,” Clarke hinted. “I know we said no boys allowed, but . . .”

“Unless they’re exceptionally hot,” Raven reminded her. “This guy seems to fit the bill. Have at it, Clarke. I don’t care.”

“Well, you can still come along,” Clarke told her. In fact, having a wing-woman there might be kind of nice.

“Oh, no way,” Raven dismissed immediately. “You don’t need me there being a third wheel. This guy agreed to meet you, not you and your best friend.”

“But I don’t want you to feel like I’m ditching you.”

Raven shrugged flippantly. “You are, but I’m okay with being ditched. Honestly, I was just gonna go out tonight for your sake. But I’m perfectly content hanging out with Thelma and Louise.”

“Are you sure?” Clarke pressed, trying to be a good best friend. Raven had just broken up with her boyfriend, and even though she seemed okay, it was possible she really needed this night out.

“I’m positive,” Raven said emphatically. “I’m jet-lagged anyway, Clarke. I wouldn’t be much fun.”

That wasn’t true, though. Raven was always fun. Whenever they went out, whether Wick was with them or not, Raven was the fun, sassy girl guys were drawn to. Clarke, on the other hand . . . well, she was the nice girl guys settled for. So in a way, maybe not having Raven there would be a good thing. Then there wouldn’t be anyone else for Bill-Ben-Bella—whatever his name was—to notice.
“What if he ends up being a loser?” Clarke fretted, suddenly fearing the worst. “Or a creep?” This was what she did every single time, over-analyzed the situation, got pessimistic about things which otherwise seemed good. That probably explained why she hadn’t done anything more than make out with any guy or girl for the past six months.

“Then just leave. Or call me and I’ll get you out of there,” Raven promised. “But I have a good feeling about this one, Clarke. You might just have gotten yourself a new boyfriend here.”

The thought of it . . . thrilled her to no end. But realistically, what were the chances? It’d probably just be a one-time hook up, which Clarke didn’t usually do, but . . . well, this guy was good-looking enough for her to make an exception.

“Clarke.” Raven gave her a warning look and got up from the counter. She walked around to Clarke, grabbed her shoulders, and literally shook her. “Don’t do this. You’re second-guessing yourself again, talking yourself out of it.”

“No, I’m not,” Clarke denied.

“Well, you’re about to. And I won’t let you. You need this. Finn’s a freaking dad now, Lexa’s getting hitched. You need something for yourself right now. You need this.”

Clarke nodded. She definitely needed . . . something. Maybe just a really good orgasm. Maybe some spark of hope that she wasn’t doomed to end up alone. Either one was fine.

“So loosen up,” Raven urged.

“I’m loose,” Clarke insisted, realizing how wrong the words sounded once she’d already said them. “I wish I’d said something else.”

Raven laughed.

An hour later, back at her place, she was all dressed up for her . . . date. If it could really even be called that. Her first inclination had been to put on a sexy, short dress, but Raven had talked her down from that, warning that she’d look like she was trying too hard if she was too dressed up. So they managed to find one pair of skinny jeans that weren’t covered in paint, along with a black tank top that was pretty low-cut and definitely emphasized her . . . watermelons. Raven loaned her a black cropped leather jacket to go over it, and after touching up her makeup and pulling her hair up into a casual, messy bun for her, her best friend proclaimed her ready to go.

“Looking good,” Raven said proudly. “This Bellagio guy isn’t gonna know what hit him.”

Dropship was one of maybe seven bars in all of Arkadia, but it wasn’t Clarke’s usual hangout. She’d only been there a handful of times, and not one of those times had been a good time for her. She faintly remembered getting sick at someone’s birthday party last year, and she vividly remembered getting kicked out when the fake ID that Raven had gotten her hadn’t been convincing enough. Hopefully tonight would be a better memory.

There were a couple of trucks parked out front, but none of them appeared to be . . . his. (God, she really needed to re-learn his name.) And when she walked inside, she didn’t see him there yet, which was a bit disheartening. Maybe he’d forgotten or had gotten busy doing something else. Or maybe he’d never intended to meet up with her at all.

Here I go again, she thought, remembering Raven’s parting advice. Loosen up. She just had to let
loose. For once.

It was a little awkward being there all by herself when everyone else seemed to be with someone else. There looked to be a double date going on at one table, where the girls were practically sitting in their boyfriends’ laps. And there were a couple women dancing with each other drunkenly, so that was obviously hilarious. Then there was a group of loud, obnoxious people her age sitting at a huge round table in the corner, and they appeared to be the ones in control of the old-fashioned jukebox by the back wall. Some hip hop song she didn’t even know was playing, and she just felt totally and completely out of place.

Dropship wasn’t exactly a bar for college students. More like college dropouts.

She sat at the counter and waited, trying to be patient. Yeah, she’d shown up ten minutes early, because she was a spaz like that. So she ordered herself a beer to get started and sipped on it gingerly while the naked lady clock on the while ticked past 7:30. She kept waiting as it became 7:45, and by 7:50, she was really starting to contemplate leaving.

He said 7:30 ‘or something,’ she reminded herself, pouring what was left of her beer into a glass. She swirled it around dejectedly, looking at her fragmented reflection in the bottom, and debated whether or not to get up and go.

Just when she was thinking she might head out of there and go home to see where Raven was at in Thelma and Louise, the door of the bar swung open, and in he came. Him . . . the smoldering man whose name she couldn’t remember but wanted to know so badly. Unlike her, he hadn’t changed out of what he’d been wearing in the parking lot. He was still dressed in the same blue t-shirt and jeans, and he still looked like a Greek god, so . . .

He scanned the room and smiled when he saw her at the bar. She smiled back, trying to play it cool, calm, and collected when he came and sat down beside her. “Hey, Clarke,” he said.

“Hey . . . you,” she returned, feeling bad that he remembered her name and she didn’t remember his. But hey, that was a good sign, right, that he remembered her name?

“Sorry I’m late,” he apologized, and god, his voice was so low, so deep, so sexy, she could barely handle it.

“Did your watermelon run away again?” she teased.

He chuckled. “No, it behaved. Couldn’t get my truck to start, though.”

“Oh, I see.” Well, that sounded like a legit reason to be late. Besides, now that he was here, she really didn’t care about how long it had taken him to show. She was just glad he actually had.

They small-talked a bit after that, with him asking her the question she so often got asked: How the hell had she, a girl, ended up being named Clarke? She told him about how her parents had been convinced she’d be a boy until she came out of the womb. He made some kind of joke about having a hole instead of a pole, which made her laugh, and then she asked what the story was behind his name, hoping something he’d say would jog her memory. But he just shrugged and said, “No, story behind it. My mom heard it somewhere and liked it. So that’s it.”

She nodded, needing more than that. Because she was still coming up blank.

It must have been obvious that she had no idea what to call him, because he finally just said, “You don’t remember my name, do you?”
Since he didn’t sound offended by that, she confessed, “No,” quietly.

He snorted. “I don’t blame you. It’s a weird name.”

“And that name is . . . ?”

He thanked the bartender when he finally got his drink, and he took a big swig of it first before he answered her. “Bellamy.”

“Bellamy.” Now that she heard it, she wasn’t sure how she’d forgotten it in the first place. “I knew it started with a B.” This time, she wouldn’t forget.

An hour (and several drinks) later, she’d gotten some information out of Bellamy. He was only two years older than her, twenty-three, which was perfect, and he had a little sister named Olivia or something—honestly, she was a bit too buzzed to remember that name, but Olivia was close enough. He and his sister had lived in Arkadia their whole lives, but neither of them attended college there. He wasn’t a dropout, though, he assured her. He’d just never gone in the first place.

He asked questions about her, too, some of which she dodged in an effort to be slightly mysterious and cool. But some she answered openly, like the ones about her age and what she was studying in college. He asked where she was from, too, and when she told him she’d grown up in the D.C. area, he cringed and muttered, “Politics,” under his breath. But they didn’t talk about politics, because they were both in way too good of a mood for that.

By the time she was halfway through her third beer, her jacket was off, and she was feeling good. Really good. Very giddy, very silly, very willing to have fun. And Bellamy, even though he clearly could hold his alcohol and wasn’t a lightweight like her, was more than willing to play around with her. She kicked his ass at darts, but of course he claimed to have let her win. They started a game of pool, got bored with pool, and ended up sitting on the side of the pool table taking selfies instead. At one point, he leaned over and kissed her on the cheek, and she snapped that picture without hesitation.

“That’s a good one,” he said.

Yeah, it looked pretty damn good to her, too.

As the night wore on, the bar started to get more crowded, and each time a beautiful girl walked in, she worried for a second that she might lose his attention, that he might notice someone else and forget all about her. But he never did. He didn’t stop smiling at her, talking to her, teasing her. In fact, every half an hour or so, he’d ask her what his name was, just to make sure she remembered.

“Bellamy!” she answered, pretending to be all exasperated.

“Bellamy what?”

“Blake.” Yeah, she’d learned that, too. His last name was Blake.

She was having more fun with Bellamy Blake than she’d had in months. For the first time in a long time, it didn’t feel like she was just going through the motions, working her way through life’s monotonous routines. She felt . . . spontaneous with him. Like when he suggested they do shots? Yeah, she just went for it. But she only went for it because she got this sense about him that he was a safe and trustworthy guy. And he proved her right when he stopped her after two shots and said, “No more for you. I’m cuttin’ you off.”

“Why?” she complained, thinking she could probably handle a couple more shots. She’d been
munching on chips throughout the night, and now he’d gotten them a pizza, too. As long as she ate, she’d be fine.

“No more,” he repeated, taking her shot glass from her so he could knock back what was left in it.

“Why not?” She leaned against him, her hands on his chest, and a shiver zipped up her spine when he put his hands on her waist.

“Because,” he said, eyes gazing into hers, face mere inches away from her own. “I wanna give you a night to remember.”

Her whole body tingled with anticipation, but even though they were having a great time, and even though they were both flirting with each other . . . she still didn’t want to get her hopes up.

Around midnight, she had to pee. Badly. In fact, she was surprised she’d been able to hold it this long. The bathroom was little more than a closet-sized space with a rickety door that didn’t shut very well, so she had to keep her hand on the doorknob while she went. When she was done, she washed her hands and checked her reflection in the mirror, taking a moment to fix her makeup. She’d done a lot of laughing tonight, which had made some of her mascara and eyeliner smear. Her lipstick had worn off a long time ago, even without a lip-lock, and her hair was starting to fall a bit, a few loose strands spilling out here and there. But for the most part, she still looked pretty decent. *Tempting* probably wasn’t the right word, but . . . not horrible.

She pulled her tank top down a bit, showing off what she would normally consider to be a ridiculous amount of cleavage, but . . . hell, Bellamy’s eyes had done their fair share of wandering downward tonight, so why not give him something to look at? Her breasts were definitely her best physical asset, and with as horny as she was feeling right now, she wasn’t above using them to her advantage.

When she walked out of the bathroom . . . there was Bellamy, just standing there, waiting for her. He had his arms crossed over his chest, head tilted to the side, and this look in his eyes . . . good god, it was so—so enticing. When he looked at her like this, as he’d been doing all night, she felt sexy. And obviously she wanted him, too.

One of his hands pressed against the wall next to her head, and the other one cupped her face as he bent down to kiss her. It was a good kiss, not too soft but not too forceful. Needy but not sloppy, insistent but not aggressive. And it just felt so natural to kiss him back, to rub her hands up and down his sides and slide them around his stomach to feel the rock-hard muscles of his abdomen.

Despite the fact that it was happening in a narrow hallway outside the bar’s bathroom, it was the kind of kiss that made Clarke’s head spin and all coherent thought fly out the window. The more she responded to him and kissed him back, the more daring he became, deepening the kiss, letting his tongue dart out to brush against her lips, then to slide into her mouth. His hands began to explore more, too. The one that had started against the wall gradually came down to rub her shoulder, but when cupped and squeezed her breast, that’s when she knew the extra cleavage had worked like a charm.

Music and laughter and conversation filtered in from the rest of the bar, but here they were, just the two of them in a secluded little hallway, and she didn’t want to stop. She didn’t usually do this, but
how was she supposed to protest as he kissed his way down her cheek to the side of her neck? It felt so good, his hot mouth on her skin, his tongue lapping at her flesh, and she rolled her head to the side to give him better access. He sucked so hard that she knew she’d have a hickey there tomorrow, and for some reason, the thought of that made her smile and moan.

When he suddenly pressed his hips against her and she felt how hard he was through his jeans, her moan turned into a sharp gasp. And he kept doing that, too, pressing and rubbing himself against her, his denim-clad groin scraping against hers. She could already feel a wetness between her legs, probably dampening her jeans at this point. There was no hiding her desire, and there was definitely no hiding his.

It got to the point where he stopped kissing her and instead just concentrated on grinding the bulge in his pants against her. It turned her on to see him so turned on, and knowing that she was the one responsible for it . . . bonus.

When his hands reached around to cup her ass and pull her hips into his even harder, she thought it was going to happen right here. He was going to fuck her right up against that wall . . . and she was going to let him. When he lifted one of her legs to wrap around his waist, she really thought it was going to happen. But gradually, he stopped grinding against her, and then he even set her leg back down. He looked at their surroundings as if he wasn’t satisfied with something.

“What?” she asked, frowning.

“Not here,” he said, grabbing hold of her hand. “Come on.”

So they went back out to the bar, finished their drinks in record time, and he slapped down enough money to pay for both of them. She barely remembered to grab her jacket—Raven’s jacket, actually—as he scurried her out the door. He was parked around back, which worked out well, because . . . well, it was more private.

Maybe the intention had been to drive her home and do it there, or maybe to take her to his place and just . . . But it didn’t happen. They were too eager, too hungry for it. One second, she was sitting in the passenger’s seat while he pushed the driver’s seat backward a bit. The next . . . well, she was just in his lap, halfway naked, riding him. They’d moved so quickly that she barely even remembered how he’d gotten her pants off, or how he’d gotten his pushed down past his knees and put that condom on. All she knew was that he had done all of those things more swiftly than she’d thought humanly possible, and then he’d pushed her panties aside and held his cock steady while she sank down onto him. There was no time to adjust. He pressed his hips up into her wantonly right from the start, so she started bouncing up and down right away, right there in the front seat of his red pickup truck where anyone who walked by could see.

His cock was, simply put, fucking huge, and the fit was definitely snug; but she didn’t let that deter her from moving at a frantic pace. The position was a great one for her. She could control the angle of his penetration and make it so that all the friction was good friction. She could watch him throw his head back against the seat as he reveled in the feel of it all. She could feel every inch of his hard cock sliding in and out of her, and it all felt so wild and so good.

The windows steamed up quickly, a thin veil to their activities.

Honestly, in that moment, though, she didn’t care if anyone saw them fucking or heard their breathless moans and knew exactly what they were doing. She didn’t even care that she barely knew him and that they were doing this in a parking lot. Why not? They’d met in one today.

“Come on,” he coaxed, reaching down between them to rub her clit. She cried out loudly when he
did that, feeling instantly close to cumming. She stopped doing so much bouncing and settled onto him as deeply as she could, taking as much of his cock inside as possible while she ground and circled her hips against his, desperately seeking release.

When he whispered, “Come on, baby,” in that deep voice of his, she lost it. A powerful orgasm tore through her, and she squeezed her eyes shut and dug her hands into his shoulders as she rode it the waves of pleasure out. He kept rubbing her clit, even when her limbs shattered and she practically went boneless against him. Only when she slumped forward did he wrap his arms around her and hold her steady so he could thrust up into her exhausted body a few more times. That was all it took for him to cum, too. With a loud, low grunt, he pressed his face into her shoulder, jerked his hips up into her jarringly a few times, and got off good.

Afterward . . . it was awkward for the first time. Because they weren’t in a bed, so it wasn’t like they could just cuddle and recuperate. So there she sat on top of his lap, his cock still nestled inside of her, still stretching her. She was spent and sweaty and shocked by what she’d just done, and most of all . . . she was trying not to read too much into the way his hands were rubbing up and down her spine soothingly.

Once they untangled themselves from each other and got dressed, he offered to drive her home. She gratefully took him up on that, because she’d probably done a little too much drinking for her to chance it behind the wheel. She had him take her to Raven’s instead, though, because . . . of course she was going to go talk to her best friend after a night like this. He didn’t need to know that, though. He didn’t need to know that she was going to go inside and gush about what an amazing night she’d had and how liberating it had been to go outside of her comfort zone for the first time ever with a guy she was insanely attracted to.

When Bellamy pulled his truck to a stop outside of Raven’s apartment complex, she said, “Thanks for giving me a ride,” and her eyes got wide after the words left her mouth.

He chuckled, amused. “Anytime.”

“A ride home, I meant,” she clarified. “But, I mean . . .” She was glad it was dark and that he couldn’t see her blushing. “The other ride was good, too.”

“Yeah, it was,” he agreed, yawning.

Oh, no, she thought, dejected. He was going to go home and go to sleep, like this was nothing, like he did this all the time. (Maybe he did do this all the time.) Whereas she was going to lie awake in bed tonight, her hand between her legs, thinking of him, of having sex with him, fantasizing about doing it again.

But Bellamy didn’t make any move to get her phone number, didn’t say anything to lead her to believe he wanted to meet up with her again. He just sat there patiently, probably wondering why she was staring at him so curiously, probably wondering why it was taking her so long to get out.

Dammit. The sex had been fun. The hanging out before the sex had been fun, too. She definitely wouldn’t have minded doing it all again. But she’d known heading into this night that this was a possibility, that he was just looking for one night, nothing more. She had to be okay with that.

“Alright,” she said, hand on the door handle. “Well . . .” She gave it a few more seconds, just to see if he might whip out his phone and take her number. But nope. He didn’t. “See you around,” she said unsurely.

He smiled at her. “See ya.”
In what felt entirely anti-climactic despite her earlier climax, she got out of the truck, nearly rolled her ankle when she hopped down onto the sidewalk, and waved goodbye to him as she made her way to the front entrance of Raven’s building. To his credit, he waited there while she punched in the security code she wasn’t supposed to know, and only when she slipped inside did his truck rumble off down the street.

The elevator was broken, so she had to trudge up four flights of stairs to get to Raven’s floor. Her legs felt shaky, her thighs sore, so she’d probably really be feeling it tomorrow. She touched the side of her neck, wondering just how visible that hickey would be in the morning. Because there was bound to be one.

When she let herself into Raven’s apartment, the only light was coming from the TV. Raven had piled a vast array of blankets and pillows on her living room floor and lay there with the remote in her hand, dozing off while the Thelma and Louise DVD menu played on repeat.

Clarke kicked off her shoes, draped Raven’s jacket over the back of the recliner, and lay down beside her friend, carefully taking the remote out of her hand. Raven felt her do that, though, and stirred a bit. “Clarke?” she said sleepily.

“Hey, didn’t mean to wake you,” Clarke said quietly, pressing Play so the film would start again. “I just got back.”

“What time is it?” Raven asked, rubbing her eyes.

Clarke wasn’t even sure, so she just said, “Late.”

Raven yawned, handing Clarke an extra pillow. “Did you have fun?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Clarke replied emphatically, setting the remote aside. “I had a lot of fun.”

“Hmm, how much fun, Clarke?”

“Well, on a scale of one to ten . . .” She trailed off, grinning. No need to say more.

“Oh my god!” Raven sounded wide awake now. Even with barely any light, Clarke could see her eyes go wide when she exclaimed, “You hooked up with him?”

“In his truck,” Clarke admitted. “We did it in his truck.”

“Wow,” Raven laughed. “Clearly I’m a bad influence on you.”

“Clearly.”

“Wow,” Raven said again, sounding somewhat dumbfounded. But also, like oddly proud. “So was his dick big?”

“Raven!” Clarke hissed.

“What?” Raven said innocently. “I’m just curious.”

Clarke supposed there was no harm in gushing, not when there was quite literally so much to gush about. “I didn’t even know how it was gonna fit, Raven.”

“Oh my god!” her friend yelped through laughs. “This is awesome. You are like such a different person right now.”
“I had fun,” Clarke said. “That’s all that matters.”

“Definitely,” Raven agreed. “Are you gonna do it again, with this guy?”

“Bellamy,” Clarke informed her.

“No, I’m still gonna call him Bellagio. So are you guys gonna hook up again or what?”

Clarke sighed, wishing the answer to that was an obvious yes. But it wasn’t. Maybe she’d run into him at Walmart again sometime, or out at some bar or some club. It wasn’t like Arkadia was a huge town, but she definitely wasn’t guaranteed to see him again, either.

“I don’t think so,” she answered finally.


“I do,” Clarke admitted, staring at the TV screen while the beginning of this movie she’d seen a dozen times played. “I think it was just a one-time thing for him, though, so that’s fine.”

“I guess,” Raven mumbled disappointedly.

“Oh, but I did get a picture of him.” Clarke ignored the movie and grabbed her phone out of her pocket, quickly navigating to the selfies they’d snapped tonight.

“Damn,” Raven said, swiping through them. There was one where they were just smiling normally, one where they were both making weird/goofy faces, and then, of course, the one where he was kissing her cheek, which was Clarke’s favorite. “Damn,” Raven said, handing the phone back. “Way to go, Clarke. At least you got the one time. Bellagio’s fine as fuck.”

“Bellamy,” Clarke corrected, looking at the picture a little bit longer than she should have, a little bit more wistfully than she should have allowed herself to be. Yeah, Bellamy was cute, and Bellamy was nice, and Bellamy was fun to be around. She really did like Bellamy Blake. But here she was now, just as she’d been when that runaway watermelon of his had hit her in the foot today: alone.

Oh, well, she told herself, setting her phone aside as she clamored under Raven’s mass of blankets, hoping the movie would lull her to sleep. At least looking at that picture of her and Bellamy made her feel slightly less pathetic than looking at those pictures of Finn and Lexa had.
Bellamy made a mental list of all the things he needed to fix when he walked up to his front door that night. The truck—it still was having problems starting, so obviously something wasn’t right. That broken step on his porch—what he would have given for cement steps instead of these crappy wooden planks. And his screen door was about to fall off its hinges, so he had to do something about that, too. One of these days, he needed to just take a day off to fix shit around his own place instead of fixing stuff for other people.

He had to hold onto his screen door carefully as he stepped inside his house, had to give it a good, solid tug to get it to shut again behind him, too. The whole thing made quite the noise, which startled the two male figures in his kitchen. The lights were off, but he made out Miller right away, pressed up against the counter, making out with some guy Bellamy didn’t recognize.

“Sorry,” he apologized, since it was pretty obvious he was interrupting.

“It’s fine,” Miller assured him, straightening out his clothes. “Bellamy, this is Jackson. Jackson, my roommate Bellamy.”

Bellamy crossed the living room and joined the two men in the kitchen. “Hey,” he greeted, extending his hand.

Jackson shook it politely and said, “Nice to meet you, Bellamy. Nate’s told me a lot about you.”

Bellamy’s eyebrows shot upward, because whenever anyone called Miller by his first name, that meant it was serious. “New boyfriend?” he asked.

Miller grinned sheepishly and confirmed, “New boyfriend.”

“That’s great,” Bellamy said, reaching into the refrigerator for the orange juice. “Well, don’t let me stop you two from . . . doing your thing.”

“Actually, I was just leaving,” Jackson said. He turned to Miller and cupped his face, giving him a quick kiss. “See you tomorrow?”

Miller nodded. “See you then.”

“Bye.” Jackson smiled at Bellamy and said, “Good to meet you,” again as he started to leave.

“Yeah, you, too,” Bellamy called, settling in at his kitchen island. He unscrewed the lid of the orange juice carton and drank straight from it. Why did he always crave orange juice after he got laid? Mystery to him, but it was his thing. Maybe something to do with vitamin C? He’d read an article once about how vitamin C could help increase your sex drive, so it was probably more of a ritual than anything else at this point.

“So . . .” Miller said, smiling hopefully. “What do you think?”

Bellamy shrugged, probably the wrong one to judge whether or not a guy was boyfriend material. “Seems nice.”

“Yeah, he is.” And that was all it took for Miller to launch in and start raving about the guy. He
talked a mile a minute, which he never did unless he was really into someone, and told Bellamy all about how smart Jackson was, how he was studying to be a doctor, how he was so easy to talk to and so proud of being a gay man. Bellamy just sat there and listened, happy for his best friend, but also . . . tired as fuck.

Miller probably would have kept on talking had their other roommate, Murphy, not come trudging down the hall, shirtless, hair tousled, hunched over and holding his back as if he were an old man.

“What happened to you?” Miller asked.


Bellamy and Miller both exchanged a look and laughed.

“Shut up,” Murphy hissed, “she’s in there right now.”

“Waiting for more?” Miller teased.

“No, sleeping, but I can’t sleep ‘cause I’m in pain,” Murphy complained. “Real agony here. Bellamy . . .” He shot him a helpless look, like he expected some miracle cure. “Please.”

“Please what?” Bellamy asked.

“Help me. You fix things. Fix me.”

A broken step, broken screen door, and even a broken truck were way easier to fix than a broken back, and Bellamy had absolutely no intention of helping Murphy, only of giving him a hard time. “Okay,” he said, standing up. “Come here.”

Murphy hobbled closer, and when he was close enough, Bellamy bent down and punched him in the side.

“Fuck, Bellamy!” Murphy yelled, wincing. “What the hell did you do that for?”

“Does your side hurt worse than your back now?”

“Yes!”

“Well, there. Problem solved.”

Miller chuckled, stepping around the two of them. “You guys go ahead and beat each other up,” he said. “I’m goin’ to bed.”

“Night,” Bellamy called after him as he headed upstairs.

“Dammit, Bellamy,” Murphy swore, holding his side. “I hate you, you know that?”

“Hate you, too.” Bellamy sat down at the counter again, resuming his orange juice consumption. “So Emori really does this to you, huh?”

“Yeah, she’s a freak.” Murphy grinned fondly. “That’s one of the things I like best about her.”

Bellamy shook his head, amused, only because Murphy having a serious girlfriend would never not be weird to him. But Murphy was happy. And now Miller was looking pretty happy, too. So things were good.
“Did you meet Jackson?” Murphy asked.

Bellamy nodded. “Seems decent.”

“Yeah. I think you’re the only single one now.”

Bellamy shrugged, unbothered by that. “Still get laid, though.”

“Is that what you were doin’ tonight?”

He smirked, unabashedly smug about his ride with sexy little Clarke tonight. “Right in my truck.”

“Wow,” Murphy said. “You’re actually a master. If I didn’t think I’d break my back, I’d bow down.”

“Well, it was either gonna be my truck or the Dropship bathroom.” Clarke had been way too cute to fuck in the Dropship bathroom, so . . . his truck it was.

“So what’s the verdict?” Murphy asked. “One and done? Or something more?”

Bellamy grunted. Did Murphy even have to ask? “It was just sex,” he said, standing up again. He put the lid back on the orange juice and stashed it back in the refrigerator, then added, “You know how it goes.”

“Yeah, I know how it goes,” Murphy muttered.

Feeling tired, Bellamy gave his friend one more halfhearted punch to the gut before he headed for the stairs. “Night.”

“Night,” Murphy echoed.

Yawning, Bellamy trudged up the steps, surprised by how exhausted he was. Yeah, it was late, but he and Clarke had only done it once. Usually it took a couple rounds to tire him out. He had worked all day, though, before heading to Walmart, so that was probably why.

He smirked. Walmart. Good old Walmart. He’d never actually picked up a girl there before, but hey, there was a first time for everything.

When he made it into his room, he felt like he had no energy left in his body, so he flopped down onto his bed heavily, face first. The headboard fell forward a bit, not enough to be dangerous, but enough for him to add it to his ever-expanding mental list of things around that house that needed to be fixed.

Slowly, he turned over onto his back and reached down to cup his dick through his pants. Damn, Clarke had felt good on him tonight. If only he’d been a little more patient; then he could have brought her back here and fooled around with her until morning. Although maybe it was better this way. Clarke seemed like a sweet girl, and he hated seeing sweet girls look sad when they realized he didn’t want anything more with them.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

In the week following her wam-bam-thank you, ma’am hook-up with Bellamy, Clarke settled back into her normal routines. She went to class, went to work, came home and studied, did some drawing, did some painting, hung out with Raven and continued to be amazed by how resilient her best friend was after a break-up. The only notable change was that, when it was time to go to bed
and she was under her covers all alone . . . she masturbated a lot more. Like a *lot* more.

Six months ago, she hadn’t had any reason to do this, because her sex life with Lexa had been both consistent *and* consistently satisfying. Since breaking up with her, she’d done it about once a week, twice if she was feeling horny. But after Bellamy, she felt like she had to do it every single night. It was frustrating, not being able to get herself off every time, but no matter how hard she tried, she just couldn’t get her fingers or her vibrator to feel as good as his cock.

Sex with Bellamy had left her feeling thirsty *as fuck*, and when she asked Raven what to do about it, Raven’s advice was simple: “Get out there and do it again.”

She lay in bed a week after her encounter with Bellamy, unable to fall asleep, contemplating it. Could she do it again? Physically, sure. Did she want to? That was where the uncertainty came in. Bellamy was . . . a one-night stand, technically, and she’d never had a one-night stand before. She wasn’t exactly looking to make a habit out of it, because even though he’d worn a condom, she knew it wasn’t the safest or healthiest sex practice. But it *had* been fun, and since it was so out of the ordinary for her, it had been *exhilarating.*

It wasn’t just the sex that had made the night so memorable, though. It was . . . *Bellamy.* The guy was charming as hell, and she’d had a lot of fun with him. She’d enjoyed hanging out with him and getting to know him, even if all she had done was scratch the surface. Another one-night stand wasn’t guaranteed to be as great, because whoever she hooked up, guy or girl, couldn’t just be good in bed (or in truck, as the case may have been). They had to be . . . likable. Likable and entertaining.

What probably wasn’t helping things was that part of her return to normal routines meant a return to following her exes on social media. Finn kept posting more and more pictures of him, his daughter, and his daughter’s mother. And they were all adorable, of course. And Lexa kept posting more and more pictures of her and Costia, and they were all adorable, too. And Clarke kept willingly subjecting herself to the torture of looking at those photos, reading their happy tweets. It didn’t matter how glad she was for them, deep down, because undeniably, she was still envious. Not exactly envious of their significant others, but envious of what they had: relationships. Real, serious, committed relationships.

She wanted one of those, but all she had were these selfies with Bellamy. Pictures she couldn’t even post, because then all her followers—okay, she only had about a hundred followers, but still—all her followers would ask if he was her new boyfriend. And he wasn’t. He probably hadn’t even thought about her once since he’d dropped her off at Raven’s the other night.

Her vibrator broke on Saturday, which meant that she was *really* struggling to get through her Sunday study session at Raven’s house. She sat in the cushy recliner, reading but not really reading a passage about Picasso, while Raven and Niyalah chatted on the couch. Niyalah probably should have been studying, but it wasn’t much of a priority to her, and Raven didn’t need to study, because she was a legitimate genius who could teach all of her grad school professors more than they could teach her. Wells lay sprawled out on the floor, probably the only focused one of the bunch, well-accustomed to tuning three girls out.

When she simply couldn’t even pretend to concentrate anymore, Clarke set her book down and blurted, “Am I girlfriend material?”

Her friends all stopped what they were doing and looked at her curiously. “Huh?” Raven said.

“Am I girlfriend material?” she repeated. “Would I make a good girlfriend?”

“I’ve always thought so,” Niyalah said, grinning suggestively. “That’s why I flirt with you so much.”
Clarke blushed, used to Niylah’s flirting. They hadn’t ever done anything beyond kissing, mostly because she didn’t want to jeopardize the friendship. But if she didn’t get some other offers soon, she was giving Niylah a go. “Wells?” she asked. As the only male in their group, his perspective was both unique and important.

“I used to have a crush on you,” he recalled.

“Never mind her,” Raven said to them. “She’s been feeling down in the dumps ever since her one-night stand.”


“There’s nothing to tell,” Clarke denied.

“Sure there is,” Raven corrected. “She met him at Walmart. They hooked up at a bar. In his truck, if memory serves.”

“Scandalous,” Niylah teased.

Wells set his textbook aside and sat up, looking similarly intrigued. “That doesn’t sound like you, Clarke.”

“It’s not,” she admitted. “But . . . yeah, I had a good time. I’m not gonna sit here and tell you I didn’t.”

“Now she’s bummed,” Raven summarized, “because she wishes it was something more.”

Clarke huffed exasperatedly. “Well, do you blame me? Here, look at him.” She whipped out her phone, found the pictures of her and Bellamy, and held it out for Niylah and Wells to see. “He’s hot, don’t you think?”

Wells stared at the phone, dumbfounded. “I’m probably the wrong person to ask.”

“Yeah, me, too,” Niylah said.

Clarke rolled her eyes and put her phone away again.

“Hey, if you like the guy, just call him up,” Niylah suggested simply.

“I can’t. I don’t have his number.”

“So go back to the bar and see if you run into him again,” Raven advised. “It’s worth a shot.”

Clarke fell silent, thinking about it. It wasn’t the first time she’d thought about it. Last night, before her vibrator had quit working on her, she’d been squirming underneath the covers, imagining what would happen if she walked in and saw him sitting there. Maybe he’d bring her home this time, or be willing to come back to her place. The truck had been fun, but having a whole bed to fool around in, having the proper space to get completely naked and fully appreciate him . . . it turned her on just thinking about it.

“Maybe I will,” she mumbled, returning her eyes to her book. Who was she supposed to be reading about again? Picasso? Monet? She didn’t care about either one of them right now.

It took five more days for Clarke to work up the courage to take Raven’s advice. Faced with the prospect of a Friday night alone while Raven and Wick bickered about how to divide the furniture in their apartment, Clarke set her new vibrator aside without even trying it out. Instead, she got up, got
dressed—t-shirt and jeans, casual was probably still best—and straightened her hair. *It’s worth a shot,* she kept telling herself as she touched up her makeup. Worst case scenario, Bellamy wasn’t there, and then she either went home alone or possibly met someone else instead.

Dropship was bustling when she got there around 9:00, a lot busier than it had been a couple weeks ago. Judging by the guy wearing a hat with 21 on it, there was a birthday party going on, and that’s where a lot of the noise was coming from. Several tables had been pushed aside to make a larger dance floor, too, and that was filling up, mostly with couples who were clearly using dancing as a form of foreplay.

Clarke strolled in, looking around as casually as she could. There were plenty of guys there—dark-haired guys, hot guys, even, but no Bellamy. Attempting to swallow her disappointment, she sat down atop the only empty stool at the counter, unsure what to do from here. Should she just sit and wait, see if he came in? 9:00 was early for a bar, after all. There was plenty of chance that he’d show. But if he didn’t, then she’d be that poor, pathetic girl sitting by herself the entire night. Which didn’t sound fun.

When the bartender came over to take her order, she said, “Oh, actually I was just looking for someone. He was in here a couple weeks ago. Really good-looking, really deep voice.”

“Bellamy?” the bartender guessed.

“Yes.” Excitement bubbled up inside her. So he *was* a regular here after all. “Bellamy Blake.”

The guy sitting on the stool next to her snorted out a laugh, and the bartender just motioned to him. “You’re lookin’ for Bellamy, huh?” the guy said.

“Yeah.” She spun to the side, surveying this scrawny person with the sharp bone structure and Metallica t-shirt. “Do you know him?”

“Oh, I’d say so. He’s my roommate.”

Her eyes widened with surprise. “Really?” Small world then, but this was . . . sort of perfect.

“I’m Murphy,” the guy introduced himself as the bartender put a small bowl of nuts and pretzels in front of him.

“Clarke,” she returned.

“Clarke.” He let his eyes roam up and down her, then smirked. “So how do you know Bellamy?”

“Oh, we’re, um . . .” She didn’t want to lie, but she didn’t exactly want to tell the truth, either. “Uh, we hung out here not long ago.”

“And now you’re hoping to ‘hang out’ with him again?” Murphy said, using air quotes to indicate that he knew exactly what she and Bellamy had done.

“Maybe.”

“Well, you’re in luck,” Murphy said, popping a pretzel into his mouth. “He’s on his way here now.”

Her stomach immediately knotted up, even though this was what she’d wanted. She hadn’t planned this out, though, at least not well. What was she going to say when she saw him? What was she going to do? What if he didn’t even remember her? How mortifying would that be?
She was grateful when a girl with long dark hair came up to Murphy, immediately distracting him and giving her something else to think about, too.

“Hey, baby,” Murphy said, circling an arm around her waist.

“Hey, you.” The girl bent down and kissed him, then looked up at Clarke and smiled. She was gorgeous and exotic, the kind of girl people would normally think was way too pretty for a guy like this. She had a very unique design tattooed on her face, down her nose and across her left cheek. It was a brave choice for permanent body ink, but she pretty much rocked it.

“Who’s this?” the girl asked.

“Oh, this is Clarke,” Murphy replied, pulling his girlfriend down onto his lap. “She’s a friend of Bellamy’s.”

“Oh,” the girl said, nodding slowly. “I see.”

Clarke frowned. What did that mean?

“I’m Emori,” the girl said, stealing her boyfriend’s drink out of his hand.

“Emori,” Clarke echoed. “That’s a pretty name.”

“Thanks.” Emori took a drink, put the bottle back in Murphy’s hand, and became very blunt when she remarked, “So I take it you slept with Bellamy.”

Clarke felt her eyes widen, and she knew she must have turned various shades of red.

“Relax,” Emori said. “Nothing to be ashamed of.”

No, she wasn’t ashamed. She just wasn’t used to this, talking about sex so openly with people she didn’t even know. But then again, maybe that happened as a result of having sex with someone she didn’t even know.

“So how was it?” Emori asked, grinning.

Murphy gave her a sharp look.

“What?” she said innocently. “I’ve always wondered.”

“You have?”

Clarke laughed a little bit, glad that these two could actually make her feel a little less nervous as she waited for Bellamy to show. “It was ... fun,” she said, figuring that was an accurate yet harmless enough word to describe it.

“That’s it?” Emori made a face, clearly disappointed. “Come on, tell me more.”

Clarke wasn’t about to do that, though, so she said, “Really fun?” hoping that would suffice.

“It’s fine,” Murphy said. “We don’t need details. She’s already satisfied with what she’s got.”

“I am,” Emori said, taking a moment to gaze at her boyfriend affectionately. For as much as she claimed to have wondered about Bellamy, it was clear that she only had eyes for one guy. “Funny story,” she said to Clarke, “when I first met Murphy, it was right here at this bar. I was out with some friends, and he and Bellamy came in. All my girls had eyes for Bell, but I was the only one who
noticed this guy here.”

“Thanks,” Murphy deadpanned, “that makes me feel great.”

When she kissed him, though, the love between them . . . it was clear. Everything else was just good-natured teasing. These two . . . they were it for each other, clearly.

And here came that envious feeling again.

“Hey, here he is,” Emori said when she finally stopped kissing her boyfriend and came up for air.

Clarke glanced to the left momentarily, just long enough to see Bellamy walk in the door. He was stopped almost immediately by two guys on their way out. They did that whole bro-handshake thing, said a few words to each other, and then laughed about something boisterously.

Oh god, Clarke thought, looking down at the counter. He was of those guys everyone in the neighborhood knew, wasn’t he? He was like the popular guy in high school, and she was that little artsy wallflower at the dance trying to get noticed.

“Bell-oh-my!” Emori called in a sing-song voice as he waved goodbye to the guys heading out.

“Hey, guys,” he said as he approached them.

“Bell, your friend’s here,” Murphy said, pointing to Clarke.

Heart beating a mile a minute, she peeked up at him quickly, managing a shaky smile.

“Oh, hey,” he said, and a couple seconds later, he added, “Clarke.”

Inwardly, she breathed a sigh of relief. At least he remembered her name. “Hey,” she greeted in return.

“We were just keeping her company,” Emori said.

“Oh, I bet she loved that,” Bellamy said sarcastically.

“Screw you, man,” Murphy said. “We’re very good company.”

“Very good,” Emori agreed emphatically.

“If you say so.” Bellamy squeezed in between the stools, leaning against the counter, standing so close to Clarke, she could smell his musky cologne—or maybe that was just sweat. Whatever it was, he smelled good. He gave a quick signal to the bartender, and the bartender nodded in response, already preparing a drink for him.

“Where you been?” Murphy asked him. “Work run late?”

“Yeah, I had too much shit to do,” Bellamy lamented, taking a seat at the stool next to Clarke’s when the person sitting there got up and left. “Not enough hours in the day.”

Clarke kept her eyes averted, managing to glance out the corner of them to take in his clothes, though. His white t-shirt was dirty, his jeans a bit muddy. His jacket was frayed around the zipper, and his hair honestly looked like he hadn’t combed it since he’d gotten out of bed. Damn, he looked good, though.

“Well, screw work,” Emori said. “It’s the weekend now.”
“Yep,” Bellamy agreed, thanking the bartender when he got his drink. Before taking a sip, he asked Clarke, “You want one?”

She didn’t even know what he was drinking, and her stomach was probably too nervous to even handle a beer. So she said, “I’m good, thanks,” to politely decline.

The four of them sat in somewhat awkward silence for the next couple seconds until Emori got up off her boyfriend’s lap and grabbed his hand. “Let’s dance,” she said.

Groaning, he practically made her pull him to his feet. “I don’t dance.”

“Yes, you do.” She smirked at him lovingly, and he smiled back at her, and all his resistance just melted like ice cream as he let her pull him out into the midst of all the other couples. Clarke watched them for a moment, amused by Murphy’s incredible lack of rhythm, and then she peeked over at Bellamy again. Maybe he’d want to dance, too? Not that that’d be a good thing for her. She had a worse case of two left feet than Murphy did.

“So what’re you doin’ here, Clarke?” he asked as he drank.

“Oh, nothing,” she replied nonchalantly, hoping she actually sounded nonchalant. “I was just in the neighborhood, thought I’d swing by and see if you were here.”

“Well . . . here I am.”

Here you are, she thought, rubbing her legs together discreetly. How was it possible for him to look so good after he’d just gotten off work? At the end of her workdays, she looked like a corpse. He still looked like the hottest guy she’d ever seen.

“So where do you work?” she asked, trying to strike up a conversation that actually had some legs to it.

“Howay?”

“Well, you said you were working late, so . . . where do you work?” She didn’t want to give off stalker-vibes, though, give him the impression she’d be showing up with flowers and chocolate candy on his lunch break, so she added, “I’m just curious.”

“Oh, I don’t really work anywhere,” he replied. “I kind of just . . . find work, you know? Like today I fixed somebody’s roof and sink. Tomorrow it’ll be somebody’s car or dishwasher.”

“Dishwasher?” she echoed, trying not to get turned on by this whole hot handyman image she was conjuring in her head.

“Yeah, those are complicated, though. You really gotta know what you’re doing there.”

“Well, you sound like you know what you’re doing.”
“Oh, I always know what I’m doing.” He grinned at her mischievously, and she blushed, thinking that . . . he had to be referring to sex, right? Because that sounded sexy.

“Well, I—I have some things in my apartment that aren’t quite working right,” she sputtered, not exactly sure what those things might be. Her microwave, maybe? She couldn’t cook, so she could easily fuck up her microwave. “Maybe sometime you can come fix things for me.”

“Yeah, sure,” he said, that grin still stuck on his face. He chuckled lightly, shaking his head before he took another drink. “You’re cute, Clarke.”

“What?” Had she really heard that correctly?

“I said you’re cute,” he repeated. “Actin’ like you just happened to be around here, just happened to come in when you haven’t been here for weeks.”

Shit, he was onto her. She was so not mysterious, and guys liked a little mystery in a girl, so she’d have to deny the hell out of this one. “No, I really did just drive by,” she lied, “and I just thought to myself, ‘Hey, maybe that guy from Walmart’s there tonight.’”

“That guy from Walmart?” He threw his head back, laughing louder. “Did you forget my name again?”

“No . . . Bellamy.”

“Ah, good.”

“I remember your name.” Raven still didn’t, but . . . well, he didn’t need to know she’d talked to her friends about him.

“That was fun the other night, huh?” he said, sounding as casual about it as she wished she could be.

“Yeah, it was really fun,” she agreed. She sensed a segue, a chance to talk about that night a little more in-depth, so she took it, hoping it wouldn’t freak him out too much. “Actually, the whole night was fun, not just . . .” She lowered her voice, even though that bar was way too loud for anyone else to hear and way too wild for anyone else to care. “Not just out in the truck,” she said. “You were fun. Hanging out with you, getting to know you a little bit . . . I really enjoyed it.”

“Well, thanks,” he said, finishing the drink in front of him. “You really don’t do this a lot, do you?”

“Do . . . what?” she asked.

“Hook up with people you barely know.”

She felt her words get trapped in the back of her throat for a moment, and all she could do was laugh nervously. “Well, no,” she admitted, “I don’t make a habit out of it. Do you?”

He shrugged. “I mean . . . I probably do it more than you do.”

“Am I doing it . . . wrong?” Was there some one-night stand etiquette she wasn’t aware of? Was she violating that unspoken etiquette just by sitting here talking to him right now?

“No, you’re fine,” he assured her. When he said that, though, he got up, and for a split-second, she feared he was leaving.

“Wait, Bellamy—” She got up and followed him, stopping abruptly when she noticed that he was just grabbing a menu off of one of the tables. He wasn’t going anywhere.
Feeling like an idiot, like she had no game whatsoever, she cringed. “I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I’ll just go. You’re here with your friends. You don’t need me bothering you.” She turned to leave, but he grabbed her wrist and pulled her back.

“You’re not bothering me,” he said, his voice low and seductive. Well, it was always low and seductive, but . . . especially now.

That look in his eyes, the constantly flirtatious one . . . it made her heart feel like it skipped a beat. But what if he wasn’t flirting? What if this was just the way he looked at every girl, talked to every girl? The obvious insinuation he’d made was that he’d had way more than just one one-night stand in his life. He was probably far more experienced and far more sexually adventurous than she was, and she was probably out of her league here. Whatever spurt of confidence she’d felt in that Walmart parking lot was gone, and she was so unsure of herself now.

“We had fun the other night,” he recapped, pulling her a bit closer, “together.”

“Yeah.” At least they agreed on that.

What he said next shocked the hell out of her: “You wanna do it again?”

What? she thought, trying to process the question. Wait, what? First he was calling her cute, and now he was . . . what was happening?

“Sure,” she said, answering with her gut instead of overthinking it. Shutting her mind off had worked well last time. Why not try it again? If he was offering, she wasn’t about to turn him down, not when she’d broken her whole damn vibrator trying to replicate the feel of him.

“Alright,” he said, setting the menu back down on the table. “Let’s go then.”

Go? she thought. Go where? She didn’t ask the questions out loud, just tried to stay relaxed and not be a spaz when he put his hand on her back and ushered her towards the door.

“Murphy!” he called to his friend.

Murphy’s eyes were transfixed on his girlfriend’s gyrating body out on that makeshift dance floor, so he didn’t even look up as he gave Bellamy a wave goodbye.

“Come on,” Bellamy said, one arm around Clarke as he led her outside.

They got into his truck, which was weird since she couldn’t stop thinking about having sex with him there, and he didn’t tell her he was taking her to his place, but she pretty much assumed that was where he was taking her. When he turned on the radio, she felt relieved, because having some guitar rifts flow through the vehicle meant that she didn’t have to say much to fill the silence.

Talking to Bellamy hadn’t been hard the first time, maybe because she’d had a couple of drinks in her then. But what was she supposed to say right now when he was clearly just driving her back to his place so he could fuck her again? Can’t wait? I’m looking forward to it? Can you be on top this time? As exciting as the whole thing was to her, it was awkward as hell, too.

Her heart was pounding with anticipation by the time they arrived at his house. With no driveway, he had to park out on the street.

“So this is your place?” she said as she got out of the truck. It was a white two-story house, not a shack by any means, but nothing fancy, either. The front yard was small, as was the backyard, which was separated by a chain link fence from its neighbors.
“Yep.”

She tried not to be too judgmental of the neighborhood as they walked from the truck to the front door, but truthfully, it was the kind of neighborhood her mom had forbade her to ever go play in when she’d been a kid. She could hear dogs barking nearby, music pulsating a few houses down the street, and various other loud noises, like adults yelling and babies crying. Bellamy’s house was quiet, though, and dark inside.

“So does Emori live here with you and Murphy?” she asked as he pulled open a rickety screen door.

“No, but she’s here a lot.” He shoved his key into the lock and pushed open the front door. “We have another roommate, but he’s probably out.” He stepped inside, motioning with his head for her to follow him.

The first thing Clarke thought was that it smelled nice in there, which was weird since three guys lived there. The second thing was that . . . it really wasn’t bad at all. The living room was actually kind of spacious, and she knew her stepdad would appreciate the Washington Redskins blanket draped over the back of the couch. There were video game controllers on the coffee table, which made her suspect Playstation or Xbox or whatever was a big pastime for Bellamy and his friends. And the whole living room space kind of blended into the kitchen, which looked to have some out of date appliances, but it was a fully-sized kitchen nonetheless.

“This is nice,” Clarke remarked.

“It’s old,” Bellamy said with a shrug, kicking his shoes off. “Here, watch out.” He reached behind her, grabbed hold of the screen door, and gave it a hard tug to get it shut. “Gotta fix that,” he muttered.

She toed off her shoes and set her purse down next to them, not sure how this was supposed to work. Did he show her around his house now, did they grab a snack so they could fuel up for the night, or did they just head into his bedroom and start fucking?

“You good?” he asked, leading her to believe her nervousness was written all over her face.

“I’m good,” she assured him.

Taking off his jacket, he murmured, “You let me know if you’re not good,” and stepped around her so he could hang it up on a haphazardly assembled coat rack. When he turned to face her again . . . he had that whole smoldering look in his eyes again, the same kind of look he’d had when she’d stepped out of the Dropship bathroom and seen him standing there. He moved in closer to her, eyes roaming all over her body, but when his face was mere inches from her own, his eyes just locked onto hers. He smiled encouragingly, cupped her face with one hand, and kissed her.

From the moment their mouths met, everything changed. It was as if, in an instant, her nerves just vanished, and she started to melt against him. Her hands splayed against his chest, and his rubbed the small of her back and the back of her neck. As awkward as she’d felt on the drive over there, there was no awkwardness in this kiss.

It didn’t take long for the kiss to deepen, for their tongues to start swirling around each other, for her hands to start pulling at the collar of his t-shirt, needing to feel his skin. Almost like he was reading her mind, he tore his mouth away from hers just long enough to lean back and lift his shirt over his head, dropping it onto the floor. She raked her fingers up and down his chest appreciatively as he resumed kissing her, because she’d missed out on this last time. Ridding themselves of all their clothing had been neither a priority nor a possibility in his truck. So seeing and feeling his sculpted
chest for the first time . . . it turned her on so much.

He was able to keep kissing her while his hands worked furiously on his jeans, unfastening them as quickly as possible. With an almost animalistic groan, he shoved his pants down past his knees, pretty much around his ankles, and then hoisted her up in his arms before she could even process what was happening. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around his shoulders, holding on tightly as he carried her towards the stairs. It wasn’t graceful—didn’t need to be—as he waddled up to the second floor, step by step with his pants around his ankles. He navigated the stairs without even looking, because he kept kissing her the entire time.

She took her shirt off when they got up to the second floor, dropping it near some bookshelves as he shuffled them past another couch and an old piano. She quickly took off her bra and flung it aside right before they crashed into a bedroom that had to be his. She didn’t even really get to look at the room, nor did she care to, before he dropped her down on his bed and fell on top of her.

His bare chest felt so good pressed against hers, and she arched her back up into him to feel as much of him as she could. He gave her breasts a few good squeezes, which almost instantly caused her nipples to harden, but he clearly had other things on his mind as he frantically kicked off his jeans and sent them flying to the floor with a flick of his ankles. He sat up a moment later, on his knees, giving her full view of the straining erection beneath his tight, black boxer briefs.

“You want it?” he asked, rubbing himself through his underwear.

She slithered up on the bed, whispering, “Yeah,” as her head hit the pillow.

“You?” He didn’t hesitate to pull his underwear down over his hips, then sat down so he could get them off altogether. He threw them down atop his jeans and got up onto his knees again, and that was when her eyes bulged.

*It’s so big,* she thought, trying not to stare too much. She’d known it was big, of course, and hell, she’d already taken it once before, but she hadn’t really been able to see it then. Seeing it right now, hard and jutting out from his groin, already glistening on the tip with pre-cum . . . it terrified her and thrilled her all at once.

Getting naked happened quickly for her. One second, she was just topless, and then the next second, it seemed, his agile fingers had her jeans unbuttoned and unzipped. She lifted her hips to help him remove first her pants, then her underwear. She’d worn a lacy black thong, not that it mattered, because he hadn’t left it on her long enough to appreciate it. But the way he licked his lips when he looked down at her naked body let her know that he was definitely appreciative of other things.

Prior experience led her to expect that he would just put a condom on and start doing her, but Bellamy surprised her when he pushed outward on her knees, spreading her legs open, all with a mischievous grin on his face. She didn’t even realize how much she wanted to feel his mouth on her until she did, until he’d moved down to the bottom of the bed and bent forward to press a series of hot, wet, sucking kisses to her core. She started to shake and quiver right away, and when she felt his tongue slide up and down her folds, she inhaled sharply.

*Oh god,* she thought, eyes fluttering shut despite how much she wanted to watch him. *Oh, god.* She opened them again, truly mesmerized by the sight of his face between her legs, his talented tongue flicking and licking at the most intimate part of her body. Having dated a girl, she obviously had plenty of experience with oral sex, and she loved it. It was the easiest way for her to get off. But doing this with a guy was different, because the only other guy she’d been with was Finn; and on the rare occasions when he had done this for her, he’d treated it like a chore. Never had he gone down on her so eagerly.
Bellamy acted as though it were a privilege, though. He basically made out with her pussy, kissing and sucking and licking at her there just as he did her mouth. He ate her out so good, her hips started to buck up off the mattress on their own accord, desperately seeking out the heat and friction of his mouth. He put one hand on her hip to hold her down, hold her steady, and continued to just absolutely devour her, making her feel like she was about to fly apart into a million tiny pieces.

“Oh . . .” she whimpered shudderingly, digging her head back into the pillow. He had her so close to cumming, but she was self-conscious to do so. She barely knew the guy. What if he didn’t want her cumming all over his face?

He didn’t let up, though, didn’t slow down. In fact, he only ratcheted things up a notch when he found her clit and purposefully directed all her attention there. He nipped and sucked on the tiny cluster of nerves there, teasing it deliberately with flicks from his tongue, and all that attention made the orgasm swirl in her stomach. Before she knew it, she felt it rising up within her, building to its peak, and then suddenly . . . it just happened. It was like an explosion, like a tidal wave crashing into the shore. She came, and she came hard, all over Bellamy’s face. He licked and lapped at her greedily, never once tearing his mouth away, as if he didn’t want to spill a drop. As she gradually came down from it, she saw him grinding his own hips against the mattress. Which was probably the hottest thing she’d ever seen in her life.

“Oh my god,” she gasped, completely euphoric in that moment. That had to be one of the best orgasms she’d ever had, in no small part due to how damn good he was with his tongue. Hands-free orgasms weren’t the easiest thing to get out of a girl, but one of his hands was still on her hips. The other had never left her inner thigh.

Still dazed after cumming, she was barely aware of what was happening as he crawled up the bed and opened his end table drawer. She heard him tear open a small foil package, but he kept his back to her as he rolled the condom on. When he was done, he turned around again, got on top of her, and kissed her passionately. She could taste herself on his lips, which was . . . surreal and intoxicating.

There was no slowing down, though, not with Bellamy, not tonight. He grabbed her hips and flipped her over onto her stomach in one swift motion. She moaned, automatically lifting her backside up off the bed so that he had better access. Pressing her cheek to the pillow, she lay there, limbs still shaky with pleasure, and waited for his cock. The mattress squeaked beneath him as he shifted his weight, positioning himself behind her. When she felt the head of his cock tease her entrance, her whole body jerked forward a bit, but he put one hand on her waist to pull her back into him again. He rubbed his cock up and down her entrance a few times before pushing it inside.

“Oh . . .” she moaned, reveling in the feeling. Thank God she’d already cum once and had plenty of natural lubrication working in her favor, because his cock was huge, and it made her feel so . . . so full. It wasn’t a bad feeling, though, at all. It was different than Finn, and a lot different than Lexa’s strapon, but it was a good kind of different.

It was Bellamy.

He started thrusting right away, and they weren’t slow, shallow thrusts, either. They were long, hard, powerful thrusts, the kind that made her whole body rock back and forth, the kind that made the headboard of his bed hit the wall. His hands gripped her hips tightly while his skin slapped against hers, and that sound alone was enough to make Clarke feel like she was going to cum again. His determined grunts were a serious turn-on, and even though he never quite moaned the way she did, he tended to make these low, guttural groans that more than clearly indicated his pleasure.

He fucked her, just straight-up fucked her from behind, harder than she could recall ever being fucked before. And she loved it; she loved every second of it. She’d never felt more wanted, more
desired, than she did right now by Bellamy Blake. The way his hands gripped her, the way his cock slid in and out of her . . . god, it made her feel so wild, so out of control, so fucking sexy.

He got his hands in on the action this time, reaching around to rub her clit. It didn’t take long, and she probably would have gotten off without that extra stimulation, but his touch assured it happened quickly. She came again, even more easily this time since she was still riding the high of her previous orgasm. Her body weakened and started to flatten out as he pounded a few final thrusts into her, and soon, with a loud, long groan, his hips stilled, pressed in hard against her, and he came, too.

Unable to move, barely able to breathe, she lay in a boneless heap as his body settled heavily on top of hers. His cock was still nestled inside of her, and as irrational as it was, she really wished he wasn’t wearing a condom so she could really feel him.

“Fuck,” Bellamy choked out, gasping for air. His breath tickled her hot skin and rustled her sweat-soaked hair.

She laughed dazedly, hoping he had more in him tonight. Because she wanted to do that again.
Chapter 3

Waking up was always a challenge for Clarke. Once she was up, she was a productive person, but the struggle of getting out of bed in the first place was very, very real.

Waking up in Bellamy’s bed was . . . interesting. It only took her a second and a few rapid blinks of her eyes to clear her head out of its sleepy haze and remember where she was. But it had just been so long since she’d woken up in anyone’s bed other than her own—Raven’s didn’t count—that she had to just lie there a bit, taking it all in.

Bellamy wasn’t asleep beside her, not that she’d expected him to be. But he had fallen asleep with her, she was pretty certain. Not cuddled up with her or anything, but next to her, sweaty hair completely plastered to his forehead. He’d fucked her three times before succumbing to exhaustion, and even though she’d contemplated calling a cab or seeing if Raven could come pick her up, she’d decided it was fine to just crash there for the night. If he wasn’t kicking her out of bed, why leave?

She sat up slowly, holding the covers to her chest, getting her first real look at this room. It’d been too dark in there—and they’d been too preoccupied—for her to see much of anything last night. But now that the sun was peeking in through the gap in his curtains and she didn’t have him to distract her, she was able to see it more fully. For a bedroom, it was pretty big, probably the master. And even though there were a few items of clothing on the floor, it was actually pretty clean. The bed itself they’d fooled around in was quite nice, probably a queen-sized, with four different pillows strewn about up at the top. The headboard was looking a little iffy, and she wasn’t sure if it’d been like that before or ended up like that because of them. The sheets were simple and probably filthy right about now, but . . . it was comfortable.

Glancing over at his nightstand table, a big red 10:06 greeted her on the alarm clock, meaning she’d definitely slept in. Beside that clock was a picture that caught her attention, a picture of Bellamy with a beautiful, thin, dark-haired girl. She picked up the frame and took a closer look at it, smiling because she assumed the girl was his sister. They were both wearing white t-shirts that said Blake on the chest, and both white t-shirts were covered in paint splatters, like they’d just gone and played paintball before it was taken. His sister had on dark sunglasses and posted with attitude, pouting exaggeratedly, and making a sideways peace sign with her right hand. Bellamy kind of looked like a big dork compared to her, wearing big, round glasses and a goofy smile.

Clarke set the picture back down and decided to get up, because she had to be at work in two hours and definitely had to get home and take a shower before then. As she scooted towards the side of the bed, she winced, feeling a dull ache between her legs. Damn, he’d really done her hard last night. Not that she was complaining. She’d loved every second of it.

Wrapping the sheet around her naked body, she padded towards the window, pulling one of the long curtains back so she could look outside. There were some kids running around and playing across the street, and a young guy walking a huge Sandlot-type dog down the sidewalk. Bellamy’s truck wasn’t parked out front anymore, which she took as an indication that he was gone.

Damn, she thought, disappointed as she closed the curtain.

Next to the window was an old, possibly antique blue chair, where she noticed he’d folded and piled all of her clothes for her. Thank God. The idea of walking through the house and picking them up like pieces of a puzzle had been mortifying. Her purse was sitting there, too, and on top of it was a
yellow post-it note with his name and phone number. She smiled excitedly, because that had to be a good sign. He wanted to see her again.

Even though she probably should have just gotten dressed and been on her way, Clarke was nosy as fuck. She walked over to his dresser, once again scouting out the framed pictures set up there. His sister was in a few more of them, along with another dark-haired woman who Clarke assumed to be his mom. There was a picture of Bellamy and his sister in front of a Christmas tree back when they’d just been kids, a picture of Bellamy and his mom standing by a Berlin Wall exhibit at some museum; and in between those photos was a picture of the three of them at Bellamy’s high school graduation, standing together outside a building that had *East Arkadia High School* painted in faded letters above its entrance. Bellamy looked ridiculous and so different in his blue cap and gown, but when Clarke squinted to get a closer look, she spotted something else in that picture, too: There was a gold stole around Bellamy’s neck, the thing that valedictorians and salutatorians wore. Clarke knew exactly what that was since she’d graduated third in her class and just barely missed out on wearing one herself.

*Smart and sexy,* she thought as she pulled open the top dresser drawer and snooped around. *Rare combo.* She didn’t disturb the contents of his drawer too much, and there didn’t seem to be much more in there than a vast collection of t-shirts. When she looked over her shoulder at his closet, though, the door was opened enough for her to see that he had plenty of nicer shirts, too, and nicer pants, even a couple suits shoved in the back, it seemed.

She shut his drawer again and shuffled towards what she assumed was a bathroom. She twisted the knob carefully, hoping it didn’t lead her to Murphy’s room, and when she stepped on a cool tile, she knew her first assumption was correct. She flipped the light switch, and a bright overhead light flickered on, revealing a modest, but once again fairly clean, bathroom to her eyes. There was a tub that doubled as a shower, and she immediately wondered if he’d gotten in there and washed off this morning. If he had, she really regretted sleeping through that.

When she caught sight of her own reflection in the bathroom mirror, she was horrified. She clutched at her hair in distress and whimpered dramatically. Was this what Bellamy had seen when he’d woken up this morning, her looking like a cat had just died on her head? After desperately raking her fingers through her unruly mane and making it at least presentable, she used her finger to brush her teeth and thankfully found some mouthwash in one of the bathroom cabinets. She browsed a couple pages of the *Playboy* magazine sitting next to his toilet while she did her morning business, then contemplated squeezing in a quick shower before leaving. But that just seemed weird to do without him actually being there, so she put on a bit of his deodorant, not caring if she smelled like a dude, used her hands to comb out her hair one more time, and then went back into the bedroom to get dressed.

Once clothed, she pocketed his phone number, slipped on her shoes, grabbed her purse, and headed out without fixing up his bed. Because really, she wasn’t some hotel maid, and the bed hadn’t been made last night anyway, so maybe he was the type of guy who left his bed unmade. Halfway to the stairs, though, she remembered that she hadn’t left her number for him, so she scurried back to his room, rummaged around his nightstand drawer, and managed to find a Sharpie. She couldn’t find anything to write on, though, so she ended up picking one of last night’s silver condom wrappers up off the floor. She smoothed it out and scribbled her phone number on it, hoping he’d be able to read it and would notice it if she left it right next to his alarm clock. Then she left.

The goal, of course, had been to slip out without being noticed, get outside and figure out the address of this place so Raven or Niylah or Wells could come get her. But she heard noises coming from the kitchen as she was creeping down the stairs and knew that wouldn’t be possible.
It wasn’t Murphy scrambling eggs atop the stove. It was a different guy, African American, built like a wrestler, pretty awesome beard. He glanced up when she stepped onto the bottom stair with a creak and said, “Hey.”

“Hey,” she said, assuming this was the third roommate Bellamy had mentioned. It would’ve been nice if he’d been there to introduce them.

“I’m Miller,” he said, turning the heat on the stovetop burner down.

“Clarke,” she said, taking a few hesitant steps forward.

Nothing about him was hesitant, though. He strode towards her with his hand outstretched and said, “Nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, you, too.” God, it would have been nice to be so effortlessly friendly and at ease around strangers. The good thing about this guy, though, was that he didn’t seem like he was judging her for this very obvious walk of shame. Which perhaps prevented it from being a walk of shame at all.

“Hey, uh, Bellamy had to leave early this morning,” Miller explained. “Someone called him up for work, so . . .”

“Oh, yeah, that’s fine.” Somewhere in that neighborhood was probably a broken dishwasher, and Bellamy, with his talented hands—oh so talented hands—was probably fixing it.

“I can give you a ride home, though,” Miller offered, using a spatula to push his eggs around in the frying pan.

“Oh, you don’t have to. I can have someone pick me up.”

“It’s not a problem,” Miller said, turning off the heat on his breakfast altogether. “I got the whole day open.”

“Are you sure?” She didn’t want to inconvenience him, but if he was willing . . .

He grabbed his keys off the end table next to the couch and said, “Yeah, let’s go.” He walked out the door, motioning with his head for her to follow.

Sensing that Bellamy’s friend was perfectly trustworthy, Clarke got into his car with him and told him her address. He just nodded as though he knew exactly where it was, and indeed, as he started zipping down the streets, she got the feeling he knew this town like the back of his hand. His vehicle rumbled worse than Bellamy’s, and it was a bumpy ride; but even though she lived across town, he’d probably get her there in record time.

“So are you the Walmart girl?” he asked as he slowed to a stop at a red light.

Her heart fluttered a bit, just because that meant Bellamy had mentioned her. “Yeah, I guess I am.”

Miller smirked. “Cool.”

“And you’re . . . Bellamy’s friend, I take it, if you live with him.”

“Best friend,” he corrected. “You met Murphy?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Well, don’t let him tell you Bellamy likes him better, ‘cause he doesn’t. Bellamy and I have been
best friends since high school.”

“Oh, really?” She supposed he’d know if Bellamy had been the valedictorian or salutatorian then, but that kind of seemed like a weird question to ask.

“Yeah, I moved to Arkadia as a freshman,” Miller explained, “’cause they had a good wrestling program. So that’s how I met Bellamy. We were on Varsity together all four years.”

“Ah.” So Bellamy had wrestled. Great. Now all she could do was picture that amazing body of his in a skin-tight singlet, rolling around on a mat with another man.

The light turned green, and Miller honked impatiently when the vehicle in front of them remained stationary. It leapt forward then, and he pressed down hard on the gas, doing the same. “Bellamy’s actually one of the first people I came out to, a couple years ago,” Miller revealed.

“Oh, really?” As awful as it was to have judged a book by its cover, she never would have pegged him as gay.

“Yeah, but he already knew. I guess everyone already knew. There were all these rumors goin’ on about me in high school, and it got really bad, you know? Guys wouldn’t share a locker room with me, wouldn’t even wrestle with me during practice. But Bellamy didn’t give a fuck. He just kept bein’ my friend, and then when I finally did tell him I was gay, he was just like, ‘Yeah, what else is new?’”

She laughed, knowing how important it was to have that kind of person in your life. Raven had been that friend for her, back when she’d had the courage to come out about her own orientation. “I’m bisexual,” she told Miller.

“Awesome.”

“Yeah, I haven’t really told Bellamy yet. But it sounds like he’d be cool with it?”

“Oh, yeah, he won’t care,” Miller said, barely applying the break as he whipped the car around the corner at the next big intersection. “He’s a guy, so he’ll probably think it’s hot.”

She really wanted to hear more Bellamy stories, but there wasn’t enough time as he zig-zagged down a couple backroads, pulling up in front of her apartment before she had the chance to ask just how big of a history nerd Bellamy really was—underneath that Playboy magazine had been a World War II book, and hanging on the wall of his bathroom was a newspaper report about the Kennedy assassination.

She thanked Miller for driving her, and he reiterated that it was no problem. Then he said, “Hopefully I’ll see you again,” as she got out of the car.

“Yeah,” she said, shutting the door and waving goodbye. He waved back and drove off down the street.

She frowned when he was gone, not liking the sound of his last words to her. Hopefully he’d see her again? Was that not likely? She’d assumed that, with Bellamy leaving her his number, maybe it was likely she’d be back. But then again . . . maybe it was just wishful thinking. Sure, she’d managed to transform her one-night stand into a two-night one, but . . . what if that was all it would be?

Don’t worry about it, she told herself, turning to head into her apartment. She had other things to think about today, things that weren’t spontaneous and sexy and ridiculously skilled in bed. Routine things, normal things. Work. Studying. The usual.
Bellamy got done fixing Diana Sydney’s dishwasher at 3:00 in the afternoon. That woman was a real bitch, and he hated her with every fiber of his being. But she had plenty of money in her bank account ever since her divorce, so in that respect, she was his favorite customer. She paid him double what anyone else would have, and the tip she gave him was insanely generous, probably because she had a cougar crush on him. He used that to his advantage, going shirtless whenever he worked on anything for her. The more he went shirtless, the more she paid up.

He flopped down on the living room couch next to Miller when he got home, back hurting. Maybe part of that was because he’d spent hours today hunched over a dishwasher. Maybe part of it was because of what he’d done last night.

Miller was absorbed in a game of *Grand Theft Auto* and didn’t even glance up from the TV screen. “Wanna play?” he asked, thumbs moving quickly and expertly on the controller.

“Nah, I’m good,” Bellamy said, yawning.

“Hey, I met Clarke today.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah, I drove her home. She seems nice.”

“Yeah, she is.” He shut his eyes for a moment, feeling like he could just fall asleep right there.

“Guess where she lives, bro.”

Bellamy opened his eyes again, trying to remember the apartment complex he’d dropped her off at after their . . . truck ride. “I don’t remember.”

“Polaris.”

“Polaris?”

Miller nodded emphatically.

“Really?” He scratched his head, confused. He was pretty sure that wasn’t where he’d driven her. He would have remembered dropping a girl off at that fancy of an apartment complex.

“Didn’t we used to call that place ‘the palace?’” Miller recalled.

“Yeah, we did.”

“Well . . .” Miller shrugged. “Looks like you scored yourself a princess.”

Bellamy chuckled, a little bit mind-blown by that. Girls from Polaris didn’t know guys like him. What the heck had a girl from Polaris been doing at Walmart in the first place? Clarke was a mystery, it seemed.

“Hey, did O stop by?” he asked his friend, changing the conversation abruptly.

“No.” Miller swore under his breath when the game froze up suddenly. When he whacked the side of the controller, somehow that started it going again.

“Probably holed up with Lincoln, if they’re even back from Mexico yet,” Bellamy muttered, none
too happy about that possibility. He used to see Octavia all the time, every day, almost, but ever since she’d gotten this damn boyfriend of hers, their sibling time was increasingly limited. When Octavia wasn’t gallivanting off to Mexico with the guy, she was doing things with him behind closed doors Bellamy preferred not to think about.

“I’m sure she’ll come by soon,” Miller said.

“Yeah.” If not, he’d swing by the campus rec center and sit in on one of those martial arts classes she taught. She’d hate that. “Alright, well, I’m gonna go crash for a little while,” he announced, standing up and stretching. “I’ll come kick your ass at this later, though.”

“In your dreams,” Miller said, right as his character finally died. “Dammit.”

When Bellamy walked into his room, the first thing he did was make a detour for the bathroom and grab some room spray. Because it still kind of smelled like sex in there. He sprayed a generous amount, then took the wad of money from Diana Sydney out of his pocket and slapped it down on top of his dresser. That’d pay for this month’s electricity, his phone bill, and Octavia’s birthday present.

Exhausted, he lay down, still fully clothed, thinking he could squeeze in a few good hours of rest before his neighbors stopped by for the evening. It didn’t even matter that they didn’t have plans. Jasper and Monty almost always came over on Saturday nights, and usually they brought their girlfriends with them, so it was a full house.

Something on his nightstand caught his eye as he was about to drift off, though. What the hell was a condom wrapper doing up there? He reached over and picked it up, perplexed to see numbers written on it. But when he realized it was a phone number, that made more sense.

You frisky princess, he thought, staring at the number a little longer than necessary. She wanted more.

He flipped the condom wrapper back onto the table, not about to throw it away. Hell, no. Clarke was a pretty girl, and even though he’d really put it to her good last night, she’d kept up, handled it better than he’d thought she would. She’d surprised him, honestly, with her tenacity, and if she wanted another go-round . . . well, maybe he’d call her.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke stuck the post-it note with Bellamy’s phone number onto her bathroom mirror and looked at it every morning when she brushed her teeth and every night before she went to bed. She wanted to call him, really, but she was nervous to do so. What if that came across as too clingy, too desperate? She’d already been blatantly obvious when she’d ‘just happened to drive by’ Dropship the other night. Maybe it was best to let him make a move this time.

She waited for four days, not even bothering with her brand new vibrator during that time because she knew it would be unsatisfying. Each time her phone rang, she got her hopes up, thinking it might be him. She’d already programmed his number into her phone so that she’d see his name on the screen if he called. But he never did, and she was starting to think he never would.

On Tuesday, Wells aced a particularly difficult political science test, so he suggested a night out on the town to celebrate. Clarke didn’t feel especially energetic, but Niylah was always down for clubbing, and Raven proudly proclaimed that she was ready to “get her flirt on” with some new guys. So they got dressed up and headed out to Mount Weather, which was one of only two clubs in all of Arkadia. The other, TonDC, was way grungier, and they hardly ever hung out there. Mount
Weather had two floors, a VIP lounge area they sometimes managed to squeeze into by accident, mixologists instead of regular bartenders, and an in-house fog machine that occasionally hazed up the dance floor.

Clarke didn’t really mind clubbing, but it definitely wasn’t her favorite thing to do. Usually she found a booth, table, couch, whatever and sat there sipping on a martini while her friends hit the dance floor. On the rare occasions that she drank too much, she’d get out there and join them, but there had to be enough alcohol in her system to get all her inhibitions to come down for that. Raven and Niylah didn’t have that same problem. They were both naturally good dancers, and whether it was a pulsating techno beat or a hard hitting rap one, they were able to find their rhythm right away. It wasn’t uncommon for guys to forget about their girlfriends and start watching Raven dance, which seemed to be happening tonight. Without Wick there to lay claim to her, Raven was a totally free-spirited girl. She danced with all sorts of boys, never really letting them get so close that they were grinding, but allowing them close enough to get them worked up. Niylah did the same thing with the girls. If they weren’t bi before, they certainly were questioning it when she started making out with them right out there on the dance floor. And Wells . . . well, poor Wells didn’t have as much luck as the girls did, but he was usually charming enough to find some nice girl to chat up, and sometimes those girls would recognize him the next time they were there. Eventually, it was going to get to the point where he took one of those girls home and finally lost his virginity, but for now, he was still too chaste for that.

Despite sitting by herself for the majority of the evening, Clarke was still having a decent time. It was fun to watch her friends have fun, particularly Raven, who was always most lively when she was a single woman. Clarke didn’t even really allow herself to feel lonely until a couple sat down on the couch across from her, both of them clearly intoxicated and very into each other. The girl’s dress was so short, her ass was practically hanging out, and her boyfriend didn’t hesitate to rub his hands all over it. She practically straddled him, and the two of them made out like they were the only two in the club, like no one else was there.

Seeing them made Clarke think about Bellamy, made him wish that he was there with her. Not that they needed to make out like that in front of everyone. No, that much PDA was a little too much PDA. But it would have been nice just to have someone there, to have someone to talk to and maybe get out on the dance floor with. If he gave her that grin, the one that she swore should be illegal, he’d have been able to convince her to get out there and dance.

Something told her to reach into her purse in that moment and pull out her phone, and when she did . . . it was like fate. There, right in front of her on that screen was a new text message. From Bellamy.

No way, she thought, clicking on it. It was very short, very blunt, very to the point: Want to come suck my dick?

It was such an obscene question that she surely blushed. Even though no one was looking, she tried to hide her phone from prying eyes and texted back, Maybe. Because yeah, maybe she did.

She set her phone face down in her lap, looking around the club, trying to locate her friends again. Niylah was nowhere to be seen, which usually meant she’d found someone to hook up with. Wells was up at the bar with some adorable girl in a short skirt, saying something that made her laugh. And Raven was in the middle of a circle of boys, arms in the air, tossing her hair about and yelling, “Woo!” as she shook her hips in time with the song.

They don’t need me here, Clarke thought. She wasn’t adding anything spectacular to their night. They were having fun without her, and Bellamy . . . well, Bellamy wanted to have some fun with her.
Her phone vibrated a minute later when he texted her back. *Come on over,* it read invitingly.

Her stomach clenched with nervous anticipation. Oh god, what if she wasn’t as good at giving him head as he was at eating her out? Clearly Bellamy had ten times the sexual experience she had. What if she couldn’t give him exactly what he wanted and ended up being a letdown, a disappointment?

Well aware that she was psyching herself out and over-analyzing again, she quickly texted back *on my way* before she could change her mind.

She finished her martini and grabbed her clutch, slinking past people to the center of the dance floor. “Raven!” she called.

At first, her friend didn’t hear her.

“Raven!” she called again.

Raven stopped dancing and said, “Clarke, come dance!”

“No, I’m leaving!” Clarke tried to tell her.

“What?” Raven squeezed past the men around her so she could hear Clarke better. “What’d you say?”

“I’m leaving,” Clarke repeated. “I’m not really feeling that well.”

“Oh, no.” Raven frowned. “Well, I’ll go with you.”

“No, you should stay,” Clarke told her. “You’re having fun.”

“No, Clarke, I don’t have to stay.”

“I just have a little headache anyway. It’s not that bad.”

“Are you sure?” Raven asked, ever the best best friend in the world.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she insisted. “Just stay and do your thing.”

“Are you good to drive?” Raven made sure to question.

“Yeah, I only had, like, one drink.”

Raven sighed, reluctantly agreeing to it. “Okay. Just call me if you need anything, alright? I’ll be right over.”

“Okay.” Clarke gave her best friend a quick hug and said, “Bye.”

“Bye.”

On the drive over to Bellamy’s—in which she took several wrong turns because she couldn’t *exactly* remember where it was; Miller had driven her home at light speed after all—she wondered why she hadn’t told Raven about her second night with Bellamy yet. Raven wouldn’t judge her behavior at all; hell, she’d probably encourage it. But if she told Raven that she and Bellamy had hooked up again and that she was on her way over there now, then Raven would assume they were starting up a relationship. She’d start referring to Bellamy as her boyfriend. She’d want Clarke to invite him over for dinner. And Bellamy might not agree to all that.
But . . . he might, if she mentioned it.

It took her a little longer than she would have liked to get to Bellamy’s house, and she found it more by accident than anything else. Finally, though, she got there, and when she walked in the door, he already had his pants undone and was waiting for her.

He sat leisurely on the couch, legs spread while she knelt in between them, bobbing her head up and down his cock. She held her hand around the base, gripping and squeezing it gently, trying to keep up a steady rhythm with her mouth. It wasn’t easy. Because he was so well-endowed, she could at first only take the head of his cock without gagging. Gradually, she loosened up her throat muscles, managing to take more of him, about half. And what she couldn’t fit into her mouth, she made sure to lavish with long strokes of her tongue, licking up from base to tip before resuming her sucking rhythm again.

“Oh, yeah,” he groaned quietly. He’d kept the TV on to drown out some of his sounds, but he managed to keep it pretty quiet altogether. That probably meant his roommates were home tonight. At any minute, either of them could stroll out into that living room and see her sitting there on her knees, sucking him off. For some reason, that was an incredibly arousing thought, and she felt a subtle wetness between her legs when she imagined it.

“Good?” she asked, hoping she was delivering what he’d wanted tonight.

“Yeah, keep going,” he urged, reaching down to tangle his hand in her hair. He pushed her head back towards his cock, and she swirled her tongue around the head of it engulfing as much of him as she could again. He hit the back of her throat, causing her to cough and gag a bit.

“You’re a good girl,” he praised, massaging her scalp.

She pressed a kiss to the underside of his cock, inhaling the musky, manly smell of him, and then sucked some more, surprised by how natural this felt. She hadn’t given a genuine blow job in years, not since Finn. In fact, Finn had been the only person she’d ever blown before. Strapons didn’t count, so yeah, it had just been him. And Finn was nowhere near as large as Bellamy was. Regardless of size, though, it seemed like giving a blow job was like riding a bike. You didn’t ever forget how. And Bellamy seemed to be enjoying what she was doing, so she just kept at it.

When his hips started to buck up into her mouth a bit, almost as if he couldn’t control them, she figured he was getting close. And even though she knew guys liked it when girls swallowed, she didn’t feel quite ready for that yet. That was something she hadn’t even done with Finn, and she wasn’t sure she’d like it. So she released him from her mouth with a loud pop and then jerked him off with her hand the rest of the way. He came quickly, flinging his head back into the pillow, shutting his eyes. His cum squirted all over her hand, and some of it even shot up and splattered on her eyes.

“Sorry,” he apologized right away.

She wiped off her eye with her free hand, laughing a little, and stroked his cock a few more times until she was convinced he was done. His whole body went languid on the couch and he smiled appreciatively. “Wow.”

“Did you like that?”

“Yeah, it was great.”

She wasn’t about to tell him how relieved she was to hear that, but . . . oh, yeah, she was relieved.
Getting up, she treaded into the kitchen, needing to clean up. She lifted the sink handle with her elbow and washed off her hands very thoroughly, then splashed some water on her face. There didn’t seem to be any other . . . remnants.

“You did good, Princess,” Bellamy said from the living room.

“Princess?” she echoed as she wiped down the whole sink.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m gonna call you.”

“Well, I’ve had worse nicknames.” She shut off the water, grabbed a paper towel to dry off her hands, and tossed it the trashcan. “I’m glad it was good, though,” she said, returning to the couch. She sat down beside him, watching in fascination as he tucked his cock away and pulled up his pants again. He didn’t bother zipping them, though, which led her to believe that the night might not be over. Oh, she prayed it wasn’t.

Before she could even try to be seductive and tell him how wet she’d gotten just by blowing him, some moaning and groaning sounds started to come from a room down the hall. Distinctly guy/girl sounds, which could only mean one thing.

“Is that Murphy and Emori?” she asked.

“Yes.” No sooner had he confirmed that, a bed upstairs started squeaking. “And that’d be Miller and Jackson.”

“God, it’s like a symphony of sex sounds around here,” she teased.

“Yeah, the mating den,” he agreed, readjusting his cock inside his jeans. “You know,” he said, staring at her suggestively, “we could make a few sex sounds of our own.” Then he was cupping her head, leaning in to kiss her, and at first, she just wanted to kiss him back. Because yeah, the idea of making sex sounds with Bellamy Blake? She loved it. She wanted it. But doing that while both these other couples were doing the same thing . . . something about it bothered her.

She actually opened her eyes and frowned while he kept trying to kiss her, and it didn’t take him long to realize something was off. “What?” he said.

She shook her head. “Nothing.”

“What’s wrong?”

As much as she just wanted to go with it, as much as she tried to shut her mind off yet again, there was just no avoiding these thoughts. “What’re we doing, Bellamy?” she asked, needing some kind of solid answer.

“What do you mean?” he said.

“Just . . . all of this.” It wasn’t feasible to keep waiting for her next night with him, never knowing when it would happen or how often it would happen or even why it would happen.

“We’re having fun,” he said, squeezing her knee. But that was what he always said.

“So are they,” she said, gesturing down the hall and upstairs. “But they’re . . . dating.”

He groaned exasperatedly and scooted away a bit, and she worried she’d just majorly fucked things up, like that one word had really freaked him out.
“Clarke,” he said, shaking his head sadly. “Don’t ruin this.”

“Ruin what?” she asked, not about to let up now. Hell, there was no going back now. She’d brought up the issue, and now it would be the big fat elephant in the room if they didn’t talk about it.

“This. Us.”

“And what are we, exactly?”

“We’re . . .” He paused for a few seconds, tongue-tied for the first time that she could remember. She’d never seen Bellamy be anything but smooth, but now, he seemed frazzled. “We’re Bellamy and Clarke,” he finally said, and it wasn’t the answer she was looking for.

“I feel like you’re avoiding the question.”

“Yeah, ‘cause I am.”

“Why?”

“Because you probably aren’t gonna like my answer.”

She had to look away from him then, because that felt like a knife to the heart. Was he saying what she thought he was saying? Was this all just about sex to him?

“Maybe you should just leave,” he mumbled, looking down at his lap as if he were too ashamed to look at her.

_Oh my god_, she thought, mortified. _Unbelievable_. Was this really the same sweet guy who’d kissed her cheek at Dropship a couple weeks ago, the same thoughtful guy who gathered up all her clothes for her the other morning? Was this the same adorable guy whose runaway watermelon had started all of this in the first place?

“Way to be a jerk, Bellamy,” she squeaked out, quickly heading for the door.

“I’m not trying to be a jerk,” he said.

“Well, it’s a jackass move, so . . .” Suddenly, she felt like she couldn’t get out of there fast enough, so she shoved on her shoes, grabbed her clutch off the floor, and grumbled, “Glad you enjoyed your blowjob,” on her way out the door.

He didn’t come after her. Apparently that was the kind of thing that happened in romance movies, not in real life.

On the drive home, she alternated between feeling pissed off and sad as hell. By the time she walked inside her apartment, it was all just sadness. She’d even started crying, which made her feel pathetic, but . . . what was she supposed to do? He’d basically just insinuated that he was using her for sex. And it wasn’t like that for her. Yeah, she liked having sex with him, but in addition to that . . . she liked _him_. She liked Bellamy Blake as a man, as a person, and knowing that he didn’t care to see anything else or anything deeper in her . . . it hurt.

She must have brushed her teeth, like, five times, all in an attempt to get the taste of him out of her mouth. Then she changed into her ugliest plaid flannel pajama pants and an FCCLA t-shirt from her senior year of high school. Once she’d scrubbed all her makeup off and looked as dumpy as she now felt, she figured she’d crawl into bed and maybe just stay there tomorrow. Screw class. She could miss one fucking day.
She lay down in her bed, checking her phone, and saw a text from Raven asking if she was feeling okay. What was she supposed to say to that? The headache lie had been just that, a lie. But saying that she was fine was a lie, too... one that would put Raven at ease and allow her to continue enjoying her night at Mount Weather, though.

*I’m fine,* she texted back, debating whether or not she’d tell her tomorrow about all things Bellamy-related. The great sex, his magnetic personality, the dick move he’d just pulled right after she’d so willingly *sucked* his dick... Right after she’d shut her eyes and forced all leftover tears back down where they belonged, her phone actually rang, and she dreaded answering it. The only person who called her all that often rather than texting her was her mom, and she was in no mood to talk to her mom right now.

When she peeked at the caller ID, though, it wasn’t her mom calling. It was... Bellamy?

*What the hell?* she wondered, confused. This all felt like *déjà vu,* though, like Finn. Finn used to be a jerk to her all the time, and what had he done to get back on her good side? He’d called and apologized. And she’d forgiven him *every* single time.

Part of her wanted to just not answer, but dammit... that was exactly what she did. “What, Bellamy?” she bit out shrilly.

“Hey, I’m outside your apartment right now,” he said, that low, gravelly voice of his sounding even lower over the phone.

She sat up straight, surprised. “What?” Finn would have never done that.

“Yes, can you buzz me in?”

She frowned, trying to make sense of his motives and her feelings all at once. Whatever his reason for being there, inviting him up to her place seemed... too risky. He’d say something or do something that would make her turn into silly putty, and then they’d probably just end up in bed together. And that wasn’t gonna fix anything.

“I’ll come down,” she said, abruptly ending the call.

She didn’t bother to change out of her hideous pajamas or even put on any lipstick. She convinced herself it didn’t matter, because whatever conversation they were about to have would be the last conversation. She wasn’t willing to be his little fuck doll, wasn’t about to let him use her like that. Finn had used both her and Raven for that very purpose, and she wasn’t subjecting herself to that kind of unhealthy relationship again.

“Hey,” Bellamy said when she came out.

She wrapped her arms around herself, not cracking a smile, not saying a word.

“Miller told me this is where you live, so...” He looked around at the front of her apartment complex, which was undeniably lavish. “It’s nice.”

She saw a flicker of insecurity in his eyes as he took in the fake palm trees, meticulously cared for shrubbery, the marble statues, the freaking fountain. Yeah, Polaris was a nice apartment complex, paid for almost entirely by her mother and stepdad. It was a far cry from his neighborhood, and she wondered if, in that moment, he felt ashamed of living where he did.

She hoped he didn’t, because his neighborhood might not have been nice, but his house was. There
was no shame in that.

“What’re you doing here, Bellamy?” she snarled impatiently, trying to remember that she was mad at him.

“I just wanted to talk,” he replied. “I didn’t like the way we ended things.”

“Well, things can’t really end if they never begin,” she pointed out dejectedly, walking down a rosebush lined sidewalk towards the fountain. He followed her wordlessly, and she swore she could feel the heat of his gaze on the back of her neck.

They sat down on the edge of the fountain, and he took a penny out of his pocket and tossed it over his shoulder into the water. “I’m sorry I upset you,” he apologized.

She didn’t dare look at him as she denied, “I’m not upset.”

“No, clearly you are,” he said. “You’re mad at me. And you have every right to be. I should’ve been more upfront with you right from the start.”

Just stay standoffish, she coached herself. If she didn’t engage in conversation, maybe he’d get fed up and leave.

No matter what she told herself she should do, though, she ended up doing something different. “I thought you liked me,” she said quietly.

“I do,” he insisted. “I do like you.”

She grunted, because that just felt meaningless. “You like having sex with me.”

“Well, yeah,” he admitted. “And you like having sex with me. There’s nothing wrong with that. But I like you, too, Clarke. I like getting to know you.”

She shook her head, because again . . . meaningless. “You don’t know me, though.”

He opened his mouth to protest, but she wouldn’t let him get a word in.

“And knowing how to get me off isn’t the same thing as actually knowing me, so don’t even say it.”

He smirked, chuckling lightly. “Look, you know me, though. You knew exactly what I was gonna say.”

She held back a smile, refusing to laugh at that, refusing to be amused, refusing to look at that smoldering face of his; because even though she was sitting down, that face could still make her knees go weak. It was a real problem like that. “We don’t know each other, Bellamy,” she said, accepting the truth of that. So she’d met a few of his friends and seen his bedroom and heard a couple things about his sister. That was all just skimming the surface.

“Well, we’re just getting started,” he reasoned. “There’s no reason why we can’t get to know each other better.”

She frowned, unable to keep from shooting him a confused look upon hearing that. Something wasn’t making sense to her, wasn’t adding up. Half an hour ago, he’d basically kicked her out of his apartment. Now he was suggesting they spend more time together? “What?” she said.

“Clarke.” He moved in closer, close enough that his knee could touch her leg. “I like you. But I don’t wanna mislead you; I don’t wanna give you the wrong idea.”
Her frown intensified.

“I’m not . . . looking for a relationship,” he explained, speaking slowly as if he were choosing his words carefully. “At least not the romantic kind.”

Well, that was disappointing, she figured, but not exactly shocking at this point.

“If you want somebody to call your boyfriend, somebody who says ‘I love you,’ somebody to celebrate an anniversary with, I’m not that guy,” he straight-up informed her. “It’s just not in the cards for me.”

She wanted to ask him why he would think that, but . . . there probably wasn’t some huge reason. Lots of guys his age were determined to play the field their entire lives. “So you wanna keep having sex with me,” she concluded.

“Of course.”

“But you don’t wanna date me.”

He cringed a bit, as if he felt bad for saying that out loud. “I don’t wanna date anyone.”

“So you really do just wanna use me for sex then?”

“No. No, I don’t wanna use you at all,” he denied vehemently. “I could never just use you for sex, Clarke. You’re . . .” He reached up and stroked her cheek, which seemed to be one of his patented flirt maneuvers. “You’re too sweet.”

She turned away from his touch, trying not to be affected by him, by this. By any of this.

“Listen, I know I don’t know you very well,” he acknowledged, “but I think you can be a friend to me. And . . .” He paused, one again struggling uncharacteristically to find his words. “I would like that.”

Everything he was saying rolled around in her mind, and she tried to make sense of it, to piece it together in a way she could understand. “So you wanna be friends,” she recapped.

“Well.”

“But you also wanna have sex.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“So . . .” That was only bringing her to one conclusion. “Friends with benefits, basically?”

“Yeah.” His whole face lit up with excitement at the prospect of it.

“Oh my god!” she exclaimed, leaning forward, dragging her hands through her hair. She laughed a little, rocking back. “Bellamy! Are you serious?”

“I’m dead serious.”

“Friends with benefits? Half the romantic comedies ever made are about friends with benefits. And it never works.”

“Yeah, because the movies shove these crappy love stories down your throat,” he argued, sounding like he’d given this some thought. “But that’s not how it has to be in real life. Do you really think it’s
impossible for two mature, consenting adults to have sex with no strings attached? Because I don’t. I think it’s simple. If we both know what we’re gettin’ into and we know what the outcome’s gonna be, then it’s fine.”

“And what’s the outcome gonna be?” she pressed. If this was the beginning, then what was the ending?

“Well, that’s the beauty of it,” he said. “Because no matter what, we stay friends. There’s no pain, no heartbreak. Nobody gets dumped or cheats or anything like that. You’re friends who fuck and have fun. And that’s it. You care about each other and trust each other, but you don’t expect anything more from each other. You don’t have all the added pressures of a relationship. You just have this really deep, really true friendship, and when you take the time to build that up, that lasts a hell of a lot longer than romance does. That can withstand anything.”

The more he talked . . . the more it really started to make sense to her. As confused as she’d been at first, she found herself starting to become . . . very persuaded as she listened to him. And she wasn’t sure whether that was just because of his natural charisma—the guy must have aced speech class—or if there was actual merit to this whole idea. But maybe it was a combination of the two?

“So I take it you’ve done this before?” she guessed.

He shrugged. “A couple times.”

“Must not have worked, though.”

“No, it did,” he said. “But both times, these girls ended up meeting someone else, and I was fine with it. The sex stopped then, but they’re still my friends. We still get along, we could still hang out. And they’re happy, so I’m happy for them.”

Happy for them? she thought, thinking about Finn and Lexa. Especially Lexa. How many times had she looked at those engagement photos and made a conscious effort to feel happy? It should have just come naturally, and she felt guilty knowing that it didn’t. But here Bellamy was, sounding completely sincere when he said he was happy they’d moved on from him. Maybe he really did have something figured out that she didn’t.

“So if we were to do this,” he went on, “and you went out and found someone, you wouldn’t have to worry about me. And vice versa. Although, like I said, that’s not gonna happen for me.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I just know it won’t,” he said. “I don’t want it to. But it’ll probably happen for you, someday. So if you wanna pass some time with me until that day, if you wanna—if you wanna have some more fun, whether that’s sex or something else, ‘cause we don’t have to have sex all the time . . .” His tongue darted out to wet his lips. “If you wanna get to know me more and have me in your life as a friend, then . . . I’m willing to do that because . . . I mean, who wouldn’t be willing to do that with you?”

“Oh, you’re good,” she said. “You’re very good.”

“I’m not tryin’ to lay it on thick or anything. I’m serious.”

“Oh, I know you are.” Her mind was just spinning right now, trying to imagine it, trying not to fantasize about it, debating whether it was a great as he made it sound. “But Bellamy, I don’t wanna just be . . . one of your girls.”

“One of them?” He made a confused face. “I don’t have any others, Clarke. I’m not gonna go out
and recruit more. If we’re doing this, then we’re doing this, you and me. I don’t have any reason to go out and sleep with other women.”

“So . . . so it’s like exclusive friends with benefits then?” she stammered.

“Yeah, exactly.”

“How is that any different than dating?”

“Because we just know we’re not dating, and we know it’s not leading up to that, and if it ends in an instant, then it’s all good. It’s just all good, Clarke.”

God, she thought, he makes it sound so simple. But then again . . . maybe it was. Maybe for people like him who just did what they wanted to without questioning it, without constantly over-analyzing the situation and finding problems where problems didn’t exist, maybe it was a really simple thing after all.

“I’ll be honest, that first night we hooked up,” he went on, moving closer, so close that he nearly had his arm around her, “I thought it was just gonna be that one time. But then there was the second time, and then tonight, and now . . .” He trailed off and shrugged. “I don’t know. It’s up to you. Ball’s in your court . . .” He grinned flirtatiously. “So to speak.”

“Oh my god.” She couldn’t help but smile, because the innuendo about his balls was obvious with that one.

“It’s whatever the hell you want, Clarke,” he told her, jaw clenching as he looked away from her. “You know where I stand.”

She did. He’d made that perfectly clear, and for that, she was actually grateful he’d come over. She knew now that his assholery back at his house didn’t actually mean he was an asshole. He just hadn’t communicated his intentions as well as he should have. And she hadn’t been open-minded enough to consider that . . . that maybe she didn’t need someone in her life with a ‘boyfriend’ or ‘girlfriend’ title to get that fulfilling relationship she longed to have. She’d had exactly one boyfriend and one girlfriend in her entire life, and neither relationship had ended in anything long-term for her. She wasn’t still friends with either Finn or Lexa, she wasn’t as happy for them as she should have been, and she wasn’t able to stop being envious of them. Except when she was with Bellamy. Because when she was with him, even if he didn’t intend to make it a romantic thing . . . that was when she felt like she had something, too, something special that was all her own. Maybe not a brand new baby, maybe not an engagement ring on her finger, but something. Something she didn’t want to let go of. Not yet.

“Okay,” she heard herself say quietly.

“Okay?” he echoed. “Okay, what?”

“Okay, let’s do it.” There. She’d said it. No backing out, no second-guessing now. The decision had been made.

Even though he’d been the one to champion the whole idea, he looked shocked that she’d agreed to it so quickly. “You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah.” If she got someone who could make her smile and make her laugh and also give her ridiculously intense orgasms, it was like the best of both worlds. No way could she turn him down.

“You’re positive?”
“Yes.”

“Because if you don’t think you can handle it . . .”

“Oh, you’d be surprised what I can handle,” she told him, shocking herself with how Raven-esque she’d managed to sound there.

“Damn, Clarke,” he said, reaching down to readjust the crotch of his pants.

“Still think I’m sweet?”

“Oh, yeah, you’re sweet,” he said. But then he bent down and pressed a hot kiss to the side of her neck. “And sexy,” he added, warm breath tickling her ear.

_Yeah, really sexy_, she thought sarcastically, not sure how he could say that with a straight face while she was wearing these hideous pajamas. Oh, well, though. He wouldn’t say it if he didn’t think it.

“I’m gonna make you feel so sexy, Clarke,” he murmured as his fingers intertwined with hers, “you have no idea.”

She inhaled shakily, so aroused by the thought. This guy had already made her _so_ wanted, _so_ desired. If this was just the tip of the iceberg, as he made it sound, then she couldn’t wait to see what else he had in store for her.

“Well, you’d better,” she said. “I’m no expert, but I think that’s what friends with benefits are for.”

He laughed lightly, leaning in to kiss her then, a surprisingly tender, even short kiss. “I’ll let you get some sleep,” he breathed out against her lips.

_Sleep?_ What even was what? She had no desire to do that right now. “Okay,” she said, a bit disappointed that he wouldn’t . . . come sleep with her.

They got up, holding hands as they walked back down the sidewalk to the main entrance of her building. “So I’ll probably see you tomorrow then,” he said, letting go of her hand as he started to back away.

“Yeah. Sure.” Tomorrow was . . . tomorrow. She’d just have to try out her new vibrator tonight.

“Alright,” he said. “See you then.”

“Yeah, see you.” She stood there and watched him go, wondering if it’d be too forward to run up to him and just pounce on him and drag him inside. Because the thought of him alone in his bed, probably jacking off to thoughts of her, and her alone in her bed, _definitely_ working herself into a frenzy over thoughts of him . . . it just seemed ridiculous.

He’d only taken a few steps when, slowly, he turned back around and met eyes with her. His chest was heaving with heavy breaths, ones that matched her own, and she could see the lust in those brown eyes of his, knowing it was probably mirrored in her own.

He marched back towards her and literally swept her up in his arms, kissing her hungrily, ferociously, staggering backward with her towards the door. She flung her left hand out, fumbling to punch in the security code, and when the doors clicked open, they stumbled inside together, a frenetic mass of arms and legs and mouths that wouldn’t come up for air.
Bellamy’s first week as Clarke’s friend with benefits was amazing. For her and for him. They didn’t hang out every night or anything, because that was what dating couples did. But they got together a lot, usually with Bellamy’s other friends. Murphy and Miller didn’t question his relationship with Clarke—they didn’t need to; they already knew him well enough to know what it was. Emori, though, actually asked Clarke herself if she was Bellamy’s girlfriend, and much to Bellamy’s relief, Clarke said, “Nope, just a friend.” And that was that.

Time with Clarke was awesome. She fit in well with his friends, so well that Emori begged him to bring her to Dropship one night for a game of pool. He did, and he was glad he did, because when she bent over the table to take a final shot at the eight ball, Bellamy stood behind her, rolling his cue stick between his fingers. “That’s a hell of a view,” he noted.

Clarke peeked over her shoulder, smiling, then returned her attention to the task at hand. The girl was surprisingly good at pool, and when she took her shot, she sunk the eight ball in the corner pocket with ease. “Yes!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms in the air while Murphy and Emori groaned in defeat.

Bellamy lifted her up with one arm and swung her around victoriously. “Woo!” he howled, cackling at Murphy. Murphy always lost at every game, and he always glared at Bellamy and flipped him off when he did.

Seeing Clarke play pool so well was a major turn-on, so of course it led to sex. And it was the kind of sex that couldn’t wait, either, the kind where they had to duck into that narrow, dark hallway outside the bathrooms together and make sure they were just far enough out of sight from prying eyes so they could do what they wanted to do. With his pants pushed down only far enough to let his cock out and her skirt hiked up just enough to give him access, he pressed her back against the wall and fucked her quickly, quietly, getting a kick out of how hard it was for her to stay quiet when he was inside her. It was over almost as soon as it started, but it was hot as hell doing it where anyone could walk up and find them going at it.

A few nights later, Emori came over to hang out with Murphy, but Murphy was too busy playing on the XBox with Bellamy and Miller to pay much attention to her; so she called Clarke herself and invited her over. Bellamy pretty much left the girls to their own devices, because he just had to help his roommates’ kill these zombies in Left 4 Dead 2. He was faintly aware of the fact that Clarke was lying on his kitchen table and Emori, being the tattoo artist she was, was drawing something on her back; but when they came into the living room and Emori proclaimed, “Ta-da!” while Clarke lifted up the back of her shirt . . . Bellamy’s mouth gaped. Because Clarke now had a fake tramp stamp that said BLAKE in all caps drawn on her skin.

He nearly dropped his controller, and both Miller and Murphy started to yell at him when he did nothing while the zombies attacked.

Emori took his place after that, because he had to go upstairs with Clarke. He stripped her naked in record time, positioned her on all fours on that old blue chair of his grandmother’s, and fucked her furiously from behind, fixating on the temporary tattoo on her lower back.

Then there was her day off, when she complained about being so bored that he finally just gave in and let her ride around with him while he went from house to house, fixing everyone’s busted odds
and ends. On the way to Diana Sydney’s place, he warned her that she’d have to stay low in the truck, because Diana wouldn’t tip him well if she saw a girl on the premises. Clarke took this quite literally, and right out on the middle of the highway, she leaned over to his lap, undid his pants, and took his cock into her mouth, blowing him while he drove. The whole thing was so fucking hot, and there was no way he was getting to Diana’s until he came, so he took a few unnecessary detours, staying out on the highway a little longer than was necessary.

When they pulled up to a red light, he noticed a police car a few vehicles back behind them, and an officer getting out. “Cop, cop!” he warned, pushing her head away.

“What?”

“Just pretend you’re lookin’ for a contact or something,” he told her as he quickly zipped up his pants.

She bent forward, pretending to look under the passenger’s seat for something that didn’t exist.

Bellamy watched in the rearview mirror as the cop knocked on the window of a red car one row over and behind them. “Oh, okay, it’s not us,” he said, relieved, already undoing his pants again. “Get back down there.”

Daring little princess she was, she did just that. But she kept her head a little more stationary this time and got some quality deep-throating practice.

There were so many things he wanted to do with Clarke Griffin. Titty-fucking. Sixty-nine. Anal.

Now some of those things were definitely going to require them to work their way up from here, but he felt like it could all happen. So far, it seemed like he was earning her trust.

It wasn’t just the sex, though, that was good. Clarke continued to be good company, so much so that, when he surprised her on campus after class and she regretfully informed him that she had to spend the afternoon studying for her midterms, he wasn’t even all that disappointed. She said it’d be fine if he hung out at her place for a while, and he in turn offered to study with her if she needed help.

Most of the time, they hung out and hooked up at his place. Save for the one night they’d spent at hers, Polaris was still a strange environment for him. The place had a pool and hot tub area that looked more like a small spa. The elevators had glass doors. There was even a gym. It really almost felt more like an extended-stay hotel than an apartment complex, and Bellamy didn’t quite feel like he belonged there. But it was where Clarke lived, and Clarke was a pretty down-to-earth girl despite the obvious wealth she came from. So he didn’t dwell on it.

“So your dad’s really one of our Maryland senators, huh?” he said, trying to wrap his mind around that as they got off the elevator and headed down the hall.

“Stepdad,” she corrected. “And yeah. Weird, huh?”

It was weird, but D.C. was only a twenty-minute drive away, so it made sense. “Man, no wonder you have such a nice apartment.”

“Actually, my mom makes more money than him,” she said. “She’s a doctor.”

“Wow.” A doctor and a politician. Clarke definitely had lived a cushy life. “My mom’s a seamstress.”

She just smiled, like she wasn’t sure what to say to that, and fumbled around in her purse for her keys. “You want something to eat?” she asked, stopping in front of her door.
“Yeah,” he said, standing close behind her. Bending down, her murmured in her ear, “Watermelon.”
“I don’t have any,” she said, shoving the key into the lock.
“That’s okay. I’m sure you have something else I can eat.”

She tossed her head back against his shoulder and laughed as she pushed open the door. Bellamy already had his hands on her hips, eager to see if he could squeeze in a quick one with her before she started studying. But someone else was already in that apartment, some beautiful brown-haired girl he didn’t recognize.

“Raven,” Clarke said.

Oh, he recognized that name, though. The best friend. Clarke had mentioned her.

“Hey,” Raven greeted, frowning curiously at Bellamy. Squinting her eyes, peering at him closer, she asked, “Bellagio?”

Bellamy wasn’t sure what the hell that meant, so he just said, “Huh?” in response.

Five minutes later, they all sat together at Clarke’s kitchen table, each of them taking part in devouring a leftover hamburger pizza she’d had in the fridge.

“So forgive my surprise,” Raven said, “but last I heard, you were a one-night stand.”

“Well, I was,” Bellamy admitted. “But then it was two nights.”

“And then three,” Clarke added. “And then four.”

“Then twenty.” Bellamy grinned smugly.

“It hasn’t been twenty. Don’t listen to him,” Clarke told Raven. “It’s been, like, seven. Or something.”

Raven nodded slowly, reaching for another slice of pizza. “A seven-night stand. I didn’t even know they made such a thing.”

“Well, he’s my friend, Raven,” Clarke said.

The brunette tilted her head to the side skeptically. “With benefits?”

“Yeah, actually.” Bellamy broke the crust of his pizza in half and shoved one half in his mouth. She’d hit the nail on the head there.

Raven frowned at him for a moment, then swung her head back towards Clarke. “Seriously?” she gasped.

Clarke smiled tersely and said, “Bellamy, would you mind going and hanging out in my room for a bit?”

Did he mind? When this Raven chick was obviously about to question the choices Clarke was making? “Sure, no problem.” He finished his pizza, pushed the chair back from the table, and hastily made his exit from the kitchen. Clarke’s bedroom was the only room here he actually had any familiarity with anyway. He’d probably be happiest in there.

He shut the door right as Raven started in with, “This is new for you,” and their voices were
thankfully muffled after that. He took a good look at Clarke’s bed, admiring the sturdy headboard—yeah, he still had to fix his—and then wandered over to her desk, surveying all the loose papers she had scattered there. Some were pages of notes for her classes, but most were drawings. Lots of landscapes, some still-lifes of things like fruit and jewelry and shoes. There was one particularly sensual drawing, though, of two hands clasped together on top of a bed, lost in the throes of passion of whatever. Bellamy smirked, wondering if that was supposed to be the two of them.

Raven said something that sounded like, “You know it never works,” from out in the kitchen, but Bellamy ignored that as he continued around Clarke’s bedroom, scoping out everything that was indicatively her. Besides all the clothes strewn about near her closet, there was a brush with clumps of hair in it lying on the floor, and a dinner plate with silverware on it at the foot of the bed. Apparently the only thing the Polaris apartments didn’t have was a cleaning service, but Clarke probably could have used one. Not that he was judging. His house wasn’t spotless by any means, either. Besides, wasn’t there some saying about the messier the apartment, the prettier the girl?

“He’s a boy. He’s a friend. He’s just a not a boyfriend,” he heard Clarke say. Didn’t sound like she and Raven were arguing. Raven just needed more of an explanation for their whole arrangement than a girl like Emori did. She didn’t know him. Of course she had her doubts.

Curiosity got the best of Bellamy when he discovered Clarke’s underwear drawer. It was like the holy land. He really couldn’t resist snooping, and hell, since he was the guy currently taking her underwear off, he doubted she’d mind. He dug around for the good stuff, thongs mostly, but got a little distracted when he stumbled across what could only be called ‘period panties.’ Most were hilarious. There was one that said Shark Week and just had this blood-red ocean with buoys and life preservers in it. And there was another that said Cunt Dracula and had a picture of a very unhappy-looking cartoon vampire, blood dripping from his fangs. Clarke probably didn’t want him to see those, but it was no big deal to him. In fact, he thought they were fucking funny.

In the middle of appreciating her thongs (and debating whether or not he should pocket that silky green one and try to sneak it home), a pair of rainbow panties caught his eye. He lifted them up to find that they had Bi, Bi, Bi written on the front, along with a winking emoji that had its tongue out.

Bellamy cocked his head to the side, brow furrowed in confusion. What? he wondered, pretty sure that could only mean one thing.

“Bellagio!” Raven called in a sing-song voice—he really had no idea why she kept calling him that. “You can come out now!”

He stuffed all of Clarke’s panties back in the drawer, shut it, and rejoined the girls out in the kitchen. The pizza was completely gone now, so clearly they’d eaten and talked at the same time.

“So how long have you been into girls?” he asked Clarke outright.

“Ooh, since she came out of the womb,” Raven squealed.

“How did you know?” Clarke asked him.

“I saw your rainbow underwear.”

“Oh, you just happened to see those, even though they were stashed away in my underwear drawer?”

“I was . . . just passing through,” he said impatiently, wanting to get an answer out of her. “So how long?”
Clarke shrugged. “Probably forever. I didn’t know until high school, though.”

“Huh.” Clarke being bisexual opened up a whole new realm of fantasies for him, and he was intrigued. “What clued you in?”

“Well . . .” Clarke hopped up onto her table, kicking her legs as she thought back. “Probably sophomore year, when I tried out for cheerleading. Because, I mean, I knew I got turned on seeing other girls change in the locker room, but . . . that’s nothing. You can be straight as an arrow and still get turned on seeing naked breasts.”

“True,” Raven agreed readily.

“But I only tried out for cheerleading because the head cheerleader was so hot,” Clarke went on, closing her eyes and shuddering with delight. “Anyway. That’s when I knew.”

“Interesting.” The more he found out about Clarke, the more he liked her. Now there was this whole cheerleading thing to consider. “So did you make the squad?”

“No, they cut me after the first round.” She pouted.

“Damn, I was hoping you’d have one of those little skirts.”

“I have one,” Raven chirped. “She can borrow it sometime.”

Clarke made a face. “Since when were you a cheerleader?”

“Since never, ugh,” Raven said, her tone a disdainful one, as though she had something against cheerleaders. “But Wick and I . . . we used to dress up sometimes.”

“Ew, no,” Clarke said, making a squeamish face. “God, I can’t even.”

“It’s fine,” Bellamy said, already picturing what she’d look like wearing one of those for him. “We’ll take the skirt. Thank you.”

Raven stuck around for about fifteen more minutes and grilled him after that. Standard best friend questions, like did he have a job?—yes. Did he go to school?—no. Was he going to break Clarke’s heart at the end of all this?—hell, no, that was the point of their arrangement in the first place. When she seemed satisfied with all the answers he’d given, she headed out, but not before making Clarke solemnly swear that they’d have a girls night with Niylah soon, whoever the hell that was. Clarke promised, and Raven was on her way.

Bellamy settled in on the couch, trying to find something on TV to watch while Clarke laid out all her books and notes on the kitchen table. She’d only sat down for a few minutes, though, before she got up, crossed the living room, and opened the sliding the door that led out onto a balcony. She went outside wordlessly, shutting it behind her, and stood by the railing, looking down with this thoughtful expression in her eyes, wind blowing back her hair from her face.

What’s wrong? Bellamy wondered, distractedly arrowing his way through the program guide. Clarke had been bubbly and upbeat with Raven there, but now that she was gone, she looked . . . not sad, exactly, but kind of serious.

Oh, crap, he thought, hoping Raven hadn’t said anything to make Clarke second-guess this whole friends with benefits idea. They had a good thing going, he was sure of it, and the last thing he wanted was for her to reconsider.
He joined her out on the balcony, getting his first glimpse of the incredible view she had. There was a garden/courtyard down below that looked meticulously-maintained, and . . . were those tennis courts? Did Polaris really have its own tennis courts?

“You alright?” he asked her.

“Yeah,” she answered quickly. “I just . . .” She looked over at him, smiling appreciatively. “Well, I’m just really glad you didn’t make a big deal out of that whole thing.”

“What whole thing?”

“Me . . . being bisexual.”

“Oh.” He shrugged flippantly, because really, it was no big deal. “Why would I make a big deal out of that?”

“Well, I didn’t think you would, because Miller told me you were totally cool about him. It’s just nice, though.”

He leaned back against the railing, folding his arms over his chest. “That stuff doesn’t even really matter to me,” he assured her. It never had.

“Well . . . it matters to some people,” she mumbled, hanging her head.

He frowned, wondering who she was referring to. An ex, maybe? A family member? “Who’s made a big deal out of it with you?” he questioned, feeling an automatic anger towards whoever had upset her before.

“My mom,” she replied quietly. “And my stepdad. Neither one of them likes it.”

He snorted, shaking his head. It was a different generation, and he understood that, but sometimes, it really pissed him off how close-minded people could be.

“I never really acted on it until I was twenty,” Clarke revealed. “That’s when I dated a girl for the first time. Lexa. So I told them, and . . .” She made a face. “It’s not like they disowned me or anything, but it still strained things for a while.”

He nodded, wishing she hadn’t had to experience that. But her stepdad was a Republican senator, from what he gathered, and . . . well, most Republicans were obviously more conservative. Bisexual stepdaughter probably didn’t fit in with his campaign image very well. Her mom, though? That one really pissed him off, maybe because his own mother would have loved and accepted him whether he was into chicks, dudes, or something else entirely.

“Has it gotten any better since you told them?” he asked.

“Yeah, it has,” she said. “I mean, they’re not going out and marching in any pride parades, but it’s still better.”

“Good.” He reached over and put his arm around her, pulling her in closer to his side, glad that she’d been willing to open up to him about all of this. This was definitely the friends part of friends with benefits, and it felt good to be someone she could talk to. Besides, it helped him get to know her better. Clarke Griffin came from privilege, clearly, but knowing all of this . . . he knew that didn’t mean she had everything she wanted.

“I think it’s kinda hot, honestly,” he told her in order to lighten the mood.
She laughed lightly. “Miller said you would.”

Needing to know if his suspicions were true, just so his fantasies could have some substance, he inquired, “Did you and Raven ever hook up?”

“No. Did you and Miller?”

“No,” he answered emphatically, before joking, “Well, there was that one time . . .”

“What?” she shrieked, playfully hitting his chest.

“No, I’m kidding.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes, I am. It never happened.”

Still, she was reluctant to believe him. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I would remember if I did a dude, Clarke.”

She narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Alright, if you say so . . .”

“Sorry to disappoint.” He rubbed her arm, catching a whiff of her shampoo when her hair blew up towards his face. “Hey,” he said, turning to face her and look her right in the eye. “In all seriousness, though . . . I think it’s awesome, Clarke. You are who you are, and you never have to worry about that with me.”

A slow, content smile spread across her face, and she asked, “Are you trying to seduce me?”

“No.”

She tilted her head the side skeptically.

“I’m really not,” he insisted. Sex was like the last thing on his mind right now. Well, not the last thing, but . . . well, now it was on his mind.

“Because you are,” she informed him, placing both her hands on his chest. She rose up on her tiptoes, lips ready for a kiss. He circled his arms around her, pulled her in close, and kissed her deeply, wondering if he could convince her to go put on those rainbow panties. Today seemed like a fitting day for them.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

“Clarke?”

Reluctant to open her eyes, Clarke murmured, “Mmm,” hoping she could keep sleeping.

“Clarke.”

As sleep started to give hold on her, though, and she remembered where she was, and she recognized her boss’s voice . . . she jolted awake.

“Sorry,” she apologized quickly, ashamed of falling asleep at the front desk of the art museum. She was supposed to be the information station for any guests who showed up. But it’d been a slow day so far, and she’d had a late night last night, so . . .
Her boss, Dante, smiled down at her understandingly. “Why don’t you go home?” he suggested. “You can come back tomorrow once you’ve gotten some rest.”

Forever, she would be grateful for this old man. Not only did he hire her entirely based off her appreciation for art, disregarding all her notable lack of work experience, but he’d always been super empathetic when it came to her schedule. She was one of the many college students who worked at the museum, which meant that juggling her responsibilities as a student and an employee wasn’t always easy. But Dante assured her that he had been just like her once upon a time, and more often than not, if it was clear that she needed a day off, he’d give it to her.

“Thanks,” she said, gathering up her stuff. He took her seat at the front desk, and she yawned on her way out the door. Out of habit, she checked her phone as she made her way to her car, and awaiting her was a very flirtatious text from Bellamy: Our lips should have a meeting.

She laughed, shaking her head. God, he could be as adorable as he was sexy. Even though she knew she wouldn’t get any of the rest she needed if she went and spent time with him—hell, he was the reason she was so tired in the first place—she texted back, I’ll cum over later, knowing he’d enjoy her intentional misspelling.

Bellamy had warned her that Saturday nights at his house tended to be wild. It wasn’t just him and Miller and Murphy on Saturdays. Emori was there, of course, as she usually was. Miller’s boyfriend, Jackson, would be there, too, if he didn’t have to work. Their neighbors, Jasper and Monty, would likely come by and bring their girlfriends along with them. So it’d be a packed house. He said his friends congregated there every Saturday night with what was pretty much an open invitation for them to come by and party, drink, and get high if they wanted to, and he made sure she understood that the open invitation now extended to her, too.

An intense pot aroma flooded Clarke’s nose from the second she walked in the door, the result of one of Bellamy’s neighbors, Jasper. When Bellamy introduced Clarke to him, he exclaimed, “Oh, you’re so pretty!” and grabbed her arm, leading her away from Bellamy so they could sit down on the couch together. Clarke let him touch her hair for a minute, only because he was so obviously stoned and seemed fascinated by it, and Bellamy just chuckled and said, “Good luck,” as he headed into the kitchen to set out more booze on the counter.

Everyone seemed to have their role to play. Miller kept the music going, which meant a lot of 80’s and 90’s hip hop, Jackson kept a beer in his boyfriend’s hand, the girls danced and convinced the Asian guy—to dance with them, too. Murphy seemed content to just lie on a beanbag in the middle of the living room floor, barking out orders to everyone, things like, “Bellamy, get me another drink,” and “Emori, make out with Harper. Please.”

Jasper talked a lot, and when he wasn’t talking, it was usually because he was passing out joints to whoever wanted one. And most of them did want one, except for Jackson, which made sense since he was studying to become a doctor, and Bellamy, which Clarke found surprising given how free-spirited he was. Bellamy’s role very much seemed to be the guy who made sure his friends were having fun. He kept the counter littered with alcohol, but he didn’t actually drink that much of it, and he encouraged Monty to dance with the girls, but then he rescued him when he got overwhelmed.

Maybe being fine as fuck is his role, Clarke thought, struggling to keep her eyes off of him while Jasper talked her ear off.

“I mean, it’s just bullshit, is what it is,” Jasper was saying, in between taking hits. “I mean, yeah, they decriminalized it, finally, but that’s only for under ten grams. And it’s not like cops are walkin’ around with scales in their pockets, so what’re they doing? They’re just eyeballing it. And if they
“So you think you got everyone’s names?” he asked, taking her cup from her. He took a drink and put his arm around her lazily.

“Yeah, he’s a little out there,” Bellamy agreed. “Ah, he’s a good kid, though.”

“Kid?” she echoed. “Isn’t he, like, a year younger than you?”

“Two years,” Bellamy corrected. “He’s kinda like a little brother, though.”

“Aww.” She found it adorable that Bellamy’s friends were like his family, and it was certainly something she could understand, given how much of a sister Raven had come to be in her life.

“She said she’s fine,” Bellamy cut in, stepping over Murphy on his way to the couch. “I know you want this, though.” He handed her a red plastic cup, and she took it appreciatively, taking a sip. Simple, straight-forward beer. Now that she could handle.

“Bellamy won’t get high, either,” Jasper said disappointedly.


Clarke gave him a pointed look.

“Besides that.” He smirked, then sat down beside her, just barely squeezing between her and the arm of the couch. “Move, Jasper,” he said.

“Alright, alright.” Jasper got up, joint still in hand, and bounded towards Monty, exclaiming, “Let’s go get the bong, man!”

“He’s interesting,” Clarke remarked, scooting over a bit so Bellamy had more room.

“Yeah, he’s a little out there,” Bellamy agreed. “Ah, he’s a good kid, though.”

“Kid?” she echoed. “Isn’t he, like, a year younger than you?”

“Two years,” Bellamy corrected. “He’s kinda like a little brother, though.”

“Aww.” She found it adorable that Bellamy’s friends were like his family, and it was certainly something she could understand, given how much of a sister Raven had come to be in her life.

“I think so,” she said, surveying everyone one last time. She pointed them out as she said their names. “Okay, stoner friend, Jasper.”
“Right.”

“Non-stoner friend . . . Monty?”

“Well, he’s kind of a stoner, too, but he’s cuttin’ back.”

“Okay, Monty’s girlfriend . . . Maya?” She cringed as she said that, because she sensed she was wrong.

“Strike one.”

“Okay, Monty’s girlfriend, Harper.” That girl was gorgeous and looked like a walking advertisement out of a fitness magazine. The pale, dark-haired one belonged to Jasper. “Jasper’s girlfriend Maya. Did I get it?”

“Good job,” he said. “And you already know everyone else.”

“Yes.” She’d met Jackson for the first time a couple mornings ago, when he’d been rushing out of Miller’s room and she’d been right next door, rushing out of Bellamy’s. Both of them had been on their way to work, and both of them had been, unsurprisingly, running late.

“You have a lot of friends,” she noted.

“I do?”

“Yeah. Way more than I do.” Perhaps that said something about his charisma, or her lack thereof.

“I still gotta meet all your friends,” he said. “You should bring ‘em next time.”

“Oh, I can probably bring Raven and Niylah,” she said, “but Wells would be totally freaked out here.”

“We can be on our best behavior,” Bellamy promised.

As if on cue, Jasper howled, “Yeah! Take your clothes off!” and lifted his girlfriend up onto the table. She climbed down immediately, but Harper and Emori climbed up in her place, dancing like they were on the Coyote Ugly bar or something.

“Really?” Clarke said skeptically. Did any kind of best behavior exist with this crew?

“Well, we can try,” Bellamy amended.

As the party raged on, Miller turned the music up louder. No one seemed concerned about creating a noise disturbance, which was sort of refreshing. In Clarke’s neighborhood, people called the cops just to complain about fireworks on the Fourth of July. Monty did duck out for a moment to run over to his house and get a bong, which Jasper did not hesitate to put to use.

At one point, Harper moseyed over to the couch and coaxed, “Clarke, come dance with us.”

“No, I don’t really dance,” Clarke informed her.

“Oh, come on, it’s fun.” Harper grabbed her arm and tried to pull her to her feet.

“Actually . . .” She pulled her hand back and curled her legs up onto the couch. “I kinda just wanna . . . make out with Bellamy.” She leaned into her non-boyfriend, hoping he would oblige her here.
“Alright, suit yourself,” Harper said, tripping over Murphy as she skipped over to her own boyfriend and threw her arms around him.

“Can’t get enough of me, huh?” Bellamy teased, setting her drink—his drink, their drink, whatever—down on the coffee table.

“Well, that and . . . if you saw me dance . . .” She shuddered exaggeratedly. “You’d never be attracted to me again.”

“Oh, I doubt that.” He leaned in and kissed her, one arm still draped over her shoulders, his other hand coming up to cup her cheek.

So much better than dancing, Clarke thought as the tip of her tongue brushed his. Unfortunately, they’d just barely gotten started when the front door opened, and in strode the girl from all of Bellamy’s framed photos, the one with the tiny stature and big attitude: his sister.

“Octavia!” Harper exclaimed, immediately leaving her boyfriend’s side. She walked over Murphy without concern for him and flung herself at the dark-haired girl, hugging her like she hadn’t seen her in months. The other two girls were quick to follow, and soon enough, it was a hug-fest.

“Hey, guys,” Octavia said.

Bellamy got up, too, slower than the girls but with a similarly excited smile on his face. “About time you came home,” he teased, giving her a hug of his own.

“Missed you, too, big brother,” she said.

Their hug seemed to be cut short when a big, burly man also came inside, multiple bags flung over his shoulders. He dropped them at his feet, gave Bellamy a nod, but Bellamy ignored him and sat down next to Clarke again.

“How was Mexico?” Harper squealed excitedly.

“Who cares?” Emori grunted. “Did you bring us souvenirs?”

Octavia gave a look to her . . . boyfriend? And he lifted up a bulging blue bag full of souvenirs with one hand.

It was pretty much a frenzy after that. Jasper’s souvenir was a collection of Mexican beer, which pretty much just looked like American beer with Spanish labels on it. But it was enough for him, Monty, Miller, and all the girls to go wild. All the girls got swimsuits, which they wasted no time changing into, even though it was way too cold to go swimming anywhere. Miller got a sombrero, which he thought was the coolest thing in the world, and Murphy got two Spanish issues of Playboy. He immediately took those into the bathroom, and Bellamy muttered that he wouldn’t be back out for a while.

Octavia saved Bellamy’s souvenir for last, bringing it over to the couch for him while all their friends—and her boyfriend—ran outside to do something with Miller’s sombrero. “Here,” she said, handing him a book. “You’re like the hardest person to buy for.”

He made a face. “Why?”

“Because you don’t like normal things.”

He started flipping through the book, and from what Clarke could see, it was one of those travel
books that had photos and info about all the cool tourist attractions and historical sites of Mexico.

“Nah, this is good,” he said. “Thanks, O.”

“No problem.” She looked down at Clarke and said, “Well, since my brother’s gonna be an ass and not introduce us . . .”

“I was gonna introduce you,” he said weakly.

“I’m Octavia,” she said. “And you are?”

“Clarke.” She held out her hand for a shake, but Octavia frowned as if handshakes were weird. So Clarke slowly withdrew her hand.

“She’s my friend,” Bellamy explained.

Octavia glared impatiently at him, growling, “What kind of friend, Bellamy?”

“O . . .”

She rolled her eyes exaggeratedly and stomped out the front door.

*What did I do?* Clarke thought, horrified. How was it possible to make such a bad impression so quickly? “She scares me,” she confessed.

“No, she’s really nice once you get to know her,” Bellamy promised. But Clarke found that hard to believe. “Once you get to know her,” he repeated.

Murphy came plodding out of the bathroom a few seconds later, a satisfied smirk on his face. “Man, those Mexican chicks are hot,” he proclaimed, stopping when he saw how empty the living room now was. “Where’d everyone go?”

“Outside,” Bellamy replied.

Murphy motioned between the two of them, questioning, “Are you two gonna screw?”

Bellamy groaned, digging his head back into the couch.

“Can I watch?”

“Come on,” Bellamy said, standing up, pulling Clarke up along with him. They headed outside, and Murphy followed them.

The backyard ended up being the location of a game that looked very much like Keep Away, except instead of a basketball or football, it was the sombrero everyone was keeping away from Miller. He chased them around the yard like a chicken with its head cut off, and when Bellamy got involved, that’s when it got serious. Bellamy was faster than Miller, so he could keep the sombrero away from him without even having to pass it off to anyone else. Miller, who was winded at that point, suggested a wrestling match for it instead.

“Team Miller!” Jackson exclaimed, raising his hand.

“Yeah, my money’s on him, too,” Murphy said, slinking over to Jackson’s side. “Sorry, Bell.”

“Clarke, you have to captain Team Bellamy,” Harper said as a circle started to form around the two men, “be his cheerleader.”
“But I didn’t make the squad,” Clarke protested to no avail as Miller and Bellamy started wrestling. Luckily for her, as soon as it got started, Jasper seemed more than happy to be Team Bellamy’s captain. He danced around and kicked his legs in the air like a little cheerleading reject, and even when Bellamy nearly got pinned, he shouted, “Bro, you got it! You’re my hero!”

Clarke watched with interest, partially because it was two hot guys rolling around together, partially because it was hilarious to hear Miller boast about how he was a two-time state champion and Bellamy was nothing. Bellamy was bigger and probably stronger, too, but Miller definitely seemed to have more technique. So it was probably only a matter of time until Bellamy would be pinned, but at least he was putting up a good fight.

Octavia sauntered up to Clarke, arms crossed over her chest, and said, “I’ll join Team Bellamy, even though he hates my boyfriend.”

Clarke looked across the circle of friends, where the big guy was just kind of watching with a half-smile on his face. “What’s his name?” she asked.

“Lincoln.” Octavia grinned proudly and boasted, “He could kick both their asses if he wanted to.”

Of that, Clarke had no doubt. Lincoln was built like an amateur bodybuilder, and his size was intimidating. Octavia was intimidating, too, though, in her own right. Intimidatingly beautiful, intimidatingly confident, intimidatingly hostile. Clarke wanted to like her, but she was just . . . unnerved by her instead.

“Sorry if I seemed like a bitch before,” Octavia muttered, getting the words out quickly as though apologizing wasn’t a normal thing for her. “You do whatever you want with my brother. I just . . . well, I wish he’d try something serious with someone. No offense.”

“No, none taken,” Clarke assured her, returning her attention to the wrestling match. Miller had Bellamy pinned now, and Jackson was down on the ground, examining it, counting. He slammed his hand down like a referee on a mat, and everyone cheered.

“Yeah!” Miller hollered, shooting to his feet. He paraded around the circle victoriously with his arms in the air. “Victory again! What is this now, Bellamy, huh? What’s my streak?”

Bellamy stood up slowly, holding his arm and laughing. He had dirt on his clothes and on his face and in his hair, and he looked . . . so adorable. Young and boyish and adorable. And nothing like the man who was probably going to get on top of her later tonight.

No, it’s not serious, she thought, because it never hurt to remind herself of that. But at least it’s fun.
Clarke’s mother invited her out to lunch at the start of midterms week, and it couldn’t have been worse timing. She had so much studying to do, so many projects to complete before the end of the week, and the thought of having to set aside time to try to impress her mother honestly sounded exhausting. But she agreed to it, because she pretty much had to. She did love her mom, and she knew it was important to spend time with her to try to close up that gap that had formed between them ever since she’d announced her bisexuality.

Her mother, Abby, was a beautiful woman, and it wasn’t uncommon for people to mistake her and Clarke for sisters when they went out. Sometimes, it even seemed like the waiters were flirting with her, which was awkward for Clarke to sit there and watch, but she was used to it by now. No one ever flirted with her when Marcus Kane was out with them, though. Clarke’s stepfather was well-known and well-respected all over D.C. and the surrounding area. When Abby told Clarke that he’d be accompanying them for lunch, there wasn’t a doubt in Clarke’s mind that he’d get them into the nicest restaurant and get them seated at the nicest table where they’d be served the nicest food by the nicest waiters.

“So, Clarke,” Marcus said as he halfheartedly ate his way through a salad—Abby had him on this whole healthy food kick since election year could be so stressful. “How are your classes going?”

“Fine,” she replied, although truthfully, they hadn’t been her biggest priority lately.

“Are you on track to graduate this year?”

“I think so.”

“And then what’s the plan?” her mother asked as he removed all the croutons from her own salad.

Clarke shrugged, reaching to the center of the table to grab a breadstick, because salads were not her thing. “We’ll see.” Nothing was set in stone yet, so her options were open. Very open. An art degree wasn’t the easiest thing to launch a career out of, but she had ambitions. Not plans, exactly, but ambitions.

“Well, if all else fails, you could always come work for me,” her stepfather offered.

She just smiled politely, but . . . there was no way she’d ever do that. It was nothing against him, either. For a politician, he was a decent guy, and he’d been a good stepdad. But a career in politics was not for her, just like a career in medicine hadn’t been.

“How’s Raven?” her mother inquired, switching the subject much to Clarke’s relief.

“Good,” Clarke replied. “She went through a break-up last month, but it was mutual, so she’s good.”

“Which one’s Raven?” Marcus asked. “The lesbian?”

Clarke bit her tongue, because . . . as good of a guy as he was, did he not hear how that sounded? The lesbian? “No, that’s Niylah,” she clarified. “Raven’s the one in grad school.”

“Her best friend,” Abby reminded him. “Well, that’s good that she’s doing well. Beautiful, smart girl like that . . . she’ll probably have another boyfriend in no time.”
“Probably,” Clarke agreed. For as much as Raven did enjoy being single, she never seemed to stay that way for long.

“What about you, Clarke?” her mother kept on questioning. “Who are you seeing these days?”

And here we go, Clarke thought as her stomach churned a bit. Those questions about Raven had just been an elaborate segue to this. She should have seen it coming. “I’m not really seeing anyone,” she responded calmly, and it wasn’t a lie. Not technically. “I’ve made some new friends, though, lately.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” her mother said. “Do they go to the university?”

“Um . . .” She set what was left of her breadstick down on her plate, feeling less and less hungry the longer and longer this conversation wore on. “No.”

“So they’re older then?”

Leave it to her mother to jump to that conclusion. “No, they’re about my age,” she said, sensing what both her mom and stepdad were thinking. What kind of friends were these? Were they lazy bums? What kind of no-good nonsense were they into?

Her mother frowned. “Hmm. I thought Arkadia was supposed to be a college town, though.”

“It is, but it’s a small college,” Clarke pointed out. “They’re really fun, though. And one of them . . .” She smiled fondly when she thought about all the documentaries Bellamy had stocked on his bookshelves. “One of them really loves history. He’s really smart.”

“I don’t understand why, in this day and age, though, anyone would opt not to go to college,” her stepfather said, much to her displeasure. “Maybe it sounds pretentious, but just knowing what the job landscape is, young people these days almost have to pursue an education if they want to have any sort of future. Or at least anything beyond blue collar work.”

Clarke frowned, looking down at her lap. Bellamy was blue collar. What was wrong with that? So were Miller and Emori. Murphy . . . well, he was probably more no collar since he didn’t have a job, and Jasper was a different breed altogether. But they were all good people, and here her own stepfather was, talking about them as if they were . . . inferior.

The conversation continued to deteriorate after that, with her mother and Marcus doing most of the talking. They talked about grad school, about the possibility of Clarke going to grad school. They talked more about this job opening at Kane’s office, which Clarke didn’t want to hear anything about. They even talked about some ‘nice young man’ who was an up-and-comer on the political scene, someone they thought Clarke might really like and wanted to introduce her to at some point. Neither one of them seemed to notice that she’d essentially exited the conversation and was just sitting there in silence, waiting for the main course, hoping they’d skip dessert.

When it was finally over, she hugged and said goodbye to them both, thanked them for the lunch like the good little daughter she was, and then proceeded to blast some angry chick rock music on the drive home. She poured herself into her studies for the rest of the afternoon, but by the time evening rolled around, her attention span was shot, and she slammed her books shut and went over to Bellamy’s.

He was still in his work clothes when she dragged him up to his bedroom, but he got out of them quickly. She sat in his lap and ranted while he removed her clothes from her, so focused on her frustration that she didn’t even do much to help him.

“And the whole time, I was just sitting there thinking, ‘What’s so great about white collar anyway?’”
she rambled he lifted her shirt over her head. “What, like it’s the social class everyone’s supposed to aspire to? What’s so great about it?”

“I don’t know,” he breathed against her lips, kissing her sloppily as his hands wound around her back to unhook her bra.

“It’s all stuffy luncheons and charity events if you ask me.” She shook her shoulders so her bra fell off. “Not that there’s anything wrong with charity.”

He lifted one breast and bent down to press a hot, sucking kiss to it.

“What’s wrong with being a plumber or a handyman or an artist?” She groaned, shifting in his lap as he pulled her pants down. “They don’t like my job, my orientation . . . do they like anything about me?”

“I like you,” Bellamy murmured, kissing his way up her collarbone to suck on her neck.

“It’s just so frustrating,” she lamented, moaning as his large, calloused hands slipped down the back of her panties to cup her ass. “Bellamy, just . . .” She threw her head back, already panting for air.

Having his hands and mouth on her was making her forget about what was pissing her off.

“Bellamy, please . . .” She grabbed at his hair and dug her fingernails into his arm as the juncture between her legs started to throb for him. “Just fuck me,” she told him, knowing that would put her in a better mood.

She got exactly what she’d asked for when he put her on all fours and pounded her hard for the next ten minutes. He was a little bit rougher than normal, perhaps venting some workday frustrations of his own. It took Clarke longer to cum than she would have liked, only because she was so tightly wound after everything today; but the longer he was inside her, the more she felt the tension in her body start to dissipate. After she came, she felt completely relaxed, completely at ease, and cuddling up next to him afterward was icing on the cake.

“You feel better?” he asked, rubbing his arm up and down her back.

“Yeah.” She traced lazy designs on his chest, wishing they could do this every time she felt stressed or distressed about something. Like tomorrow when it came time to take that art history midterm she was probably going to fail. It would have been really nice to be able to get up during the middle of the test, go fuck Bellamy, and then come back afterward and finish.

“Not to upset you again,” he said leadingly, “but was it just your mom today or your mom and your dad?”

“Stepdad,” she corrected. “And it was both of them.”

“Stepdad,” he echoed. “How long has he been your stepdad?”

“Mmm, like two years now.”

“Two years?” His fingers started to play with the tips of her hair. “Where’s your actual dad? Is he still part of your life?”

She nuzzled her face against his chest, sadly mumbling, “Not anymore.”

Bellamy sighed, rubbing his legs against hers beneath the blankets. “I’ve never met my dad,” he revealed. “I don’t even know who he is. I don’t even care.”
She’d kind of gathered that much from the blatant lack of any father figure in all these pictures in his room.

“Octavia has a different dad,” he went on. “She knows him.”

*He thinks my dad just abandoned me,* she thought, *like his abandoned him.* She didn’t want to let him think that. It wasn’t fair to him to keep it a secret or fair to her dad. She wanted him to know the truth, but the truth wasn’t an easy thing to talk about. She supposed she should, though, in the interest of being friends. One of the biggest *benefits* of her relationship with Bellamy was supposed to be the closeness that their friendship could provide. He’d already listened to her about the bisexuality stuff, and he’d been a good listener. So she knew he’d listen to this, too.

“My dad and I were best friends,” she reminisced, smiling fondly as she remembered all the ‘take your daughter to work’ days and bicycle lessons in the park. “We did everything together.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah.” If nothing else, she had those memories. Nothing could ever take that away from her. “But then he died when I was sixteen.”

Bellamy stilled beneath her. His hand stopped playing with her hair, and his chest quit moving up and down. “God, Clarke,” he finally said. “I’m sorry.”

She shifted so that her hands were pillowed beneath her head and she could look up at him. “It was a brain tumor,” she revealed. “Smartest guy I ever knew and . . . a brain tumor.”

Bellamy shook his head Sadly, tightening his arm around her. “That’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not,” she agreed. “I think he’d be proud of me, though. He loved that I love art, and he’d probably even love that I love girls. He was very open-minded.”

“Sounds like a cool guy.”

“Yeah.” Honestly, Bellamy reminded her of him in a lot of ways. His intelligence, his charisma, his ability to fix things . . . those were all traits her father had possessed in spades.

Propping herself up on her forearms, she urged, “Tell me something about you, though. Something deep.”

“Something deep?”

“Yeah, we’ve talked about my dad, my bisexuality . . . we never talk about you.”

“There’s not much to say.”

She gave him a look. Since when did he hold back? Bellamy liked to talk, liked to hear himself talk, and other people liked to hear him talk, too. Now here she was, asking him to say something and . . . nothing? It didn’t make sense.

“You already know the main things,” he said. “I love my mom, love my sister. Love my friends. That’s it.”

“You love history,” she added.

“Okay, yeah, I do love history.”
“You were valedictorian.”

“Salutatorian,” he corrected, mumbling disgruntledly, “I should’ve been valedictorian.”

“What else?” For the most part, this was pretty much stuff she already knew. And she wanted to know more.

“I was homecoming king,” he said.

“Wow, you really got deep there.”

He chuckled. “I don’t know. I don’t know what else to say.”

She sighed heavily, pretending to be all exasperated. “Fine, we’ll keep it lighthearted. What’s your favorite fruit?”

“I don’t know,” he said again.

“Not watermelon?”

“No, I don’t even like it that much. I was getting that for Miller.”

“And the apples?” she asked.

“For Murphy. I don’t like them that much, either.”

She shook her head disapprovingly. “Look at what they started.”

“It’s all their fault.” He smirked flirtatiously and pulled her head down towards his for a kiss, the kind that didn’t stop, the kind that felt like it could go on forever. And in that moment, as she lay all warm and comfortable in his arms, Clarke kind of wished it would.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Bellamy hated going to the gym with Miller, because Miller was a drill sergeant when it came to workouts. But every once in a while, when he had no jobs lined up for the day and nothing better to do with his time, he went, only because Miller was his best friend and practically begged him. Well, and because he didn’t want to look like a shrimp next to Lincoln. But whatever.

“Five more,” Miller said, serving as his spotter while he bench pressed what was probably ten pounds over his limit.

“I hate this,” Bellamy groaned, lowering the bar to his chest, struggling to lift it back up again.

“It’s good exercise,” was Miller’s rationale. “Maybe not as good as sex with Clarke, but . . .”

Bellamy had to keep from laughing so he wouldn’t drop the heavy bar. “Gotta stay in shape,” he said, finishing it out. Three, two, one . . .

Miller took the bar and helped him put it back in the holder. “Good job,” he said.

“That sucked,” Bellamy grumbled as he sat up, wiping the sweat off his forehead. “Clarke and I aren’t having that much sex, are we?”

Miller choked out an incredulous laugh. “Uh, yeah, you are,” he said. “I can’t even get to sleep most nights.”
“Oh, you’re one to talk,” Bellamy pointed out. “What about you and Jackson?”

“Jackson spends the night maybe twice a week,” Miller said. “Clarke’s over all the time.”

“Three or four nights,” Bellamy said.

Miller held up five fingers and proclaimed, “I counted. Five nights last week, man.”

Five nights? Bellamy thought. How had that happened? Not that it mattered. They could spend as many nights together as they wanted to. Or as many nights apart as they wanted to. That was the glorious freedom their kind of relationship allowed. There was no expectation.

“I think she likes our place,” he said, standing up.

“Better than the Palace?” Miller swung his leg over the bench press and lay down, taking Bellamy’s place.

“Yeah. Don’t get me wrong, Polaris is nice,” Bellamy said, removing one ten-pound weight plate from each side, “but I think it’s a little too nice for her.”

Miller chuckled, positioning his hands on the bar. “Who knew our house was the real Palace all along, huh?”

“Yeah, really.” Bellamy lifted the bar off of the rack, and Miller started his reps.

Before leaving the rec center, Bellamy swung by one of the studio rooms, where he knew it was likely Octavia was teaching one of her classes. Karate, tai-kwon-do, martial arts. Whatever it was, he could never really tell the difference. He heard her yelling from all the way down the hall, and when he peeked in, he saw her putting her class through a punishing workout. She had them doing hip flexors and lunges, and the people who couldn’t do that were doing squats. It looked like boot camp; it looked like torture.

“Bellamy!” she called over some annoying techno beat from her speaker. “Join us.”

“Nah, I think I’m alright,” he declined.

“You might wanna build up some core strength if you wanna keep . . . doing what you’re doing,” she suggested, giving him a pointed look. “Or if you wanna do it for longer periods of time.”

“Can we stop?” one desperate, overweight woman in the front of the room asked. She was dripping sweat and looked like she was about to die.

“One more minute,” Octavia told her. “One more minute, people! Finish strong. You got this.”

Bellamy hung back, occupying himself with a yoga ball while Octavia finished up with her class. Seeing his little sister like this never ceased to impress and amaze him. And also terrify him. Her dedication to fitness was something he definitely hadn’t seen coming when she’d been growing up, but she’d started karate lessons in eighth grade to help channel some anger issues, and that had ended up being the start of everything. Of course, he was fairly certain she’d met Lincoln in one of these classes, so . . . he wasn’t a fan of that.

When everyone was gone, she jumped in front of him and said, “Are you my supervisor now? Are you monitoring this just like you try to monitor every other part of my life?”

“Hey, I think I’ve loosened up over the years,” he said, even though he could definitely still be
overprotective. “I let you go to Mexico for four fuckin’ weeks.”

“Oh, you let me go?”

“You know what I mean.”

She sighed dramatically, rolling her eyes. “I’m not a little kid anymore, Bellamy. You know that.”

“I know.”

“I’m an adult.”

“Uh-huh.”

“A grown woman.”

He grimaced. “That sounds weird.”

“Why? Because grown women have sex?”

He rubbed his forehead, muttering, “I really don’t wanna think about that.”

“You know, I’m pretty much the same age as your little ‘friend,’ Clarke or whatever.”

“That’s different,” he argued.

“Why? How is that different?”

“It just . . .” He was well aware of the double-standard, his sexual promiscuity being completely acceptable in his mind while her monogamous relationship with Lincoln wasn’t. “It just is, okay?”

She glared at him judgmentally. “What are you doing with her anyway, Bell? Are you trying that friends with benefits crap again? Because that’s exactly what it is: crap.”

“O . . .” He was starting to regret coming in here at all. Here he’d thought he and his sister could maybe go hang out this afternoon, catch up after her month away, maybe figure out what Christmas gifts they wanted to get their mom. But apparently she was in one of her vicious moods, which he’d learned to tolerate but still didn’t enjoy.

“No, Bellamy, you deserve more, okay?” she pressed on. “You’re a good guy—annoying sometimes, but generally good. And you’re just wasting your time in these meaningless relationships, just so you can get laid. But you know you’re a good boyfriend. You know there are plenty of girls out there willing to date you.”

“And you know I’m not interested in that.”

“Well, Lincoln said--”

“Oh, please,” he cut in vehemently, “do tell me what Lincoln said about me. His opinion matters so much to me.”

“Forget it,” she said dismissively, waving him off as she collected the yoga mat and ankle weights she’d brought to the gym today. “If you and Clarke ever stop fucking and have an actual conversation, tell her I said hi.”

He absorbed that parting shot and stood there alone in that studio after she’d gone, shaking his head
in frustration. He loved his sister more than life itself, but there were times . . . times when she made him want to punch something. And this was one of those times. Even though they’d grown up together for virtually their entire lives, there were just certain things they struggled to understand about each other. He, for instance, couldn’t understand what she saw in Lincoln, a guy who was six years older than her and supported her decision not to attend college, even though she had the option to go. She in turn didn’t understand why his relationship with Clarke was a good thing, how it was possible for them to have plenty of sex and plenty of actual conversations at the same time.

He didn’t need her approval, though, any more than she needed his.

 Clarke wasn’t sure how Bellamy convinced her to do so many of things he did—sex in his truck was the primary example, of course, but visiting a sex shop with him? That was another quizzical thing she had no explanation for. She didn’t even know Arkadia had a sex shop, but apparently it did. It was this little store shamefully tucked away at the end of the town’s very small, very pathetic outlet mall. It was called Ice Nation, so naturally, Clarke had always assumed it sold ice skates.

Bellamy seemed to want to go explore it with her as more of a joke than anything else, but Clarke called Raven and convinced her to tag along as backup. Raven didn’t need much convincing. She was a little bit of a freak and enjoyed the slightly wilder things in life. Clarke felt better having her there, because if Bellamy started talking about some weird sex mechanisms she didn’t even have the vocabulary for, Raven could probably enlighten her.

“God,” Clarke said as they strolled past the whips and handcuffs, some of which were furry. “I feel like I just walked into 50 Shades of Grey.”

“Crap movie,” Bellamy denounced.

“Are you into that kind of thing?” She really hoped he wasn’t, because as willing as she was to try new stuff with him and be adventurous, all that BDSM pain and humiliation was probably taking things a little too far.

“No, not really,” he replied, much to her relief. “But I mean, there’s nothing wrong with a little . . . spanking once in a while.” He reached down and smacked her ass as he said that.

She jumped a bit, startled. Although, no, she supposed there was nothing wrong with that, within reason. “This place is crazy,” she said, subconsciously veering off in the direction of the strapons. She’d never been a huge fan of strapon sex, but Lexa had sometimes worn this purple one that she knew how to work pretty damn well. She used it better than Finn had used his real one, so that was saying something.

“You’ve really never been to a place like this before?” Bellamy said, sounding surprised.

“No, never.”

“Not even to get one of these?” He held up one of the vibrators. “Or those?” And then he gestured towards the strapons.

“I don’t own a strapon. And I order my vibrators online,” she informed him. “I’m an Amazon Prime member. I get free shipping.”

He laughed, shaking his head. “Crazy,” he said, putting the vibrator back up on the shelf. “Oh, and look at this.” He nearly knocked down a display of dildos as he squeezed around her to pick up some weird-looking interconnected metal rings.
“What is that?” she asked.

“I don’t know, like a dick harness or something.”

“Yours wouldn’t even fit in there,” she said, not only to boost his ego, but also because it was true.

“Damn straight.” He shuddered a bit and put that back down.

She stumbled over something down on the floor and picked it up to get a closer look, perplexed.

“What is this, like a construction cone?” she asked. It sort of looked like one, only it was smaller and pink.

“You’re probably supposed to stick that up your ass,” he said.

“Ew.” She immediately dropped it onto the floor. “Isn’t there anything normal in here?”

“No, Clarke, it’s a sex shop.” His eyes lit up when he spotted something in the back of the store.

“Get a load of that.” He scampered towards a life-sized blow-up sex doll, one who had a conveniently placed hole in her mouth, in between her legs, and probably one around back, too.

“Come here,” he said, setting the doll in front of him.

“Oh my god, Bellamy.”

“Just come here.” He grabbed her hand and pulled her in close, and just for the sake of playing along, she pretended to be all over the doll, making an exaggeratedly aroused face as he snapped a quick selfie.

“There,” he said, putting the doll back. “Now we had a threesome.”

“Please don’t post that picture anywhere,” she begged. “I really can’t have my mom finding it.”

“Your secret’s safe with me, Princess,” he promised, pocketing his phone.

Raven, who had been more than content to let them browse together while she wandered off on her own, suddenly called, “Clarke!” from the other side of the store. “Come here for a minute.”

Clarke left Bellamy to look around at whatever else caught his fancy or piqued his curiosity, and she joined Raven in the clothing section of the store. Some of the clothes, upon first glance, actually looked pretty cute.

“Look at this,” Raven said, holding up a red bra and panties set.

“Lingerie,” Clarke said. “Nice.”

“Edible lingerie,” Raven informed her.

“What?” Clarke took a closer look and noticed that the whole thing was made out of candy, Red Hots, to be exact. “Oh, no way.”

“You should get this,” Raven suggested. “I bet Bellagio would love it.”

“I can’t wear that,” Clarke said.

“Why not?”

“I’m too . . .” She glanced down at her chest. “Top heavy. You could get it, though.”
“Hmm, maybe.” Raven held up the miniscule clothing—was it even really clothing if there was no cloth involved?—and studied it closely. Her eyes wandered to the side, though, when Bellamy dropped something. As he bent down to pick it up, Raven swore, “Damn, Clarke. Look at his ass.”

“I know, it’s ridiculous.” Clarke just stood there for a minute, admiring the view. Girls were typically the ones with the better backsides, but Bellamy’s was just so perfectly sculpted, just like the rest of him.

“How the fuck did you meet this guy at Walmart?” Raven asked in astonishment, practically salivating.

“Hell if I know.” Clarke licked her lips, loving these tight jeans he was wearing. He really needed to wear them more often.

“Sorry,” Raven said, tearing her eyes away. “Don’t mean to ogle your boyfriend.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Clarke reminded her.


“Allright. Go make sure he’s not getting into any trouble. I’m gonna keep looking,” Raven declared, hanging up the Red Hot outfit again.

“Let me know if you find anything I actually could buy.” As weird as this store was, Clarke wasn’t opposed to purchasing something if it wasn’t too out there.

When she rejoined Bellamy, he’d found something that had his full interest: a book. “Leave it to you to find something to read in a sex shop,” she teased.

He shut the book and held it up for her to read the cover. Tantric Sex, it was called, and there was a picture of a couple in the middle of some heavy duty lovemaking on the front of it.

“Educational?” she asked.

“It’s not bad,” he said, reopening it. “Lots of positions and stuff. Look at this one.” He showed her a diagram of a couple that looked . . . backbreaking.

“I don’t think I’m flexible enough for that,” she fretted.

“Oh, you are,” he assured her, snapping the book shut. “I might get this.”

“Go for it.” She highly doubted Bellamy needed a book to get inspiration for new positions, but maybe it’d be interesting reading for her.

After laughing at and poking fun of a few more of the so-called ‘toys’ on display, Clarke and Bellamy headed up to the front counter to pay for their book. It was hardcover thing, so it was marked at twenty-five dollars. Even though Clarke offered to pay for half of it, Bellamy wouldn’t let her. He rang the bell for service at the register, and a few seconds later, a long-haired guy with a half-ponytail shuffled out from an office. He neglected to shut his door, though, so Clarke caught sight of his computer, which was still in the middle of playing a video on some porn site.

“Bellamy,” he said. “Long time no see.”

“Yeah, you too,” Bellamy said. “I thought you were dead.”
The long-haired guy cracked a smile. “Not dead. Just needed a break. But now I’m back. The king of Ice Nation has returned.” He glanced at Clarke and introduced himself as he scanned their book. “I’m Roan.”

“Roan,” Clarke echoed. “The king, huh?”

“Well, this is my store,” he proclaimed proudly.

“Why is it called Ice Nation?” she inquired. She’d asked Bellamy on the way there, but he hadn’t known.

“It’s an homage to one of cinema’s greatest sex scenes,” Roan explained, “from the movie 9½ Weeks.”

Clarke cocked her head to the side, still confused. “I don’t get it.” It probably didn’t help that she’d never seen the film.

“It involves ice cubes,” Bellamy told her. “I’ll show you later. You’ll like it.”

“You could try it with one of these positions,” Roan suggested as he put the book in a non-transparent sack.

“Actually, that’s not a bad idea.” Bellamy handed over three ten dollar bills to pay for the book.

“Don’t waste your time,” Raven advised as she meandered to the counter with the red edible lingerie in hand. “I’ve tried the whole ice cube thing. It’s overrated.”

Roan stared at her as though he were star struck, and distractedly handed Bellamy’s change back to him. “Well, well, well,” he drawled, eyeing her up and down, “what do we have here?”

“We have a Raven,” Clarke’s friend answered confidently, setting her lingerie down on the counter. “Just this, please.”

Roan lifted up the fragile garment and nodded his head in approval. “This will look amazing on your skin tone,” he speculated.

“It’ll look better off of it.”

Damn, girl, Clarke thought, always impressed by her friend’s outgoingness. She and Bellamy stepped aside so Raven and Roan could . . . well, flirt.

Roan seemed to take his sweet time ringing up Raven’s purchase, and was even brazen enough to ask, “Who gets to see you in this?”

“That’s to be determined.” Raven smiled at him seductively, and it was as if Roan suddenly had no interest in the porno he’d left playing on his computer. When they left, he’d probably switch to some Latina porn site, because that was clearly what he’d be craving.

It wasn’t just Roan, though, who felt the spark. When they left the store and were out of earshot, Raven eagerly announced, “I love the king,” and practically pranced towards the car.

Bellamy gave Clarke a curious look, and she just smiled. Hey, the Walmart parking lot, the Ice Nation sex shop . . . sometimes sparks happened in the weirdest places.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~
Bellamy felt like he was truly blessed when he got to shower with Clarke for the first time. She’d had a flat tire, so she’d called him to come fix it. He had, of course, but since all she had was this little temporary tire in the trunk, he insisted on following her home, making sure she got there okay.

How all of that resulted in the shower, he wasn’t quite sure, but he didn’t care to question it. At first they kind of just stood under the water and made out, and he even ran some shampoo through her hair for her. But when her shower doors were sufficiently steamed up and he was getting turned on to the point where he had to adjust the temperature of the water downward, that was when she got on her knees and took his cock into her mouth.

Damn, it was good, feeling that steady stream of water on his back while she licked and sucked every droplet off his length. She was trying lots of different techniques, too, first concentrating on the head by circling her tongue around it. Then she gave him lots of long licks, her tongue pressed flat to the underside of his cock as it glided all the way from base to tip. But eventually, she opened up wide and really took him in, keeping her lips tight as she moved her head up and down. It felt sort of like a vacuum, which felt amazing, and he made sure to whisper and groan, “Yeah,” and “Like that,” so she knew she was doing well. She made sounds, too, throaty moans that vibrated all around his shaft. Hearing her moan made him realize it wasn’t just him who was enjoying this; she was enjoying it, too.

When the hand she was using to grip the base of his cock shifted ever so slightly to cup his balls, he about shot his load right then and there. This was new. She gently massaged them while continuing to suck him off, and he knew he was a goner. His princess was treating him so well.

“I’m gonna cum,” he warned her, trying to push her head away. She wouldn’t let him, though. He knew she’d heard him, but she didn’t pull away like she usually did, didn’t use her hand to finish him off. Her gorgeous lips remained wrapped around his cock, and he took that to mean it was okay. So he closed his eyes, reveled in the sensations a bit longer, and then just let go. He came pretty hard in her mouth, hoping she could handle it. He knew the taste or the texture or whatever grossed some girls out, and Clarke had never actually done this before. At least not with him.

Eyes shut, she slowly slid her mouth off his cock once he was done, pressing her lips together tightly to keep everything inside. He watched in awe as she tilted her head back determinedly, and her throat moved as she swallowed. Judging by the look on her face, it wasn’t a particularly enjoyable taste, but she did it; she did it for him.

When she opened her eyes and looked up at him with this sweet, innocent look on her face, he wished he was able to cum again right that minute. “Wow,” he breathed out in amazement.

Her breasts jiggled as she stood up, she smoothed her wet hair back from her face. “Did you like that?”

“Yeah.” Maybe it was recency bias, but it was the best damn blow job he remembered getting in a long time. “You didn’t have to that, though.”

“I know,” she said, rubbing her hands against his chest. “I wanted to.”

Damn, he thought, gazing at her appreciatively. She was one hell of a good girl.

He could have left and gone home for the night, but she offered to cook him dinner. That was a disaster, one he had to rectify by whipping up some spaghetti, but it was fun to see her try. After they ate, she complained about having to study, and he lay down on the bed with her, flipping through the TV channels while she flipped through her textbook.
“Sure you don’t want me to return the favor?” he asked, still high off that shower blowjob.

“No,” she said. “Well, I mean, I want you to, but you can’t. I have to study.”

He took a peek at what she was reading, frowning when he saw some big flowchart on one of the pages. “What’re you studying? That doesn’t look like art,” he remarked.

“It’s not. It’s for my business class.” She turned the page disinterestedly, then turned another without reading anything.

“Why are you taking a business class?”

“Because, after I graduate, I wanna start up my own gallery. But you gotta have some kind of business knowledge to do that, so . . .”

“Ugh,” he groaned, rubbing his head, “you know who has his own art gallery?”

“Who?”

He shot her an unhappy look. “Lincoln.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, he owns it with his friend Nyko.”

Clarke thought about it a moment, and then her whole face lit up with excitement. “You mean the Trikru art gallery? I love that place! I used to go there all the time when I needed inspiration.”

“Oh, great another Lincoln fan,” he grumbled sarcastically, redirecting his attention to the TV.

“Sorry,” she apologized.

“No, if you need to talk to him to get some advice or anything . . . have at it.” He finally settled on American Ninja Warrior, because . . . really, that shit was just fucking awesome.

“Why don’t you like him?” Clarke asked, totally forgetting about the open book next to her as she stared at him intently.

“Ah, I’m just an overprotective big brother,” he confessed. “Plus, I walked in on him and Octavia having sex when she was eighteen.”

“Oh god.”

“He deflowered her,” he said dramatically, because that was the only terminology he could think of to describe it. “He deflowered her, and I saw it. I’m gonna have nightmares about that for the rest of my life.”

“Well, at least she waited until she was eighteen,” Clarke pointed out. “I was sixteen.”

“The high school boyfriend?” he guessed. He’d heard a couple things about that guy.

“Yeah, Finn.” She rolled her eyes in annoyance. “I thought he was so cute, though, and to his credit, he was really there for me after my dad died. So that’s how we got together. But he was cheating on
me with Raven, and he was cheating on Raven with me. So when we found out about it, we decided to hate him instead of hating each other, and that’s how we became best friends.” She smirked proudly.

“That’s . . . kind of awesome.” He’d never understand guys who cheated on their girls, and he had no qualms about being highly judgmental of the ones who did.

“What about you?” she asked, scooting a bit closer. “How old you were you?”

“Oh, fifteen.” That seemed like a lifetime ago.

“How was it?”

“Some random chick.”

“Some random chick?” she echoed laughingly. “Well, it must have been a magical night.”

“It only lasted two minutes,” he openly admitted. “I was over-eager.”

“Well, you’ve gotten better since then.”

“I would hope so.” Hopefully that girl, who he was going to have to avoid the fuck out of if he ever attended a high school reunion, wouldn’t hold the bad experience against him. He was pretty sure it’d been her first time, too.

“How many girls have you been with?” Clarke inquired suddenly.

The question threw him for a loop, not because he wasn’t expecting it, but because . . . it wasn’t like he kept a tally.

“A few,” he answered vaguely.

“Like ten?” she pressed.

“More than ten?”

“More than ten.”

“Do I even wanna know?”

“Probably not.” Sometimes even he didn’t like to think about it.

She reached over and put hand on his lower abdomen, gently drumming her fingertips against it. “Is that how you got so good?”

He shrugged as best he could lying down. “Practice makes perfect.” He knew most of it was from experience, some of it from porn, and plenty of it was just natural-born talent; but yeah, he’d done a lot of different things with a lot of different women. But he paid attention, gauged their reactions, and figured out what they liked. And what they didn’t.

“God, no wonder I have such a hard time keeping up,” she said.

“What’re you talking about?” For a second, he actually thought she was joking, because . . . since when didn’t she keep up with him? “You do so good. You’ve had practice.”

“I’ve only ever been with two other people, Bellamy,” she informed him.

“Seriously?” That surprised him.

“Yeah, Finn and Lexa. And Lexa didn’t have the same equipment you do. Actually, neither did
Finn. That was, like . . .” She held her fingers apart and squeezed the air to demonstrate. “. . . half-size.”

As much as it thrilled him to know that he was one of only three people she’d slept with, (and that he was bigger than her ex), he still couldn’t help but be bit shocked by the whole thing. “I’m really only the third person you’ve had sex with?”

“Yes, is that so hard to believe?”

“Kind of.” He’d assumed he was the fifth or sixth, maybe.

“What, do you think I’m like a slut or something?”

“No, just . . .” He didn’t want to offend her by insinuating that. His surprise was more of a compliment than anything else. “Wow. You had me fooled.” He pictured her mouth on his cock, doing what it did so well, and all he could figure was that she was fast learner. Because a high school relationship couldn’t have been that educational, and a relationship with a girl was just different. “It’s a good thing,” he assured her, genuinely impressed. “You . . . you’re good, Clarke.”

Of course, Clarke had this thing about praise; he’d noticed it and doubted she was even aware of it. But when he complimented her, she loved it, so it wasn’t all that surprising when she started to nuzzle up to him and murmur, “Mmm.” She was horny.

“No, no, you gotta study,” he reminded her, gently pushing her away.

She groaned frustratedly and buried her head in her pillow, so he reached over and turned the pages in her book back to that flowchart page where she’d technically left off. As much as he would have loved to distract her for the night, she was his friend. And he wasn’t about to let his friend flunk her midterms.
“Almost done?”

“Yeah.” Clarke lay out on the increasingly-prickly grass of her campus’s center plaza, putting the finishing touches on her quick sketch. She added a little shading where necessary, then then held her notebook to her chest and said, “Okay. One, two, three.” She and Niylah both flipped their sketches around, revealing their best penis drawings, and unsurprisingly, Niylah’s was horrible. “Niylah!” Clarke screeched in outrage. “What is that?” It didn’t even look like a human body part.

“I tried my best, okay?” Niylah said. “It’s not like I’m an expert.”

“But you’ve seen one, right?”

“One. But I didn’t get up close and personal with it or anything.”

“Clearly.” Niylah’s drawing was so . . . puny. A true embarrassment to men everywhere.

“I can’t help it,” her friend said. “I think they’re unsightly.”

“Well, some of them are,” Clarke admitted. “Not Bellamy’s, though.”

Niylah motioned to Clarke’s drawing. “Is that supposed to be his?”

“Yeah.” She smiled at its likeness, though it didn’t look exactly the same. “I didn’t get all the freckles, though.”

“Well, I must admit, size-wise . . . it’s impressive,” Niylah acknowledged. “I could almost go straight for that.”

Clarke laughed at the absurdity of that statement. “Yeah, right.”

Niylah crumped up her drawing and aimed it at a nearby trashcan. It bounced off the side and didn’t go in, so she got up and threw it away. “No, seriously, though,” she said, sitting down next to Clarke again. “I’d love to meet this guy. We could compare notes on going down on girls, see who has the better technique.” She wriggled her tongue excitedly.

Clarke purred contently, because all she had to do was think about that to feel aroused.

“Well, well, well,” Raven’s voice rang out as she approached, an overstuffed backpack slung over her shoulders, “if it isn’t my two favorite undergrads.”

“And our resident genius,” Clarke said.

Raven dropped her backpack down at her feet and lay down, using it as pillow. “So what’re we talking about?” she asked.

“Clarke’s boyfriend’s package,” Niylah replied.

“He is not my boyfriend,” Clarke said emphatically. Sooner or later, they were going to have to get the terminology right, because she didn’t them calling him that in front of him.
“Fuck buddy, Niylah. Get it right,” Raven scolded. “Please, Clarke, do tell. I’m living vicariously through you right now.”

Clarke smiled blissfully, because there were only good things to report. Sex with Bellamy was just as exhilarating and unpredictable now as it had been the first time. She got the sense that there was still so much more she could do with him, so much more she could try, and they were working their way up to all of that. “He’s amazing,” she raved.

“Best sex you’ve ever had?” Niylah questioned.

“Yeah.”

“Really?”

“Mmm-hmm.” She didn’t even have to think twice.

“What makes it so good?” Niylah asked on. “Besides the big dick.”

That was hard to explain, but since they were asking, Clarke figured she might as well try to explain it. “Just him, you know? He’s so . . .” She trailed, shivering with delight. “Okay, like, no matter what we’re doing or how hard we’re going at it, he’ll always stop and check in with me, you know? He’ll ask if I’m okay or just kiss me.”

“Ugh,” Raven muttered, “Wick would never.”

“And he’s not one of those guys who overdoes it on the dirty talk. You know how in porn the guys are always like, ‘Yeah, suck it, bitch. You’re a dirty little whore.’”

“I don’t watch straight porn,” Niylah reminded her.

“Well, Bellamy doesn’t say stuff like that. But he’s always like, ‘You’re such a good girl.’” She got butterflies in her stomach just imagining him saying that. “And he calls me Princess.”

“That’s called a praise kink, Clarke,” Raven informed her. “See, I’m the opposite. I don’t mind being called a bitch. Call me a bitch. Tell me I’m your dirty little slut. Oh, I bet Roan would have a filthy mouth in bed.”

And here we go, Clarke thought. Raven couldn’t stop thinking about that guy.

“Who’s Roan?” Niylah asked.

“This guy who owns the Ice Nation sex shop. Raven has the hots for him.”

“He’s gorgeous,” Raven enthused. “Besides, I’m so sexually frustrated. Which I don’t expect you to understand, Clarke, because here you are having the most sex of your life. But even with Wick, I wasn’t satisfied. Did you know that he could never get me off in missionary? I always had to be on top.”

“Seriously?” Clarke wasn’t opposed to being on top, but sometimes it was nice to just lay there and let Bellamy do all the work.

“Yeah. Me on top or bust.” Raven sighed dramatically. “But I bet the king would be much more skilled.”

“Oh my god,” Niylah cackled, throwing her head back, “we are thirsty as fuck!”
It's not my fault, Clarke wanted to say. She’d always enjoyed sex, but she’d never been quite this fixated on it until Bellamy.

The next day, while doing some last-minute Halloween costume shopping with her non-boyfriend, Clarke told him about the sex-infused girl talk, and he seemed surprised that they talked about it (and him) so much. “I think girls talk about sex more than guys sometimes,” he speculated as they strolled through the mess of a store that was Party America.

“But guys talk about sex all the time,” she argued, stepping over some children’s Halloween costumes that had fallen down. Everything was ransacked.

“No, guys think about sex all the time,” he corrected. “There’s a difference.”

She wished she could read his mind, just to see what filthy thoughts might be going through it right now. “Do you think about sex all the time?”

He didn’t hesitate. “All the time, Clarke.”

“All the time?”

“Yes.”

With me? she wondered. But there were probably plenty of ex-girlfriends who popped up in his fantasies, too. “Even when you’re looking at this?” she asked teasingly, holding up a big, bulky, polka-dotted clown costume.

“Maybe not that.” He shook his head.

“God, this is awful. Everything’s picked over,” she complained, hanging the costume back up on the sales rack. “I should’ve got my costume sooner. But I was busy flunking my midterms.”

“Passing your midterms,” he corrected, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze. “Come on, I’m sure we can find you somethin’ here. And I’m gonna buy it for you. Whatever you want.”

Bellamy maintained his optimism while they shopped, but Clarke remained hopeless. He convinced her to try on so many ridiculous costumes, including a bumble bee, Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz, and a Minnie Mouse costume that she swore was actually meant for little girls, because she couldn’t get it up past her butt. After every failed attempt, he insisted she come out of the dressing room and show him—“model it for me, baby,” as he put it—and then he proceeded to laugh his head off, because she looked miserable and stupid in each one.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying this,” she muttered as he tossed her the next option. She didn’t even look at what it was when sheducked back into the dressing room to put it on.

As it turned out, this last costume he’d picked . . . wasn’t bad. There wasn’t much to it, as it was basically just a short white dress with matching wings and a halo. It was comfortable, though, and it fit pretty well, so maybe it would work.

“Don’t laugh at this one,” she said, stepping out of the dressing room.

He didn’t. His mouth dropped open a bit, and his eyes danced all over her, but he didn’t laugh. “Wow.”

She smoothed her hands over her stomach, feeling a bit self-conscious about how tight it was. “I wish it was in black, though,” she said. “That’d be slimming.”
“You can dye it,” he suggested, standing, moving in close to her. “Be a dark angel.”

“How much is it?” He lifted up the price tag and swore, “Shit. A hundred and fifty bucks.”

“Hmm.” That was probably more work than it was worth, though. Besides, hooking up with Bellamy these past few weeks had probably caused her to lose a couple pounds, so maybe she didn’t even need a slimming color.

“For this?” Maybe he was misreading it. That seemed ridiculously high for what was basically a stretch of fabric and some accessories.

“It’s probably real silk,” he said, sighing. “Oh, well. I said I’d buy it for you, so I’ll buy it.”

There was no way she could let him spend that much money on a Halloween costume she’d wear once, though, especially not when his income was . . . unpredictable. She probably had more money in her savings account, courtesy her parents, than he had in his entire bank account right now, and she wasn’t about to allow him to waste so much of the cash he’d worked hard for. “It’s not worth it,” she said, removing the halo. “I can come up with something else at home. And then I can surprise you.”

“Surprise me, huh?” He grinned suggestively, backing her up into the dressing room again. He shut the door, locking it into place. “I like surprises.”

“Bellamy, what are you doing?”

He pressed her back against the wall as far as he could, but her wings got in the way. “Take these off,” he said, unclipping them from her costume so he could press her back all the way.

“Bellamy.” She knew they’d done stuff in his truck and at Dropship before, but this just seemed like a new level to think about doing it here. There were other people in that store, mulling about for their own costumes mere feet away. If they heard them or had seen them slip in there together, they’d know exactly what was going on.

“You want to?” he asked huskily, a gleam of mischief in his eyes.

“We’re in a dressing room,” she pointed out.

“So?”

Of course that wasn’t enough to deter him. And honestly . . . it wasn’t really enough to deter her, either. The door went all the way down to the floor, so no one could actually see them in there. If they just kept it as quiet as possible and made it quick . . .

“We could get in trouble,” she whispered, nibbling playfully on his ear.

“I don’t care,” he whispered back, spinning her around. She gasped a bit too loudly, earning a “Shh,” from him as he pressed on her back, urging her to bend over.

Oh god, she thought, hiking her dress up and pushing her panties to the side as he slid his zipper down. Were they really doing this? They really were, weren’t they? Bellamy was crazy, and somehow he always convinced her to do these things she’d never been brave enough to try before.

“Shit,” he swore suddenly. “I don’t have a condom.”

“I do.” She tilted her head in the direction of her purse.
He reached in there and found the little foil package, smiling thankfully. “That’s my girl,” he said. “Always prepared.”

She figured she had to be nowadays, what with the two of them being so . . . active.

He tore the package open with his teeth and quickly rolled it onto his cock. She’d barely had time to position her hands against the wall when he plunged inside her, nearly causing her knees to buckle. He coiled one arm around her waist, holding her up, tugging her ass back against his groin, and settled his cock deeply inside of her.

Clarke didn’t know how she was going to stay quiet when he started thrusting. He kept his movements pretty short and simple, just to avoid the obvious sound of his skin slapping against hers. His hips grinded against her while his hands tightly gripped her waist, and she just closed her eyes and let him fuck her. This would probably be too quick for her to get off, but that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. If he had to leave her hanging, then maybe he’d go down on her once they got home or—or reach over to the passenger’s seat and finger her during the drive there. He’d never done that before, but he’d probably be willing to, right?

“Look,” he encouraged huskily, bending forward so he was breathing into her ear.

“What?”

“Look at us.”

She knew what he was asking her to do, so slowly, she turned her head to the side and took in the sight of the two of them in the dressing room mirror. Those mirrors were never the most flattering, but what she saw . . . looked good. It looked hot.

“Look how sexy you are,” he said, his eyes locked on their reflections as well.

Oh, god, she felt sexy. Her whole body felt like it was on fire when he was touching her, when he was inside her like this. She felt out of control in the best way possible, and actually watching him fuck her, seeing them in that mirror as though they were people in a movie . . . it added this whole new level of thrill to an already thrilling situation.

She wanted to cum so badly, but he came first, fighting to keep himself quiet as he rammed his hips into her a few more times. He mumbled something about taking care of her later, which she liked the sound of, and then started getting both of them dressed. She felt dizzy with pleasure, barely able to even remember her own name, let alone remember where she’d set her shirt. But thankfully he fixed her up.

When they left the dressing room, they tried to be subtle about it, but . . . it was bad. It was so bad. There were two preteen boys with acne on their faces loitering about, cell phones out as though they’d been recording what they’d heard. They averted their eyes and tried not to laugh, of course, but Clarke knew they’d been listening.

Even more mortifying, though, was the little girl standing there with wide eyes, a pink princess dress in her hands. She couldn’t have been more than eight years old, and they’d probably just scarred her for life. Her mom had probably told her to come back here and try that costume on and . . .

“Oh my god, Bellamy,” Clarke mumbled hastily, feeling like they’d just corrupted all of Arkadia’s youth.

He must have felt that same sense of horror, because he just stared at the little girl for a moment, dumbfounded while the acne boys started to laugh louder. “Let’s just get outta here,” he finally
suggested, grabbing her hand.

They practically fled the store.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Halloween wasn’t much of a holiday—nothing compared to President’s Day or Columbus Day or anything like that—but Bellamy still went all out for it. As a kid, he’d stopped dressing up in the fourth grade, because his mother had worked the night shift at a factory, and it’d become his responsibility to take Octavia trick-or-treating. So the holiday became all about her, her costume, her candy, until she didn’t want to go trick-or-treating anymore. It wasn’t until after he’d graduated that he bothered with a costume again, which was pretty much just a toga. Over the years, he’d kept the same outfit, though, adding to it so that he now had these ridiculous gold gladiator sandals and a gold laurel wreath crown. To complete the look this year, he found a matching gold cape at the thrift store, and when he put it all together . . . it was his best version of Apollo yet.

“There he is, god of the sun,” Miller said as Bellamy came downstairs. He and Jackson were pouring themselves some drinks in the kitchen to get their night started early. They were likely using each other’s clothes as costume, since Jackson was wearing a security guard uniform and Miller was in scrubs.

“And god of music and poetry and pretty much everything,” Bellamy made sure to add.

Jackson chuckled as he took a drink. “Why’s he your favorite?” he inquired.

Bellamy shrugged. “He’s kind of a boss. Plus, he’s got the sister, like me, loves his mom. And he’s the most beautiful god, so . . . if the shoe fits.” There was no need to be modest.

“You should’ve died your hair blonde this year,” Miller said.

“Nah, I’d rather rip my toenails off than do that.”

“I’d make a hot blonde,” Murphy boasted as he shuffled out of his bedroom. He didn’t look much different than he usually did, except that his clothes were dirtier and baggier.

“What’re you supposed to be?” Bellamy asked him.

“I’m a homeless person.”

Emori came bounding out of the room a few seconds later, looking way too hot for him in her Tomb Raider costume. “You guys ready to go?” she asked.

“Almost,” Bellamy replied, checking the clock on the wall. Clarke should have been there ten minutes ago. Maybe her costume was taking her a while.

“What’s Clarke dressing up as?” Miller asked him.

Before he could respond, Murphy grunted, “Probably Marilyn Monroe.”

Bellamy sent him a warning look.

“What? She’s got the rack for it.”

Bellamy thought about it and shrugged. Fine, that was true. And he definitely wouldn’t mind seeing Clarke as Marilyn. He was also kind of hoping that Sandy from Grease was a possibility.
“I know what Clarke’s wearing,” Emori bragged. “She sent me a picture earlier.”

“She did?” Bellamy’s interest was piqued. “Can I see?”

“No, she said it’s supposed to be a surprise.” She whipped out her phone, though, and showed her boyfriend, and he chuckled and said, “Yeah, he’s gonna love that.”

For fifteen more minutes, Bellamy and his friends waited. They talked and speculated a lot about who the live music at TonDC would be tonight, but Bellamy didn’t really care about that. He was way more interested in speculating about Clarke’s costume. It had to be something she could have thrown together pretty quickly, since she still hadn’t had one as of yesterday. Maybe she’d finally gotten that cheerleading skirt from Raven. If she went that route, he definitely looked forward to seeing her shake her . . . pom poms.

Nearly half an hour later, Clarke finally showed up, letting herself inside without knocking. Bellamy went speechless the moment he saw what she was wearing, because . . . Murphy was right. He loved it. She had on this shiny, short blue dress that looked like a sexier version of Cinderella. It was a corset style one-piece that really emphasized those amazing breasts of hers and showcased an ample amount of cleavage, and there was a layer of white lace peeking out from underneath the skirt. On her feet were sparkly shoes, on her head a sparkly crown, and her hair was pulled up off her neck, loose tendrils curtaining her face.

“Nice, Clarke,” Miller said.

“Damn, girl, you look good!” Emori complimented. “ Took you long enough to get here, though. Let’s go!”

Bellamy stood up slowly, still a bit slack-jawed at the sight of this girl, and walked towards her as his friends piled out the door. “Wow,” was all he could say. She looked stunning, no doubt about it.

“You like it?” she asked, twisting from side to side, flicking the bottom of her skirt up a bit. “I had to drive to D.C. to get it, but I figured it was appropriate.”

His princess dressed as a princess? Hell, yeah, it was the most appropriate costume ever. And it filled his mind with so many inappropriate ideas.

“I love it,” he told her, happy that she’d taken inspiration from the nickname he’d given her.

“Thanks,” she said. “I like yours, too. Zeus?”

He scoffed at that. “Zeus was dumb as a box of rocks. Apollo.”

“Oh, that explains all the gold.”

“Yeah, I literally wear the same costume every single year,” he confessed. Next year would probably be time to switch it up.

“It looks good,” she said, using the strings of his cape to pull him in closer. “You’re wearing a dress.”

“A toga, Clarke,” he argued.

“Is there a difference?”

“Yes.” He had this same conversation with Murphy every year.
“Are we sure?” she teased playfully.

Unable to suppress a smile, he shook his head and pointed a finger at her, warning, “I’m not gonna have sex with you later,” as he headed out the front door.

“Yes, you will,” she said, following him. “You can’t say no to the princess.”

Per Clarke’s request, they started the night out at Mount Weather. Bellamy wasn’t sure how long they were going to stay there, but he hoped not long. Mount Weather was nothing compared to TonDC. The music was shit, the fancy drinks were shit, the people were shit—it was very much the college crowd since it was located close to campus. Not that there was anything wrong with Arkadia’s college students. They just didn’t party the way the people at TonDC did. Mount Weather was like a child’s birthday party compared to TonDC, and Bellamy couldn’t wait to get out of there.

Raven was there, dressed as Wonder Woman, and she was accompanied by some long-haired girl in a pirate costume. Clarke introduced him, and he realized the pirate was Niylah, the chick who liked chicks. The first thing she said to Bellamy, though, was, “I like your dick,” which both shocked and confused the hell out of him.

“I drew it for her,” Clarke explained.

“Oh.” That made him wonder what else she was drawing in her spare time.

In addition to Niylah, he also got to meet Clarke’s friend Wells, who was dressed as Will Smith from Men in Black. That poor kid looked like he would have rather been at home studying or playing Tetris or something, but he seemed nice enough.

Murphy and Emori didn’t last more than half an hour at Mount Weather before they told Bellamy they were leaving for TonDC. Miller and Jackson were next to go, and Monty and Harper never showed up in the first place. There wasn’t a chance in hell Jasper would ever visit Mount Weather, because it was way easier for him to get high at TonDC. By 9:00, even Octavia was texting him, asking if he was on his way.

All his friends were at a better club, and technically, he could have left to go hang out with them. Clarke wasn’t his girlfriend; they weren’t dating. He wasn’t obligated to spend the entire night with her. She would have been fine on her own, because she had other friends there. Like Wells, who she talked to about finals, which Bellamy didn’t understand, because it was Halloween and finals were months away. So why talk about school? But that kind of seemed like Wells’ thing. She had Niylah, too, who she was able to talk to about girls, and she even helped Niylah scope some out. She helped Raven scope out guys, and she had a drink or two, the colorful, fruity kind. She was having fun.

And it wasn’t that Bellamy wasn’t having fun. No, watching Clarke prance around in that princess get-up was fun, even though she had yet to get out on the dance floor. Seeing her interact with her closest friends gave him a better idea of who she was, and just like she enjoyed his friends, he enjoyed hers. Niylah seemed awesome, and watching her grab random chicks out on the dance floor and start making out with them was hot. And even though Wells was pretty reserved, he did make a few jokes about how Will Smith and OJ Simpson were the only viable options for black men to dress up as on Halloween. Bellamy genuinely cracked up when Wells lamented, “Yeah, we lost Michael Jackson when he turned white.”

He still didn’t want to stay, though. He wanted to take Clarke to TonDC and show her what a club could really offer up on Halloween. But he didn’t want to take her away from her friends, so he pulled her aside at one point and suggested, “Let’s get out of here. All of us.”
“You wanna leave?” she asked loudly over the music.

“Yeah. Let’s go to TonDC.”

“TonDC?” her eyes bulged. “That place is crazy.”

“Yeah, so let’s go.”

She looked back out at the dance floor she hadn’t even ventured onto and said, “I don’t know . . .”

“Come on, Clarke,” he urged, putting his hands on her hips. “You wanna go to a real party?”

It took a bit of convincing, but finally, she agreed to it. Wells politely declined, of course, but Niylah was down to tag along right from the start. Raven seemed to have found a couple suitable men to dance with, so she wasn’t sure if she wanted to go, but Bellamy knew how to convince her.

“Roan’s probably gonna be there,” he informed her.

She immediately shoved both her dancing partners away and said, “Well, what are we waiting for then? Let’s go.” And then she was the one to lead the way outside.

On the drive across town, Bellamy warned Clarke that TonDC would be crowded. It was a smaller space than Mount Weather, and there would probably be twice as many people there. He told her it’d be hot inside, and loud, but he also told her it’d be fun. Because if she let loose the way he knew she could, then it would be.

There was a bit of a line out front, but since the guy at the door was one of Miller’s ex-boyfriends and recognized Bellamy, they were able to bypass everyone who was waiting and get right in. The music, some real hardcore rap shit, was blasting, and the speakers were amped up so loud on the bass, it kind of felt like the whole room was shaking. People were packed in like sardines on the dance floor, one sweaty body pressed up against the next, all of them rubbing and writhing against each other, and anyone who didn’t have enough room out there seemed content to climb up on the stage or even on top of the bar and dance there. Lots of the women either hadn’t shown up in much clothing to begin with or had stripped down significantly, because bras were definitely a big theme.

“Wow,” Clarke said, coiling her hands around his bicep. “This is intense.”

“This is awesome!” Niylah exclaimed. “We should’ve been coming here this whole time.” She squeezed out onto the dance floor, immediately finding her groove and a group of people she didn’t even know to dance with.

Raven was a woman on a mission, though. Her eyes scanned the crowded dance floor with purpose. “Where’s Roan?”

_He’s gotta be here_, Bellamy thought, looking around.

“I swear to God, Bellagio,” Raven growled, glaring at him, “if he isn’t here . . .”

Thankfully, Bellamy spotted Roan at the bar and pointed him out to Raven before she could finish her threat. He had one blonde girl sitting on his lap and was talking to another, both of whom were dressed as _Playboy_ bunnies.

“Thanks,” she said, quickly ditching him and Clarke. With surprising strength, she shoved aside anyone who was in her way and stepped right in front of the talkative blonde. Roan tossed the other one aside, his attention immediately diverted to Raven.
“The start of a love story?” Clarke wondered aloud.

“Who knows?” Anything was possible, he supposed, but he didn’t know much about love stories anymore.

Suspecting his friends would have staked out their own section rather than bothering with the dance floor, Bellamy braved the massive clump of people in front of him, trying to make his way to the back of the club where they usually hung out. Clarke kept hold of his arm and followed, clearly a fish out of water here. She wasn’t Niylah or Raven, both of whom seemed pretty fearless in any social situation, but she wasn’t petrified like Wells would have been, either. Still, Bellamy felt bad when a couple of drunk guys ran into them, forcing her to let go of his arm as they stumbled toward the exit. He lost sight of her in the crowd before he even knew what was happening.

“Clarke!” he called. Dammit, she was so short, he might never find her again. He stood up on his tiptoes, trying to see over all these arms that were flinging in the air. He didn’t see her, but he heard her saying his name, so he just followed the sound of her voice until he found her again.

“Hey, you alright?” he asked, holding both her arms.

She nodded, but . . . yeah, she looked a little overwhelmed by this place and happy to see him again.

“Come on.” He took her hand in his, making sure to hold it tightly as he zig-zagged through the remainder of the crowd. Once they were off the dance floor, they had room to breathe again, and he caught sight of his friends at a huge round table and couches in the back corner, their usual spot. They all roared when they saw him, and he felt Clarke relax a bit beside him. Familiar faces.

“About time!” Harper squealed, running up to hug him. She looked to be doing her best impersonation of Britney Spears tonight, with the midriff-bearing school girl outfit she had on. “Hey, Clarke,” she chimed, hugging her as well. “You look great. I love your outfit.”

“Oh, thanks.” Clarke tugged down on the skirt a bit, but it didn’t do much to hide the gorgeous curve of her ass.

The party was definitely already in full swing. Jasper sat surrounded in his own personal cloud of smoke, smiling stupidly when he saw them. Bellamy couldn’t tell what his costume was supposed to be at first, until Maya came out of the bathroom and sat down beside him. She was wearing a red one-piece swimsuit and a blonde wig, but it wasn’t Baywatch; she and Jasper had gone the couples costume route. She was Wendy Peffercorn and Jasper was Squints from The Sandlot.

Beside Jasper, Murphy and Emori were sprawled all over each other, looking dazed and happy as they shared a joint. Miller and Jackson were making out while dancing, and Harper was doing some of her own dancing for costume-less Monty, moving seductively like a stripper on his lap.

Bellamy and Clarke found enough space to squeeze in among all the other couples, and immediately, he started looking for Octavia. Even though he was high, Murphy must have noticed what he was doing, because he said, “Bathroom.”

As if on cue, she came out from the back, Lincoln with her. Bathroom, he thought. Yeah, right. They’d probably been . . . he didn’t even want to think about what they’d probably been doing.

“There he is!” Octavia called, sounding like she’d had a bit to drink even though she wasn’t of age yet. “Big brother.” She came and gave him a hug, asking what he thought of her costume. “It’s historical,” she said. “Xena.”

He wasn’t about to burst her bubble and point out that Xena was little more than a made-for-TV
character, so he just said, “Good job,” and tried to ignore the fact that Lincoln had dressed as Hercules. What the fuck was that about? He should have known mythology costumes were Bellamy’s thing.

Clarke leaned over once Octavia had meandered over to Lincoln again and said, “Ah, so this is why you wanted to come here so badly, to keep an eye on your sister.”

“No,” he said, rolling his eyes in disgust when Lincoln and Octavia started to dance. “Well, maybe a little bit.” It wasn’t like the dancing they were doing was even that nauseating, though. Most of the other people in that club were grinding, but Lincoln and Octavia appeared to be doing some salsa stuff. There was practiced footwork and plenty of space between them, but Bellamy still didn’t like it. “Where’d they learn that?” he grumbled. “Some Mexican favela?”

“Aren’t favelas in Brazil?” Clarke questioned.

“Whatever. Why don’t we just call up Dancing with the Stars right now? They look ready for it.”

“Oh, she’s fine,” Clarke said, whacking his arm. “Look at her. She’s more covered up than Harper and Emori are. And as far as dancing goes, that’s very PG-13.”

“I guess,” he mumbled, looking away, letting the sight of the sweat glistening between Clarke’s breasts distract him instead. It was, like he’d warned her, hot in there. But then he wondered if sweaty breasts were something Lincoln noticed about his sister, and that was just disturbing, so he glanced over at the bar, desperately in need of a buzz. It was busy, but the bartender was another one of Miller’s ex-boyfriends, so if he brought his friend with him, he could probably get served quickly. “I need a drink,” he decided, standing up.

He got Clarke a beer and himself something stronger, and he and Miller brought back plenty of shots for the group, too. Bellamy just did one, and much to his surprise, Clarke knocked one back, too. She scrunches up her face and went, “Blegh,” after she’d downed it, though, which probably meant she didn’t do shots very often. He’d never seen her do any since their first night together at Dropship.

“I want another,” she told him, though, and he supposed it was her attempt to loosen up. He went back up to the bar and got more for the whole table, and Clarke didn’t hesitate to do a second one. She didn’t make as much of a disgusted face this time.

“Go get her some pretzels or chips or somethin’,” he told Murphy, because he had a feeling his princess was going to need some food to go along with all this alcohol.

“I wanna do another one,” she declared, taking his shot glass right out of his hand. “But what if I get, like . . .” She trailed off, already struggling to find the words.

“Relax, I’m right here,” he assured her, rubbing her back. “I got you.”

“You’ll take care of me?” she asked.

“I’ll take care of you.” Hell, the prospect of seeing Clarke Griffin get really and truly drunk was too good to pass up. Yeah, she had a couple of drinks when they went out to Dropship or when they all hung out on Saturdays, but this was gonna be at a whole different level, and he couldn’t wait to see it.

“Okay,” she said, about to bring the glass up to her lips. She hesitated, though, and said, “But you gotta promise you won’t let me start dancing.”

“Okay.”
“You promise?”

“I promise.” He had no intention of living up to that, though, because dancing was another thing he really wanted to see Clarke do.

“Alright.” She downed another two shots, and the other girls cheered her on.

Clarke started feeling really good after that, it seemed. She burst into random fits of giggles that were the most adorable thing in the world, and at one point, she just exclaimed, “Bottoms up!” and kicked both her feet in the air. Sitting across from her, Jasper’s eyes got big as saucers as he caught an eyeful, and Bellamy had to push Clarke’s legs back down and help her sit up again. She smiled at him goofily, and he just shook his head at how spacey she looked and readjusted her tiara for her.

Around 11:30, Raven finally found them again. She told Bellamy she was going to take off—with Roan, of course—and he told her to have a good time.

“You got her?” she asked, motioning to Clarke, who was now dipping her pretzels into her next shot of vodka.

“I got her.”

Clarke’s fifth shot was her last shot—he’d already decided that much. She complained a little when he announced he was cutting her off, but when he secretly switched her alcohol with a glass of water, she didn’t even notice.

Harper, Emori, and Maya didn’t give her a chance to complain anyway. They plucked her up from her seat and said, “Let’s go dance!”

“Okay!” Clarke agreed readily, and Bellamy just smirked and let her go with them. That gave him a chance to knock back another beer of his own and replenish her pretzels for her. Since all the girls were a little tipsy, he and Monty made sure to keep an eye on them while they were out on the dance floor, and luckily that was easy since they stayed close to the side. They were pretty much a hot mess, falling all over each other and constantly collapsing into laughter, and he and Monty got a kick out of them. Especially Clarke. Because Harper and Emori were both good dancers, so their strategy seemed to be to sandwich poor Clarke in between them and disguise how badly she sucked.

The live music that night turned out to be nothing more than a House of Pain cover band, but when they started in on their rendition of “Jump Around,” the place went nuts. The whole crowd just started bouncing up and down, singing along at the top of their lungs, and even Jasper shot to his feet and got out there. The band kept playing after that, but the girls came back, looking tired and sweaty.

“She’s having fun, Bell,” Emori said, depositing Clarke onto his lap.

“I’m having fun!” Clarke yelled, squirming in his arms. She managed to get to her feet, but then she just fell back down onto him again.

Eazy-E’s classic “Boys-N-The-Hood” came over the loudspeaker, which Murphy had somehow adopted as his ‘theme song’ over the years even though he still mistakenly called it “Cruisin’ down the street in my ’64.” The girls hollered at him, but he was already climbing up onto the table to do his dance. It was a stupid dance Bellamy had seen dozens of times before but still couldn’t help but laugh at. Lots of arm movements, some pointing, some vogue-ing, all mixed with this sinister facial expression and tendency to lift up his shirt at the end. Sometimes Bellamy thought Murphy was just high off his ass when he danced like this; other times, it really seemed like Murphy believed he was a good dancer.
Niylah finally wandered over to the table a little after midnight and after Murphy’s performance. She introduced herself to everyone with ease, then plopped down next to Bellamy as Clarke nuzzled her face against his neck and nibbled on his earlobe. Clarke seemed to be going through many phases of intoxication in a short period of time. This was an overly-affectionate one. Sober Clarke never would have shown this much PDA.

“So I hear you have skills,” Niylah started in. “Tell me your technique.”

At first he thought she was joking, but he soon found out she was completely serious. So there he sat with Clarke’s lesbian friend, comparing notes on how to eat pussy. Niylah had some good strategies, things he mentally filed away to try next time, and she seemed to respect his process and get a few ideas from him, too.

They’d just started talking about fingering technique when Clarke started to get antsy. “Bellamy . . .” she whined. “I’m thirsty.”

“Clarke, you can’t blow me right here,” he teased. “We’re in public.”

“No, not . . .” She frowned exaggeratedly. “Thirsty, Bellamy.”

“Oh, I see.” Keeping one arm around her waist so she wouldn’t fall right out of his lap, he leaned forward and grabbed her glass off the table. “Here you go,” he said, handing it to her.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Oh, tequila.”

“Really?” Her face lit up with excitement, and she started chugging.

“What is it, really?” Niylah leaned over and asked quietly.

“Mountain Dew. She’s already three sheets to the wind.”

“Oh, no,” Clarke said when she accidentally spilled some of her drink on herself. She handed her drink to Niylah and mumbled, “I dropped something.”

“You what?” Niylah asked.

“I dropped an ice cube,” she said, tugging down on the top of her costume, “down my shirt.”

“Whoa, Clarke, put those away,” Bellamy said, pulling her top back up when one of her breasts popped out.

“You like them,” she said, smiling dopily.

“I do. That’s why I don’t want anyone else to see them.”

Giggling, she put her arms around his neck and tried to press his face against her chest.

“Jesus, Clarke.” He was more than willing to get lost in those things a little later. Although she’d probably pass out before they got home.

“Let’s have sex, Bellamy,” she urged, rolling her hips against his.

“Clarke, you are such a little drunk slut right now,” Niylah informed her.
“I know,” Clarke admitted. “I even danced.”

“You did?” Niylah shot Bellamy an alarmed look. “She did?”

“Not well,” he replied.

“I wanna dance some more,” Clarke declared, and Bellamy almost felt bad about not keeping his promise. But despite her lack of rhythm, drunk Clarke clearly enjoyed dancing. So why not indulge her?

“You hear that?” he said.

“I heard it,” Niylah confirmed.

“Hey, Miller!”

His friend untangled his tongue from Jackson’s and looked up.

“This one wants to dance some more,” he said, pointing to Clarke. “I think you know what that means.”

“I think I do,” Miller agreed. “I’ll go request the song.” He shot to his feet and darted towards the DJ booth. The DJ was another one of his ex-boyfriends, so when he put in a song request, it got played right away.

As was their tradition, the guys completely cleared off the table, and the girls climbed on while they formed a circle around it. Bellamy made sure he was standing on the opposite side of table as Octavia and couldn’t see her. At all. “Get on,” he encouraged Niylah, and she didn’t need to be told twice, but Clarke refused to get up there. She stayed by Bellamy’s side while “Wop” started to play.

It was a really dumb song, and Bellamy wasn’t even sure how this had become a club tradition for them in the first place; but when the chorus of the song kicked on, he and all the other guys pretended to ‘make it rain’ with invisible cash in their hands. It was basically their excuse to act like they were pimps, even though they were just idiots. Bellamy swayed from side to side in time with the music—finding the beat was not an issue for him—and Clarke just stood there, mouth gaping in astonishment.

When the actual “wop” part of the lyrics kicked in, the girls went nuts with the ass-shaking, giving all the guys—even Miller and Jackson—quite the show. Harper, by far the best dancer of the bunch, went into full-on twerking mode. Emori’s technique was more of a side-to-side approach, and Maya, being the more reserved one of the bunch, usually just popped her chest a bit. Bellamy wasn’t sure what Octavia’s wopping technique was, nor did he care to know, but he did have a nice view up Niylah’s skirt as she snaked and slithered all over the place like a pro.

“It’s easy,” he told Clarke. “You just stick your ass out.”

In her drunken state, she took that way too literally and just bent right over, once again giving Jasper a great view of . . . everything.

“No,” Bellamy said, lifting her up again. “Like this.” He tried to demonstrate as best he could while still looking like a pimp instead of a stripper.

“You’re good at dancing, too?” she screeched. “You’re good at everything!”

“I know!” he yelled back over the music. “I can’t help it!”
He and the guys ‘made it rain’ again on the next chorus, and he put his hands on Clarke’s hips and tried to get her doing anything that might even remotely resemble Harper’s twerking. But the girl was stiff as board and drunk as a skunk, so for tonight, at least, it was lost cause. She got all pouty and frustrated when she couldn’t get it, and it was cute as hell.

By the end of the night, when the club was starting to clear out and the dancing was dying down, Clarke took his wreath crown off his head and replaced it with her tiara instead. He gave her a confused look, not sure what she was doing, but he didn’t question it. Right now, she didn’t know what she was doing, either.

“You’re a brave princess,” she said, kissing his cheek before she snuggled into him like she was ready to go to sleep.

He chuckled and shook his head, not sure what she meant by that, if she even meant anything, and cuddled her closer. Hopefully she wouldn’t be too furious with him when she woke up tomorrow with the hangover from hell.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The night was catching up to Clarke. She wasn’t sure how late it was when she lay down and put her head in Bellamy’s lap, but it was definitely past her usual bedtime. And she was dead tired. Her eyelids felt like they weighed a thousand pounds each, and she couldn’t keep them open to save her life. Voices started to drift in and out all around her, muffled and distant. Sometimes she was aware of what was happening around her, sometimes not. But as long as she felt Bellamy’s hands on her side or in her hair, she felt okay.

“I think your princess is worn out,” she heard someone say. Octavia?

“Yeah, she is.” Bellamy stroked her cheek, making her moan. Words were too difficult right now, but sleepy moans were easy.

She heard someone else, probably Niylah, ask, “Is she going home with you?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright, I’m gonna head out then.”

“See ya.”

Clarke stirred a bit, wanting to at least say goodbye. But she couldn’t lift her head up to do so. Her head weighed a thousand pounds, too, now.

“You ready to go?” Bellamy asked her, rubbing her shoulder.

“Mmm-hmm,” she murmured.

“Alright, I’m gonna go get my truck. You wait here.”

She didn’t like it when he got up and left, because she didn’t have a pillow without his lap. It wasn’t comfy without him, so she forced herself up, feeling dizzy even though she was sitting. She had to squint her eyes to make out anything around her. The club looked kind of empty now, and all Bellamy’s friends—her friends, whatever—were gone. Except for Octavia and . . . Octavia’s boyfriend. She was too drunk to remember his name. They sat on the couch across from her, looking totally awake.
“You alright?” Octavia asked. “You hit it pretty hard tonight.”

She tried to say something in response, but all that came out was a burp.

Lincoln—that was his name, Lincoln—laughed. “I think you’re gonna have to sleep this one off, Clarke.”

“Yeah,” she agreed, yawning. Sleep sounded good.

“This place is a little wilder than Mount Weather, isn’t it?” Octavia said. “Not so much of a college crowd.” She snorted. “College kids think they’re so cool.” She must have remembered who she was talking to then, because she added, “No offense.”

Clarke couldn’t have been offended in that moment if she’d tried. In fact, she sort of didn’t even know the meaning of the word offended in that moment. Still, even in the haze of her intense drunkenness, this talk of college got her thinking about something, something she’d wanted to ask Octavia for a few days now, or any one of Bellamy’s friends, really. But Octavia was probably the best person to ask. “Why didn’t Bellamy go to college?” she inquired, struggling to separate her words. “He’s smart.”

“He is,” Octavia agreed, looking very thoughtful for a moment. “He was gonna go,” she said, “but then . . .” She trailed off.

“What?” Clarke asked. Right now, this conversation was the only thing keeping her awake.

Octavia stared off into space, shaking her head a bit. “Things . . . changed.”

Clarke frowned, because she didn’t know what that meant. And she wasn’t sure if she didn’t know simply because it was vague or if it was because she was drunk. She didn’t get a chance to ask anything else, though, because Bellamy came back inside, jiggling his keys in his hand. “You ready to go?” he asked her.

“Mmm.” She’d been ready an hour ago. But she didn’t move.

“You can’t get up, can you?” he figured.

*Maybe* she could, but she really didn’t want to try it on her own. So she held out her hand, and he grabbed it and hoisted her up. “Bye, O,” he said as he walked off with Clarke, his arm around her waist to keep her steady.

“Bye,” she called after him. “Sleep it off, Clarke!”

Clarke rested her head against Bellamy’s shoulder, pretty sure she could fall asleep while walking if she had to walk too far. Luckily, though, he’d pulled his truck up right outside the front.

The drive was a complete blur. Clarke didn’t have her eyes open for any of it. She didn’t even know they were home until he opened the car door and she nearly fell out onto the sidewalk. He caught her, unbuckled her seat belt for her, and helped her out onto her own two feet. “Almost there,” he said, practically dragging her inside.

She felt like a rag doll, so she was very thankful for his support—*literal* support. She would’ve fallen over without him. He helped her in the door, and when she got one look at those steps and groaned in agony, he bent down, put one hand under her knees, the other around her back, and lifted her up. “You owe me,” he told her as he carried her up the stairs.
“I owe you,” she agreed, holding on limply to his shoulders. The stairs made her feel queasy, so she kept her eyes closed and her face pressed against his chest. When she finally felt the bed, it felt great, like the best bed ever, and all she wanted to do was lay in it for the rest of her life. She wanted to lie down and get comfy on her back, but he made her sit up and put her legs over the side instead.

“Alright,” he said as he started to look through his t-shirt drawer, “I’m gonna get you in somethin’ comfortable, and you’re gonna get some sleep.”

That all sounded good. That sounded really good. She started to tilt to the side.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” He rushed back to her and grabbed hold of her to keep her up. “I got you.”

“I’m sorry, Bellamy,” she apologized sleepily. “I’m a little drunk.”

“A little bit, yeah.” He grinned. “You good?”

“I’m good.”

“Alright, stay there.” He went back to his dresser, getting out of his clothes quickly, and put a t-shirt and some sweatpants on in place of his man-dress. Toga. Whatever.

“I had lots of fun, though,” she said, hearing the slur in her own words. “Your friends are nice. I like them.”

“Yeah, they’re pretty great,” he agreed, pulling out a grey football t-shirt that was way too big for her.

“Do you like my friends?” she asked. “They’re nice, too.”

“Yeah, I like ‘em.” He knelt down in front of her and took her shoes off, and she giggled, because it felt really Cinderella-y.

“Maybe we can all be friends,” she rambled on. “Like on Barney.”

“Barney?”

“Yep.” She scratched her head, letting him move her all around and manhandle her as he got her out of her princess costume. “My dad used to watch that with me all the time when I was little.”

“Did he now?”

“Mmm-hmm.” She smiled fondly as she remembered. “We used to sing the ‘I love you,’ song.”

“Sounds like a good dad.”

“He was.” She realized he’d gotten her completely naked now, except for her panties, and she thought he might just tell her to sleep like that. But then he helped her put her arms through the sleeves of that grey t-shirt and pulled it up over her head for her. “Ow,” she said when he had to yank it over her hair.

“Sorry.” He reached behind her head and took her hair out for her. “Better?” he asked.

“Much better.” She felt comfy and cozy now, ready for bed.

“Alright, lay down,” he told her.
She tried to tilt straight backwards.

“On your side,” he said, pulling her back up. He lifted her legs up onto the bed for her, and she did as he instructed, curling up on her favorite pillow of his, the one he usually let her have when she stayed the night.

“Alright, I’m gonna put this here,” he announced, bringing a small metal trashcan out of the bathroom to set by the side of the bed. “In case you need it. You’re gonna need it.”

“Will you cuddle with me?” she asked. Because that just sounded really nice right about now.

“Yes, I will cuddle with you,” he replied, already crawling into bed behind her, pulling blankets up over the two of them. “Don’t throw up on me, though.”

“I won’t.” She sighed contentedly when his arms wrapped around her waist and he scooted in close behind her, his whole body curling up against hers. He felt so big and warm, like a teddy bear.

She felt like she was going to fall asleep at any second, so she squeaked out a “Thank you, Bellamy,” while she still could.

He didn’t say anything, but he did kiss the side of her neck. So she took that to be his way of saying, “You’re welcome,” before she drifted off to sleep.
Chapter 7

Poor Clarke. The vomiting seemed to have started right away that morning. Bellamy wasn’t sure whether she was using that trash can he’d put next to the bed or if she’d made it into the bathroom to lurch over the toilet. But wherever she was, it was loud. Even downstairs, he could hear it. And it just kept going and going.

“Oh, I love the sound of nausea in the morning,” Miller remarked sarcastically as he finished his breakfast.

“Yeah, it’s not pretty,” Bellamy agreed, struggling through his plate of scrambled eggs. There was just nothing appetizing about eating when someone was puking up above you.

“She was wasted, man,” Miller said, chuckling.

“Ah, everyone has that inaugural night at TonDC,” Bellamy pointed out. “Clarke’s no different.” Miller finished his coffee and put his plate and cup down in the sink. “You know,” he said as he rinsed them off. “Clarke’s kinda . . . she’s alright, man.”

“Okay.” Whatever that meant.

“I like her,” Miller elaborated, drying off his hands. “Even though she’s in college and lives in the Palace and . . . didn’t you say her dad’s a senator?”

“Stepdad, yeah.”

“She’s still kinda down-to-earth, you know?” Bellamy grunted. “Well, yeah, she shops at Walmart.”

“True. You really can’t be too high and mighty if you shop there.”

“No, I get what you mean, though,” Bellamy said. He knew girls in this town, sorority girls, mostly, who thought they were so much better than everyone else, including him. Sometimes he did jobs for people who lived in nice neighborhoods and probably wouldn’t have hired him if they knew where he lived. The world was full of pretentious people who judged guys like him, but Clarke wasn’t like that. She was restoring his faith in the upper-middle class.

“So did you like her costume?” Miller asked, wriggling his eyebrows. “I liked it, and I don’t even swing that way.”

“Yeah, it was pretty good.” Bellamy really hoped she’d hold onto that, because . . . well, that and the cheerleading skirt, if they ever got a hold of it. Could be interesting.

“She wore that just for you,” Miller noted. “You know that, right?”

“Well, she’s a good girl.”

“That’s what you keep saying.” They both heard a toilet flush upstairs, and Miller said, “Alright, I’m gettin’ outta here. Tell Clarke I said hi.”
“See you later.”

Miller slipped out the door right as Clarke started trudging down the stairs like a zombie. Bellamy almost didn’t even want to look at her, because there was a very real possibility she’d look like actual death. He risked it, though, taking a peek out of the corner of his eye, and it wasn’t as bad as he’d thought it would be. Sure, her hair was all over the place, her makeup was smeared around her eyes, her skin was flushed and kind of sweaty, and she looked like she could throw up again at any minute. But she was also still wearing his grey Redskins t-shirt, so that was the one saving grace.

“Morning, Clarke,” he said, quickly finishing his breakfast.

The only response he got was an anguished groan.

“Hey, you know what’s the best part about being sober?” he asked.

“What?”

“Nothing.” He couldn’t help but laugh.

“Oh, I’m struggling, Bell,” she complained, dragging her body to the center island so she could sit down on one of the stools. “I feel like I’m gonna regurgitate my whole self.”

“Yeah, you were pretty plastered last night.” He returned to the frying pan on the stove, using the spatula to lift out the rest of the scrambled eggs and set them on a plate for her.

“I don’t know what got into me,” she said. “I’ve never been that drunk before.”

“How much do you remember?” he asked.

“Parts. But parts are fuzzy. Like I remember seeing Murphy dance.”

“Good.” That was a memory everyone deserved to have.

“And I remember you complaining about Lincoln and Octavia.”

“Yeah, that doesn’t count. That was before you had a drink.”

“No, it counts,” she insisted. “I’d already been drinking at Mount Weather. Maybe that was the problem. I started too early.”

“Ah, you did alright.” He set the plate down in front of her, urging, “Eat up.”

She looked at the eggs, wrinkling her nose in disgust. “No, I can’t right now,” she said. “Food sounds so gross.”

“Eggs are good for hangovers,” he reasoned. “I made ‘em just for you.”

She smiled at him lazily and slowly picked up her fork. “I do remember that you took care of me,” she recalled.

“Of course.” He’d been the one to encourage her to loosen up and go wild like that in the first place. She was his responsibility.

“I am really sorry, though,” she apologized. “It was Halloween, and you ended up having to babysit me.”
“No, don’t feel bad,” he told her. “It was fun watching you have fun. I had a good time, too.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Are you just saying that?”

“No.”

Sighing, she moved her eggs around her plate, eating just a small bite off the tip of her fork. “Well, did I do or say anything embarrassing?” she asked.

Oh, the inevitable question. He’d already thought a lot about how much he was going to tell her, and the conclusion he kept coming to was that, if he didn’t tell her everything, someone else would. So if she wanted to know, he was going to be completely honest. “Well, you almost took the top of your costume off,” he told her. “But I think Niylah was only the only one who saw, so you’re good there.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Yeah. And you kept wantin’ to have sex with me. But I can’t blame you for that.”

She smiled and blushed a little.

“And then . . . well, you flashed Jasper.”

“What?” she shrieked shrilly, eyes suddenly wide with horror. “Like my boobs?”

“No, your crotch.”

“What?!"

“Yeah, twice.”

“Oh my god,” she groaned dramatically.

“Don’t worry, he enjoyed it.”

“Please tell me that’s the worst of it.”

He opened his mouth to tell her it wasn’t, but then he just ended up nodding slowly.

“Oh, no, what?” she said.

“Well . . .” It was hard to even keep a straight face when he thought about her incredible lack of limb coordination. “Then there was the dancing.”

“What?!” she shrieked, looking truly mortified, even more so than she’d been when they’d strolled out that dressing room together. “Bellamy!” She slammed her fork down on the counter, all worked up. “You said—you promised you wouldn’t let me dance! I remember that part!”

He shrugged flippantly. “I lied.”

“Ugh!” She picked up an apple off the counter and hurled it at him angrily. He had to spin to the side so it hit his leg instead of his crotch.
“Watch the junk, babe,” he cautioned. “We need that.”

“You are such an ass,” she seethed. “I’m never sleeping with you again.”

“Oh, never?”

“Never.”

“Hmm.” He already knew that wasn’t true. “We’ll see about that.”

“Ugh, I can’t believe you let me do that,” she muttered, shaking her head infuriatedly. It was actually kind of hilarious how she was more upset about the dancing than she was about flashing Jasper or flashing Niylah or just getting that drunk in the first place. “I don’t dance, Bellamy. I’m horrible at it.”

“Oh, trust me, I noticed.” He glanced at the clock on the microwave, wishing he had a little more time to tease her this morning. “I had you tryin’ to the do Wop and everything.”

“The Wop?” she echoed. “I don’t know how to do that.”

“You really don’t.”

“Oh, and I suppose you’re great at it?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty good,” he openly boasted. “I can dance, Clarke.”

“Of course you can.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll teach you sometime,” he promised, giving her shoulder a squeeze as he headed toward the door. “Not right now, though. I gotta go work.”

“Well, I’ve got the day off,” she said, “so . . . do you mind if I just hang out here?”

“Sure, go ahead.” That just made everything easier. When he got home, he wouldn’t even need to call her up.

“Don’t burn down my kitchen, though,” he warned. “I gotta teach you how to cook sometime, too.”

“Ass!” she growled again, but he could hear amusement in her voice on his way out the door.

“Wait, Bellamy!” she called suddenly just as he was about to shut the door. He stopped and backtracked, figuring he was already gonna be late to Diana Sydney’s house. Why not be five minutes later? As long as he fixed that sink of hers without a shirt on, she wouldn’t care.

“I do remember another thing,” she said, spinning on the stool so she was facing him. “I asked Octavia something about you.”

“Oh, great.” This was gonna be good.

“No, something serious,” she said.

He frowned, not exactly sure where she was going with this.

“I asked her why you never went to college,” she revealed. “Not that there’s anything wrong with that. Not that it’s an expectation. But you were salutatorian, so . . . I’m just curious.”

He frowned, sort of . . . caught off guard by the question. “Well, what’d she say?”
“Nothing much. Just that . . . things changed?” She gave him a confused look.

Bellamy knew she wanted him to elaborate more, to tell him what had changed, but he really did have to get going. Besides . . . that was a potentially long conversation, one he didn’t have time for.

“My mom lost her job that year,” he explained, deciding to give her the abridged version, “so I had to work and help her out. That’s it.”

“Oh.” She thought about it a moment and nodded. “Well, that makes sense.”

*Yeah,* he thought. *It does.* “I gotta go,” he said, quickly slipping out the door, shutting it firmly this time before she could ask him anything else about it.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

It took Clarke a while to finish the scrambled eggs Bellamy had made for her. She ended up throwing a few bites away, just because her stomach was still somersaulting and she didn’t want to overload it. But she trusted Bellamy’s hangover remedies. If he said eggs were good for her right now, then they were good for her.

She sat down on the couch, flipped on the TV, and tried to find something mind-numbing to watch for the next hour or so. Murphy came lumbering out of his room before she’d settled on anything, though, and flopped down beside her, seizing the remote. “You look like hell,” he remarked, switching to the channel *The View* was on.

“And you smell like shit,” she shot back jokingly. Although it wasn’t much of a joke. He really did smell bad.

Murphy lifted his t-shirt up to his nose and took a whiff, but that wasn’t enough to make him go shower or even change. He tossed the remote aside and sprawled out, his feet on the coffee table, hands behind his head. He watched those women on *The View* intently, with interest, and Clarke wondered if this was a daily routine for him. It certainly seemed like it. If she caught him watching *General Hospital* later, it wouldn’t be a surprise.

Towards the end of *The View*, she started to feel restless and headed back up to Bellamy’s room to use his bathroom and take a shower. The eggs had definitely helped. The tidal wave of nausea seemed to have passed, and besides a dull headache, her only complaint was that she was slow-moving and tired. But with no class and thankfully no work today, either, she had plenty of time to relax, maybe even take a nap.

She wished Bellamy were in that shower with her while she washed her hair. They really hadn’t done anything in his shower yet, or in his bathroom at all. Given the thrill of that dressing room sex they’d had the other day, though, she couldn’t help but want him to bend her over the bathroom counter and do her there, too. He had a nice big mirror, after all.

Since her only outfit was a shiny blue princess costume she had no desire to squeeze back into, she put on another one of Bellamy’s t-shirts and slipped into a pair of his boxers, rolling them up several times around her waist so they wouldn’t fall down. Then she grabbed a couple of his *Playboys* out of the bathroom and brought them to his bed, lounging around for a good hour and a half, trying to read the articles even though she was distracted by all the naked women. Miss July had this amazing patriotic centerfold that had to be one of Bellamy’s favorites. It certainly caught Clarke’s eye.

By the time she got to the August issue, though, she was a little bit bored. She set the magazines aside and swung her legs over the side of the bed, wondering what she could do for four or five more
hours until Bellamy got home. Maybe Murphy was still around.

The best way to pass the time, though, and the thing Clarke always found herself doing when she was bored, was drawing. So she dug around Bellamy’s night stand drawer and managed to find a dull, eraser-less pencil and a few crumpled pieces of paper. She smoothed them out, figuring she could make them work, and then just let her pencil roam, drawing whatever came to mind. Before she knew it, she had cartoon sketches of all her friends in their Halloween costumes: Raven as Wonder Woman, Niylah as a sexy pirate, Wells as Will Smith, and Bellamy as Apollo. His tan skin tone was impossible to replicate with just a pencil, though, especially a crappy pencil like this.

Next, she started drawing a house. Not just any house, she quickly realized, but Bellamy’s house. Sure, it wasn’t in the nicest neighborhood, but it had charm; it had character. And she liked it there.

Halfway through that drawing, her pencil snapped in half. She’d been pressing too hard. “Crap,” she muttered, checking the drawer again. She fumbled and reached around inside, willing to use anything if she couldn’t find a sharpenner, even a pen or a freaking crayon if she had to. She just hated leaving a sketch unfinished.

Her hand settled on top of a small metal box, and for some reason, that struck her as odd. Everything else in that drawer had just been dumped in there, like a junk drawer. Maybe this was a box full of condoms or something.

She took it out and jiggled it a little bit. There were definitely a few things in there, things that made noises condoms wouldn’t have made. For such a small box, it felt kind of . . . full.

Curiosity got the best of her.

When she opened the lid, she nearly melted. Because it was so adorable. He had tons of old photos of himself with Octavia stashed in there, many of which had probably been taken in the pre-iPhone day and age. There were pictures of the two of them at amusement parks, water parks, hiking, canoeing. The best photo was definitely one of them at a mud-volleyball court, though. Bellamy couldn’t have been older than junior high, and little Octavia looked so precocious. She was covered in mud and dirty, but he was miraculously still pretty clean. She had a clump of mud in her hand, though, and a mischievous look in her eyes, so Clarke was willing to wager that, the second after that photo was snapped, she’d probably lobbed that mud at her brother or smeared it all over his face.

Seeing all these pictures of the Blake siblings actually made her a bit envious. Never had she resented the fact that she was an only child—it’d forced her to be very imaginative when it came to playtime, and imagination was a good thing for an artist to have. Besides, siblings could be annoying. But Bellamy and Octavia were just so close, and in every picture, it was obvious how much he adored her. He had to be one of the best big brothers in the entire world, so she really did hope Octavia appreciated that. As overprotective as he could be, it was clear that it all stemmed from a loving place.

As it turned out, the pictures of Bellamy and his sister were just a small part of the treasure trove of memories in that box. He had plenty of photos of him and his mom, too, and goodness, it was obvious where those kids of hers had gotten their genetics, because she was beautiful. She looked young, too, younger than Clarke’s mom, so maybe she’d had Bellamy really early on in life, perhaps even as a teenager.

As she got closer to the bottom of the box, Clarke found other evidence of Bellamy’s love for his family: newspaper clippings about Octavia’s high school volleyball team, who apparently had been state runner-ups; a DVD that said Mom’s 40th Birthday on the front; an address hastily scribbled on a wrinkled Post-It note, one unsure word scrawled below it: Dad? There were so many things
packed into that box, Clarke wasn’t even sure how he’d made it all fit. (But then again, Bellamy was good at fitting things into small places.)

She had to move down to the floor after a while, because she’d littered his bed with his artifacts. It faintly occurred to her that maybe he’d kept this box stashed away for a reason, because he didn’t want anyone else to know about it. But it was too late to stop now.

Towards the bottom of the box, things got . . . interesting. Confusing. Really confusing, actually.

There were multiple pictures of a girl Clarke didn’t recognize. Tall, in shape, long dark hair. The first one looked like a senior picture with her leaning back against a brick wall, gazing at the camera intently. The others looked mostly like selfies, but Bellamy was in a few of them. He had on glasses in one of them, and in another, he was kissing her cheek.

*That looks familiar,* Clarke thought, recalling the pictures on her own phone.

This girl, whoever she was, had been Bellamy’s high school girlfriend. There was even a photo of the two of them at prom. Bellamy was in a tux. She’d never even seen him wear a suit before.

The bottom of the box had more than just photos, though. There were two ticket stubs from a concert, a silver bracelet, a dollar bill that had *European Vacation Funds* written over George Washington’s face. And then there was a ring. A simple silver ring with a small, round diamond on top of it. Clarke held it up and stared in astonishment. Was that . . . was that what she thought it was? On the inside, the word *Forever* was lightly engraved.

*Oh my god,* she thought, suddenly feeling very blown away by all of this. Bellamy . . . had been in love. Clearly. Whoever this girl was, he’d thought the world of her, enough to hold onto their memories, enough to buy her a ring.

*Maybe I shouldn’t be doing this,* she thought, but even as the words ran through her head, she couldn’t stop herself from picking up one of the last things in that box. Another newspaper clipping, but this one was . . . different. Not happy.

It was an obituary.

That long, dark-haired girl’s smiling picture was at the top of a two-column article titled *Miss Roma Bragg.*

*Oh, god,* Clarke thought as a sinking feeling filled her stomach. *Oh, god.*

“*Miss Roma Bragg, 19, of Arkadia, Maryland, died Friday, June 1, at Howard County General Hospital and Trauma Center,*” it read, “*due to injuries received during an automobile accident that same day.*”

Clarke clasped one hand over her mouth as she read on. It talked about when Roma was born and who her parents were. It said she had attended East Arkadia High School and had been a member of the softball team. Then it listed all the family members she was survived by—parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins. There was a line all its own that said, “*She will also be remembered by her boyfriend, Bellamy Blake.*”

Clarke blinked back tears and the article fluttered in her hand. The rest of it talked about when and where the funeral would be held, and indeed, the very last thing in that box was a funeral program. Bellamy’s name was listed as a pallbearer.

*Bellamy . . .* she thought sadly, her heart going out to him. She wished he would have told her. But
maybe he never would have. Maybe . . . maybe he didn’t want her to know. But she’d found out on her own. She’d found out plenty.

What was she even supposed to do now?

She was still sitting on the floor, Roma’s obituary in one hand, funeral program in the other, when she heard footsteps outside the bedroom door. Then Bellamy’s voice. “Hey, Clarke, you wanna go get lunch?” he asked as he came into the room.

She quickly set those items back down in the metal box, tensing up immediately. She felt like a little kid who’d just gotten caught with her hand in the cookie jar or been discovered snooping through the Christmas presents. She couldn’t even say anything.

“Hey,” he said, smiling at her curiously. “I had a break, so . . .” He trailed off as his eyes started to roam the bed, where all of his family photos and such lay scattered. And that smile just fell right off his face. He got really quiet, really still, until he asked, “Where did you get all that?”

“Bellamy . . .” She gazed at him wordlessly, guiltily, because she knew this was wrong. She was snooping, plain and simple, and she’d probably seen way more than he wanted her to see.

*Oh, god.* She felt horrible as she tried to put all the other Roma artifacts away again. She clamored to her feet, barely able to stammer, “I . . . I can explain.”

“Explain what?” he roared accusatorily. “That you were you looking through my stuff?”

“No, I . . .” She stopped short. Because yes, that was exactly what she’d been doing. “I mean, yes, but . . .” Her words felt strangled. She couldn’t get anything out. Maybe because there was nothing to say. There was no explanation that would make this okay, make it right. She’d made a mistake, a big one, and she hadn’t even thought twice about it. “I just saw these pictures of you and Octavia,” she said shakily, “and I thought--”

“Thought you’d invade my privacy?” he yelled, glaring at her. He looked . . . angry. Really and truly infuriated for the first time that she could remember. But when his eyes flitted down to that ring on the floor, he just looked sad. Heartbroken. Like he was reliving it all again. “That stuff’s personal, Clarke,” he growled.

“I know.” She wanted to just break down and cry, because it was so personal, and she’d had no right . . . she knew she’d had no right to look at any of it.

“Then why the hell would you--”

“I’m sorry!” she cut in, her voice high-pitched and wavering with emotion. “I’m sorry, Bellamy. I . . .” She felt a few tears spill over, and that made her feel even more guilty. Because what gave her the right to stand here and cry when he was the one whose girlfriend had died, whose dead girlfriend’s pictures were now staring up at him from his bedroom floor?

She wanted to ask him to forgive her, but in that moment, she didn’t even feel like she deserved it.

“Get the hell outta here, Clarke,” he grumbled suddenly. “Don’t come back.”

“What?” She’d hoped that maybe they could talk about it, maybe cool down and talk about later if that’s what it took, but . . . not this. “Bellamy--”

“I said leave!” he bellowed, his face a mask of fury as he stormed into his bathroom and slammed the door.
She inhaled sharply, shakily, looking down at everything that lay scattered around her feet and on the bed. So many things. She’d taken so many things out of that box, and she could have stopped at any point. Then again, she could have been a decent person and never opened it in the first place. But she’d opted to do otherwise, and now . . .

Now Bellamy hated her. And he had every reason to.

She felt so ashamed.

Even though she respected his desire for space right now, she didn’t want to leave. She wanted to put all those things away where they belonged so he wouldn’t have to do it himself when he opened that bathroom door. She wanted to sit there and wait for him to come out so she could apologize some more. But he probably didn’t want to hear it, and she probably didn’t deserve to say it. If he wanted her gone, then what choice did she have right now? She had to leave.

She cried as she left the bedroom, as she trundled down the stairs and flew out the front door. Murphy was still sitting on the couch watching TV, and he must have noticed her. But he didn’t say anything.

Her eyes were heavily clouded over with tears when she finally got to her car. Before getting inside, she heard some kind of loud thud come from the upstairs of that house. It sounded like Bellamy had thrown a chair at the wall. Because of her. Or because of Roma.

Maybe because of both of them.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Just wanted to say a big THANK YOU to everyone who has left feedback so far! It really means a lot.

Chapter 8

Clarke was a mess. Plain and simple, no other way to put it. She called Raven right when she got home, begging her to come over. But Raven had class and a midterm to take for that class, so she couldn’t miss it unless it was an emergency. Clarke assured her it wasn’t, but being the good friend that she was, Raven still rushed over anyway right after her class let out. She already had a carton of mint chocolate chip ice cream with her and the Thelma and Louise DVD, but Clarke was a bit too worked up for either of those things.

They sat on Clarke’s bed, and Clarke told her everything. She didn’t sugarcoat her snoopiness, didn’t try to make it seem like it hadn’t been as bad as it was. Because it had been bad. And very wrong.

“Wow,” Raven said, taking it all in once Clarke was done. “Wow.”

“Yeah.” Clarke sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

“So he was probably nineteen when it happened?” Raven asked.

“I don’t know. I probably shouldn’t have even told you about all of that. It’s private.”

“Well, it was private when you looked through his stuff, too,” Raven pointed out, “but that didn’t stop you.”

“Nope.” She shook her head, so pissed off at herself. Sure, she’d been a little bit snoopy over there before, back when she’d woken up in his room for the first time. And technically he’d snooped through her underwear drawer, too, but . . . whatever, that was underwear. This didn’t even compare.

“So he told you to leave,” Raven recapped, “and then . . .”

“Then I left,” Clarke filled in. “He doesn’t want me to come back.”

“He probably didn’t mean that.”

“No, I think he did.” She shuddered, remembering that look in his eyes, the way he glared at her as though he couldn’t stand the sight of her anymore. “He was so angry, Raven. I’ve never seen Bellamy that angry before.”

“Well, he has every reason to be,” Raven admitted. “And you know that.”

“I know.” She wasn’t looking for sympathy or anything of the sort. She just needed advice. “I don’t even know what possessed me to do that. Deep down, I knew it was wrong. I knew I shouldn’t be doing it.”
“I hate to break it to you, Clarke,” Raven said sternly, “but this is totally like you.”

“What?” What did that mean? Was she routinely a horrible person? Did she invade people’s privacy on a regular basis?

“You have this incessant need to control things,” Raven expanded. “You always like to have a plan and know exactly what’s going on in your life. I mean, the most free-spirited I’ve ever seen you is with Bellamy. But you still don’t know that much about him, and you want to. So when you found that box, that was like the Bellamy Blake bible dropped into your lap. And you opened it.”

“I did,” Clarke groaned, seeing some validity in what her friend was telling her. “And I feel so bad. If I could just take it back . . .”

“Well, you can’t.”

“But if I could . . .” She trailed off, sighing dejectedly. “It’s not even just that I snooped through all his personal things, you know? It’s that I drudged up the past. Now, because of me, he’s gonna be thinking about everything that happened with her.”

“Probably,” Raven acknowledged. “I’m not gonna lie, Clarke, you fucked up. Big-time.”

“Yeah.” It had been a selfish thing to do, and even now . . . dammit, she still felt selfish. Because as much as she was concerned about him and wanted to know if he’d be okay tonight, she felt bad for herself, too. Because if this was it, the end of her abbreviated yet amazing friendship with Bellamy Blake, then she was going to be devastated and filled with regret for a long time to come. These past few weeks, she’d spent more time with him than anyone else, even more than she’d spent with Raven. She’d talked to him about her dad’s passing, about her mom and stepdad’s treatment of her bisexuality. She’d opened up to him, had so much fun with him, loosened up and tried new things with him, and to think of all of that just being over in an instant . . .

“What should I do?” she asked, needing a plan of action. Raven was right, she liked to have a plan. And right now, she felt aimless, hopeless. It wasn’t a good feeling.

Raven thought about it for a moment, then shook her head sadly. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Clarke whimpered. She didn’t want to sit back and do nothing.

“He needs space,” Raven said rationally. “He needs time to figure out how he’s feeling, because I really doubt he hates you. But he probably does hate what you did.”

Clarke looked down at her lap, trying to keep the tears inside. What I did, she thought remorsefully. What I did.

“Just leave him alone for a while,” Raven suggested. “I’m sure eventually he’ll give you a call and you guys will sort things out.”

“You think so?” Right now, Clarke had her doubts.

“Yeah,” Raven said. “You and Bellagio--”

“Raven.”

“Fine, you and Bellamy . . .” she corrected. “You guys have something special.”

As nice as that sounded, it also sounded a little . . . too romantic. “It’s a friendship, Raven,” she
reminded her.

“I know, so I’ve heard,” her friend said. “But it’s still special.”

Clarke thought about it, wanting to believe it was true. Because if that was true, then maybe he would be able to forgive her. And if he forgave her, then she could forgive herself. She nodded, a silent acknowledgement that she was going to take Raven’s advice. As difficult as it would be, she wouldn’t call Bellamy, wouldn’t text him, wouldn’t venture over to his house or purposefully try to run into him at TonDC or Dropship. She’d wait until he reached out to her, and hopefully that’d happen sooner rather than later.

It didn’t.

One day without hearing from Bellamy wasn’t unexpected. Neither was two, though at the end of that second day, Clarke felt anxious. At the end of the third day, though, she was starting to lose hope. They’d only known each other for a couple of weeks. What if he’d decided she wasn’t worth it?

To make matters worse, all his friends had gone silent on her, too. The only thing she got from any of them was a sad face emoji texted from Harper. And she didn’t know how to respond to that, so she just didn’t text back.

By the end of the fourth day with no word from Bellamy, she felt resigned. Resigned to the fact that she’d fucked things up beyond the point of no return. If this friendship between her and Bellamy was really as special as Raven claimed, then wouldn’t he have reached out to her by now?

She lay in bed that night, clutching her phone, feeling pathetic. All she wanted was just one phone call, one text. Anything to let her know that he didn’t hate her. If he didn’t forgive her, either, then that was okay, and she could understand. But the thought of him hating her, which, at this point, it seemed like he did . . . that was almost more than she could bear.

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Bellamy decided it was best to keep busy, so he threw himself into work. It was a good distraction from any crap going on in his personal life. He took on more jobs than he normally would have, skipped lunch so he could work longer hours each day. It ended up being pretty lucrative. In four days, he made more money than he had in the past two weeks.

Diana Sydney must have sensed that something was up with him, because after he fixed her broken showerhead—which he was convinced she had broken herself—she slid up behind him and started rubbing his shoulders, claiming he looked tense, offering a massage.

He just stood there and let her rub his back, just because he didn’t want to lose her business. But all the while, he kept thinking to himself, If she was a dude and I was a chick, this would be assault.

At night, he stuck to his routine, hanging out with his friends, kicking their asses at whatever video game they decided to play. Murphy and Miller both knew better than to ask him what had happened with Clarke, and they’d probably told Emori and Jackson not to say anything, either. But when Jasper and the rest of the crew came over like they did every other Saturday night, that was when things got awkward.

“Hey, where’s Clarke?” Jasper hollered right when he walked in.

Everyone immediately fell silent, looking at Bellamy.
Jasper was clueless, of course, so he kept going. “She’s comin’ over, right?”

More silence. Bellamy was pretty sure the only thing making noise were the crickets outside. “No,” he answered simply.

Jasper looked confused, and sort of like he wanted to say more, until Monty nudged his arm and shook his head, wordlessly communicating that he should probably shut the fuck up.

They carried on after that, not much differently than they usually did. Jasper got high, Miller cranked the music, and Murphy got situated on his beanbag with a beer in his hand. The girls did a little dancing, but they seemed more subdued this time. Not that Clarke would have gotten up and danced with them, at least not without some liquid courage helping her along. But still, it was clear to him that they kind of missed having her around.

So did he.

He made some excuse about feeling tired around 10:00 and headed upstairs early. Not his typical Saturday night. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d spent a Saturday night like this, pissed off at the world, lethargic, and admittedly, very lonely.

Even though he’d packed up that box of loved ones memorabilia again, he hadn’t put it away, hadn’t even tried to since Clarke had gotten it out. Quite the opposite, actually. He found himself looking at the things in there every night before he went to bed, smiling at the pictures of Octavia and his mom, not smiling at the ones of Roma. He read her obituary every night, the way he used to back in the months following the accident. He twirled her ring in between his fingers, trying to remember what it’d looked like on her hand. And he looked at the dollar bill that was supposed to have been the start of their vacation fund, wishing they’d had the chance to add to it. Back then, they’d talked about going to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower and London to see Big Ben. They’d talked about going everywhere, doing so many things. And five years later, he had yet to do any of them.

Luckily, he’d put the Roma stuff away and was only sifting through old snapshots of him and his sister again when the door to his room swung open. In came Octavia herself, wearing one of her shirts from Mexico and more makeup than she actually needed.

“Hey, loser,” she greeted.

“When did you get here?”

“Half an hour ago.” She shut the door and came to stand beside the bed, looking down at him. “Why aren’t you downstairs?”

“I’m tired,” he lied.

“You’re not sleeping.”

“Yeah, I know. Just lookin’ at some old pictures.”

“Ooh, nostalgia.” She sat down on the side of the bed, asking, “Can I see?”

He wasn’t about to hand over that whole box to her, but he had no problem giving her a small stack of pictures to look at.

“Oh, wow,” she said, making a face as she looked at the one of them from the Six Flags amusement park. “Look at my hair.”
“It’s awful,” he agreed.

“Look at yours.”

“It’s awesome.”

She rolled her eyes, going through the stack rapidly. “I look cute there,” she would remark on one before declaring, “Hideous,” on the next.

“You never looked hideous,” he assured her.

“Oh, I was referring to you.”

“Oh, thanks.”

She laughed, handing the photos back to him. “Those are pretty neat, Bellamy. I’m glad you hold onto that stuff.”

“Yeah, someone has to.” He gave her a pointed look, because she was that quintessential millennial who had no problem storing all her photos on her phone.

“I’m gonna get the Mexico photos printed,” she said.

“Oh, great, you and Lincoln,” he mumbled, carefully putting those photos back in his box. “Can’t wait to see those.”

“Oh, stop it, Bell,” she snapped. “I don’t care if you don’t like him. You can at least be nice.”

“I’m very nice,” he claimed.

“You don’t even talk to him. He’s downstairs right now, and everyone else is getting along fine with him. Do you realize that?”

“Do you realize I don’t care?”

She huffed, frowning. “You’re in a bad mood tonight.”

Oh, she had no idea. “I told you, I’m tired,” he grumbled, pulling open the drawer on his bedside table again. Only because he didn’t want her to question what else was in there, he stashed that compact tin container away again, hoping he’d have the willpower to leave it there.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, narrowing her eyes at him suspiciously.

“Nothing.”

She saw right through him, though. If anyone could tell when he was lying, it was Octavia. “No, something’s wrong,” she said knowingly. “And I’m guessing it has to do with the fact that Clarke isn’t here.”

He groaned, rubbing his forehead dramatically. “I don’t wanna talk about this.”

“Did you finally realize friends with benefits is crap? Did you fall in love with her? Did she break your heart?” she rambled on.

“No.”
“Which one?”

“All of the above.”

She furrowed her brow in confusion. “What’s the issue then?”

Figuring it was best to keep it vague, he answered, “She just did something to piss me off, that’s all.”

“What’d she do?”

“I told you, I don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Oh, this is so platonic between the two of you, Bellamy,” she said sarcastically. “I can’t even.”

“No, our arrangement was working fine,” he insisted. “This isn’t some flaw with friends with benefits. This is . . .” He didn’t exactly want to divulge all of it, but he’d been keeping it to himself for days now, so maybe, in a way, letting it out would be a good thing. “She found out some stuff about Roma,” he finally just blurted. What the hell, why not?

He didn’t have to elaborate for Octavia to know what that meant. “Oh,” she said, lowering her head.

“Yeah. And I didn’t tell her. She just . . . found out. In here. She looked through my stuff, basically, O. She looked through my stuff without asking.”

“And found out about your ex-girlfriend.” Octavia nodded slowly. “Well, as far as reasons for being pissed go, that one’s pretty legit.”

“Yeah, so I told her to leave, and now I haven’t talked to her for five days.”

“Are you going to?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, figure it out!” she demanded shrilly.

“It’s not that easy.”

“Sure it is.” Typical Octavia. For her, things tended to be very black and white, very cut and dried. “Do you miss her?”

For a second, he didn’t know if she was talking about Roma or Clarke. But then it dawned on him that, for either one of them, the answer was the same. “Yeah,” he replied. “But it doesn’t matter.”


“Yeah, but if I talk to her, then I have to be willing to talk to her about . . . everything. There’s no avoiding it.” He shook his head, not sure if he’d be able to do that. There were about two people in the world he could talk to about Roma, and one of them was sitting beside him right now. The other was downstairs with Jackson. Even his mom wasn’t an option for that kind of conversation. She’d loved Roma like a daughter-in-law, and it made her too sad to talk about her.

“Bellamy, I know you don’t like talking about all that stuff,” Octavia empathized, “but if you do, I’m pretty sure Clarke will listen.”

He swallowed hard, wanting to believe that was true. But he didn’t know if it was. He and Clarke
had had a few meaningful conversations, sure, but those had been conversations about her. *Her* parents, *her* bisexuality. Not him.

“Think about it,” Octavia urged, patting him on the chest before she got up and headed out of the room.

Oh, he thought about it. A lot. In fact, he lay there and thought about it all night. At one point, he looked over at his chair, where Clarke’s princess costume lay draped, and he let himself remember how cute she’d looked in it, how adorably out of place she’d been at TonDC. Her tiara was still on his nightstand, so he picked it up and stared at it for a long time. He couldn’t help it. He wondered what his princess had been up to these past few days.

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Sometimes it really sucked being a politician’s daughter. Or step-daughter, as was Clarke’s case. During these ‘campaign years,’ she often found herself feeling obligated to attend Marcus’s political rallies and conventions. Her mom went to all of them, because as his wife, she pretty much had to. Clarke showed up sporadically, whenever her schedule would allow. Or whenever her mother *really* guilt-tripped her into attending.

Today’s wasn’t so bad, she supposed. The speech was outside in a park, and it was a nice sunny day, unusually warm. Clarke put on a nice, floral dress, curled her hair, and stood off to the side of the podium with her mother, trying to look focused and interested as her Marcus addressed his constituents. A couple hundred people had shown up, which would have intimidated the hell out of Clarke, but her stepfather spoke with ease.

“As your senator, I strive to represent what you the people want,” he declared grandly, “and I will continue to do so for as long as I hold this position. Those who have voted for me know what I hold dear: a conservative value base that upholds the basic principles and integrity of our government, our people, and our culture.”

That got a mild round of applause, but Clarke couldn’t muster any claps of her own. That conservative value base wasn’t any friend to her, to Niylah, to Miller or Jackson.

She started to space out as the speech wore on. It was well-written, she supposed, and Marcus spoke very eloquently. But he wasn’t actually saying anything all that substantial, wasn’t giving the specifics of his proposals or ideas, wasn’t taking questions from anyone in the audience. It was the kind of a speech that was more of a show than anything else, a chance for him to get up in front of everyone and have the spotlight, to keep himself in their minds while the smear-ads started to run on TV.

*I hate this,* she thought, wishing she could just bolt. Hopefully she was standing far enough to the side that she was off-camera, because she must have looked *painfully* bored.

Afterward, they had to hang around while Marcus did a meet-and-greet with some of the people who had shown up. Clarke found herself yawning, and whenever her mother caught her, she nudged her inconspicuously so she would stop. There were required photo ops, too, which Clarke got roped into. News reporters from local stations gathered them together in front of a huge *Kane for U.S. Senate* sign and posed them like they were mannequins.

“Smile, Clarke,” her mother told her through clenched teeth.

She forced a close-mouthed smile, because anything more genuine was impossible.
After the rally, her mother invited her home for what was either a late lunch or an early dinner—Clarke wasn’t sure—and she reluctantly agreed to it, because her only other option was to head back home to her apartment and work on a paper for her art history class. Neither option sounded particularly appealing, but since she did actually love both her mother and Marcus despite all this stupid political crap, she figured sitting down to eat with them was a slightly more appealing option.

Her mother cooked, which was good, but Clarke sensed they’d be getting a maid soon, which was less good. Apparently campaign years were just “too busy” for housework.

Clarke knew she was being horrible company. She picked her way through her food, not sure if she was eating chicken or quail, and barely took part in the conversation, barely even listened to what they were saying. They were talking about voter demographics or the opposition or the next speech or something. Whatever it was, Clarke just couldn’t find it in herself to give a damn.

“What did you think of the speech, honey?” her mother asked her.

“Huh?” She’d been spacing again.

“The speech today,” her mother repeated. “Did you like it?”

Did she like a speech that wasn’t aimed at her sector of the voting demographic at all? Not really. “Well, I obviously have a different ‘value base,’” she said, using the same terminology. “But your voice inflection was on-point, Marcus.”

To his credit, he didn’t take offense at that. He chuckled and said, “Well, thank you, Clarke.”

Her mother gave her an impatient look, though, and said, “What’s the matter with you today? You seem like you’ve been in a bad mood.”

Was it that obvious? She really had tried to conceal it as much as possible at the rally itself. “Sorry,” she apologized. “I’ve just had . . . some stuff going on, that’s all.”

“Well.” Her mother smiled excitedly. “Maybe I have some good news then.”

Oh god, Clarke thought nervously. Is she pregnant? Was that even still a possibility, or had the menopause started up already?

“Yes stepfather spoke with Daniel, the young man who’s been helping out with the campaign,” her mother revealed. “He said he’s interested in having dinner with you if you’d like.”

Clarke stared at her incredulously. This was supposedly the good news? “Are you kidding me?”

“No. He’s interested.”

“Very interested,” her stepfather emphasized. “I showed him your picture; he thought you were very beautiful.”

“You guys are trying to set me up.” Clarke set her fork down, exasperated. “Unbelievable.”

“Clarke, I’ve met him,” her mother kept on, apparently not getting the hint that she wasn’t interested. “He’s very smart and very driven. Very nice, very good-looking.”

I already know somebody like that, Clarke thought, staring down at her plate.

“He’s quite the upstanding young man,” her stepfather declared enthusiastically. “He comes from a good family, and he has a very bright future ahead of him. I wouldn’t even be surprised if he ends up
Clarke grunted, shocked that they would think for one second she’d be interested in someone with that kind of aspiration. She was into art, not politics. So many of the things that they focused on and thought were important were just things that didn’t even register with her. How did they not understand that? Did they really know so little about her, or were they just trying to mold her into someone she wasn’t?

“Look,” she said, trying to keep herself calm. “I’m sure this David guy is very nice.”

“Daniel,” her mother corrected.

“But I don’t . . .” She squeezed her hands into fists momentarily, not sure how to reject the offer without possibly upsetting her mom. “I’m not looking for a relationship right now,” she said, parroting what Bellamy had once said to her. “At least not the romantic kind.”

“But Clarke--” her mother protested.

“I have plenty of other things that I’d rather focus on.”

“And that’s good,” Marcus interjected. “That’s important. We’re glad you make your education a priority, and with grad school on the horizon . . .”

“Grad school?” What thin air were they pulling that out of? “I don’t even know if I’m going to grad school.”

“Sure,” he said, “but the possibility exists . . .”

“Just like the possibility of Daniel exists,” her mother added.

“Look, I don’t care about Daniel!” Clarke erupted suddenly, unable to contain herself any longer. All afternoon, she’d played the part of doting stepdaughter, putting on the pretty dress and smiling for the camera. She couldn’t take it anymore. She couldn’t sit here and act like she wasn’t annoyed and wasn’t frustrated when, in reality, that was all she was.

“I was just trying to do something nice,” her mother said, sounding hurt.

“I know, but I didn’t ask for your help. I am perfectly capable of starting up a relationship all on my own.”

“Like you did with Lexa?” her mother asked coldly.

“Yes, like--” She stopped talking abruptly, because . . . well, that really said it all, didn’t it? Her tone alone made it so obvious. “Oh. That’s what this is about, isn’t it? You just wanna set me up with a guy so I don’t date a girl again.”

“Clarke . . .” Marcus said softly.

“No, I see right through it. It’s so transparent.”

“Are you seeing Lexa again?” her mother asked.

“Lexa’s engaged, Mom! Oh, and Finn has a daughter now. So in case you’re keeping track, both the people I was involved with have happily moved on to someone else.”

“Maybe you should do the same,” her mother suggested.
“No, you don’t get it!”

“What don’t I get, Clarke?”

She huffed in exasperation, unable to fully explain. What exactly was she supposed to say? *Sorry, Mom, I know you’d rather I have a boyfriend, but up until a few days ago, at least I had a boy who was willing to fuck my brains out?*

“I think I’m just gonna go,” she announced, getting up from the table.

“Clarke, you can stay,” her stepfather offered.

He was being a lot more level-headed than her mother was right now, so for that, she was actually grateful; but there was no way she could stay in that big house of theirs any longer when they were talking about things like this. “I have a paper I need to write,” she informed him. And hey, that wasn’t a lie.

She made the short drive back to Arkadia, wishing she would feel better once she got back there. But she knew she wouldn’t. No, there was no way. This same stress and anxiety and tension that she felt all over her body right now . . . it wasn’t going anywhere. Her fancy little Polaris apartment wasn’t going to make her feel any more relaxed or calm about things.

It would have been different, though, if she was able to go over to Bellamy’s. To lie down in that warm bed of his, to be in his strong arms . . . even if they didn’t do anything, even if he didn’t kiss her, just being around him right now would have made everything feel so much better.

She missed him so much.
The art history paper went nowhere fast. At 7:00 that night, Clarke had a whole whopping two sentences of it written. And they were crappy sentences, ones she’d probably delete. How was she supposed to even try to focus on this, though, when she was still upset about her parents meddling in her life? How was she supposed to compare and contrast ancient and modern Chinese art when she was still upset how things had gone down with Bellamy and dwelling on the fact that it’d been a week since she’d heard from him?

*Maybe I just need to have an orgasm,* she pondered, lying down on her bed. She did *not* have the patience to go locate batteries for her vibrator, so she just slipped her hand beneath her underwear and gave it a shot. She rubbed and worked on her clit furiously, desperate for some sort of release. But she never got there. Actually, she never even felt close. The sad fact of the matter was, her fingers were a lousy substitute for Bellamy’s fingers, and they most definitely couldn’t compare to his mouth.

She felt so frustrated in every way she could possibly imagine. Academically, emotionally, and sexually frustrated. The tension coursing through her limbs made her whole body feel tight with agitation, to the point where even lying on her bed didn’t feel comfortable. She groaned in distress and shot to her feet, pacing around the room angrily. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t stay awake all night feeling like she was about to lose it. No paper was going to get written in that state of mind; none of that frustration would start to fade. She felt restless and anxious, and if she didn’t do something about it, she was gonna explode.

*Screw this,* she decided, picking up her phone. She quickly called Raven, relieved to hear her friend’s chipper voice answer on the second ring.

“Hey, what are you doing tonight?” Clarke asked her.

“Um . . . probably going out with Roan,” Raven replied. “Why? You wanna tag along?”

As much as she didn’t want to be a third wheel, anything was better than being stuck here at home by herself. “Please,” she begged.

Perhaps she overdid it on the outfit. There was a gold sparkly thing in the back of her closet she’d never actually worn before, mostly because she didn’t know if it was supposed to be a shirt or a dress. It was probably short enough to be a shirt, but whatever. She was wearing it as a dress. She paired it with some skin-toned strappy sandals that went halfway up her calf, combed her hair out into a wild lion’s mane, and decided she was good to go. A little slutty? Possibly. But if it got her laid and the laying was good, then that was all that mattered.

Roan was driving, and his first question when Clarke climbed into the backseat of the car was, “Do I need to go pick up, Bellamy, too?”

“Shut up,” Raven growled.

“No, we can just go,” Clarke said, tugging down on her dress/shirt thing. God, how was she even going to keep her ass covered tonight?

Roan offered to take them to either TonDC or Mount Weather; he said he enjoyed either one. Raven said it didn’t matter to her, either, so that left the decision up to Clarke. “Where to, Griffin?” she
asked.

Clarke sighed, wishing she felt adventurous enough for TonDC. (She was certainly dressed for that place.) But if she ran into Bellamy or even some of Bellamy’s friends, then that would just be strange and make it look like she was trying too hard. Besides, that place was pretty crazy, and she didn’t exactly trust her own decision-making there, not without Bellamy looking after her.

“Mount Weather,” she decided. It wasn’t a bad club by any means. She could mingle and meander there and hopefully meet someone passable. Didn’t have to be a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend. Certainly not anyone who was going to be her next friend with benefits. Nope, tonight was truly going to be a one-night stand. She could do it. She’d done it before.

Well . . . almost.

The fog machine appeared to be malfunctioning when they showed up, because a greenish haze was billowing out of the club, and people were evacuating. The manager came out shortly after everyone else and promised that they were working on fixing the problem and that the doors would open back up in half an hour. Plenty of people just left for good, but the ones who stuck around got in line and waited. It worked out perfectly for Roan, gave him ample opportunity to press Raven up against the building and make out with her. They were so into each other, and they were both so ridiculously good-looking that Clarke didn’t really mind watching. But it started to feel a little weird when Roan reached behind Raven to cup and squeeze her ass, and Raven responded by unbuttoning two buttons on his shirt.

“Okay, no,” she said, finally tearing her mouth away from his. “Not here.”

“Right here,” he growled lasciviously.

“Later,” she said, threading her hands through his long hair.

When Roan went to go bribe the bouncer to get them to the front of the line, Raven turned to Clarke and squealed. “Okay, do you see us? Are we hot as fuck or what?”

“It’s so hot,” Clarke confirmed. “I would watch you guys have sex. I don’t even care if it would ruin our friendship.”

“Okay, first of all, nothing would ruin our friendship,” Raven assured her. “And second . . . Roan said he’s down for a threesome.”

Clarke’s eyes bulged. No way. Was Raven really suggesting . . . that?

Much to her relief, Raven laughed. “No, just kidding. I mean, he is down for a threesome, but I’m not.”

“Phew.” Clarke breathed a sigh of relief. As much as she loved her best friend, she wasn’t willing to love her that much.

“He’s into some kinky shit, Clarke,” Raven went on. “I mean really.”

“Well, yeah, he runs a sex shop.”

“We’re taking things slow, though. Tonight . . .” She wriggled her eyebrows mischievously. “It’s the edible underwear.”

“Please tell me you’re not wearing that right now.”
“Oh, I’m not wearing any underwear right now,” Raven boasted. “Are you?”

“A thong.” Clarke whimpered worriedly and tugged her shirt/dress down again. “I feel self-conscious. I feel like my ass cheeks are just flapping around out in the breeze.”

“Your ass cheeks don’t flap,” Raven informed her. “But even if they did . . . just own it. I mean, that’s clearly why you came here tonight, right? To get laid?”

“Mmm-hmm.” Her hand had been such a complete disappointment, and she didn’t hold much hope for her vibrator to do any better. The only thing that was going to make her feel better was some authentic, genuine dick. Or maybe even a pussy. Whatever. Didn’t matter to her as long as she got off on it.

“Are you sure you want to?” Raven asked, sounding . . . concerned.

Clarke made a face. “Yeah, why would I not be sure?”

“Well, you know.” Raven lowered her voice. “Because of Bellamy.”

“What about Bellamy?” If this was going to work, she had to try her best not to think about him. “He’s not my boyfriend. We didn’t break up.”

“Yeah, but still . . .”

“No, still nothing. I’m a free, single lady, and I’m here to have fun,” Clarke proclaimed proudly.

“Good for you,” Raven said supportively. “But in case you don’t . . .” She grinned as Roan reapproached, “I’ll have enough fun for the both of us.” She laughed in delight as he hoisted her up with one arm, holding her like she weighed nothing, and her legs wrapped around his waist. He pressed her back against the wall again, and they resumed their make-out. And it was still very, very hot.

When the club doors finally opened up again, it was nearly 11:00, and the scenario for picking up some hot guy or girl was not ideal for Clarke. Probably only about half the people who had originally been there had stuck around, so her options were limited to begin with. The dance floor was not packed, very open with every dancer being very exposed, so there was no chance in hell she could get out there and mingle, not when there was no camouflage for her lack of rhythm. It took a good half an hour for the drinks to start flowing again and for people to regain their buzzes, but once they did, the atmosphere started to pick up a little.

You can do this, Clarke told herself, scoping out her options. There was a group of three beautiful girls up at the bar, all of them wearing the shortest of shorts and low-cut tops. Her lesbian radar wasn’t quite as finely attuned as Niylah’s was, but chances were, she could convince at least one of those chicks to throw down with her tonight. Even straight girls were willing to experiment these days.

Deep down, though, she knew that wasn’t what she wanted. Maybe it was just the Bellamy effect, but tonight, she wanted a man. He didn’t have to be as sculpted as Bellamy, or have that same gorgeously tan skin. He didn’t have to have that deep, gravelly voice or be quite as big—Be real here, Clarke, she thought. She wasn’t going to find anyone else that big. He just had to be a guy, an attractive guy, who was willing to hook up with no strings attached. She didn’t think that would be so hard to find.

Unfortunately, it was.
The first guy she talked to was studying to be an accountant. Nope.

The second guy she talked to had a cat named Larry. Uh-uh.

The third guy she talked to exclaimed, “Your name’s Clarke? Like Clark Kent? Awesome. I’m gonna call you Supergirl.”

Ugh. No way. Princess was a better nickname.

By the time she started talking to the fourth guy, Doug, she was feeling desperate. Doug was . . . cute. He was a little too dressed up for a club, and his nervousness led her to suspect he was only a freshman or a sophomore. He babbled like a spaz, and Clarke couldn’t believe it. For once in her life, she was the experienced one.

They sat down in the nearly empty VIP section and talked for twenty minutes, but the conversation was disjointed, stiff, full of awkward pauses. That level of attraction that she’d gotten so used to feeling with Bellamy just wasn’t there with Doug. And it wasn’t his fault. He was trying so hard to connect, to make her laugh. But even that wasn’t working. In fact, some of his jokes were making her cringe because of how un-funny they were.

“So—so tell me something about yourself,” Doug urged.

“Well . . .” She gurgled the remainder of her fruity drink through her straw and shrugged. “I’m bisexual.”

“Oh, really? Cool,” he said. “You know, I—I find it really hard to argue with bisexuals ‘cause you never know which way it’ll go.” He laughed—a really annoying laugh—at his own joke.

Clarke just tried to smile and nod.

“Get it?” he said. “cause a bisexual person can go either way.”

“Yeah, I’m . . . clear on that.”

“It’s funny, right?”

It so wasn’t funny, but at least it wasn’t offensive. “Hilarious.”

Clarke wasn’t an idiot. She knew she was reaching with this guy, really struggling to make it work. And chances were, if they got into bed together, they wouldn’t be compatible. For all she knew, he was a virgin, and she wasn’t exactly looking to be somebody’s first time tonight. No, this just wasn’t going to work. Maybe it was time to just cut her losses and go the girl route. It wasn’t exactly what she’d had in mind, but neither was this kid.

“You know what, Doug?” she said, interrupting him while he rambled. “I just don’t think this is gonna work out. But it was really nice to meet you.” She tried to get up and leave, but he grabbed her hand and pulled her back.

“No, wait,” he said. “I really like you.”

“Doug.” She shook her hand away from his sweaty palms.

“No, come here, please.” He grabbed hold of her arm this time, pulling her back to the point where she lost her balance and practically fell on top of him.

“Okay, stop,” she said, trying to untangle herself from him, but he kept holding on.
“Wait, Clarke--”

Suddenly, she felt two familiar hands on her arms, pulling her to her feet. “She said stop,” Bellamy growled warningly.

Her breath caught in her chest, and her heartbeat instantly sped up. Bellamy?

“Sorry,” Doug apologized, holding his hands up in front of himself like a shield. “Mixed signals.” He backed away, keeping one eye on Bellamy as though he were very afraid of him, and when he was out on the dance floor, he turned and sprinted.

_Oh my god_, Clarke thought, unable to take her eyes off of Bellamy. Was he really there right now? Or was she dreaming this? Because it seemed like it could be a dream.

“Hey, Princess,” he said, cracking a half smile.

She smiled, too, relieved. Nope, not a dream. Not a dream at all.

Obviously they needed to talk, and Mount Weather wasn’t the place for it. Clarke didn’t really want to leave Bellamy’s side, fearing that he’d be gone if she left and then came back to get him, so she just texted Raven that she was leaving with him and that she’d talk to her tomorrow. She got into Bellamy’s truck, wishing for a second that it could just be simple, that she could hop onto his lap like she had that first night and they could forget about everything else. But he drove to her place in silence, so she refrained from saying anything, too.

She would have much rather gone to his house, but her apartment would have to do, she supposed.

“Thanks for driving me home,” she said as they walked inside. “Raven and Roan are in their own little world.”

“Yeah, no problem,” he said, stuffing his hands in his pockets.

_God, he looks good_, she thought, appreciating the way those dark jeans hugged his legs and the black t-shirt showed off his biceps. Maybe it was just because she’d gone a week without seeing him, but the thirst was _real_. Not that she should have been thinking about that right now. There were more important things to deal with.

“Nice shirt,” he remarked.

“Oh, thanks.” Once again, she tried to tug it down, even though she supposed it didn’t really matter. Bellamy had already seen everything underneath. “It’s a dress, though. I think.”

He scratched the side of his head confusedly. “If you say so.”

Even though she knew she was showing lots of leg this way—and hopefully that was enticing or something—she actually wished she was wearing leggings or pants. Because the longer she stayed in this outfit, the more she felt like a Spice Girls reject in it. It was so not her.

“You doin’ alright?” he asked her quietly. But of course he would ask that. Leave it to Bellamy to _still_ be checking in on her, just like he did when they were in bed.

“Yeah,” she said, but that wasn’t entirely true. She’d been miserable this whole week, and today had been the height of that misery. “I miss you,” she blurted suddenly. The words came out on their own accord before she could stop them, before she could second-guess herself.
He locked eyes with her and whispered, much to her surprise, “I miss you, too.”

You do? she thought, feeling that spark of hope again. Maybe, just maybe, he didn’t hate her after all.

“Look, Clarke . . .”

Or maybe he did. Because he sounded pretty serious.

“I’m not gonna stand here and act like I wasn’t mad at you,” he started in. “I was, and I think I had every reason to be.”

She looked down at her feet, nodding shamefully in agreement.

“I mean, if you’d just been looking at pictures of me and my mom and Octavia, that would’ve been one thing, but that other stuff . . .” He trailed off, shaking his head. “There’s a reason I keep it hidden away.”

She gulped, hating that she’d been the one to bring it all out in the open again. It hadn’t been her place to do so, and she hadn’t even given it a second thought. What kind of person did that make her?

“It’s just . . .” He exhaled heavily, averting her eyes. “It’s really hard for me to talk about.”

“I understand,” she said. For over a year after her dad had died, she’d barely been able to talk to anyone about him. “I’m so sorry, Bellamy.”

“I know you didn’t mean to--”

“No, I was wrong,” she cut in, taking a few hesitant steps towards him, hoping he wouldn’t back away. And he didn’t. “It was the wrong thing to do, and I should’ve known that. I just . . .” She stopped herself before trying to make excuses, because . . . well, there was no excuse.

“You want forgiveness?” he asked, sauntering towards her, hands still in his pockets.

“Yes.” More than anything, she wanted that.

“Then I’ll give that to you,” he offered. “You’re forgiven.”

She blinked back tears, feeling like she didn’t deserve it. “Bellamy, I never meant to hurt you.”

“Clarke, I’m fine.”

“No, but I brought it all up again. And I feel like . . . like I betrayed you.”

“No, you didn’t . . .” He closed the space between them, putting one hand on her shoulder. “You didn’t betray me.”

She shook her head adamantly, feeling like he was letting her off too easily for all of this. “I invaded your privacy. I looked at stuff I had no right to be looking at.”

“Clarke, look at me.”

She lifted her head, meeting his eyes, and he just looked so . . . so soft. So compassionate. It comforted her; it overwhelmed her.

“It’s okay,” using his thumb to wipe a tear track off her cheek.
“It’s not okay.”

“I’m okay,” he emphasized. “I was mad for a while, I was sad for a while, but now I’m okay.”

“No, you shouldn’t have to just be okay, Bellamy,” she argued.

“Clarke.”

“If you wanna be mad at me, be mad. Don’t feel like you just have to forgive me. I completely understand if—”

“Clarke.”

“If you don’t wanna forgive me because, I mean, it should’ve been up to you if you ever wanted to tell me about any of that, and I didn’t give you the choice. I just went in there and—”

“Clarke, shut up.” He bent down and kissed her so suddenly, her mouth couldn’t even react. She just stood there, breathless, blissfully happy for that second that his mouth was on hers. Because it’d been seven days, and she’d almost forgotten how good it felt.

“I forgive you,” he reiterated more firmly this time. “Okay?”

In a way, she still felt like he was letting her off the hook, but all she could mutter was a breathy, “Okay,” in response.

“Allright.” He took her hands in his, rubbing his thumbs across her knuckles.

“Are you still my friend?” she asked nervously, afraid of the answer to that question. Because forgiveness was one thing—it was noble and commendable and one of the most gracious things a person could give. But friendship . . . maybe it wasn’t so easy to fix that, and that terrified her. Because her friendship with Bellamy had come to mean so much to her so quickly.

“Clarke.” He pressed the softest of kisses to her forehead, the softest kiss she could remember him ever giving her, and murmured a promise with his lips against her skin: “I’ll always be your friend.”

She shuddered, a relieved sigh escaping her. If he knew how much it meant just to hear that . . .

“Come here,” he said, letting go of her hands so he could wrap his arms around her and pull her in close for a hug.

Oh god, this was it. This was what she’d yearend for all day today, during that speech, those photo ops, the dinner back home. To feel this with him, to be this with him, was such a comfort. That sense of warmth and security that she got when his arms were around her was worth just as much as his forgiveness was. And she was so grateful for that that she let herself cry, not caring if she looked stupid or weak. They were happy tears.

“I missed you so much,” she cried, scrunching his shirt up in her hands.

He just stood there with her and held her, rubbing one hand up and down her back, massaging the other through her hair. It was just what she needed, and he seemed to know that.

“Clarke?” he finally said, his hands stilling on her body. When he spoke again, his voice was shaky, and he sounded unsure for the first time she could ever recall. “Can I talk to you about it?”

She leaned back slowly, shocked that he would want to. She lifted her head and gazed up at him in bewilderment, her heart breaking when she noticed the tears in his eyes, too.
“Sure,” she replied. After everything she’d done, she owed it to him to listen. She wanted to listen. She wanted to know.

He took her hand in his and led her to the couch, sitting down.

“You don’t have to, if you don’t want to,” she made sure to add.

“Well, I don’t . . . I don’t want to,” he admitted, “but . . .” His Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed hard. “I have to.”

She didn’t know if that meant he had to because she’d seen everything already or because he didn’t want to stay silent about it any longer. She decided not to ask, though, because if he felt like he had to . . . well, then he had to.

“All my other friends already know,” he said. “You should know, too.”

“Okay.” She tucked her knees up underneath her, turning to face him, watching him intently, waiting. He could take as long as he needed.

And it did take a while. For probably three minutes, he just sat there, unable to get any words out, unable to look at her. There was an expression on his face and in his eyes she didn’t recognize, one that wasn’t flirty or mischievous, one that wasn’t smug or playful. He looked like he was on a bit of an emotional roller coaster in his head, reliving everything, and she wasn’t sure he’d even be able to tell her. But finally, he just started in.

“So Roma . . . she wasn’t the girl I lost my virginity to,” he said. “She was the girl I wanted to lose my virginity, too, but . . .” He trailed off, chuckling, never really meeting his eyes, always kind of off in his own world. “She was a year ahead of me in high school, and she lived down the street from the house I grew up in. I always liked her. I thought she was really beautiful and . . . interesting.” He smiled fondly, as though he were remembering something good. “Anyway, we got together the summer after my freshman year. Pretty standard, you know? I took her out on dates. We hooked up. We . . .” He paused for a few seconds, looking up at her ceiling, taking a deep breath. “We fell in love.”

Clarke smiled sympathetically and put a hand on his leg, silently urging him to continue.

“We dated for three years,” he went on, still staring straight ahead at nothing. “And it was serious. We wanted to be together. We said we would be . . . forever.” His jaw got real tense, his brow furrowed, when he said that word, but he managed to keep going, somehow. “Anyway, I got her a promise ring, which you probably saw.”

She squeezed her eyes shut, remembering what word had been engraved on the inside of it. Forever.

“If I’d had another year, it might’ve been the real thing,” he admitted. “She was my first love, you know?”

Oh, yeah. That much was very clear.

“But we had all these plans. We were gonna go do so much stuff, and someday we were gonna have a house of our own, maybe get married, maybe have some kids.”

Oh god, she thought, feeling her heart break on his behalf. All of that at eighteen? And here she’d thought her relationship with Finn had been intense. But it didn’t even compare. What she and Finn had shared was a sham, but Bellamy and Roma . . . that was the real deal.
And I was gonna go to college,” he added. “I got a full ride to Boston College, so we were gonna move up there. And Roma wasn’t goin’ to college or anything, but she was still gonna move there with me.” He smiled as more memories undoubtedly played out in his head. “She was excited.” His smile faded shortly after that, though, and Clarke shifted uncomfortably, not even sure if she could bear to hear anymore. She’d read the obituary. She knew what happened next.

Anyway, we were on our way up there one day,” he said. “We were gonna look at apartments. And then . . .” His bottom lip started to tremble, and his eyes looked so glassy, like the tears were going to fall at any minute. “We were just talking,” he said, his voice cutting out. “I don’t remember what I was saying, but . . . one minute everything was fine, and then the next . . .” He had to stop, close his eyes for a moment, and swallow the lump in his throat. “I had the green light, so I just pulled forward into the intersection,” he said, using his hands to demonstrate, “and out of nowhere, this other car comes up on the side, runs the red light, and hits us. It hit her.”

Clarke covered her mouth with her hand, literally starting to feel sick to her stomach. She’d known it was a car accident, but . . . for him to be in that car with her? She hadn’t known that part.

“I don’t really remember anything after that,” he confessed. “The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital, and my mom was there, and Octavia was there. And they told me what happened. And my mom had to tell me Roma died.”

Even though she tried not to let it out, Clarke could help but start to cry. Because the thought of Bellamy, especially an eighteen year old Bellamy, going through all of that . . . it broke her heart.

“It wasn’t a drunk driver or texting or anything,” he said. “It was just an accident. It just happened. And they said she died on the scene.”

Clarke bent forward, raking both hands through her hair, trying to keep it together. Because Bellamy needed her to be strong right now. He was the one reliving all the traumatic memories. For once, he, the guy who fixed things and took care of things for everyone else, needed someone to take care of him.

“I don’t really know why I made it and she didn’t,” he said sadly. “I mean, she died, and I—I had a broken wrist, Clarke. And some cuts and bruises. But that’s it.” He finally looked at her, for the first time during the account of this whole thing, and he looked . . . so confused, like even all these years later, he still couldn’t make sense of that.

“Bellamy . . .” She wanted to say something comforting, consoling, but she didn’t know what to say. So all she managed was his name.

“Uh, when you asked me the other day why I didn’t go to college,” he kept on, “I kind of lied because . . . well, I mean, my mom did lose her job that year, and I did have to work, but . . .” He wrinkled his forehead, looking regretful and anguish when he said, “I couldn’t go. Not after that. I was . . . I was in a pretty dark place for about six months there. I was depressed. I had to go therapy and everything.”

Depressed? she thought, trying to wrap her mind around it. Therapy? Given the horror of what he’d gone through, it was definitely understandable. But Bellamy was so lively and capable that it was almost difficult to imagine.

“Anyway, clearly it worked, right?” he managed to joke, cracking a sad smile. “I’m all better?” A few of his tears finally fell over, and he quickly tried to wipe them away. “Anyway. That’s that.”

Oh my god, she thought, stunned. Reading about it in a newspaper clipping was one thing, but
hearing it straight from Bellamy’s mouth? That was quite another.

“You alright?” he rasped out.

Oh god, was he really asking her that after everything he’d just shared? “Am I alright?”

“Yeah.”

_Oh, Bellamy_ . . . “I’m fine,” she said. “I just feel really bad for you.” She dabbed at the corners of her eyes, sniffling. “I got to say goodbye to my dad, you know? I had time. I knew it was coming.”

Bellamy shook his head. “That doesn’t make it any easier.”

“No, I think it does,” she disagreed. She couldn’t imagine just having her father ripped away from her in an instant, with no warning whatsoever. She wouldn’t have wished that on her worst enemy.

“I’m glad I told you,” he declared suddenly, sounding a bit surprised by that fact. “Sorry I didn’t do it sooner.”

She shook her head, wishing he didn’t feel the need to apologize. “Sorry I basically forced you to.”

“No, I’m glad,” he repeated. “It kinda feels good to talk about it.”

Well, as much as she was still ashamed of her actions leading up to all of this, if there was something good that had come out of it, perhaps this was it. He’d mentioned therapy? Talking to people who cared was probably the most therapeutic thing there was. She was more than willing to listen to him whenever he started thinking about this, whenever he needed someone to talk to. She wanted to be that person. And maybe now she could be.

“Come here, Bellamy,” she said, sensing that he could use one of those hugs right now like the one he’d given her. She pulled gently on his arm, and he leaned into her, for once letting the roles be reversed, for once letting her be the one who was looking after him. “Are you okay?” she asked, checking in with him the way he always did with her.

“Yeah,” he said, slowly lifting his head. “Clarke.” When his eyes looked into hers, though, she saw something there, something that definitely wasn’t just lust or desire. She couldn’t quite figure out what it was until he said, “I need you,” in a hushed whisper.

_Need_. He _needed_ her.

“I need to feel you,” he said, looking down as though the word embarrassed him to say out loud. Need. _Need_.

“I’m right here,” she said, picking up his hand, placing it over her heart. He wondered if she could feel it practically beating out of her chest.

“Please,” he pleaded as his lips sought hers out. It was just a quick, barely-there kiss at first, then another one. His mouth quivered against hers until the kisses became deeper, more insistent. She lay back on the couch, and his body followed hers, settling in on top of her, a heavy weight on her smaller frame. But she could bear it.

He hardly ever stopped kissing her while he undressed her. It happened quickly that her stupid shirt/dress ended up on the floor, her shoes and thong soon to follow. He managed to get his own clothes off quickly, smoothly, almost effortlessly, and she was so glad when he did. She loved the feeling of his naked body against hers.
The sex was . . . different. He settled in between her legs and sank right into her, but his hip movements were small, subtle, not exactly full-on thrusts. He seemed content to just be inside her while his hands roamed and rubbed her body, while his lips rained kisses down onto her neck. His body encompassed hers, so she clung to him, holding on as they gently rocked together. As much as he needed to feel her, she needed to feel him, too, right now. A week without this had felt like a month, and that was way too long.

His breath rasped against her neck hotly when he came. She wasn’t quite there yet, and she wasn’t going to get there, but she didn’t really care. Tonight wasn’t about her. It was about him, him opening up, talking about things he obviously tried to keep buried. As long as he got what he needed out of this, then she was satisfied, too.

He lay on top of her afterward, obviously completely exhausted, physically and emotionally. His forehead was coated in sweat, hair sticking to it, so she brushed it away from his eyes. He pulled his hips back just enough to slip out of her, but he didn’t move much else. Using her breasts as a pillow, he rested his head against her, breathing deeply, eyes closing. She stroked his head and his hair, content to just let him lie there as long as he needed. Because tonight, he needed her.
Chapter 10

Clarke started to stir awake early that morning when the sun peeked through the gap in her curtains, hitting her eyes. Usually it took multiple alarms to wake her up this early, but not today. Even before she opened her eyes, she knew something was different. She wasn’t in her bed, for starters; she was on the couch. And she wasn’t alone like she had been for the past seven mornings.

When she opened her eyes, she was greeted with the sight of Bellamy next to her, curled up on his side, still asleep. His head was on her shoulder, one of his legs draped over both of hers, and a thin blue blanket covered them both.

He looked so peaceful, so different than the guy who had opened up to her about everything last night.

_Last night_, she thought, smiling softly. _Last night_ had been . . . something. Really something. Not something romantic, surely, because there was nothing romantic about the trauma he’d endured and recounted for her. And even the sex had been more _intimate_ than anything else. But whatever it had been, whatever had transpired . . . it made her feel _so close_ to him right now.

As much as she didn’t want to disturb him, she had to move. Her back hurt from sleeping on the couch all night, and her arms and legs felt stiff. She tried to stretch out a bit, and that woke him up, too.

“Hey,” he said, slowly lifting his head.

“Hey.” God, he looked so cute with his tousled hair and sleepy eyes. She could only hope she didn’t look like nightmare. “Sleep well?”

“Yeah,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “Probably should’ve slept in the bed, though.”

“Yeah, really.” Her couch was barely big enough just for her, let alone the two of them.

He yawned, reaching over to put his hand on her hip. “Thanks for lettin’ me stay,” he said, rubbing lightly.

“Of course.” How many nights had she spent at his place? This was the least she could do. Besides, it wasn’t like she’d _wanted_ him to leave.

“Thanks for . . . everything, Clarke,” he mumbled, looking down at the small sliver of space between them. “Just . . . thanks.”
He didn’t have to elaborate for her to know what he meant by that. He was thanking her for being there with him last night, for listening.

Her phone rang shrilly before she could tell him that last night was the least she could do after bringing all of this back to him again in the first place. She groaned, because it was her mother’s ringtone.

“You want that?” he asked reaching down onto the floor to fumble in her purse.

“I guess.” With the way she and her mom had left things yesterday, it was probably best that they talk.

He found her phone and handed it over to her, and she braced herself for what might not be a pleasant conversation. “Yes?” she answered.

“Hi, Clarke,” her mother said. “I wasn’t sure you’d answer.”

“Well, I did.” She shot Bellamy an annoyed look, and he just smiled.

“I was hoping we could talk,” her mother said. “Yesterday was just so . . . unpleasant at the end there. I hate to leave things like that.”

Clarke did, too, honestly. As aggravated as yesterday had made her feel towards her mother, she didn’t want to fight with her. Anything could happen at any point, like it had with Bellamy’s girlfriend. Life was too short to waste it being angry.

Her mom started to apologize for upsetting her, and Clarke tried to pay attention to what she was saying, but Bellamy made it difficult to do that when he tossed the blanket aside and slithered down on the couch. She watched him confusedly until it became blatantly clear what he wanted to do: He put his hands on her knees and tried to spread her legs.

“Bellamy, no,” she scolded incredulously, covering the phone. She couldn’t do that while she was talking to her mother.

He just nodded as if to say, Yes.

“Don’t you think so, Clarke?” her mother was saying.

“What?” She hadn’t been paying attention. Did she think what?

“That my intentions were in the right place,” her mother said. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Powerless to stop it—hell, she hadn’t cum last night, so she wanted to get pleasure as much as he clearly wanted to give it to her—Clarke allowed Bellamy to open up her legs and then watched in disbelief as he lowered his mouth to her cunt. “Oh!” she couldn’t help but gasp the moment she felt his tongue in between her folds.

“Oh?” her mother echoed.

“Oh . . . yes,” she said, halfway to her mother, halfway to Bellamy. “Yes, I know you didn’t mean to upset me,” she said, struggling to put together a coherent sentence as he kissed, licked, and suckled on her.

“I really didn’t,” her mother insisted. “And I feel awful. I know I can be pushy sometimes.”

She pushed herself down onto his face, delighting in the friction.
"Clarke?"

"Yeah?" That was her name. At least she could still respond to her name.

"Are you listening?"

"Uh-huh." Bellamy’s breathing was loud down there, his breath hot on her sensitive flesh. He moaned and moaned and made *Mwah* sounds as he made out with her lower lips, and when he cast a glance up at her, she gave him a warning look. Because if he got too much louder, her mother was going to hear him.

“I feel like you’re not really listening,” her mother said dejectedly.

“No, I am,” she insisted, squirming slightly, circling her hips against his face. “I just, uh . . .” She fought to hold back a moan as his tongue zig-zagged all the way up to her clit. “I’m kinda . . . busy,” she offered.

“Well, I just wanted to clear the air,” her mother said. “And I promise I’ll let up on the matchmaking.”

That’s good, Clarke thought, because right now, her only match had his head between her legs.

“But please don’t get mad at me if I ask you about your personal life every once in a while,” her mother pleaded. “I’m not trying to be nosy. I just like knowing what you’re up to.”

Clarke laughed a bit, because if her mother knew what she was up to right now . . .

Her mom just kept on going, and Clarke tuned her out completely as Bellamy’s tongue flicked rapidly at her clit, very determined to get her off. It was so hot to watch him work, to see his eyes close in concentration, only to open moments later and shoot up to her face, gauging her reaction.

“Anyway,” her mother said. “I should probably let you go now.”

“Yeah, probably,” Clarke agreed quaveringly. Her impending orgasm had her feeling like she was teetering on the edge of a cliff, and Bellamy was most certainly about to push her over.

“Oh, but Marcus wanted me to tell you . . .”

Clarke squeezed her eyes shut, not caring what Marcus wanted to tell her. She had to press the phone into the back cushion of the couch when she felt her thighs start to quiver. Every muscle in her body tightened, and it sort of felt like a volcanic eruption . . . down there. She clenched up, arched her hips against his mouth, and tried not to make any sounds as she came. She couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t focus on anything except the wave of pleasure coursing through her. And what a wave it was. It left her feeling mindless, boneless, completely satiated afterward. She just lay there, unable to move, still feeling some pulsating aftershocks down in her core, where Bellamy’s tongue was lazily lapping up her juices.

*Oh god,* she thought, finally remembering that there was a phone in her hand. She brought it back up to her ear just in time to hear her mom saying, “Well, alright, I can tell that I’m boring you, so I’ll just talk to you later, okay?”

*Words,* Clarke thought, head still spinning. *Say something.* “Okay,” she managed to get out before she ended the call, dropping her phone onto the floor. “God, Bellamy,” she gasped.

Smirking proudly, he crawled back up her body, lying between her legs, propping himself up with
an arm on either side of her head. “You like that?” he asked gruffly.

“Yes, but . . . that was bad.”

“Oh, it felt pretty good to me.”

Unable to keep from smiling, she rolled her eyes in amusement. Who was she kidding? It’d felt pretty damn good to her, too. Bellamy was an oral sex aficionado. He did things and got reactions out of her that she couldn’t even explain. Like right now, her toes were tingling. What even was that?

“I have to shower,” she said, hating the thought of getting up and getting ready.

“Alone?” he asked.

“Probably.” She would have loved to get in there with him, but if they did that, then they’d end up having sex again, and she’d lose track of time and fail to get clean. “I have to go work,” she told him, already wondering if there was any way she could convince Dante to let her leave early.

“That sucks,” he said. “If you have to, though . . .” He sat back on his knees and grabbed her hand, pulling her up along with him. He took a moment to steal a few more kisses, though, which was incredibly arousing since she could still taste herself on his lips. It took everything she had to get off that couch and head into the bathroom.

He lay on her bed and turned on the TV while she showered. She went about her morning routine with him there, just lounging, hanging out, and it felt so natural. At one point, he even offered to braid her hair for her. (Apparently, he’d learned how to do that with Octavia.) She didn’t take him up on that, only because she didn’t have enough time, but she did hop onto his lap so she could give him one big goodbye kiss before leaving for the day.

“Feel free to hang as long as you want,” she told him. “You can snoop through anything.”

“Nah, I think I’ll head home,” he said. “I got some work to do today, too.”

“Okay.” She patted his stomach and tried to get up, but he put he grabbed her hip, holding her in place.

“Come over tonight, though,” he murmured against her lips before giving her one more peck.

She smiled, looking forward to that. Because the only thing more enjoyable than a night with Bellamy at her place was a night together at his.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Since she knew she was spending a lot of time with Bellamy these days, Clarke started using her lunch breaks for girl time with Raven and Niylah. It was becoming a nice daily tradition—or almost daily—one that always ended up in the three of them talking about sex. It was inevitable, it seemed, especially once Clarke and Bellamy got past their slump and started hooking up again. If they were all having sex, they could all rejoice in the glory of it together.

Niylah had found a girlfriend . . . sort of. The official terminology was ‘maybe starting something.’ Her name was Luna, and she was real modern-day hippie, by the sound of it. When Clarke saw the pictures, she understood the attraction, because Luna had a mane of curly brown hair and prominent eyebrows that made her look very modelesque. Niylah raved about how amazing it was to sixty-nine with her, which Clarke had to admit was something she and Bellamy had not done yet. But it seemed...
to be heading in that direction.

Raven and Roan still weren’t coming up for air, and it seemed that the Ice Nation sex store owner was getting her to try some kinky things. Raven was a little tight-lipped about what it all was, but she assured the girls she was enjoying it, and that was really all that mattered. She also bragged that Roan was amazingly well-endowed and proposed that she and Clarke do an inconspicuous dick measuring contest to see whether he or Bellamy was bigger.

“Roan’s, like . . .” Raven tried to use her forearm to give them some accurate measurement, but when that didn’t work, she just reached across the table and flopped her hand against Clarke’s cheek. Then she dragged it across her mouth and back again like it was a big, limp snake.

“What are you doing?” Clarke asked, accustomed to her friend’s weirdness.

“This is my impersonation of it,” Raven said, flapping her arm against the side of Clarke’s face before dragging it up over Clarke’s eyes. “It’s everywhere.”

Ultimately, however, even though sometimes they talked about Luna and sometimes they talked about Roan, both of Clarke’s friends seemed content to let most of the conversations focus on her sex life with Bellamy. Niylah had only met him a handful of times, and Raven still insisted on calling him Bellagio, but they both liked him and were interested in his and Clarke’s relationship. Niylah, for one, was completely serious when she requested a front-row seat the next time he ate Clarke out. She said that, based on Clarke’s descriptions and Bellamy’s own explanation of his technique, he was a “Grade-A oral master.” Clarke definitely wasn’t about to dispute that, but she wasn’t about to let Niylah be a spectator while Bellamy went down on her, either.

Raven, in contrast, was more interested in the full-on sex. It seemed to fascinate her that Clarke’s favorite position with Bellamy was simply having him on top. Due to her lackluster experiences with Wick, Raven was reluctant to try missionary with Roan, fearing that she might be disappointed by the experience.

“Just try it,” Clarke urged her. “Worst case scenario, it sucks, and then you have him ask Bellamy for advice.”

“This guy . . .” Niylah shook her head in amazement. “God, Clarke, you should have him write a how-to manual or something. Seriously.”

Clarke tossed her head back and laughed.

She told Bellamy about Niylah’s suggestion when she was over at his house for her first Saturday night shenanigans since they’d patched things up. He got a kick out of the idea, chuckling, “A how-to manual, huh?”

“Well, yeah, you’re really good.” She leaned against the counter and stole pieces of mozzarella cheese off the top of the pizza he was preparing. “I could send it to Finn for Christmas or something.”

“I thought you said he had a daughter.”

“He does, but that doesn’t mean he has sex skills.”

Bellamy shook his head as he arranged pepperoni slices on top of the cheese. “Why’d you stay with that guy for two years if it was so bad?”

“It wasn’t bad,” she clarified. “It was just . . . high school. Clumsy, awkward high school.”
“I wasn’t clumsy and awkward in high school,” he boasted. “Well, just the first time.”

“Just the first time?”

“And the second. And the third and the fourth and the twentieth,” he confessed. “But after that, I got really good.”

“With Roma?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He smiled a bit, not a sad smile this time. Just . . . reminiscent. These past few days, he hadn’t really talked about her a whole lot, but if her name ever did come up in conversation, he didn’t shy away from it, either.

Since Bellamy was taking on the role of chef that night and Clarke had absolutely nothing to contribute in the kitchen, she left him there and rejoined the others in the living room. Nobody was really saying it, but everyone sort of knew tonight’s get-together was sort of a welcome back party for her. Miller let her pick the music, then complained when she requested something he didn’t like; Jasper offered her some of his best pot, which she politely declined; the girls all wanted to play with her hair, and even Murphy was nice enough to give up his beanbag and let her lounge there for a few minutes. Once he told her time was up, though, she had to go back to the couch.

Octavia and Lincoln showed up right when Bellamy was pulling the pizza out of the oven. Octavia took one whiff and exclaimed, “Did you use Mom’s sauce recipe?”

“Of course,” he replied, winking at her.

Cooking. Yet another thing Bellamy Blake was randomly good at. Clarke had no cooking abilities, nor did she have any desire to learn, so she was perfectly content to just sit back and watch him work. Because he looked good tossing that salad, and he looked good sprinkling parmesan cheese all over those breadsticks, and he looked good slicing that pizza.

She was thirsty for him.

By the time he was done, it looked like Olive Garden up in that kitchen, smelled like it, too. All his friends piled over each other to be the first one at the pizza, and since Murphy took three pieces, they ran out. Bellamy seemed to have anticipated this, though, as he already had a second pizza in the oven.

Clarke hung towards the back of what could very loosely be defined as a line, but she didn’t need to. Bellamy already had a plate ready to go for her, even though he didn’t have one for himself.

“This looks good,” she said, inhaling the Italian aroma as she headed back over to the couch.

He sat down beside her while his friends ransacked the kitchen, and she felt sort of bad being the one eating when he’d done all the cooking. She tried to give him one of her breadsticks, but he just said, “I’ll get one later,” and put his arm around her.

“Where’d you learn how to cook?” she asked, blowing on her pizza slice to cool it off. “Your mom?”

“Yeah, kind of,” he replied. “She worked nights at this factory, though, while I was growin’ up, so I had to make dinner for O a lot.”

“Oh.” That made sense, she supposed, with what she knew about Bellamy’s childhood. He didn’t speak about it with resentment or anything like that, but it seemed pretty clear to her that he’d had to
be a lot more than just a regular big brother. He’d been the man of the house at a very young age, so
given that fact, maybe it wasn’t surprising that he was so skilled at so many things.

“Is it good?” he asked as he watched her eat.

Her mouth was full, so all she could do was nod and say, “Mmm-hmm.”

“The salad probably sucks. I don’t eat salad a whole lot.”

“No, it’s all good,” she assured him. The fact that Bellamy had gone to all the trouble of making an
entire meal for everyone, though, was probably his way of contributing to the welcome back
celebration. He didn’t say that that was what it was, but she kind of suspected.

Most of their friends ate themselves to the point of being sick—Harper, all toned with her six-pack,
even complained about having a food baby in her flat stomach. But Clarke, what with her thirst for
Bellamy being at the forefront of her brain, limited her consumption. She was intent on having a
great deal of sex with him tonight, and she didn’t want any stomachache derailing that plan. Bellamy
didn’t eat much, either, mostly because, by the time he finally got around to fixing himself up a plate,
there was barely anything left.

Since everyone was weighed down with food and no one felt like dancing or wrestling or doing all
the other crazy things they usually did, they ended up just turning on the TV. Finding something
everyone could agree on watching was nearly impossible, especially with Murphy in charge of the
remote; so while their friends bickered and argued with each other and just generally attacked
Murphy for his poor viewing choices, Clarke and Bellamy made out on the couch. Nothing major,
obviously, because Octavia was there. But eventually, Bellamy’s tongue got a little too
rambunctious, leading Octavia to yell, “Ew, could you guys stop? Ugh!”

Nothing ‘ugh’ about it, Clarke thought, reluctantly tearing her mouth away from Bellamy’s. Kissing
technique. That was another chapter for his hypothetical how-to manual.

Even though Murphy lobbied hard for softcore porn, he was outvoted on account of there being two
gay men and a sibling pair in the room. Miller eventually just wrestled the remote out of his hands
and turned on Family Guy, which, it seemed, was something everyone could enjoy. Most of them
lay on the floor, but Miller and Jackson curled up in the recliner, both of them looking like they could
fall asleep early after a long day of work. Jasper wandered over to the kitchen table at some point,
possibly mistaking it for a bed as he climbed up on top of it and lay down on his side. The snoring
started almost instantly, and Maya even brought a blanket over to her boyfriend and covered him up.

Clarke didn’t have anything against Family Guy, but it hadn’t been her first choice. Truth was, no
matter what TV show they’d settled on, it wouldn’t have held her interest. The only thing she could
think about was the man beside her, whose jeans seemed to have gotten a little tighter around the
crotch once they’d started making out. She waited until the commercials, when chatter rose up
among all the others, to attempt to casually broach a subject she’d put off addressing for days.

“Hey, so the other night at my place,” she said, “when we . . . you know.”

“Had sex?” he filled in.

“Yeah.” She didn’t know why she was embarrassed to say it when she was having so much of it.
“Well, I didn’t really give it much thought at the time, but . . .” She lowered her voice, glad to find
that everyone was absorbed in a joke Monty was telling and wouldn’t overhear her. “You didn’t
wear a condom,” she informed him.
“Oh.” His eyebrows darted up in surprise. “Yeah, I didn’t think about it, either. Hmm.” He thought about it for a moment now and shrugged helplessly. “Sorry.”

“No, that’s okay,” she said. “I mean, I’m on the pill, obviously. I just wondered . . . is that a thing we’re doing now?”

“Is it something you wanna do?” he asked back.

“Well, not like regularly or anything.” Maybe an exception could be made for his birthday or New Year’s or something like that. “I mean, we probably shouldn’t.”

“Right,” he agreed. “No, I get it.”

“Is that okay?”

“It’s fine,” he said. “Damn, no wonder it felt so good, though.”

She whacked his shoulder playfully, and the commercial break ended, allowing the episode to resume. Their friends quieted down a bit, just lightly buzzing amongst themselves while, for the most part, they watched the show, laughed at the jokes, and tried to figure out who in their group was the Meg.

“It felt good to me, too,” Clarke whispered to Bellamy. “I mean, not just because it was condom-less. Because it was very . . .” Try as she might, she still couldn’t find the right word to describe what that night had been like for her.

“Brief,” he supplied. “Not my longest performance.”

“Well . . .” Fine, that much was true.

“You didn’t even cum that night, did you?”

“No. But it was still good.”

“Shh!” Murphy shushed them loudly. “I can’t appreciate crude humor if you two are constantly yakking.”

“Shut up, Murphy,” Bellamy growled. And, as usual, that seemed to do the trick. “It was nice,” Bellamy agreed, keeping his voice low and quiet as he grazed his hands up and down Clarke’s bare thigh. Despite how chilly it was getting outside, she’d worn a skirt tonight, just to give him easy access, because . . . well, she wanted him to have easy access. That was the thirst at play again.

“I hope you don’t think it’s gonna be like that every time, though,” he went on.

She tilted her head to the side curiously. “What do you mean?”

“Well, like tonight, when all these people leave?” He locked eyes with her, staring at her seductively. “I fully intend to throw you over my shoulder, carry you up those stairs, toss you down on the bed, and fuck you like you’ve never been fucked before.”

Holy mother of god, she thought, feeling her insides clench with anticipation. “Oh my god.”

“You like that, huh?”

“Yeah.” Bellamy could be the sweetest guy in the world sometimes, but when he decided it was time to throw down, he could turn it on like no one else she’d ever known before. “We might have to try
some of that dirty talk stuff a little more,” she said.

“Ah, it’s overrated,” he declared dismissively. “Besides, that’s more of the whole ‘bad girl’ thing.”

“I can be bad.” She tried to make a sassy, pouty face, but it just kind of morphed back into a smile.

“No, you’re good,” he said, chuckling lightly. Leaning over, he murmured, “You’re such a good girl, remember?” and kissed her cheek.

That simple kiss combined with those simple words . . . it did something to her. Maybe it was a praise kink, as Raven had called it, or maybe it was just the way he said it. Whatever it was, it made the juncture between her legs feel a little slicker. “God, Bellamy,” she said.

“What?”

It wasn’t surprising that she was getting turned on by that, but sitting in a room full of other people perhaps wasn’t the best place for it. “Just hearing you say that,” she replied, smiling sheepishly, “makes me wet.”

“Really?” He quickly scanned the room, apparently convinced that no one was watching them, because he subtly slipped his left hand underneath her skirt and touched her panties. “Wow.” He gave her a few good strokes, then removed his hand.

“And now I’m just getting wetter,” Clarke thought, mesmerized by his daring hands, by the way he’d literally just felt her up with no one noticing.

“Well, in that case . . .” He leaned in and whispered in her ear, “You’re such a sexy girl.”

Oh god, this was just getting out of control. She felt herself getting so wet, there was surely about to be evidence of it on that couch if she didn’t get some kind of . . . thirst-quencher. “Bellamy,” she said, rubbing her legs together wantonly, “I can’t wait.”

He stared at her with a look of wonder and intrigue in his eyes. “No?”

“No.” Normally she had more self-restraint than this, but her hormones were just out of control. Maybe subconsciously she was trying to make up for the seven day drought without him, because all she could think about was getting him naked and getting him inside her. But the night was still young, and these people would likely be over here for a while, possibly watching one episode of this stupid show right after another . . .

“Let’s go,” Bellamy decided, shooting to his feet. He pulled Clarke up, too, and they scurried up the stairs, completely obvious about what they were going to go do.

“There they go,” Miller narrated, unsurprised.

“I think I’m gonna be sick,” Murphy muttered.

He stared at her with a look of wonder and intrigue in his eyes. “No?”

“Let’s go,” Bellamy decided, shooting to his feet. He pulled Clarke up, too, and they scurried up the stairs, completely obvious about what they were going to go do.

“There they go,” Miller narrated, unsurprised.

“I think I’m gonna be sick,” Murphy muttered.

Even though he didn’t follow through on his plan to carry her up those stairs, Bellamy did seem fully intent on following through with his promise to make it a wild time. He managed to get her completely undressed before they even reached his bedroom, and once inside, he kicked the door shut loudly. He made good on his idea about throwing her down on the bed, and his problematic headboard lurched forward when he did so.

“Take your shirt off,” she told him when she noticed his fingers getting right to work on his pants.
He grabbed his t-shirt at the hem and pulled it over his head swiftly. Yeah, that was one good masculine chest right there. She loved Bellamy’s build. He had defined muscles but wasn’t bulky like a bodybuilder. No, he was a lot leaner than that. And his skin... seriously, how had his parents’ genetics combined to create that skin tone? Plus, the freckles. Even though most of them were on his face, they were still kind of everywhere.

Everywhere.

“Come here,” he said, grabbing hold of her ankles, pulling her over to the side of the bed. He pressed her knees up towards her chest, getting her positioned exactly how he wanted her: on her back, legs spread at the perfect height for him to stand next to that bed and drive into her.

“Condom,” she reminded him as he pushed his jeans and underwear down past his knees.

“I know.” He grabbed one off his nightstand—god, just how horny were they that they had a box of condoms just sitting out there in full view?—and quickly sheathed himself, bending his knees so he could press the tip of his cock against her entrance. Then, holding onto her calves with both hands, he slammed inside roughly, making her whole body jolt.

“Oh!” she cried out, having to instantly stretch to accommodate his girth. There was no foreplay, no easing her into it this time, no going slow. Nope. He’d told her he was going to fuck her, and that was exactly what he was already doing.

“Shit,” he swore as he began moving his hips into her.

“Oh god.” Thankfully, her natural lubrication made it easy for him to establish his rhythm and give her long, hard thrusts right away.

He moaned—and she could count on one hand the number of times she’d heard Bellamy Blake legitimately moan—as he pounded her. It was a loud moan, too, the kind that echoed off the walls of that bedroom in time with the squeaking of his mattress. “Fuck,” he swore, penetrating deep enough and hard enough that the skin of his thighs slapped against the back of hers.

Clarke was faintly aware that, downstairs, Octavia was shrieking, “That’s disgusting, Bellamy! I can hear everything you’re doing!” but that was nowhere near enough to make her consider stopping.

“That’s too bad,” Bellamy decided, likewise undeterred. He leaned forward a bit, pressing his hands down hard on the back of her knees, and kept pushing her legs further backward, opening her up to him even more. Clarke wasn’t especially flexible, so it wasn’t the most comfortable position. But even though there was some slight discomfort, the knowledge that it was Bellamy who was the one stretching her like this was enough to make her relish it.

“Oh . . .” she purred as he continued to fuck her. It felt like he was going really deep this time, maybe due to the position or just due to the power of his thrusts. He kept leaning forward, hovering so far over her that her legs had nowhere else to go but up over his shoulders. God, she was gonna be sore tomorrow.

“Fuck, Clarke,” he grunted, grabbing hold of her hips to yank her back towards the edge of the bed.

“Oh . . .” she yelled, wincing in some pain when she felt something she hadn’t ever felt before. It just felt like there no room for him left to go, and she could literally feel his balls slapping against her ass. “Ow, Bellamy,” she whimpered.

“What?” He immediately stopped and moved his hips back a bit, alleviating some of that ‘full’ feeling. “You okay?”
She took a second to breathe and try to relax her muscles again. “Yeah.”

“Did I hurt you?”

She knew how concerned Bellamy would be about that, probably to the point where he’d stop altogether, and she didn’t want that to happen. “I’m fine,” she reassured him, moving her legs off his shoulders strictly for comfort reasons. “Keep going.”

“You sure?” he asked.

“Uh-huh.” She tried unsuccessfully to roll her hips against him, but he was very much the dominant one in this position, so it was kind of up to him to start moving again.

He thrust forward again, not all the way this time, and his pace had slowed significantly.

“Bellamy, _fuck me_,” she urged, feeling like she could get off pretty quickly if he just kept pounding her. Maybe not quite as deep as he’d just been, but . . . going pretty deep was still fine. She liked feeling him inside her. It was a rush.

Bellamy was pretty much in a haze, even though he had broken out of it long enough to check on her. He soon did resume the pace of his thrusts, _really_ doing her, and even brought his thumb down to massage her clit while he did so. The sensations started to overwhelm Clarke, and there was no doubt she’d be cumming in no time. “Oh god, Bellamy . . .”

“Clarke, my headboard,” he said suddenly.

“What?”

“It’s gonna fall over.” He was still fucking her, but his eyes were fixated up on the top of his bed now.

She didn’t care if it fell over. She just wanted to get off on this. “Don’t stop,” she begged.

“Clarke—”

_Please._ If he just kept touching her, she’d get there in no time.

“Shit, Clarke.” All of a sudden he lifted her up off the bed, right as the headboard came crashing down. The wood made a horrible splintering sound, and half of it landed on the pillows, just above where her head had been. The whole bedframe kind of a shifted, and the mattress sank down slightly on Bellamy’s side.

Somehow, though, thankfully, _miraculously_, he was still inside her. The only difference was that now he was holding her up. “Ah, this works,” he decided, locking his arms tightly around her to hold her in place while he fucked up into her.

Later that night, with the bed out of commission, they lay on the floor, a big comforter he’d dug out of the back of his closet underneath them. He’d stripped the sheets off his bed, and she’d grabbed the pillows, so now, the floor was pretty much converted into a bed. It wasn’t quite as comfortable, but it would do. Hell, Clarke would’ve slept out on the street as long as Bellamy had been with her. After sex, she just liked _being_ with him, being close to him, keeping some kind of physical contact.

“So what was that called,” she asked, using her finger to trace invisible drawings on his bare back, “where I felt really . . . filled up?”
“Bottoming out,” he replied, his head pillowed on both arms.

“I think Raven likes that.” She remembered hearing the terminology before but never actually experiencing the sensation herself. “Do you like it?” she questioned him.

“Well, yeah,” he confessed. “I basically got to put my entire dick inside you, so yeah, I thought it felt great.”

The thought of him being *that* deep inside her was both head-spinning and exhilarating. She’d gone from being able to handle about half of Bellamy’s cock during their first time together to this? Crazy. “It only hurt a little,” she assured him, tracing light hearts on his back.

“That’s ‘cause I fucked it up,” he said. “I did it wrong.”

“What?” She’d never heard Bellamy speak about his bedroom performance with anything but the utmost pride and confidence before.

“Yeah, you’re supposed to go slow,” he said. “I wasn’t even tryin’ to . . . but, you know, I was caught up in it, so it just happened.”

She sensed that he was feeling a little bad about the whole thing. He’d been quieter tonight than he normally was, not quite so flirty and definitely not so willing to do it all again. “It’s fine,” she reassured him. “We can try it again sometime.”

“No, we don’t have to.”

“I want to.” She liked the thought of being able to take *all* of Bellamy. It wasn’t easy, that was for sure, but it was worth it to at least try.

“Well, we’ll see,” he said. “What’re you drawing on my back, by the way?”

What *was* she drawing now? She kept switching it up. “Property of Clarke Griffin,” she teased.

“Oh, really?”

“No, I’m drawing a cat.”

He wrinkled his forehead in confusion.

“I’m seriously drawing a cat,” she said.

“Why?”

“I don’t know.” She’d pretended to draw lots of things. If he’d allowed her to use that Sharpie in his drawer, his back and shoulder blades would have been a mural by now.

“You’re weird,” he remarked.

“I thought I was sexy.”

“Weirdly sexy.” He smiled drowsily, looking like he could fall asleep any minute now. Clarke was actually feeling a bit tired herself, but she also felt kind of . . . sore. The more she lay there, the more everything was starting to hurt, and she kept having to move around to try to get comfortable.

She rolled over onto her back, first trying to stretch out, then brought her knees upward when that didn’t make her feel any better.
“What’s wrong?” he asked, sounding concerned.

“I just can’t really get comfy,” she said, trying to arch her back. “I have cramps.”

“Oh, is it *that* time?” Being a guy, he started to lean away, as if period cramps were contagious or something.

“No, I just kinda hurt,” she said. “My stomach hurts. My back hurts. I have cramps.”

He frowned worriedly.

“We’ve had a lot of sex, Bellamy,” she pointed out. “I think it’s all just catching up to me.”

“No,” he said, rolling over onto his back, sighing heavily. “This is my fault, too. This happens sometimes after . . . that happens.”

He sounded sure, so maybe he’d had some prior experience with this. “So . . . I have cramps because you bottomed out?” she said.

“Pretty much.” He cringed. “Sorry.”

“No, it’s okay.” It was definitely a reasonable explanation, what with him possibly hitting some things inside he hadn’t hit before. Ultimately, on a pain scale of one to ten, though, this was a very minor four, more annoying than it was actually painful. “It’s not that bad.”

He, however, seemed to think it was that bad, because he got right up, grumbling, “Can’t even get in the bed right now” frustratedly. He surveyed the headboard, shaking his head in defeat, and sat down on the mattress, testing it out. It sank even more under his weight, so maybe it wasn’t just the headboard that had given out. Maybe there was something underneath, too, that needed to be repaired.

“I’m just breakin’ everything tonight,” he lamented. “Maybe I can fix it.”

“No, Bellamy.” She frowned. “Can’t you just lay with me?” As sweet as it was that he wanted to fix his bed so she could get comfortable in it, the most comfortable thing of all was just to have his arms around her. As long as she had that, she’d start to feel better.

“Okay, give me a minute,” he said. “Wait here.”

She was a little surprised that he just headed out of the bedroom without a stitch of clothing on, but she figured he had some sort of plan in mind. She heard him doing something out there. Moving something, perhaps? It was hard to say.

When he came back into the room a few minutes later, he said, “Alright, come here,” and knelt down next to her, scooping her up into his arms. “I got you,” he said, wrapping the both of them up in that big white comforter. He managed to stand up and carry her out to . . . a bed. A bed that was usually just a ratty old green couch.

“I didn’t know this was a fold-out couch,” she remarked randomly.

“Actually, it’s Miller’s fold-out couch,” he said, first sitting down with her, then lying down. He kept them both wrapped up in that comforter, their bare chests mating, but she had a feeling she’d be even more comfortable if he spooned up to her from behind, so she turned over onto her opposite side.

“Mmm, this feels better,” she murmured.
“Yeah? That’s good.” He seemed to want to make sure the comforter was pulled up all the way over her shoulders and that his arms were wrapped securely around her waist, holding her close. “Maybe we can break this one, too,” he joked.

She laughed a little, but not too much because . . . yeah, things were still a little sore. A few minutes of this, though, and she’d probably feel a million times better.

“Can I ask you something?” he announced suddenly.

“Sure.” She realized what he was doing before he even started doing it. He was going to get her talking about something else to get her mind off of how tense her abdominal muscles felt.

“How’d you ever get into art?” he inquired. “Because you’d say you’re a logical person, right? You’re a thinker; you have plans. You use your head, have a sense of control in your life.”

“Right.” Well, that certainly showed that he knew her. Because even though her plans weren’t always set in stone, they did exist. And even though she’d tried not to overthink things and use her head too much these past few weeks, she still found herself doing so from time to time.

“Well, aren’t artists supposed to be the opposite of that? Like really free-spirited?” If she could have, she would have shrugged. “Sometimes.”

“And when we’re together . . . I’m not sayin’ we’ve got 50 Shades of Blake goin’ on or anything . . .” She couldn’t help but laugh at that.

“. . . but you don’t seem to mind relinquishing some of the control to me.”

“Well, you’re more experienced,” she pointed out. “Plus, truth be told, Bellamy . . .” She found his forearms beneath the comforter, tracing her fingertips across his skin in more lazy patterns and designs. “I got into art at a young age because it was the one thing I could do where I could shut my brain off and not think and not overanalyze. I could just do it and try it and see how it turned out.”

“Hmm.” He nuzzled his face against the back of her neck. “Sounds familiar.”

“Exactly, right? That’s kind of how I feel with you. Because when I’m with you, I don’t feel worried about all the things I can’t control. I don’t feel like I have to have everything figured out. I just feel . . .” Her eyes fluttered closed, so heavy, so tired, and she struggled to find the right word. “Happy,” she finally decided on. Because even though it was a generic word, it was also important. And accurate. “I’m happy, Bellamy.”

She was way too tired to elaborate, too tired to do anything other than lie there in his arms and slowly fall asleep. But as she was drifting off, she did feel him press a kiss to the top of her head and whisper, “I’m happy, too.”
Bellamy awoke to a confused, “What the hell?” from Miller, who was already up and dressed for work.

It took him a few seconds to remember why he and Clarke were lying on the pull-out couch, wrapped up in a comforter, each other, and not much else. “Hey,” he said, tugging upward on the comforter so he could cover up Clarke’s chest for her. Not that his gay best friend was going to stand there and ogle it.

“What’re you guys doin’ out here?” Miller asked.

Bellamy yawned. Apparently Miller had come upstairs and gone to bed early last night, because it had probably only been 11:00 when he and Clarke had moved on out to the couch. “My bed broke,” he explained, wondering if Jackson, too, had wandered out of Miller’s bedroom earlier this morning and experienced a similar confusion.

“Was that was that sound was?” Miller asked, adjusting his tie.

“Yeah, go look.”

Miller opened the door to Bellamy’s room, surveyed the damage, and chuckled. “Wow, man.”

Even though Bellamy knew that was gonna be one hell of a fix-it job, if he even could fix it at all, he couldn’t deny the cool factor. He and Clarke had broken the bed. They had literally broken his bed. That was a first, even for him.

“You guys are crazy,” Miller said, shaking his head in amazement as he headed for the stairs. “Morning, Clarke.”

Bellamy looked down next to him, where Clarke was stirring just a bit. Her hair was all over the place, her makeup smudged, and knowing her, it’d take a good ten minutes of trying to wake up for her to actually wake up. She wasn’t a morning person.

At 9:10, Clarke remembered that she had class at 9:30, so that sent her into a panic. She took the quickest shower he’d ever seen her take, threw on some clothes she’d stashed in his bottom dresser drawer the other night, and begged him to drive her to campus so she wouldn’t have to worry about parking her car. Even though he wasn’t the most familiar with all those one-way campus streets, he managed to get her there with five minutes to spare.

“Thank you,” she said, leaning over to give him a quick kiss before she reached for the door handle.

“Hey, you feelin’ alright?” he questioned before she could get out. “You good?”

“Yeah. Last night’s snuggle session did the trick.”

“Good.” He hated knowing that having sex with him had caused her some discomfort afterward, but at least it wasn’t anything major.

“Good luck with your bed today,” she said as she carefully climbed out of his truck, moving a little gingerly.
“Yeah, I’ll see you later, alright?”

“Alright.” She shut the door and headed up the sidewalk towards a building that said Burnett Hall on the outside. She was walking kind of weird, had a little waddle going on. And he knew that was because of him. It didn’t take a genius to figure it out.

He smirked, watching her go, because even though he felt kind of guilty for making her so sore, he also felt . . . kind of proud.

Since the only job he’d booked for the day was fixing Diana Sydney’s toaster—the woman was really running out of things for him to do—he had plenty of free time that afternoon to figure out a plan for his bed. He moved the mattress outside the room and got to work, like a doctor fixing up patient. Except his patient was in critical condition. That damn bed was more busted up than he’d thought. The problem was, he’d let that headboard get way too far out of alignment with the rest of the old wooden frame, and that was bad news for the frame. So now there were other boards besides the headboard that had split apart, too. The box springs were a mess, but that was mainly because they were old, and all in all, it looked like it was going to be a pain in the ass to even try to fix. Around 2:00, after an hour of attempting to resurrect his patient, he just stared down at the mess of it helplessly, pretty sure he’d just made it worse.

“Bellamy?”

He heard his sister say his name when she came in downstairs, so he called back, “Up here!” He put his hands on his hips and shook his head, resigned to having lost the patient. It’d been a good bed, but it was time for a new one. Time of death: 2:05 p.m.

“My god,” Octavia said, climbing over the mattress as she made her way into his room. “What happened here?”

“Clarke and I broke the bed,” he replied. “Ew.” She scrunched up her face in disgust.

“It’s been in bad shape for a while,” he said, kicking at the one of the broken boards. “I probably just need a new one.” He wasn’t looking to spend a whole lot of money, but he had enough on hand to make a trip to the thrift store. Hopefully he could find something there that could accompany a queen-sized mattress, because there was nothing wrong with his mattress, and he wasn’t about to give it up.

“You guys are psychotic,” Octavia declared, rubbing her temples.

“What? It was gonna break no matter what.”

“No, not just ‘cause of this. Because of . . .” Octavia made dramatic circles with her hands as she tried to explain. “. . . you guys.”

“Huh?” He wasn’t following.

“You and Clarke, your whole relationship. It confuses me.”

He grunted, crossing his arms over his chest. “That’s ‘cause you never took the time to be friends with Lincoln. You went straight from meeting him to falling in love with him. I don’t expect you to understand.”

“Lincoln is my friend,” she informed him. “But he’s also my boyfriend. And Bellamy, you and
Clarke . . .”

“Are not like that,” he filled in.

“Really? Because last night, you sat on that couch together like a couple, came up here and screwed like a couple . . .”

“But we’re not a couple,” he reminded her emphatically. Truth be told, this wasn’t even a conversation he was interested in having, especially given the things he wanted to say about her own relationship. So he shook his head and treaded downstairs.

She followed him, though, of course, unwilling to let it go. “So let me get this straight,” she said. “If Clarke was out there having sex with somebody else right now, you’d be totally fine with it?”

He’d be confused what she was getting from someone else that she couldn’t get from him, but other than that . . . “Yeah,” he replied.

“And if she said, ‘Hey, Bellamy, I can’t break any more beds with you, because I have a new boyfriend now,’” Octavia went on, “that wouldn’t bother you?”

“Nope.” He pulled open the refrigerator and took out two bottles of water, handing her one. “I mean, I’d miss the sex, but we’d still be friends.”

Octavia squinted at him skeptically and shook her head. “I don’t believe you.”

“Well, you don’t have to believe me.” At the end of the day, it didn’t matter whether she understood or not. As long as he and Clarke understood it, then it was fine.

“I think you’d be jealous,” Octavia speculated. “And I think she would be, too, if you hooked up with someone else. Because you guys like each other, Bellamy, a lot.”

“Yeah, of course we like each other. That’s why we’re friends. See how we’ve come full circle here?”

She rolled her eyes, opened her water bottle, and took a drink. “You know what else I don’t understand?” she grumbled. “Why is it okay for you to pass judgment on my relationship but I can’t pass judgment on yours?”

“Judge it all you want,” he allowed. “But that’s not gonna change it. It’s a friendship. Nothing more.”

“Nothing more,” she echoed, grunting. “Bellamy, I love you, but I think you’re full of shit.”

He shrugged, content to let her think that. As long as she loved him, she could think whatever she wanted to think about him, about his relationships. She could get annoyed at him for not attempting something serious with Clarke; she could get pissed at him for not accepting Lincoln. For as close as they were, they’d never seen eye to eye on everything, and these things were no different.

In the days following his sister’s visit, Bellamy didn’t speak to Octavia much. He wasn’t mad at her, per se, but he was admittedly frustrated. She knew what he’d been through in the past, the heartache he’d endured. She knew why a romantic relationship wasn’t in the cards for him. Yet she was trying to force one onto him. What was that about?

The next time he saw her was on “Thirsty Thursday” at TonDC. Some local rapper was making his stage debut, so the place was pretty packed, though nowhere near as crowded as it had been on
Halloween. Everyone showed up, which meant Bellamy was forced to sit there and watch Lincoln and Octavia be . . . Lincoln and Octavia. And he wasn’t happy about it.

“Look at that,” he said to Clarke when Lincoln put his arm around Octavia’s shoulders. “Look at that overt display of public affection.”

Clarke gave him a look. “Seriously? We had sex in a dressing room.”

He took a shot, getting the feeling that Clarke might be the one carrying him out of there tonight.

“I think they’re cute,” she bravely declared.

“What?” Since when the fuck was she was on this bandwagon? “I thought you were on my side.”

“I didn’t know there were sides.”

“Yeah, there’s their side, which sucks, and there’s my side, which I thought you’d be on since I give you orgasms.”

Groaning frustratedly, she rolled her eyes. “Fine, I’m on your side then.”

That wasn’t convincing. “No, you’re not.”

“No, I’m not,” she admitted easily. “I can’t help it, Bellamy. Look at them.”

“I’m trying not to.”

“They’re adorable. He loves her.”

“But you know what I don’t get?” He had to look away when his sister started toying with the buttons on her boyfriend’s shirt. “She acts like they’re the ideal thing. Like everyone should aspire to have that kind of relationship. She doesn’t understand that what you and I have is different, but it works for us.”

Clarke frowned. “What do you mean she doesn’t understand?”

He sighed, not sure if TonDC was the right place for him to vent his frustrations. But oh, well. Too late to stop now. “The other day, she came by, said some stuff.”

“Stuff?” Clarke echoed, tilting her head to the side curiously.

“Yeah.” He glanced over at Octavia and Lincoln again, having to look away quickly because they were kissing now. “She doesn’t think we’re just friends. She doesn’t get it.”

“Oh.” Clarke thought about it a moment, then shrugged. “Oh, well. You don’t get her and Lincoln.”

“Yeah, but . . .” Dammit, when she put it like that, it made him feel like a hypocrite. But he was still frustrated. “I don’t know why it’s so hard for her to understand.”

“Well . . .” Clarke set her drink down on the table, shrugging. “It is a little unconventional,” she acknowledged. “I mean, I know we’re not the first people in history to do friends with benefits, but we’re only doing it with each other.”

“Yeah, so?”

“So in her mind, that probably just blurs the line between friendship and romance,” Clarke
rationalized.

“Huh.” He supposed he could see that. Octavia was more the whirlwind romance type of girl—hell, that was her and Lincoln’s relationship in a nutshell. As much as she claimed to be friends with him, they’d never truly been friends, at least not without that romantic aspect involved. Octavia didn’t know how one could exist without the other because she’d never experienced it.

“Not in your mind, though, right?” he asked, just to make sure their boundaries with each other were still clear. “It’s not blurry?”

“No, I know what we are,” Clarke reassured him. “I like what we are. It’s fun.”

“Very fun,” he agreed. Still, though, in a weird way, maybe his whole talk with Octavia had brought up something important. He and Clarke were close, no doubt about that, and they were spending a lot of time together. But perhaps it wouldn’t be a bad thing to branch out a bit, just for the night, just to remind everyone else that they weren’t really dating. Because they didn’t need to remind themselves, or each other. No, they themselves were perfectly clear. But if that line between friendship and romance was blurry for Octavia, then maybe it was blurry for Miller, too, for Murphy, for all of them. But he and Clarke could fix that.

“I got an idea,” he announced.

“Oh, no, this doesn’t sound good.”

“No, I think we should prove her wrong,” he said, “prove we know what we’re doing.”

“And how exactly are we gonna do that?”

He motioned around to the club they were in, where there had to be plenty of single people, or at the very least people who were pretending they were single for the night. “Why don’t we get out there and meet people? You meet some guy—or girl, whatever—I’ll meet a girl, and we’ll just . . . do our own thing tonight.”

“Our own thing?” Clarke echoed. “You want me to go have sex with someone else?”

“Go have fun with someone else,” he urged. “If that’s flirting, it’s flirting. If that’s sex, it’s sex.”

She blinked rapidly a few times, then looked down at her lap dejectedly.

“Don’t do that,” he said, feeling guilty.

“Do what?”

“Look sad.” He hated seeing her look that way.

“I’m not sad,” she claimed. “Just . . . kinda bummed. I mean, I don’t wanna have sex with just anybody, Bellamy. I wanna have sex with you.”

“Then don’t have sex.”

“Are you gonna have sex?”

“Probably not.” Truth was, he wasn’t particularly interested in sleeping with anyone else right now, either.

Clarke definitely wasn’t quite as socially outgoing as he was, so he wasn’t sure she’d agree to it. It
took her a minute or two of contemplation, but finally, she decided, “Fine. Let’s prove Octavia wrong. Let’s do our own thing tonight.”

“Well, well, well, I thought, sort of impressed. Maybe Clarke had gotten a little more confident since they’d begun fucking.

Harper fluttered over to him, taking Clarke’s seat and immediately started babbling, “Oh my god, what’s going on? Are you and Clarke fighting?”

“No, we’re just not dating, either,” he reminded her.

She looked bewildered for a moment, and he realized she had probably forgotten that. Maybe they all had. Maybe every single one of his friends had the same assumption that Octavia had. They were, after all, all in relationships. Every single one of them. It wouldn’t be surprising if they doubted that he and Clarke had what it took to pull this unique type of relationship off.

Well, if that was the case, then it was time to prove them all wrong.

Confident in his sense of rhythm, Bellamy opted to mingle out on the dance floor instead of at the bar, thereby giving Clarke plenty of space. He ran into a few girls from high school, chatted them up a bit. Then a few of his clients spotted him and said, “You’re the guy who cleaned my gutter,” or “You fixed my broken windshield.” A woman who looked to be in her forties even said, “I hear you’ll do some plumbing work. Wanna clean my pipes?” Not subtle, and he was not interested.

He’d been mingling for about thirty minutes, a bit aggravated that no one had really caught his eye yet, when he let his attention drift back toward the bar, just to see what Clarke was up to. She was still talking to the same girl, but she was leaning forward even more now, showing off plenty of cleavage.

“Man, I gotta up my game,” he thought, impressed by how outgoing his princess was being.

Almost as if on cue, the crowd parted, and he caught sight of another beautiful blonde girl, this one dancing with her friends. She wasn’t quite as shapely as Clarke, definitely didn’t have the same type of chest, but she had the same hairstyle. Unlike Clarke, she also seemed to be a good dancer.

He strode towards her, grabbing her arm gently, pulling her away from her group. “Hey,” he said, hoping he wouldn’t have to say anything more to get her interested.

She looked him up and down and grinned. “Hey.”

Bullseye, he thought. This was the simple kind of girl, the kind he could get with so easily if he wanted to. In fact, prior to Clarke, this was the kind of girl he’d spent his nights hooking up with.

He learned the basic facts about her, just because. Her name was Bree. She didn’t live in Arkadia but was there visiting some friends for a couple days. She was nineteen. She was pretty.

Bree stayed with him rather than returning to her friends once the rapper came up on stage. They danced a bit, even though neither of them knew the songs. He pretty much kept his hands on her waist while she moved in front of him, deliberately swirling her ass back against his crotch the whole
time.

Oh, yeah. She could definitely move.

In between songs, Bellamy looked over at the bar again. Clarke was still there, but she had a new companion now: a guy. A chubby, pale guy who was using a napkin to wipe the sweat off his prematurely balding head. Whatever he was saying was currently making Clarke laugh.

_Huh_, Bellamy thought. That was an interesting choice.

Bellamy made it through two more songs before he started feeling restless. This rapper wasn’t great; all his songs sounded the same. Besides, the guy at the bar got up and left for a minute, so now was his chance to go check in with Clarke, see if she was having fun, make sure she wasn’t drinking too much. That sort of thing.

“I’ll be back,” he told Bree, not sure if she even heard him as he slipped through the crowd and off the dance floor.

Clarke must have noticed him approaching, but she deliberately looked away.

“That guy, huh?” Bellamy said, leaning against the counter.

“Yeah, he’s nice.”

“He’s like the opposite of me.”

“And your little Barbie’s like my spitting image.”

“No,” he denied.

“Blonde hair, half ponytail? Really, Bellamy?”

He stuffed his hands in his front pockets, unable to deliver a comeback because, yeah, from a distance, the resemblance was uncanny and he knew it. “You doin’ alright?” he asked.

“I’m good,” she said. “I’m having a great time.”

“Yeah, me, too,” he said, although honestly . . . he wasn’t quite sure that was true. Bree was . . . fine. She was just fine.

“You might wanna get back out there before somebody snatches your girl up,” Clarke suggested.

_My girl?_ he thought. Nah, even if she wasn’t his girlfriend, his girl was sitting right there at that counter. She was the one he wanted to take home, the one whose body he couldn’t wait to get his hands on. Bree was just a replacement.

“All right, well, have fun with Jonah Hill here,” he urged.

“Goodbye, Bellamy.”

He sighed and headed back out onto the dance floor.

Bree was still there, still waiting for him, still wanting to dance with him, although this time she was a little more daring. She turned to face him, eyes fixated on his hips as they moved. He wasn’t doing his best dancing, but apparently it was enough to turn her on, because all of a sudden, her hand was sliding down his pants, cupping him through his underwear.
“Ooh,” she said excitedly. “God was generous with you.”

Her hand . . . her hand right there . . . it wasn’t that it didn’t feel good. Because he was a guy, and that was his penis, so yes, of course it felt good. But he just couldn’t help but think of how Clarke’s smaller hands felt so much better.

Yeah, he just wasn’t into this.

Grabbing Bree’s wrist, he lifted her hand, much to her confusion. “Sorry,” he said. “Not tonight.”

She frowned at first, then pouted exaggeratedly.

“Sorry,” he said again, figuring he didn’t owe her an explanation. He left the dance floor and made that same trek to the bar, glad to see that Clarke was still sitting by herself. The stool next to her was conveniently empty, so he sat down.

They just stared at each other for a moment, both of them trying not to smile.

“I was bored,” he finally admitted.

“I was, too,” she said quietly.

“Not jealous, though,” he made sure to clarify. Because that was important.

“No, me, neither.”

“Good.” He looked over at Octavia, who seemed to have caught sight of him and was literally face-palming. “I think we proved our point, though,” he said, “don’t you?”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “You met someone, I met people.”

“We weren’t jealous,” her reiterated.

“We did our own thing for, like, two hours.”

Really, that was it? It had felt longer than that. “But it just seems stupid to bother with these other people when we know we have each other,” he said.

“Right. I mean, we could go home and we could just . . .” She trailed off, leaving it up to his mind to conjure up all sorts of fantasies.

“We could just,” he echoed, grinning at her. God, there were still so many things he wanted to do with her. They’d barely scratched the surface of all the amazing things their bodies could do together.

She got up off her stool, coming to stand in between his legs. Her hands found his, her eyes all innocently downcast as he murmured, “We could probably just leave now, if you want.”

It was only midnight, and all their friends were likely going to stay for a while. But if the alternative was an early start to getting it on with Clarke Griffin, then there was no decision to be made. “I like the way you think,” he said, pressing up on the underside of her chin so she would look at him.

She smiled prettily, and he kissed her.

Fifteen minutes later, he was still kissing her as they tumbled in the front door of his house, stepping on each other’s feet in their haste, clamoring to get each other’s clothes off. He made more progress than she did, ridding her of both her shirt and her skirt while her fingers fumbled with his jeans.
“I don’t care what people think, Bellamy,” she moaned passionately as he sucked hungrily on her neck. “I love our friendship.”

“It’s the best,” he agreed, moving her hands aside so he could take over. He quickly divested himself of his jeans, then lifted his arms in the air as she pulled his shirt over his head.

“Did you get your new bed?” she asked breathily as he backed her towards the staircase.

“No yet.”

“No?”

“No.”

Clumsily, they tried walking up the stairs together, but they’d only made it a few steps up when he realized . . . there was no point. Right now, his bed was just a mattress on the floor. Why not just stop and do it right there instead?

“Come here,” he said, encircling his arms around her waist. He pulled her body in tightly against his, taking a moment to rub his groin against her. But she gasped when he suddenly spun her around and pressed down on her shoulder blades, effectively bending her over right there on the staircase.

“Oh my god, Bellamy,” she whispered, holding onto the railing.

Oh, yeah, he thought, lifting one of her left leg up to the railing as well. This is gonna be hot. He swiftly shoved his boxer briefs down and shucked them off his feet, then moved in close behind her, positioning himself at her entrance. She was already wet, so when he started to slide in, it felt so good. So, so good.

And that was when he realized he wasn’t wearing a rubber.

“Shit,” he swore, pulling out quickly. “Stay there.” He had to run down the stairs and grab his jeans off the floor, praying he had a condom in one of the pockets.

“Bellamy,” she whined impatiently.

“I’m coming.” He finally found one, tearing open the package as he hurried back up the stairs. He slid it on in record time, got right back behind her where he belonged, kneading the round flesh of her ass he plunged right back into her hot, tight pussy. A rush of air escaped her lungs.

God, this was always such a fucking rush for him, this first moment when they were joined. For a second, it was like he forgot his own name, and all he could think about was how warm and soft she felt, and how lucky he was to be inside her.

Fuck the hell outta her, his mind screamed, so he started pounding away.

“Oh!” she cried out. “Oh . . .”

“Yeah.” It felt good to him, too.

She started to lean forward as he fucked her, so far forward that he was actually kind of worried she might lose her balance and fall over that railing; so he grabbed her hair, pulling on it to get her to lean back a bit. She must have thought he was just being rough with her because she moaned. Loudly.

With one hand tangled in her hair, the other gripping her hip, he watched in amazement as her body accepted his. It was such a turn-on, getting to see his cock sliding in and out of her, seeing the way it
stretched her. She was so small, so petite, but she took him so well. Such a good girl she was.

As much as he was enjoying the position, particularly the view, being on the stairs for this was already killing his legs, and it couldn’t have been easy for her to be perched on the railing, either. So he put one hand around her stomach, the other around her chest, and lifted her torso up so that her back was to his chest, carefully making the move to sit down and bring her along with him. Unfortunately, his cock slipped out of her, which he’d been trying to avoid, but at the very least, it elicited a disappointed whimper from her.

“Here we go,” he said, helping her straddle his lap. “Get on there.”

She looked a little confused at first, almost like she’d been expecting him to turn her around. But he wanted to try a new position, one he had no doubt she would enjoy.

With one hand, she held his cock steady as she slowly sank back down on top of it. She rolled and circled her hips a bit, getting situated to her liking, and he forced his own hips to stay still, willing to relinquish some of the control to her this time. Yeah, usually, he ended up on top, but she was more than capable.

When she started to ride him, he had flashbacks to their first time together in his truck. He hadn’t had the privilege of seeing and feeling her full naked body that night, but now he did. He could feel her ass sliding against his lower abdomen as she moved up and down on him, could watch her tits bounce when he peeked over her shoulder. Fuck, her breasts were a thing of beauty, probably the most amazing thing he’d ever seen. They fascinated him to the point where, even though he was trying to keep his hands off her and just let her go to work, he couldn’t resist bringing both of them up to cup her tits and give them a good squeeze.

“Oh, yeah,” she moaned, throwing her head back against his shoulder when he did that.

He pressed his cheek against her, sensing that he was probably closer to cumming than she was, even though she was clearly enjoying this just as much as he was. Sometimes, as much as he loved the foreplay, he just felt like skipping it and getting to the main event; but if she needed a little more, he could give that to her.

Gradually, he slid his hand downward, past her flat, smooth stomach to the juncture where he was penetrating her. He rubbed her clit with his middle finger, smiling at the reaction that got out of her. She inhaled, her entire body stilling for a moment before she started riding him again. He rubbed furiously, desperate to get her off before he came. He could tell she was close when she stopped bouncing so much and sank down as low onto him as she could, shifting her movements to more of a grind. She moved as forcefully against his hand as she did his cock, and watching her entire body wriggle and writhe as she chased her climax . . . it was one of the sexiest things he’d ever seen.

“Cum for me, baby,” he whispered in her ear. And she was a goner after that.

His name fled her lips, and her pussy clamped down on his cock as her orgasm shattered through her. Her juices coated his cock and seeped out onto his fingers, too, but for some reason, the thing that really got him was how her fingernails dug into his thigh while she rode out the wave. All he had to do was jerk his hips up into her a few more times to find an equally satisfying release.

He sat with her afterward while they both came down from it, still inside her, one arm around her midsection, the other holding her breasts. Her eyes were shut, her whole body slumped back against his, and she looked completely spent. Her sweat-soaked hair was proof of how hard she’d worked just now.
“Good job, Princess,” he praised, a bit breathless himself. Her stomach muscles fluttered in response.
Chapter 12

Thanksgiving used to be Clarke’s favorite holiday, back when her father had been alive. He’d been an amazing cook, so he knew how to make the turkey just right so that it wasn’t too dry or too juicy. He’d taken on the responsibility of preparing everything for their family’s meal—the stuffing, the potatoes, the green bean casserole—and never once had he acted disappointed that Clarke wasn’t a wiz in the kitchen like he was.

Now that he was gone, though, Thanksgiving had lost some of its appeal. It wasn’t her mother’s fault. Abby was a decent cook, too, and to her credit, she tried to make all the same meals Clarke’s dad had. But her turkey was never quite as succulent, her mashed potatoes never quite as well-mashed. She put something in the stuffing Clarke didn’t particularly like, and her green bean casserole was more like green bean mush. She really did try, but it just never turned out quite the same.

Without her dad around, Clarke didn’t really get to see his side of the family on the holidays anymore. Her paternal grandparents were little more than names on a Christmas card at this point. In contrast, her mom’s side of the family all congregated at their huge home in D.C., and there were a lot of them. Aunts and uncles, cousins and half-cousins, and of course, Clarke’s grandparents. Her grandpa couldn’t hear well anymore, so he was pretty laid-back and easy to get along with. But her grandma was kind of nitpicky. It wasn’t uncommon for her to critique Clarke’s clothes or try to run a brush through her hair whenever she first saw her.

This Thanksgiving, Clarke’s plan was just to try to stay invisible, do her time with her family, and then leave as soon as she possibly could. It wasn’t that she didn’t love them. They just were a bit much sometimes.

She parked on the street behind her uncle’s minivan, checking her phone one last time before she headed inside. Raven had sent her a pic on Snapchat of herself and Roan that said “Happy Thanksgiving from Roven.” (Oh, they were in deep now. They’d given themselves a ship name.) She had her trademark bright, effervescent smile on her face, but Roan was just staring grumpily at the camera. Raven had mentioned something about how he didn’t like holidays, except for International Fetish Day, which . . . was that even a real thing?

From the second Clarke walked in the front door, she tensed up. There were all sorts of awkward hugs with relatives she didn’t really know that well, and she had to plaster a smile on her face to disguise the fact that she wasn’t really all that excited to be there.

“Clarke, honey, you look so beautiful,” her grandmother raved, even as she got to work pulling out some loose threads on Clarke’s dress. “How have you been? You’re not still going through that bisexual phase, are you?”

It took everything she had to bite her tongue and keep smiling.

They all congregated in the living room and dining room while her mother worked zealously in the kitchen. Clarke tried her hardest to avoid her grandmother by hugging her grandfather instead and asking him how he was doing. He didn’t hear her, so he didn’t respond. She was glad when Marcus’s mother showed up. He didn’t have any kids of his own, so his mother was his only guest, and she was quite possibly the only easygoing guest. She was a sweet, soft-spoken lady with a penchant for plants—she brought Clarke’s mother a potted fern as a hosting gift every year. Clarke
would have been content to just sit and talk to her all afternoon, because she didn’t nitpick, boast, or
dudge. But her time with her son was limited, so of course she and Marcus spent the majority of their
time talking to each other. Clarke didn’t want to intrude.

Unfortunately, with both her mother and her stepdad occupied, that meant Clarke mainly had to
associate with her cousins while she waited for the meal to be finished. And most of her cousins
were just not nice people. One of them, Brent, ran his own law firm and liked to complain about
having to represent clients from “blue collar walks of life.” Another, Ron, had moved to New York
City a few years back and he couldn’t seem to carry on a conversation without name-dropping
celebrities anymore. The worst, though, was Anna, who was Clarke’s age and very much entrenched
in Ivy League academia. She had this air of social elitism about her that Clarke couldn’t stand, and an
overestimation of her own skills and abilities that matched. Apparently she’d already been accepted
in grad school. Big freaking deal.

“I mean, Harvard law was my first choice,” she babbled, “but Yale should be fine, too.”

Oh my god, Clarke thought. Get me out of here.

Anna took a sip of her tea, doing the whole hoity-toity pinky-up thing, and inquired, “So what have
you been up to?”

Clarke just gave her a despondent look, not because she hadn’t been up to anything, but because she
didn’t care to tell her about it. How could an arrogant Ivy League student possibly find anything
interesting about a small college in Arkadia? Or wild nights with blue-collar people at TonDC? Or
nights tangled up in a certain man’s bedsheets?

Thankfully, the meal was done around 3:00, which gave Clarke an avenue out of any and all further
conversations with these people. She sat down at the table, next to her mother, who sat at one end,
and surveyed the food. That stuffing did not look like her dad’s. And where were the mashed
potatoes? It looked like there were only sweet potatoes this year.

“Did I do okay?” her mother asked nervously.

Clarke smiled, quelling her disappointment. “Yeah.”

Her mother breathed a sigh of relief, and Clarke remembered that this was a stressful day for both of
them.

As they ate, the tradition was that they would all take turns saying what they were thankful for. Since
there were a lot of them at the table, it sometimes took a while, and Clarke had plenty of time to
contemplate what she wanted to say. She wasn’t about to say “my educational opportunities,” like
Anna did, because that was just lame. Nor could she say, “my career,” as Brent did, because she
didn’t have one yet. When it was her turn, she went with her gut and said, “My friends.”

Everyone smiled pleasantly, of course, but no one really said anything until her grandmother
grumbled, “Not girlfriends, I hope.”

She squeezed her fork tightly, feeling as if she were about to burst.

After dinner, she went outside to get some fresh air, wondering if it’d be too rude to just . . . leave.
Had it not been for her mother, who now had the pressure of both a pumpkin and pecan pie on her
mind, she probably would have. Or at the very least, she would have pretended to be sick just so she
could cut out early.

How much longer? she wondered, checking the time on her phone. One hour? Two? Marcus had to
drive his mom back home to her assisted living center, and he’d probably want to do that before it
going dark. Maybe the extended family would leave around that same time? A girl could hope so.

She felt like she just had to text Bellamy, even though he was spending time with his mom and sister
today. I’m going crazy here, she typed out quickly, hoping he’d have some words of encouragement.

A minute later, he texted back an interesting suggestion to alleviate her insanity: Send me a dirty pic.

Clarke stared at the words on the screen, checking carefully to make sure she was reading them right.

Not just any picture, not just a selfie or something. No, a dirty picture.

What do you want to see? she asked, surprised that she was even considering it. Sexting was never
something she’d done before—actually, she was pretty vehemently opposed to it because of all the
horror stories she’d heard about pictures getting leaked. But she trusted Bellamy. If she sent him a
picture, no one else would ever see it.

Surprise me, was his response a few seconds later.

A feeling of excitement started to bubble up inside her when she thought about what he might like to
see. Bellamy made it a habit to pretty much worship her body on a regular basis, but he definitely
had a favorite thing about her, and she definitely knew what it was.

Part of her couldn’t believe she was doing this, but a larger part was eager as hell. She scurried back
inside, heading straight for the bathroom, where she could have a little privacy. She shut the door and
locked it into place, then took a look at her reflection in the mirror. She thought she looked tired, but
Bellamy would still think she looked good. Whatever picture she sent him, he’d like it.

She slid both her sleeves down over her shoulders and lowered the top of her dress enough to take
her breasts out. Then she pushed the cups of her bra aside, exposing them completely. She held her
phone up and out to the side, facing the mirror, and tried to think of some seductive pose to do.

Nothing came to mind, so she just put her other hand on her hip and jutted it out to the side. She
snapped the picture brazenly and then took a look at it. The lighting in there was crap, and she felt
like she looked really pale, but Bellamy would love it. He had this thing about her boobs. More often
than not, when she woke up in the morning, he had his hand on them. And she wasn’t complaining.

He must have been eagerly awaiting that picture, because a few seconds after she’d sent it, he texted
back, Nice.

Clarke pulled her dress back up, wishing he was there. The afternoon would have been so much
more bearable if she could have slipped away with him, just for a few minutes, to get a quick fix. She
still had a bedroom in this house. They could have gone up there and just . . . been quiet.

Just as she was about to trudge back out and rejoin her family, Clarke got another message from
Bellamy. And it had a picture of its own this time: his cock, pulled out of his jeans, one of his large,
strong hands wrapped around the base.

Oh my god, she thought, blushing intensely. No one had ever sent her pictures like this before, but it
was a great picture. Bellamy was unabashedly proud of his cock, and he had every reason to be. Just
seeing it spawned a wetness between her legs.

Gonna need some of that when I get home, she texted him, hoping she knew how turned on this was
making her. It was a rush, that was for sure, doing something so dirty, something anyone in her
family would have disapproved of if they knew about it. In fact, it was such a rush that she was even
considering slipping upstairs to her old bedroom by herself and seeing if her fingers could work some
magic.

*I got my new bed*, he quickly sent back.

The thought of that thrilled her to no end. There was nothing better than spending hours fooling around with Bellamy in his bedroom, nothing she enjoyed more.

“Clarke?” her mother’s voice rang out suddenly, startling her. She knocked on the bathroom door and said, “When you come out, Anna’s gonna show us some pictures of the work she did with the Peace Corps.”

Clarke’s shoulders slumped, and she groaned inwardly. That . . . sounded horrible. But she supposed she could suffer through it as long as she had something to look forward to when she got home.

Bellamy pocketed his phone as he strolled back downstairs, unable to suppress the satisfied smirk on his face. Sexting. Not something he did very often, but maybe he’d have to start doing it more. That picture Clarke had sent him today was sexy as hell, and he had no doubt that the one he’d sent her back had her feeling all worked up now.

His mother, Aurora, and his sister were sitting at the small kitchen table, already eating without him. They had a plate full of food set out for him, though, ready to eat. “What were you up to?” his mom asked him.

“Nothing.” He sat down, inhaling the tempting aromas, and commented, “This looks good, Mom.”

“Thanks,” she said. “I tried something new with the stuffing this year. You’ll have to let me know what you think.”

He picked up his fork, and that was the first thing he went for. It definitely tasted different, but he didn’t know enough about her recipe to know what ingredient she may have either added or taken away. “It’s good,” he declared.

“Yeah, everything’s really good, Mom,” Octavia agreed. “Way better than anything I could’ve cooked.”

“Way better,” Bellamy agreed.

She picked up her roll and lobbed it at him.

“Oh, it’s nice having both of you here,” Aurora said. When she smiled, Bellamy swore she and Octavia looked so much alike. “Nice to have a couple days off, too, not have to work.”

“Are you still workin’ fifty hour weeks?” Bellamy asked, noting the bags under her eyes. She looked tired.

“No, they cut it back to forty,” she informed him

*Cut it back*, he thought bitterly. That was ridiculous. She was still working a 9-5 day, and that was cutting *back*? “If you need help with money or anything, I’ve got a little I could give you,” he offered. He would’ve had more if he hadn’t had to splurge on the new bedframe, but . . .

“Oh, Bellamy, I’m fine,” she reassured him. “You don’t have to take care of me.”

He wanted to, though. He wanted to save up enough money that she’d be able to quit working
someday, or at least cut back to part-time. He wanted to buy her a new house, because this one was small and old and had way too many things wrong with it. He wanted her to not have to worry about money anymore, but since he wasn’t exactly swimming in cash himself, that didn’t seem like a possibility.

“So what about you?” his mother asked. “Have you been busy with work?”

Octavia snorted before he could respond. “Oh, he’s been busy.”

He shot her a warning look.

“What about work?” his mother asked.

“Mmm-hmm.” He focused on the food in front of him, shoveling in more of it so he had an excuse not to talk. There was just no need to delve into his personal life right now.

His mom knew him well, though, of course, and she must have sensed there was more to it than that. “Or with something else?” she asked, sounding hopeful. “A girl?”

“Bingo,” Octavia chimed.

“Bellamy!” His mother’s whole face lit up, and she looked excited for him. “That’s great. Tell me about her.”

He shook his head, desperate for an exit from this conversation. “It’s not really--”


“We’re not really dating,” he muttered.

“They do everything together,” Octavia went on, holding nothing back. “They hang out together, they make out together, they break beds together.”

“Oh my,” his mother said.

“O.” He gave her an incredulous look, silently pleading with her not to say stuff like that in front of their mother.

“Oh, she’s used to it,” Octavia said. “She used to hear you and Roma up in your bedroom all the time.”

He picked up his own roll and tossed it at his sister, but she ducked out of the way and he missed. “Sorry you have to hear all this, Mom,” he apologized on her behalf.

“No, I’m very happy for you,” she told him. “I’m glad you’ve found someone again.”

“No, it’s not like that,” he cautioned.

His mother frowned. “What do you mean?”

Once again, Octavia answered for him. “He says they’re just friends. But I say that’s a load of crap.”


“Then I don’t care what you say about me and Lincoln,” she retorted.
“Fine.”

“Perfect.”

He glared at her, she glared at him, and their poor mother sat in between them, probably a bit stunned by the hostility. They weren’t really mad at each other, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t argue.

Bellamy felt bad that they were arguing in front of her, though. In front of Miller and Murphy and the rest of his friends? Not a big deal. They were used to it. But it was Thanksgiving, and their mother had cooked this entire meal for them, and they owed it to her to get along. “Sorry, Mom,” he apologized quietly.

“Yeah, sorry,” Octavia added.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Aurora said nonchalantly, almost as if she expected their bickering. “I’m happy for both of you.” She looked at her daughter and said, “I’m happy you have Lincoln,” then turned to Bellamy. “And I’m happy you have . . . Clarke?”

He nodded.

His mother smiled at him. “Even if she is just a friend.”

He breathed a sigh of relief, thankful, on this Thanksgiving, for that much. This was the difference between his mother and his sister. Despite how similar they looked on the inside, their personalities definitely weren’t the same. For starters, his mom wasn’t so pushy, so nosy. She’d let him do his own thing his own way. But Octavia would nag and nitpick to the point where it drove him crazy. Sometimes, like him, she didn’t know when to butt out.

Bellamy wanted to help his mother with the dishes after they got done eating, since she didn’t have a dishwasher or anything. He’d assumed that Octavia would go up to her old bedroom to give Lincoln a call, but much to his surprise, she took the drying towel from their mother and said, “Go sit down. I got this.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine--”

“Mom.” Octavia gave her a decided look.

Aurora sighed, leaving her kids in the kitchen to clean up.

“We’re assholes,” Bellamy muttered as he scrubbed at their plates. Their mother must have gotten up early that morning to get that turkey in the oven. Who knew how long she’d spent in the kitchen that day? And what did they do? Came over and fought in front of her? What a way to show their gratitude.

“She loves us anyway,” Octavia said. “Yeah, we probably shouldn’t be like that in front of her, though.”

“Well, you started it.” He felt like a fifth-grader saying that, but it was true.

“I know,” she conceded. “I just get so frustrated with you sometimes, Bell. You piss me off.”

“Well, you piss me off, too.” He nudged her side, and she nudged him back a little harder, and he couldn’t help but smile. “I still love you, though.”

“I know you do. And I know it’s because you love me that you’re so protective. But Bellamy . . .
you drive me crazy with this Lincoln stuff.”

“So what’s your plan then?” he said, handing her a plate to be dried. “To drive me crazy with the Clarke thing?”

She sighed heavily, rolling her eyes. “Alright, I’ll make you a deal: If you let up on me about Lincoln, I’ll let up on you about Clarke.”

Ooh, that was tempting. Not having to listen to her claim he and Clarke were dating when he knew they really weren’t? Yeah, he liked the thought of that. But if the tradeoff was that he had to be nice to Lincoln, that was gonna be difficult for him.

“Deal?” she asked expectantly.

Bellamy handed her another plate, even though she hadn’t dried the first one yet. “What exactly do you want me to do?” he asked skeptically.

She thought about it a moment, then said, “Lincoln and I are going out to dinner this weekend. You could come with us.”

He grunted, thinking that sounded awful.

“And you could be nice. The whole time.”

That sounded awful, too.

“Will you do that for me?”

Dammit, he thought. What choice did he have? He couldn’t very well say no without seeming like the biggest dick in the world, probably starting up another argument in the process. So he agreed to it, reluctantly. “Fine.”

“You promise?”

“I’ll try my best.” He wasn’t about to guarantee that he’d never say anything negative to or about Lincoln again. Because that just wasn’t realistic. But if he could lighten up on her and she lightened up on him in return . . . then that would probably be a good thing.

~*~*~*~*~*~*

Clarke didn’t anticipate spending her Sunday evening with Bellamy—she had some work to do for her classes, which she dreaded the thought of starting back up tomorrow. Thanksgiving break was too damn short. But when he called her up and basically pleaded for her to accompany him to dinner with Octavia and Lincoln, she couldn’t really say no.

They went to some burger place she’d never been to before and waited for the lovebirds, who, it seemed, were running late. Clarke picked at her fingernails, eager to order her meal, because it smelled so greasy but so good in there, and asked, “Why am I here again?”

“Because I need backup,” Bellamy replied.

“Why couldn’t Miller or Murphy be your backup?”

“Because I might wanna slip away and have sex with my backup if things get too tense,” he explained.
“Oh, I see.” She couldn’t resist making the obvious joke when she added, “You could have sex with Miller.”

“Nah, no thanks.”

Too bad. She still thought that’d be hot.

“I don’t wanna do this,” he grumbled, tapping his leg on the floor nervously. “I don’t know why I agreed to it.”

“Just be nice,” she said, putting one hand on his thigh to stop his fidgeting. “You’re a nice guy.”

“Not when it comes to Lincoln I’m not,” he readily admitted, shaking his head stubbornly. “I’m a jerk. I know it.”

“Okay, then I’ll do you a favor,” she volunteered. “I’ll talk to Lincoln about all sorts of art stuff, and that way you barely even have to say anything.”

He put his arm around her and pulled her into his side. “See, I knew there was a reason I brought you.” He kissed the top of her head.

She laughed a little, then caught sight of Octavia and Lincoln on their way in. “There they are,” she pointed out.

“Oh, great,” he muttered. “Listen, just kick me in the shin if I’m bein’ an ass, alright?”

“Oh, great,” he muttered. “Listen, just kick me in the shin if I’m bein’ an ass, alright?”

“Okay.” That she could do.

Octavia took her long, dark coat off as she approached the table. “Hey, guys,” she said.

“Hey, O,” Bellamy said tersely. He seemed to have to swallow all his pride simply to add, “Lincoln.”

“Hi,” Lincoln said to both of them.

“Oh, Clarke, I should’ve known you’d be here,” Octavia remarked as she slid into the booth, moving all the way over so Lincoln had plenty of space for his much-larger frame.

“I hope that’s okay,” Clarke said.

“Oh, yeah, it’s fine,” Octavia assured her. “The more the merrier. It’s a double date.”

Bellamy shot her a quick warning glance.

“Except not really,” Octavia amended. “So, did you guys order yet?”

Even though the whole ‘double date’ thing had probably just been an honest mistake, a harmless slip of the tongue, it was enough to make Bellamy even grumpier. And it wasn’t like he’d been in the best of moods to begin with. He ordered his meal and barely said two words after that. He and Lincoln sat across from each other awkwardly. Tension so thick, you could cut it with a knife.

Clarke followed through on her idea to dominate the conversation with art talk. She asked Lincoln about his gallery, and he told her about some of the new work they had on display. They swapped stories about pieces they’d created over the years, and he even gave her some business advice for possibly starting up her own studio after graduation. For her, the conversation was fluid and easy. Lincoln was a nice guy and therefore nice to talk to. For Bellamy, it just seemed to remain more
complicated than that.

“Lincoln wants to see the Mona Lisa someday,” Octavia chimed in while they continued to wait for their food. “It’s his favorite.”

Lincoln smiled appreciatively. “It’s beautiful. Historic.”

“Historic,” Octavia agreed. “Yes. Bell, you love history.”

Bellamy just sat there with his arms crossed over his chest, very standoffish and obviously not about to play into her attempt to find them some common ground. “Yep.”

“Maybe you guys could talk art history sometime,” Octavia suggested way too optimistically.

“Wouldn’t count on it,” Bellamy muttered. And that earned him his first kick to the shin from Clarke.

The conversation veered off into a not so good direction after that. Lincoln mentioned that he and Octavia would see the Mona Lisa when they went to Paris, and Bellamy growled, “Now you guys are goin’ to Paris? Don’t you ever just stay put anymore?”

“I’m not a dog, Bellamy,” Octavia snapped. “I’m free to roam.”

He mumbled something under his breath about her needing a leash, and Clarke kicked him beneath the table again.

That was when Lincoln started talking about their upcoming summer vacation plan, which, as it turned out, wasn’t Paris. It was India. And then Thailand. And then Vietnam. Clarke got the sense that, even though they traveled a lot, neither of them had ever been to Asia, and they were both excited to go.

Bellamy, of course, was less excited. “Vietnam, huh?” he snorted. “Why don’t you just go to North Korea while you’re at it? I hear that’s a real good time.”

Kick.

“I don’t even know how you afford all these trips, O. Your fitness class can’t pay that much.”

Kick.

“And Lincoln, what’s with you always takin’ my sister away, huh? You think you guys are too good for the rest of us here?”

Another kick. A hard one this time.

“Stop kicking me,” he told Clarke.

“Stop being an ass!” She wasn’t used to seeing Bellamy like this. Overprotective and unfairly judgmental of Lincoln? Sure. But now he was just being mean.

“Screw this,” Octavia said, climbing out of the booth over Lincoln. “Clarke, come with me.” She marched toward the bathroom, and Clarke crawled over Bellamy and followed her. She was actually kind of nervous about leaving the two guys alone, but maybe that’d be good for them. Maybe they could just hash things out, and when she and Octavia returned, they’d be best friends. That wasn’t impossible. Right?

Octavia didn’t even wait until they were alone in the bathroom to start ranting. Two of the stalls were
occupied, but she didn’t care. “Ugh!” she growled, throwing her hands down at her sides. “I hate this, Clarke! Why does he get like this?”

Clarke shrugged helplessly. “I don’t know.”

“Lincoln loves me. I love him. Why can’t he just be happy for me?”

“I . . .” Again, Clarke had no answer. “He says he’s overprotective.”

“Oh, trust me, I know that,” Octavia growled as she paced back and forth. “Lincoln knows that. You know that. America knows that. But he promised he’d let up. And he hasn’t. He lied to me.”

“No, I don’t think he lied,” Clarke said, feeling the need to defend Bellamy. “He just . . . he doesn’t know how. It’s hard for him.”

“That’s why you have to talk to him,” Octavia said.

“And say what?”

“I don’t know, Clarke, but if anyone can get through to him . . .” She trailed off.

It’s me? Clarke wondered. If anyone can get through to him, it’s me?

“Look, it doesn’t matter if you guys aren’t dating,” Octavia said. “He’ll listen to you. Please.”

For the first time since Clarke had met this girl, she saw . . . tears in her eyes. Badass (kinda bitchy) Octavia Blake was close to crying. It seemed unreal to even contemplate. But clearly this whole situation with her boyfriend and her brother wasn’t just an inconvenience to her anymore; it really and truly stressed her out, and if Bellamy could see how upset she was right now, Clarke knew he’d feel bad.

“Oh,” she said, not sure what she’d say to him. But she’d say something. “Let’s get back out there before Bellamy rips Lincoln’s head off.”

Octavia managed a laugh. “Please. Lincoln could snap him like a twig.”

When they returned to their table, the boys were talking, which was a good sign. But they seemed to be talking about Hillary Clinton vs. Bernie Sanders, which was . . . less good.

“Great, politics. That’s just what you two should be talking about,” Octavia remarked sarcastically, sliding across Lincoln’s lap.

Bellamy stood up to let Clarke back in, but she grabbed his hand and said, “I don’t really feel very well. Can you take me home?”

“Yes. Thank god,” Bellamy said hurriedly. “O. Lincoln. It’s been . . . interesting.” He handed Clarke her coat and said, “Let’s go.”

Octavia mouthed a silent thank you, and Clarke gave her a small nod goodbye. Then, as she and Bellamy headed out, she kicked him one last time, just for the heck of it.

Bellamy didn’t really say anything while he drove, and he stormed upstairs right away when they got home. Clarke stayed downstairs for a moment, kicking off her shoes and hanging up her coat, contemplating whether it was best to just give him some space or try to go to talk to him. But when she heard Emori moaning down the hall in Murphy’s room, she decided there was no way in hell she was hanging out down there. She marched up those stairs and into Bellamy’s bedroom, where he
had just begun to change clothes.

“You almost made your sister cry tonight,” she informed him bluntly.

He stopped unbuttoning his shirt halfway down. “What?”

“Yeah. In the bathroom. She had tears in her eyes.”

Bellamy frowned momentarily, then shook his head and kept unbuttoning. “Octavia doesn’t cry.”

“Well, she was about to.”

He fumbled with the last button, ripping it open when he couldn’t get it, and threw his shirt on the ground. He looked visibly upset as he dragged his hand through his hair.

“I don’t get it,” Clarke said. “This isn’t just normal protective brother stuff. It’s something else.”

“Yeah, ’cause I’m not just a normal brother,” he said. “Look, Clarke . . . the way O and I grew up . . . .” His tongue darted out to wet his lips as he struggled to continue. “I’m not blaming my mom, because she did what she could, but it was just us a lot of the time. She was always working. I had to take care of my sister; I had to help raise her.”

Clarke felt her heart go out to him because . . . well, quite honestly, she couldn’t relate. She’d had all the time in the world to be a kid, to play, to grow. But the more Bellamy told her about his life, the more she realized he’d had to grow up fast. Too fast. And she felt sorry for him for that.

“We didn’t have a dad,” Bellamy went on. “Or I didn’t have a dad, anyway. She did, but . . . he was hardly ever around, okay? So I wasn’t just her brother. I had to be like her dad, too. And maybe in some ways, I still am.”

Clarke considered that, nodding slowly. It made sense. When Bellamy looked at Lincoln, he didn’t just look at him through a brother’s eyes. There was some kind of element of responsibility and duty he felt towards Octavia that fathers felt, or at least what fathers were supposed to feel. Bellamy felt those feelings because there was no one else in Octavia’s life who would.

“I know it’s stupid,” he muttered, undoing his jeans. “I know I should just get over it, but . . .” He stepped out of his pants, shaking his head. “It’s not even just that.”

“It’s not?”

“No.” He grabbed a pair of sweatpants out of his drawer and yanked them on over his underwear, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. “It’s stupid, Clarke. It’s all stupid.”

“I don’t mind listening.” Even though she’d promised Octavia she would say something . . . maybe this was one of those things where Bellamy just needed to let it all out, get some things off his chest. Like he had the night he’d told her about Roma.

He stared at her hard for a moment, then slumped over to the bed and sat down. She sat beside him, waiting for him to start talking, because she didn’t want to pressure him. Anytime Bellamy opened up to her, she wanted it to be because he needed to, not just because she wanted him to.

“Octavia went to college for a semester. Did you know that?” he blurted suddenly.

“No.” She tried to picture that girl sitting in a dorm room studying, and . . . she couldn’t. It just seemed so weird. Octavia actually seemed to have a disdain for college students, as far as Clarke
could tell. It wasn’t like she tried to hide it.

“Yeah, when she was eighteen, after high school,” Bellamy elaborated. “She hated it, though, decided it wasn’t her thing.” His jaw clenched, and he added, “She decided that when she met Lincoln.”

Clarke frowned, trying to piece it together before he told her more. Had Lincoln convinced Octavia to drop out of school? That didn’t seem like something he would do.

“So she quit, and next thing you know, they’re goin’ all over the world together,” Bellamy said bitterly. “And fine, maybe I’m a little jealous, ‘cause I always wanted to travel, too, but . . .” He grunted. “It’s more than that.”

She angled her body towards him slightly, still listening.

“Where we grew up, the only way out was education,” he explained. “And I wanted that for her. I wanted it so bad. And she could’ve had it. She did have it, all right there at her fingertips.” He looked down at his own empty hands, shaking his head sadly. “She didn’t have scholarships like I did, but it was fine. We took out the student loans. She could’ve gone.”

“And she didn’t,” Clarke said, starting to wonder if this was just about Octavia. Because after all, Octavia wasn’t the only Blake sibling who hadn’t gone to college.

“I—I couldn’t go,” Bellamy recalled. “Not after everything . . .” He trailed off, blinking back tears for a moment. “And then my mom lost her job, and I had to help her and . . . it just would’ve been too hard for me. But not for Octavia. She could’ve done it. But she didn’t and . . .” He swallowed hard. “Fuck, this sounds awful, but . . . I think I kind of resent her for throwing that all away. And I know I resent Lincoln because I look at him and see the reason why she threw it all away. Sittin’ on a beach with her older boyfriend sounded a lot more fun than sittin’ in a lecture hall, so . . . she just gave up. And it pisses me off that he didn’t convince her to keep goin’. She had that chance to go, and she wasted it, and he just let her.”

Oh, yeah, this is definitely not just all about Octavia, Clarke thought. Now that he’d actually told her about it, it all seemed pretty clear to her: When he looked at Lincoln, he didn’t just see his sister’s boyfriend; he saw an obstacle, and something that was in the way of this future he’d had in mind for her. And it probably reminded him of all the things that had gotten in the way for him.

“I mean, look at me, Clarke,” he said morosely. “I’m a handyman. That’s my job. And I never wanted it, but . . . it is what it is.”

She frowned, not sure what was so bad about it. He fixed things; he helped people. It was a hell of a lot more admirable than a lot of other jobs were.

“I wanted more for her,” he said, his words coated in sadness, regret. “But she doesn’t even have a job. Not really. Those classes she teaches at the rec center don’t pay shit, and she doesn’t teach them that often. She’s completely dependent on Lincoln, and if anything ever happens to him or they don’t stay together, then she’ll be completely dependent on me. And . . .” His jaw trembled, but he held it together. “It’s not that I wouldn’t take care of her, ’cause I did it before and I could do it again. It’s just . . .” He leaned forward, his hands on his knees, and rubbed his forehead. “I don’t know, Clarke. I’m probably not making any sense.”

“No, you are,” she assured him, putting one hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently. “I understand it a lot better now. But I just wonder . . .” She trailed off, not sure if she’d be overstepping her bounds if she said something more.
“What?” he asked, looking up at her curiously.

Well, shit, she pretty much had to say it now, didn’t she? Hopefully he wouldn’t be offended. “Are you really upset with Octavia and Lincoln?” she asked. “Or are you more upset with yourself?”

He sat up again slowly, silent as he mulled it over. It didn’t take him long to decide. “Me, probably,” he quietly admitted. “I wasted my future, too.”

“Bellamy, you didn’t–”

“I would’ve studied history,” he cut in. “Maybe I would’ve . . . I don’t know, been a teacher or something.” He laughed sadly, as though the mere idea were ridiculous now. “That’s not gonna happen now.”

“It could still–”

“But you know what, you’re right, Clarke,” he interrupted. “I get mad at them because, truth is, I’m still mad about what happened to me when I was eighteen. I still don’t get why . . .” He gulped, fighting back the emotions that were clearly still fresh. “I don’t get why that had to happen to Roma, and I don’t get why that had to happen to me. Because it was like I had this whole life ahead of me, and then I just . . . didn’t. And now here I am.”

That sounded so . . . depressing. So unlike Bellamy. But then again, she remembered, he’d had to go to therapy as a result of that accident. It wasn’t even just an accident, really; it was trauma. It was a life-altering traumatic event. Whatever inner demons it had created for him, he’d probably be dealing with them for a long, long time to come.

“I’m here, too,” she whispered, scooting in close. She kissed his shoulder, hoping that, somehow, just by being there, maybe she could help.

“I’m sorry, Clarke,” he apologized. “I don’t mean to make it sound like . . .” He trailed off, recollecting himself and said quietly, “I’m glad you’re here.”

Good, she thought. Because right now, even with him being upset like this and obviously dealing with some very complicated issues, there was nowhere else she would have rather been.

She remembered how it seemed to have helped him to just be able to be so close to her the night he’d divulged all of what he had about Roma, so she couldn’t help but think that maybe that would help right now, too. She climbed up onto his lap, swinging one leg onto the other side of him, and put her hands on his stomach, pointing out, “Bellamy, you’re only twenty-three. You’re young. You could still go to college.”

“No, I can’t afford it,” he dismissed. “It’s okay, though. College isn’t meant for everyone.”

There wasn’t a doubt in her mind it was meant for him, though. He was the smartest person she’d ever met—besides Raven, of course, but Raven was on a whole different level. The fact that Bellamy could make a living off of fixing all sorts of odds and ends for other people was a testament to how intelligent he was. He’d never studied from anyone, never had any formal training. He’d taught himself everything he knew. He was pretty amazing like that.

“Maybe college just wasn’t meant for Octavia,” Clarke stated simply. “And I know you’re gonna hate this, but . . .” She halfway cringed. “Maybe Lincoln is.”

He rolled his eyes, but that was all he did this time. No ranting or swearing or dramatic sighing. So that was an improvement.
“I think he really does love her,” Clarke said. Even though she’d never actually sat down and had a one-on-one conversation with Lincoln before, she didn’t need to. His feelings for Octavia were written all over his face whenever he looked at her. He adored her, thought the world of her. Clearly. And deep down, surely even Bellamy could see that.

“I think he loves her the way you loved Roma,” Clarke said, not sure if she was overstepping by drawing that comparison. She didn’t know Roma, didn’t know anything beyond what Bellamy had told her about the girl. But just hearing him talk about her, hearing that love in his voice five years later . . . it seemed like a fairly apt comparison to her.

“I’m gonna have to apologize to Octavia, aren’t I?” he concluded.

“Probably.”

“And I’m gonna have to be nice to Lincoln.”

“Well, he is a nice guy.”

Bellamy exhaled heavily, but he didn’t seem quite as distressed anymore. He wasn’t bouncing off the walls or anything, but once again, it seemed to have done him a lot of good to just open up about what he feeling. Because obviously, he was feeling a lot of things.

“Thank you, Clarke,” he said, caressing her hair softly. “Do you still like me, even though I was a jerk today?”

She couldn’t help but smile, because good god, he was so adorable, even when he wasn’t trying to be. “I still like you,” she reassured him, leaning in closer. She found his hands in hers, smoothing her fingers against his palms, palms that were rough and calloused and used to work. He had jeans with holes in them and shirts with permanent dirt and dust stains on them. He worked. He worked hard. And even if he didn’t think he’d amounted to anything great in life . . . she did. “For the record, Bellamy,” she said, rubbing his hands in hers, “I like you just the way you are.”

His eyes never left hers as a slow smile crept to his lips. He pressed a gentle kiss to her mouth, almost as another way of saying thank you.

They sat together on the foot of that bed, holding each other for a long while after that. She was happy to just stay in his lap, head on his shoulder, and he seemed fine with keeping his face buried against the side of her neck, breathing deeply. He didn’t make any move to start kissing her or touching her. No, despite his earlier logic that she’d been his backup because he may need to have sex with her, right now, he seemed content to just sit there and hold her. And she was more than content to let him.
Chapter Notes

Let's be honest, this is not the most substantial chapter. But it's smutty and fun, and hey, don't we all need some smut and fun to make it through this hiatus?

Thank you as always for the continued support and feedback!

Chapter 13

Christmas was still nearly a month away, so Clarke was surprised to walk into Bellamy’s house and see a tree set up. Even more surprising was that Murphy was the one who had decorated it.

“This is mine,” he proclaimed boastfully, motioning towards the tree as if it were a work of art. “I did this.”

For a tree, it was on the small side; even Clarke could reach the top of it. It was plastic rather than real evergreen, and the ornaments were kind of hodge-podge collection, looked to have been gathered up from random places over the years. But Murphy had decorated it himself, and clearly he was proud.

He told her she could pick one ornament to be hers, but then proceeded to say, “No, you can’t have that one. That’s mine,” when she tried to choose the puppy one. She went a different tactic and tried to pick a pretty, dangling gold one after that, but he shook his head and said, “Nope, that’s mine, too.” Finally, after multiple failed attempts, she said, “Why don’t you just pick one for me instead?”

“Hmm.” He went around to the side of the tree and plucked up quite the unusual ornament. It was a topless Mrs. Claus.

“I figured she’d turn you on,” he explained.

And that was how Clarke got her ornament.

But apparently a Christmas tree wasn’t the only festive thing that occurred in the Blake-Miller-Murphy residence. Clarke soon found out that Saturday night’s usual festivities were going to be slightly different this week. “Secret Santa Saturday,” as Miller referred to it. If she wanted in, she was in.

Well, of course she wanted in. She’d never actually participated in a secret Santa gift exchange before, and Miller assured her they all had a lot of fun with it.

Miller had managed to find a playlist full of trap remixes of popular Christmas songs, so that music combined with the tempting aroma of Maya’s Christmas cookies and made everything very festive while they all hung out downstairs, waiting on Bellamy so they could get this thing underway. Bellamy was in the shower, or so he wanted everyone to think; Clarke suspected he was taking his sweet time just because he was trying to put off seeing Octavia and Lincoln as long as he could. It’d been nearly a week since he’d talked to his sister, so tonight was a big night for him.

Jasper wasn’t quite as stoned as usual, but he was clearly still a little stoned when he sat down next to
Clarke and handed her one of those annoying Fidget spinners. He insisted that she had to try it, that it was the coolest thing in the world. He told her to hold it between her thumb and index finger and give it a whirl, and she did. And then she just sat there . . . watching it spin. It spun and spun and kept spinning, and part of her was expecting it to do something else, if it was really as cool as Jasper claimed it was.

“I don’t get it,” she said, unimpressed.

“What don’t you get?”

“The appeal.”

“What?” He seized the gadget back from her, spinning it himself. “How do you not get it? It’s awesome.”

Maya came over to the couch and sat down next to her boyfriend. “He has, like, ten of these,” she informed Clarke. “I think they originally made them for kids who couldn’t focus, like kids with ADHD.”

“That’s what I have,” Jasper declared.

“No, you don’t. You’ve never been diagnosed,” Maya said.

“I self-diagnosed when I was nine.”

Maya smiled and shook her head at her boyfriend. Then he leaned over and gave her a kiss.

“Have fun with your Fidget, Jasper,” Clarke said, standing up. She left the adorable couple to their own devices, whether those devices were the Fidget or each other’s bodies, and plopped down onto the floor next to Harper, who was leaning against a mountain of pillows tonight, playing hairstylist. She had just finished putting Emori’s hair into a French braid, and Clarke wanted something similar. “Harper, braid my hair,” she said, situating herself in front of her.

“Just a simple one?” Harper asked.

“Yeah.”

Harper took her hair out of her half ponytail for her and threaded her fingers through it. “You have nice hair, Clarke,” she complimented.

Clarke grunted. “Yeah, when I actually do something with it.”

Harper got to work separating her locks into three sections, continuing to use her fingers as a comb. “So are you excited to be part of our secret Santa this year?”

“Yeah,” Clarke replied. “What’s the budget again? Thirty dollars?”

“Try fifteen,” Harper corrected. “None of us has money, Clarke.”

Clarke wasn’t about to say it, but she wasn’t sure what kind of gift she could get for just fifteen dollars. Sure, she shopped at Walmart from time to time, but that was mostly for food. Maybe she’d have to venture over to the department store and do her shopping there, see if she could find something worthwhile.

“You could go to the thrift store,” Harper suggested, as if she were reading her mind. “You can find some good stuff there.”
“That’s where Bellamy got his new bed.”

Harper giggled and teased, “Try not to break this one, okay?” as she started to weave the sections of Clarke’s hair together.

Clarke blushed. At this point, everyone knew about her and Bellamy breaking the bed. It was no secret, so they all liked to joke about it.

“Who’s the hardest person to buy for?” she asked, hoping to avoid that person in tonight’s drawing.

Harper didn’t even hesitate. “Murphy. Because he hates everything. And don’t think you can just buy him another ornament for that tree of his, because if it doesn’t meet his criteria of excellence, he’ll just chuck it in the trash.”

“Speaking from experience?” Clarke guessed.

“No, not me. But that’s what happened to Maya last year. The poor girl was almost in tears. Emori was so pissed at Murphy. She made him write out an apology and everything.”

Clarke laughed, able to picture that. Murphy was putty in his girlfriend’s hands. Whatever she told him to do, he’d do it.

“Last year I had Bellamy,” Harper revealed. “I got him one of those ugly Christmas sweaters. I’m pretty sure he’s never worn it.”

“Oh, yeah,” Clarke said. “I think that’s hanging in the back of his closet.”

“See?” Harper tied a ponytail holder around the end of Clarke’s low-slung braid and declared, “Done.”

Clarke leaned forward and took a look at her reflection in one of Murphy’s shiny red ornaments. Oh, yeah. The braid was cute.

“So what are you getting Bellamy?” Harper asked.

Clarke turned around, frowning confusedly. “Can I get him something if I’m not his secret Santa?”

“Oh, of course,” Harper said. “I’m gonna get Monty something no matter what.”

“Yeah, but Bellamy and I aren’t a couple like you and Monty are,” Clarke pointed out.

“Oh, close enough.” Harper grabbed hold of her own long blonde hair and pulled it over her shoulder, starting a side braid. “You know what you should do? Just put on some sexy lingerie and tell him that’s his present,” she proposed. “He’d love that.”

Simple, Clarke thought, shrugging. Maybe she could get online and find something Christmas-themed.

“Oh, speaking of sexy stuff . . .” Harper’s eyes lit up with excitement. “Did you hear about my idea?”

“No.” She was in a group chat with these girls now, but sometimes she got lazy and didn’t check every message.

“I wanna do something for the guys,” Harper babbled, “something to surprise them. You know that scene in Mean Girls where they do the sexy Jingle Bell Rock dance?”
“Oh, god.” Clarke sensed where this was going.

“We should do that for the boys!” Harper exclaimed. “We can make our own outfits and learn the choreography. Are you in?”

“Harper, I can’t dance,” Clarke reminded her.

“No, you can fake your way through it. You’ll be fine.”

“Uh-uh.” Clarke shook her head vigorously. “Nope.”

“Maya’s not the greatest dancer, either. You can stand next to her.”

“No, I’m way worse than her,” Clarke insisted.

Harper pouted. “Oh, come on, Clarke, everyone else is already in.”

Clarke kept shaking her head, not about to give in to the peer pressure.

Not dissuaded, Harper tried a different approach. “What’s Bellamy gonna think when we get up to do it and you’re not there?” she pointed out. “He’s gonna be so disappointed. He’s gonna be like, ‘Where’s Clarke?’ And then he won’t even enjoy it.”

Clarke sighed, still not about to agree to it. But Harper had a point. And she did like making Bellamy happy. “I’ll sleep on it,” she decided, getting to her feet when he finally came downstairs to join them.

“You know he’d love it,” Harper called after her as she walked over to Bellamy, stopping him at the bottom of the stairs.

“Hey,” he said, wrapping one arm around her waist and kissing her.

_Mmm, he looks good_, she thought. He had on his glasses for a change, which were so hot in such a dorky way. And even though he wasn’t wearing the ugly Christmas sweater Harper had gotten him, he was wearing a black sweater with the sleeves rolled up. He looked like such a gentleman.

“They’re already here,” she informed him, knowing quite well what his first order of business was for tonight.

He looked over into the kitchen, where Octavia was refereeing a very mismatched arm-wrestling tournament between Lincoln and Monty, and mumbled, “What if she stays mad at me?”

“Just go apologize,” she urged. “Just like we practiced.” And yes, they had actually practiced this several times. Playing the role of Octavia was not easy, but Clarke had done her best.

She hung back in the living room while Bellamy sidled into the kitchen, gently tugging his sister away from the arm wrestling match. They went out into the back yard to talk, and Clarke squinted, trying to see if she could read his lips through the kitchen window. She saw him say the word ‘Sorry,’ several times, and to her credit, outspoken Octavia did just stand there and listen.

“Here you go, Clarke,” Miller said, breaking her focus as he approached her with a pen and yellow sticky note.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“For the secret Santa drawing. Write your name and any presents you want people to avoid.”
“Oh, well, I’m not picky.” She scribbled her name down and handed it back to him, eager to see who she would pick. Hopefully one of the girls. They just seemed easier to buy for. Maybe not Octavia, though. She was still kind of intimidating. She also wondered who would end up picking her. She and Jackson were the new ones in this social circle, so hopefully whoever picked them wasn’t disappointed.

“I wanna get this goin’. How long are they gonna be out there?” Miller asked, motioning to the siblings. Bellamy was talking with his hands now, so that meant he’d probably veered off from their practiced apology.

“It could be a while,” Clarke predicted. Knowing Bellamy, he had a lot to say to his sister.

Bellamy had to condense what probably should have been a twenty minute conversation with Octavia down to ten, only because it was so fucking freezing outside. He apologized profusely, but he tried to explain himself, too, tried to get her to understand that his overprotectiveness really did stem from a good place. He made sure to let her know that it was hard for him to accept that she was an adult now, that she could make her own choices, especially when he’d hoped she would make different ones. Once in a while, when what he was trying to say came out wrong, she’d roll her eyes or cross her arms over her chest or do something else to indicate she was annoyed. But for the most part, she really did listen, and that was rare for Octavia.

“So you promise you’ll be nice from now on?” she said as they came back inside. “Because that’s the only way I’ll accept your apology.”

“I promise,” he said. “And if I ever slip up, just bear with me. I’m tryin’ my best.”

“Okay. Good,” she said. “And I’ll stop trying to convince you to make Clarke your girlfriend. Even though I think it’d be the best thing for you.”

He shot her a semi-annoyed look.

“You have to bear with me, too,” she said, half-smiling. Then she hugged him, the way she used to do when she was younger, and he felt a surge of relief. She still loved him. No matter how much of a jerk he was or what asshole things he’d said to her boyfriend, she still loved her big brother. Thank God.

“Allright, Miller,” she called, releasing Bellamy from her embrace. “We’re ready to go.”

“Finally,” Miller said exasperatedly, stepping up to a makeshift podium, where an old fishbowl full of everyone’s names was perched. “Alright, gather round, beautiful people.”

Everyone headed into the living room, but Bellamy stopped his sister’s boyfriend. “Hey. Lincoln.” He grabbed a beer out of the refrigerator and handed it to him, figuring beer was a universal man symbol of a peace offering. He wasn’t able to apologize to this guy yet, and maybe he never would; but for right now, a beer was a start.

“Thanks,” Lincoln said, popping open the tab on his way into the living room.

*There we go,* Bellamy thought, figuring that was his one good Lincoln deed for the night. *Got that outta the way.*

He joined Clarke on the couch—it wasn’t like anyone else couldn’t sit there, but everyone seemed to accept that as his and Clarke’s spot, just like they accepted the beanbag as Murphy’s—and she
inquired, “How’d it go?”

“Good.” Luckily, he hadn’t had to delve into all that stuff about his own regrets. He’d been prepared to, if necessary, but he was glad she’d forgiven him anyway. He could talk to Octavia about Roma and the accident, but Secret Santa Saturday was not the ideal night for it. “Thanks for helping me get my head outta my ass,” he told Clarke.

She laughed lightly. “Anytime.”

Miller turned down the volume of the music and started in, “Alright, people, you know what time it is. It’s that magical time of year when you choose your holiday fate.”

“I hope I don’t get Murphy,” Clarke muttered.

God, Bellamy hoped she didn’t get him, either. More than that, though, he hoped Miller followed through on his plan to rig this for him. He gave his friend a questioning look, and Miller just nodded, motioning him up to the podium first. “Murphy, why don’t you tell them about our lovely prizes this year.”

Murphy stood up, cleared his throat, and eagerly assuming the emcee role from Miller. “Alright, so this year, the person who gives the most heartwarming gift is gonna get this wonderful . . .” He reached behind the TV and pulled out a small box. “. . . Randy the reindeer nightlight. Not Rudolph. Randy.”

Bellamy joined Miller at the podium, making sure all his friends were distracted by Murphy, and reached into the fishbowl, grabbing the top sticky note, as they had arranged. When he unfolded it, though, he didn’t see the name he wanted to. Lincoln.

“Hey,” he nudged his friend subtly. “I thought you were gonna help me pull Clarke.”

“Oh.” Miller inconspicuously looked through a few of the sticky notes, managing to find Clarke’s name, and put it up top for Bellamy to grab. “There, man.”

Murphy continued to hold the others’ attention—“And this, ladies and gentlemen, awarded to the person who gives the funniest gift, is a one-of-a-kind Miley Cyrus ‘Wrecking Ball’ Christmas ornament. Now who here would like that?”—so Bellamy put Lincoln’s name back into the bowl and grabbed Clarke’s instead. Phew, he thought. Crisis averted. Not only did he not want to be Lincoln’s secret Santa, but he really wanted to be Clarke’s. He already had a gift in mind for her.

“Alright, next!” Miller hollered, and Bellamy crumpled Clarke’s sticky note and tossed it into the trash can.

“Who’d you get?” she asked when he sat back down again.

“It’s a secret Santa, Clarke. I can’t tell you.”

When it was her turn to choose, there were no more prize distractions from Murphy, so everyone’s attention was on the drawing. She tried to smile when she looked at the name on the paper, but it ended up being more of a grimace, leading Bellamy to believe that she in fact had been the unlucky one to pick Murphy. Murphy seemed to know it, too, because as she sulked back to the couch, he muttered, “Good pick, Clarke.”

She flopped down next to Bellamy, quietly lamenting, “This is horrible. What am I supposed to get him?”
“Shh,” he hushed, making sure there was enough light conversation going on amongst his friends that they couldn’t hear his horrible gift suggestion. “Go get him that dick harness thing from Roan’s shop. He’s weird. He’d like that.”

“I’m not getting a Murphy a sex toy,” she said.

“It’s better than getting him a book or something.”

“Says the guy who actually got a book at Ice Nation.”

*Oh, yeah,* he remembered. *Tantric Sex.* He’d only looked at it a few times, on account of already knowing most of the positions in there. But it definitely had a few to recommend. “We should get that book out tonight,” he proposed, “try one of the positions.”

“What makes you so sure you’re getting laid tonight?” she asked.

They’d gone a couple days without, what with him having to work late and her needing to find the time to study. He was sure. “Well, I’ve been on my best behavior tonight,” he pointed out, “with Lincoln and O. I think I deserve a reward, don’t you?”

She shrugged nonchalantly, obviously just messing with him. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?” He readjusted is jeans and said, “Well, if nothing else, I’ll just reward myself.”

She looked at him through half-closed eyes, then glanced down at his crotch. He smirked flirtatiously, knowing he had her. The girl wanted him just as much as he wanted her.

An hour and a half later, after all their friends had either gone home or fallen asleep downstairs, he and Clarke went up to his room and sat down on his bed. His new bed. She straddled his lap, cupped his face in those soft hands of hers, and kissed him. She was such a good kisser.

“You were pretty well-behaved tonight,” she said.

“I gave Lincoln a beer. Did you see that? I was so nice, Clarke.”

“You definitely deserve a reward,” she said, reaching behind her back to take the ponytail holder out of her hair. Her braid fell free, and he threaded his fingers through her hair to spread it out around her shoulders.

“What do I get?” he asked, mind racing with the possibilities.

“Anything,” she breathed.

“Anything?” Well, now his mind was *really* racing.

“Well, within reason.”

“Ah.” That eliminated some of his ideas then.

“So, Bellamy Blake . . .” She hooked her arms around his neck and gazed down into his eyes. “How do you want me?”

Well, damn, his princess seemed frisky tonight. Hearing her ask that was such a fucking turn-on, so much so that he couldn’t resist reaching around and giving her backside a good squeeze. He wanted her, every inch of her, and truth be told, his biggest fantasy in the world was to lay her flat on her stomach so he could fuck her in the ass. But it didn’t take a rocket scientist to know that Clarke had
never done that before, and he wasn’t about to broach the subject with her until he was sure she was ready.

He lifted her off his lap and stood up with her, hands on her waist. “Undress for me,” he told her, planting one more kiss on her before he moved over to his closet.

“Like a striptease?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He removed his sweater and hung it up on a hanger, grinning at her.

“I’ll suck at that,” she predicted. “Are you sure?”

“Oh, I’m sure.” He unfastened his jeans and shoved them down his legs, stepping out of them and snapping the waistband on his black boxer briefs. “Let’s see it.” He lay down on the bed, getting comfortable, ready to watch whatever show she put on for him, regardless of how horrible the dancing was.

“This is gonna be awful,” she warned.

“I don’t care.” Even with her two left feet, she was still the sexiest thing he’d ever seen.

She thought about it for a few seconds, then stomped her foot frustratedly as she gave in. “Fine. Play some music.”

He grabbed his phone off the nightstand and played the first song that popped up on his Youtube app. It was an un-danceable punk rock song where screaming was the substitute for singing.

“Something sexy, Bellamy.”

“Fine.” He found a song that would fit the bill and switched it over. It had a real easy beat to follow, so hopefully that would help Clarke out.

She stood at the foot of his bed, tilting her head from side to side in time with the music, then started to shake her hips. Not elegantly, not sexily, but she shook them. He snaked one hand down to his crotch, cupping his bulge, and smiled appreciatively.

“You ready for this?” she teased, reaching down to grab the hem of her shirt. She tried to pull it up and over her head, but it got stuck around her face, and she just stood there with her arms in the air, all tangled up, struggling to get out. “Ow,” she said. “Dammit.”

He laughed, because she looked so absurdly adorable.

Finally, she found her way out of it, tossing it onto the floor with absolutely no grace or finesse whatsoever. “There,” she said, her breasts heaving with a relieved sigh.

Oh, those breasts . . . He had to give his crotch a good rub, because damn, her rack never ceased to amaze him no matter how many times he saw it.

She reached behind her back to unclasp her bra, and then tried to shimmy it off. It was another ridiculous dance move that didn’t look as sexy as she’d intended, but it was still fucking endearing, and it made him smile even more.

Her jeans were the obvious next item to go, and to her credit, she did manage a couple cute side-to-side twists in time with the beat while she unbuttoned and unzipped them. She pushed them down over her hips, bending forward as she slid them all the way down to the floor. But when she tried to
step out of them, she tripped over her own, foot, stumbling against the bed. “Oops.”

“Oh, god, Clarke.” He rubbed his forehead, shaking his head in astonishment. She wasn’t this clumsy in everyday life, but for some reason, when dancing was involved . . .

“I got this,” she said, brimming with faux-confidence as she turned around, giving him full view of her ample ass. She had on nothing but a thong, and when she took that off, too, he had to lick his lips. What she lacked in striptease fundamentals, she made up for in raw enthusiasm and beautiful curves.

She peeked back over her shoulder and shook her ass then, like a bunny shaking its tail. She seemed to realize how ridiculous she looked, because she giggled, tossing her head back as a blush swept over her beautiful pale skin. Then she whirled around, exclaiming, “Ta-da!” and held her hands out to the side in what could only be described as spirit fingers.

“Wow.” That was . . . definitely memorable.

“Was that the least sexy striptease ever?” she asked, climbing onto the bed.

“It was . . . really something.”

“Hmm.” She nudged his hand aside and pulled down his boxers. His cock sprang free, hard enough to lie flat on his stomach. “It worked, though,” she pointed out.

Hell yeah, it had. And he’d known it would. All he had to do these days was just look at Clarke, and he could get hard. When she looked all cute like this, doing that horrible little dance, how could he resist?

He lifted his hips off the bed, shoving his boxers past his ass, and she removed them the rest of the way. When he was just as naked as she was, she lay down in between his legs, wrapping her hand around his length, and started to stroke him confidently. Thankfully, this was something she did have the rhythm for.

“This is a good reward,” he told her.

“Better than rewarding yourself?”

“Oh, much better.” Jacking off was a quick and simple way to cum, but there was no comparison between his hand and her hand. Or better yet . . .

Her mouth. His eyes nearly rolled back when she lowered her mouth to him, first pressing a soft, almost chaste, kiss to the tip of his cock. She licked at the pre-cum that had already gathered there, then opened up to take in the entire head of him. She twisted her hand around the base of his length as she sucked on him, and all he could think was, Damn, she’s gotten so good at this.

Her head bobbed up and down on his cock, taking in an impressive amount of him. He didn’t raise his hips up, didn’t put his hand into her hair to guide her movements. He didn’t have to. She was doing so well, all he had to do was lie there and watch her work.

“Can I try something?” she asked after she’d sucked on him for a few minutes. Her warm breath tickled his sensitive flesh.

“Try what?” he asked.

She smiled sweetly and kept pumping him. “Something.”
He wasn’t used to not being the one in control in bed, so it felt a bit strange to him to let her proceed without knowing exactly what she intended to do. If it was anything like what she was already doing, though, it would probably be damn good. “As long as it doesn’t involve my ass,” he said. That was a hard limit for him.

“It doesn’t,” she promised, lowering her head again. She held her tongue out flat and licked all the way from the base to the tip of his cock, let it swirl there for a minute, then licked all the way back down again. It felt good, but it wasn’t particularly out of the ordinary until . . .

*Until.*

She first kissed his balls, then gently caressed her tongue over them, shocking the hell out of him. It sent a zap of feeling through his body, because everything was *highly*-sensitized down there, and he hadn’t expected it.

“Okay?” she asked.

It felt like such a role reversal, her checking up on him instead of the other way around. “Okay,” he said, his voice at least an octave above what it usually was.

She kept up her hand-job while her mouth explored his balls. Nothing too extreme. She kept it gentle, which he was grateful for, mostly some light kisses and licks to his sack. He closed his eyes and dug his head back into the pillow, reveling in a feeling that was . . . very different. It wasn’t completely new terrain to him, but it wasn’t exactly well-traveled terrain, either. Most girls didn’t bother with this type of thing, which was fine, but when they did, he liked it more often than he didn’t. And he liked this. *Damn,* did he like it. Clarke Griffin’s mouth on his balls felt amazing, and he was tempted to just let go and cum right then and there, all over that tiny hand she kept moving up and down his shaft.

At this point, though, he wasn’t the only one who deserved a reward. She was being so good to him, probably better than he deserved, and he wanted her to get some of the same pleasure he was getting. Orgasms always felt better when she had them with him, so he tugged gently on her hair and said, “Come here, baby.”

She lifted her head and sat back on her knees, hand still stroking him, working him dangerously close to the edge.

“Get on me,” he told her, happy to just keep lying there while she did her thing.

She moved up his body, putting one leg on either side of his waist, and pressed her hands against his chest as she positioned her beautiful pussy over his cock. He watched her sink down onto him, thinking about stopping her for a moment, because he wasn’t wearing a condom. But then he just figured . . . fuck it. They were having so much sex that this was bound to happen from time to time. They were both clean and doing this exclusively with each other. And she was on the pill, so if it didn’t bother her, it didn’t bother him.

“Mmm,” she purred, getting herself situated. She started moving her hips up and down, slowly at first, and then faster and faster, really starting to ride him at a gallop not all that long into it. It felt amazing, and watching those breasts of hers bounce was always a highlight of having her on top. But this combined with the incredible blow job *and* the fact that he wasn’t sheathed in latex this time? He wasn’t gonna be able to last much long like this.

“Clarke,” he rasped.
“Oh . . .” she moaned, running one hand through her hair.

_Fuck, I can’t do this,_ Bellamy thought, grabbing her hips to still them. He had to switch it up just so he could last a little longer, hopefully long enough to get her over that edge of pleasure with him.

Slowly, he sat up, careful not to let his cock slip out of her. He held her groin close to his while she repositioned herself, too, wrapping her legs around him so that she was sitting in his lap. She draped her arms over his shoulders, and he encircled his around her waist, letting his hands drop down to cup and squeeze the soft flesh of her ass. She whispered her name as he started to thrust up into her.

It was a better position for stamina, that was for sure. His thrusts were more shallow this way, and he had some of the control back. She didn’t seem to have any complaints about the change. In fact, in the midst of moving and grindingly wantonly against each other, she said, “I like it like this.”

Yeah, he liked it, too. Stamina factor aside, it was a good position for intimacy. Her body slid against his, his body slid against hers, and they could hold each other, look each other in the eye, kiss if they wanted to.

He kissed her.

“Are you close?” he asked, praying she was.

She nodded hurriedly.

Yeah, he was probably still closer, though. Had it not been for the blowjob, he likely could have kept this up for a good ten minutes, but since he only had two at the most left in him, he resorted to slipping his hand in between their bodies and giving her clit a good, hard rub with his thumb. That never failed to get a reaction out of her, and this time was no different.

“Oh, god yes,” she gasped.

It didn’t take much rubbing to get her there. She held on tight when she climaxed, squeezing his cock with her pussy, then slouched forward against him. He didn’t even have to make any more movements to get off. He just sat there and let his brain shoot out through his cock, into her this time rather than into a condom. It felt _amazing,_ and he didn’t want it to end.

He sat there with her afterward, drenched in sweat, panting for air. Her hair was damp and clung to both her skin and his.

“Looks like your striptease did the trick,” he teased.

She laughed, and in a weird way . . . making her laugh was just as rewarding as making her cum had been.
Chapter 14

For someone with even an iota of rhythm, learning the *Mean Girls* Jingle Bell Rock dance wouldn’t have been very difficult. For Clarke, it was nearly an impossible task. She looked up tutorials on Youtube, but that didn’t help. She went out and bought the movie, just so she have it on the big screen of her TV for assistance. But that didn’t seem to work, either. She practiced every afternoon for four days straight after stupidly telling Harper she’d take part in the whole shenanigan, but she just never seemed to get any better. Memorization wasn’t the issue; she could see the whole thing in her head, envision what it was *supposed* to look like. But when she tried to mimic their moves, it all just turned to shit, basically.

Groaning frustratedly, she stomped her feet, getting fed up, and somehow accidentally ended up stubbing her toe on the couch. She grimaced, yelping in pain, and tried unsuccessfully to find the beat again. Not that she’d ever found it to begin with.

“What’re you doing?”

She startled a bit when she heard a voice, but thankfully, it was just Raven. “Oh, thank God you’re here.”

“I got your text.” Raven shut the door, cautiously approaching Clarke in the living room. “What’s the emergency?”

“This.” Clarke motioned dramatically towards her TV screen and paused it, right at part where all four of the girls were doing this hip swirling thing she couldn’t get the hang of.

“You’re dancing?” Raven looked to be stifling a laugh.

“No, I’m trying to learn the choreography.”

“Why?”

“Because I got roped into some stupid idea, Harper’s idea,” she growled. Maybe it wasn’t too late to back out, though? Oh, except Harper had already picked up some material for their costumes, and Clarke would’ve felt bad if she’d wasted money on her.

“You guys are gonna do this on Christmas?” Raven realized, her whole face lighting up with excitement. “That’s awesome!”

“No, it’s horrible, because I can’t get it.” Clarke fretted. “And at first, Harper said we’d have practices, but now she’s like, ‘Oh, you can just learn it on your own.’ Except I can’t, because I’m challenged.”

“Oh, this looks fun,” Raven declared, taking off her jacket. “I wanna learn it.”

Clarke breathed a sigh of relief. “I was hoping you’d say that. Learn it and teach it to me.”

“Alright, I got this,” Raven said confidently. “Let’s go.”

A mere fifteen minutes later, Raven had already memorized and perfected the entire routine. She could do the whole thing flawlessly from start to finish without even having to look at the screen for
assistance. In fact, she looked like she could just be picked up and put right into the movie, along with the rest of the girls cast. She was pretty enough and a good enough dancer to pull it off.

“Oh my god, I got it!” she exclaimed, jumping up and down, clapping her hands excitedly.

“Good for you,” Clarke muttered enviously. “I didn’t.”

“Well, what part are you struggling with?”

“All of it!”

“Okay, let’s see what we can do here.” Raven stood behind Clarke and put her hands on her hips, trying to get her to move from side to side. “Move your hips. What’re you doing, Clarke?”

“I’m trying.”

Raven kept trying to direct her movements, but with no success. “No, move your lower body.”

“I don’t have a lower body!”

Raven snorted. “Pretty sure Bellamy would disagree with that.”

He would, but that was different. Sex and dancing were not the same. One was instinctive; the other wasn’t. “I can’t do this, Raven,” Clarke bemoaned, throwing her hands down at her sides.

“Don’t give up. You’ve got this,” Raven encouraged. “Come on now. Left, right, left, right. Five, six, seven, eight.”

Before they could proceed, a confused, “Whoa,” from Bellamy caught Clarke’s attention. He was only halfway in the door, eyes fixated on them. “What am I interrupting here?”

“Bellamy.” Clarke seized her remote and stopped the DVD. “You weren’t supposed to see that.”

“Oh, really?” He came further inside, a glint of mischief in his eyes. “’cause I like everything I’m seeing.”

“We were just dancing, Bellagio,” Raven told him. “Get your mind out of the gutter.”

“Dancing?” He wrinkled his forehead in confusion and pointed at Clarke.

“Well, trying,” Raven amended.

“Fine, the surprise is out!” Clarke yelled exasperatedly. “You weren’t supposed to know, but all the girls are gonna perform this stupid dance for you guys on Christmas. Including me.”

Bellamy didn’t say anything for a moment, just stood there, and then all of a sudden . . . laughter. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m just flashing back to your striptease.”

“You did a striptease for him?” Raven gasped. “Way to go, Clarke!”

“Yeah, I got caught in my shirt,” she muttered.

“It was hilarious,” Bellamy made sure to add.

Raven chuckled. “I’ll bet.”

“You know what? You guys sit here and laugh, but this is really awful for me,” Clarke vented. “It’s
embarrassing. I’m gonna humiliate myself. And do you have any idea how socially debilitating it is to not be able to dance? I’m actually really stressed out about this.”

Bellamy and Raven quit with the teasing and both fell silent for a moment. “Sorry,” Bellamy finally mumbled.

“Yeah, we’re sorry, Clarke,” Raven agreed.

“It’s fine.” Clarke knew it wasn’t really that big of a deal in the grand scheme of things, even though it did seem mortifying right now. “Children are dying in Africa. I shouldn’t be stressed about this.”

Bellamy looked like he felt bad for upsetting her, so he took pity. “Alright, I’ll tell you what: We’ll go out to TonDC tonight,” he said. “I’ll teach you to dance.”

“Oh, that sounds fun,” Raven sad. “Can Roan and I tag along?”

“Sure.”

At this point, she would have much rather gone to TonDC to drink, but if Bellamy was going to give her a dance lesson, it was probably best that it happen without all his other friends around. “I have a paper to write tonight,” she mumbled, more so as a way of reminding herself than as a way of making an excuse. “Alright, fine.” She brushed past him on her way into her bedroom to find something to wear. “But I’m warning you, I’m unteachable.”

The thing about Bellamy, one of many admirable things, was that he really did have faith in people. Much like he believed that Jasper would someday stop smoking pot and that Murphy would eventually get a job, he believed that Clarke could dance, even despite everything he’d seen from her so far. He tried to pump her up about it on the drive to the club, tried to inspire some sort of confidence, but her own hopes for success were still dim.

Thankfully, they stopped at the bar first before hitting the dance floor. Even though she wasn’t exactly looking to puke her guts out again, Clarke was definitely entertaining the possibility of getting wasted tonight. Clearly she was less inhibited when she had some alcohol in her system, and if she was drunk enough, maybe she wouldn’t even remember any of this.

Bellamy ordered them two shots of something—of what? She didn’t even care—and asked, “You excited?” as they waited for their drinks.

“Thrilled,” she deadpanned. “You’re not gonna make me Wop, are you?”

“No, we’re dancing together,” he assured her. “Trust me, it’s easier to dance with someone, especially someone you’re insanely attracted to.”

She blushed.

He thanked the bartender when they got their shots and downed his right away. Clarke swirled hers around, looking at the bottom of the glass, and then quickly tossed hers back as well. “I’m gonna need another,” she predicted.

“One more,” he said. “I need you sober tonight.”

“Oh, well, dancing with me should be very sobering,” she warned.

He grinned at her. “Nah, I’m lookin’ forward to it.”
They ordered one more shot a piece and brought them back to the booth they were sharing with Raven and Roan. Clarke was happy to be able to sit down and just chill and talk, but the promise of having to go out on that dance floor still loomed heavy in her mind. Only when Roan started talking about the ‘new inventory’ at his store did Clarke allow herself to become distracted. It was hard not to be distracted when the subject of conversation was sex toys.

“Yeah, the anal beads are selling out fast,” Roan said, “but I think the sex swings are gonna sell well, too, once I put them out.”

Clarke nearly choked on her drink. “Sex swings?” she echoed.

“Oh, yes,” Roan said. “Everyone loves a good sex swing.”

Clarke made a face, not able to comprehend how some of that stuff was even all that appealing to people.

“I’m excited to try out . . . that other thing,” Raven said, wriggling her eyebrows at her boyfriend suggestively.

“What other thing?” Clarke asked.

“Oh, you don’t wanna know,” Raven warned her.

“Oh, you don’t wanna know,” Raven warned her.

“Of course she does,” Roan said boastfully and unashamed. “It’s a . . . dildo kit, I guess you could say. You can sculpt a replica of anyone’s penis and then use it however you want. Vibrator, double penetration . . . it works for everything.”

Clarke stared at him in astonishment, trying to wrap her mind around how that could even be a real thing, then looked up at Bellamy.

“What, you want one of those?” he teased.

“No.” One of Bellamy’s cocks was just about all she could handle. Although the thought of having a replica that could be a vibrator when he wasn’t around . . . now that was tempting.

“Next time you guys come in, I’ll give you a discount,” Roan promised. “Fifty percent off on whatever you want.”

“Oh, that’s . . .” Even Bellamy seemed a bit flustered. “Alright, then.”

“Enough talk,” Raven declared, grabbing hold of her boyfriend’s shirt collar. “Let’s dance.” She pulled Roan up out of the booth and led him out onto the dance floor, and Clarke watched as they started right in, both of them moving effortlessly, so in sync like it wasn’t difficult for either of them. It probably wasn’t.

“You want that kit, don’t you?” Bellamy said.

“No, not really,” she denied.

“Not really?”

“Just . . .” It was probably a weird process, molding the thing and waiting for it to dry. But if it was something they could do together . . . “It’d be nice to have it on hand when you’re not around.”

He chuckled, putting his arm around her. “I’m always around, though. Besides, you’ve got a 24/7 open invitation to this thing whenever you want it.”
“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Ooh.” So that meant, if she got seriously horny and he was insistent that he just had to finish up his video game with Murphy and Miller, she could remind him of that. “Alright, I don’t need the replica then.”

“Yeah, I don’t really think we need any of that stuff,” he agreed, leaning closer. “We do pretty good on our own.”

“Very good,” she agreed.

He glanced over her shoulder out onto the dance floor, then back at her. “Do me a favor,” he said, his voice lower than usual. “When we get out there, don’t overthink it. Pretend it’s just you and me, and we’re in my bed. Move like we do there.”

Her breath hitched as she gazed into his eyes, because something about the way he said that . . . it was so seductive, even if he hadn’t meant it to be. Who was she kidding, though? Of course he was trying to seduce her. He always was.

She tried to keep his words in mind when it was finally time to get out there onto that dance floor and give it a shot. They moved pretty far inward towards the center, which simultaneously relieved and terrified her. On the one hand, it was nice to be surrounded by so many people, because she could just sort of blend in and be invisible; but on the other hand, if she looked like a real idiot, then everyone could see her.

“No, it is, she thought, but to his credit, Bellamy was doing a good job of getting her to see the similarities. She took comfort in knowing that it was his hands, his body out here with her, his eyes watching her every move when there was probably nobody else watching her at all.
He came in close to her, matching his hips to hers, pressing them in to the point where she could feel the bulge in his pants in between her legs. “You like it?” he asked, slipping one of his legs in between hers. Beneath her skirt, his knee brushed against her panties.

She couldn’t help but smile, because hell yeah, she liked this. With him standing like that, she was basically able to grind her hips against his leg, and it was easy to forget about how humiliating dancing was when all she could think about was how good that friction felt. She was so glad she’d let him convince her to wear a skirt instead of pants. So fucking glad.

He lifted both her arms and placed them around his neck, telling her to hold onto him. And she soon realized why she had to. He started to roll his hips forward so much that nearly lost her balance. Every move he made was so deliberate, so suggestive, that her limbs shook with delight.

Just when she felt like she was really starting to get the hang of that, he surprised her by grabbing onto her waist and spinning her around. Suddenly, his denim-clad cock was pressing against her ass, and her skirt was hiking up against him. “Keep moving,” he urged, his breath a hot whisper against her ear.

Oh, she wanted to move. And she couldn’t believe she wanted to. Under normal circumstances, she probably would have just given in to the temptation to go stiff as board and let him do all the moving. That was what she’d done with both Finn and Lexa, both of whom were far better dancers than she was. But Bellamy felt so good behind her, his body so big and strong. Even though she couldn’t dance, she wanted to try to dance for him.

She resumed moving her hips from side to side, swirling and circling them from time to time, too, each time trying to brush her ass back against his cock. It was getting harder, to the point where she could feel it more and more prominently through his jeans, and it made her head spin to think that she was the one doing this to him. Her hips, her body . . . his hips, his body. Feeling that bulge in his pants gave her something to focus on, something to center her movements around.

His hands roamed down her body to the hem of her skirt, fingers grazing her skin as he inched the fabric upward; but even though he may have been tempted, he didn’t slip his hands in between her legs. He wouldn’t do that to her out on a crowded dance floor in the middle of all those people. Not even if she . . . kind of wanted him to.

She leaned her head back against his shoulder, gripping his arm with one hand, tangling the other in his hair. He was pressed in close behind her, she couldn’t even tell where he stopped and she began. His hips rolled forward into hers, hers pressed backward into his, and all she could think was that, if they didn’t have clothes on right now, if it was just her and him . . .

An hour later, it really was just the two of them, her legs shaking around his waist as she fell apart beneath him, his hips slamming into her a few more times as he found his own release. “Fuck,” he swore.

“Mmm.” Damn, that had been some good sex. Not that it was ever bad with Bellamy. But tonight, all the dancing had really worked her into a frenzy. Bellamy’s definition of teaching her to dance had pretty much been reduced to dry-humping on the dance floor, but whatever. It was foreplay, and it had worked wonders. By the time they’d left TonDC, she’d been so wet that she practically had a river between her legs. Bellamy had made sure he sampled that prior to getting on top of her, of course.

He rolled over onto his side of the bed, except it wasn’t his bed this time. They were in her bed, which was technically nicer but somehow not as comfortable. She missed his cotton sheets, his lumpy pillows, his squeaky mattress. Bellamy had insisted that they come here after TonDC, though,
so she could work on her paper for art history class, but right now, that was the last thing she wanted
to do. It was late, and she was tired, and she kind of just wanted to lie there next to him and fall
asleep.

“I think you really were looser tonight,” he blurted suddenly.

She shot him a look. What the fuck did that mean?

“On the dance floor,” he clarified quickly. “Not . . .”

“I was gonna say . . .” She did Kegel exercises on a daily basis, just to keep things tight down there.

“I’m not sayin’ you’re Fred Astaire or anything,” he acknowledged, “but you went for it. You did
good.” Kicking the covers aside, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and got up, and for a
moment, she feared he might get dressed and leave. But she should have known better. Bellamy was
very good about being present after sex. He rarely ever left her alone.

Buck naked, he strolled on over to her desk and unhooked her laptop computer, brought it over to
her, and set it on her stomach. “Write your paper,” he reminded her.

She groaned. “I don’t want to.”

“It’s due tomorrow, right?” He wandered back over to her desk.

“Yeah. I should’ve done it earlier, but I was . . . distracted.” She tilted her head to the side, happily
admiring the view of his ass.

He seemed a little distracted, too, peering down at her open sketchbook. She was working on a
wintery drawing right now of an old, cozy house with snow-covered evergreens out front. “Can I
look at this?” he asked.

“Sure.” She’d had that sketchbook for such a long time, she didn’t even know half of what was in
there. Hopefully nothing too embarrassing.

He brought the book over to the bed and lay down, crawling back under the covers. She propped
herself up with some pillows behind her back and reluctantly opened her computer, moving the
mouse to get the blank sleep screen off. Her empty Word document nearly blinded her, taunting her
with the one and only word she’d written of her introductory paragraph thus far today: The. She’d
written the word The.

“Whoa,” Bellamy said, showing her a drawing she’d done of Lexa around this time last year. She
was sitting in front of the fireplace wearing plaid flannel pajamas, hair in a messy ponytail, sipping
cocoa and somehow managing to look beautiful even when she wasn’t trying to.

“Lexa,” she explained.

“Hmm. Hot.”

“You’re not her type.”

He chuckled, going onto the next drawing, which was another Lexa one. The one after that was of
Clarke’s mother, sort of a throwback drawing to a simpler time in their relationship when she’d been
small enough to push on the swing set.

“Your mom?” he guessed.
“Yep.” There were none of her dad in there, though. She’d tried to draw him before, but it never seemed to turn out just right. So eventually, she just gave up trying.

“These are really good,” he complimented, continuing through the book. She tried to get some words written while he looked at all her drawings of Raven, Wells, and Niylah, as well as some of the more recent drawings of her new friends. But the only thing her fingers accomplished was to delete the word The because she couldn’t think of anything to put after it. So then her blank word document was really blank.

“Damn, Clarke.”

“What?” She peeked over and saw that he’d found the sketch she was working on for Niylah. It was a steamy drawing of her and her girlfriend kissing, which she’d requested. “Oh, yeah, that’s a gift,” she told him. “I’m gonna color it up, and then Niylah’s gonna give it to Luna for Christmas.”

“That’s . . . a great gift,” he said, looking like he wanted a copy for himself. “Am I in here at all?”

“I don’t know, maybe.”

“Maybe?” When he flipped to the next page, he got his answer. She’d drawn a picture of him just recently, no more than a week ago. She had a ton of ideas for Bellamy sketches, but the actual process of getting his image down on paper was a challenging one. It was so damn hard to capture that angular jaw and to replicate his skin tone. Seriously, a pencil just could not do justice to that skin tone. The finished product, though—a picture of him looking off the page while laughing—was a pretty decent likeness.

“There I am,” he said, smiling. “Hey, I look good.”

“You do,” she agreed.

“I don’t know if I have quite that many freckles, though.”

Oh, he totally did, but she found it adorable that he reached up to touch his cheeks, as though he could somehow check.

She eagerly anticipated his reaction to the next drawing, because it was one of the steamiest ones she’d ever done. And it involved him. “Well, well, well,” he said when he saw it. “Look what we have here.”

She blushed, a little bit embarrassed that she’d taken the time to draw the exact image she saw every time he went down on her. Yes, she had drawn Bellamy Blake with his head between her legs, eyes closed, cheek grazing her thigh the way it did right before he started to devour her again.

“That’s . . .” He seemed to be at a loss for words, but he gazed at her drawing in awe.

“I couldn’t get the image out of my head,” she confessed.

He smiled, almost as if he were proud—and honestly, he had every reason to be, because his oral skills were seriously the Bellamy Blake Method™—and said, “It looks good.”

“Yeah, I think so, too.” That was why she’d drawn it.

“Where’d you learn how to do this?” he asked, flipping more quickly through some of the still life sketches towards the back of her book.
“I don’t know. I just doodled a lot when I was young,” she answered. “And then I took a lot of art classes in junior high and high school. It all just sort of took off from there.”

“Well, you’re good, Clarke,” he praised.

“Thanks.”

“No, I mean you’re really good,” he emphasized. “You’re definitely studying the right thing.”

Clarke sighed, tapping her fingers on her keyboard without typing anything. “My mom doesn’t think so,” she said sadly. “She always wanted me to go to med school and become a doctor like her. But I didn’t.” She let out a shaky sigh, remembering how that conversation had gone when she’d revealed her plans and goals for her future, much to her mother’s bewilderment. “When I told her I wasn’t going to the University of Maryland and that I was going to art school here in Arkadia instead . . .” She shook her head. “It wasn’t pretty.”

Bellamy frowned, hesitating a moment before he said, “Seems like she kinda . . .”

“She loves me,” Clarke filled in, because she knew that was true. “But I think she had all these really high expectations of me, and in her mind, I just haven’t lived up to them.”

Bellamy’s frown intensified, and he shook his head. “That’s crap.”

“Well, that’s the way it is.” She’d learned to accept it, and on the bright side, things were gradually getting better. When she’d first revealed her decision to be an art major, her mother had been furious. Now, she begrudgingly accepted it. When she’d first revealed her bisexuality, her mother had been devastated. Now, she begrudgingly accepted that, too. It wasn’t hostile anymore; it was just . . . tense.

“On a lighter note,” she said, not wanting to bring down their night when it had been such a good one. “Can you draw?”

“Can I draw?” he echoed. “No, I suck at it.”

“Really?” She didn’t even believe that. “But you’re good at everything.”

“Not drawing. I have no artistic ability whatsoever,” he readily admitted.

“What?” It was almost shocking, actually. He could dance, he could cook, he could do acrobatic things with his tongue, but drawing was a challenge? Seriously? “Draw me,” she told him, wanting to see what he could come up with.

“Oh, shit, this is gonna be bad.” He opened her sketchbook to one of the blank pages in the back and asked, “Got a pencil?”

“Drawer.”

He reached over to her nightstand drawer and took one out, a crappy mechanical one. If he thought for one second that he could draw anything decent with that, then he was sorely mistaken.

“Alright, here we go,” he said, angling the sketchbook away from her so that she couldn’t see what he was doing. “Write your paper.”

She didn’t want to write her paper, though. It was so boring.

It only took him a minute, if that, to complete his sketch. “Alright, here,” he said, holding it up for
her to see. “A masterpiece.”

It really was pathetic. Bellamy’s drawing of her was little more than a stick figure with a couple strands of hair. And two huge circles on her chest. Boobs? She huffed and clutched her chest.

“Well . . .” He shrugged. “They’re big, Clarke.”

“Oh my god. You’re right, though. You can’t draw.”

“I told you.”

“Wow.” This was rare, like finding a unicorn or a leprechaun or something. This was something that Bellamy Blake couldn’t do. “You made a mistake, though. You drew my right one bigger than my left one. But the left one’s bigger.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s good stuff.”

“Bellamy!” she squealed, swatting his hand away. “How am I supposed to write this paper if you’re doing that?”

“Ah, you don’t wanna write your paper anyway.” He took the computer off her lap and sat up, positioning his fingers on the keyboard. “How long does it have to be?”

“Three to four pages,” she droned, not sure if she could even crank out one page tonight.

“What’s the topic?”

“The impact of Renaissance art.” She made a face, not particularly inspired by that time period. It was important, certainly, but she was far more interested in some of modern history’s painters.

“That’s not bad,” he said. “I can do that. Just go to sleep.”

“What?”

“Just go to sleep,” he repeated. “I’ll write your paper for you.” He started typing, and before Clarke knew it, there was actually an entire sentence on that page, an introductory one.

“That’s my last assignment before my final exam,” she informed him.

“I know. That’s why I’ll do well on it.” His eyes were locked on the screen now, and more and more words were appearing.

“Bellamy, I can’t ask you to--”


She yawned, unable to hide the truth of that. She’d been exhausted even prior to the dancing and the sex. If she let her eyes fall closed, she’d probably be asleep in no time. “You really wanna write my
paper?” she said mid-yawn, feeling a bit guilty for even entertaining the idea.

“Yes.” He had half a paragraph done already, which was surreal to her. It was like he didn’t even have to think about the words to type them.

Well, she thought, it is for art history. Bellamy may not have been the world’s greatest artist, but he definitely knew more than she did about the history aspect of it. And in a weird way, he actually seemed excited about the prospect of getting to do an essay. Maybe because he hadn’t done one since he’d been in high school?

“Alright,” she agreed, rolling over onto her side. “Don’t screw it up.”

“I won’t,” he promised.

“Goodnight, Bellamy.”

“Night.” He reached over and shut off the lamp so that only the computer screen was illuminating the room.

As predicted, a mere minute after her head hit the pillow and her eyes fell shut, she felt herself starting to drift off, the sound of a clicking keyboard lulling her to sleep.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

When Clarke awoke, Bellamy was already gone. He’d probably had to get an early start for work. It seemed like he’d had a lot of jobs lately, mostly car stuff. With winter making its presence known, lots of vehicles were having problems, and everyone in his part of town seemed to view him as the guy who could fix them.

The first thing she did when she got out of bed was to go over to her desk and see if he’d actually gotten that paper done. And indeed, he had. It was sitting atop her computer, three and half pages, stapled in the left-hand corner and double-spaced. She skimmed it, pleased to see that it did look well-written. Hopefully her professor didn’t know her well enough to recognize that she’d never have been able to write that. Art was her thing. Art history? Not so much.

It took five days for her professor to get all the essays graded, which, in college time, wasn’t actually that bad. Clarke got a little nervous when she saw the grades of some of the people sitting around her. C-minus. D-plus. An F? A legitimate F for the girl sitting beside her? The professor had scribbled a note on the front in red ink that said, ‘Plagiarism is a crime. See me.’

Oh my god, Clarke thought worriedly. What if he thought she had plagiarized, too? Had she, technically? If they were Bellamy’s words and not her own, was that a crime? Surely not when he’d volunteered to do it, right?

The worry became panic when everyone else seemed to have gotten their paper back, and Clarke had yet to see hers. The professor stood up in front of the lecture hall, clearing his throat, holding one paper in his hand. “I do have one essay I need to point out,” he announced.

Clarke clenched the arms of her chair. Good God, he was going to tell the whole class she’d cheated, wasn’t he? He was going to make an example out of her for the others so that, when the final exam rolled around, nobody would dare break any rules.

“This paper,” the professor boomed, “is an exemplary piece of work.”

Her eyes widened in astonishment. Wait, what?
He smiled at her. “Clarke Griffin.”

Everyone turned towards the back of the classroom to look at her, seemingly surprised. And no wonder. She sat in that class without ever raising her hand, barely saying a word. She was such a non-entity that, on the rare occasions the professor did address her, he called her Connie.

“Clarke, would you come on up here?” the professor invited, stepping aside from the podium. 

_Holy shit._ She rose out of her seat slowly and slinked towards the front of the room, petrified of where this was going. She had a feeling she already knew.

“Step up to the podium,” her professor said.

She did as he instructed, trying to not look like a deer caught in the headlights, hoping the rest of her peers couldn’t see that she was shaking.

“I’d like you to read this to the class,” the professor said, setting her essay—‘her’ essay—down on the podium in front of her. “Whenever you’re ready.”

_Oh. God._ She tried to take a deep breath without actually looking like she was taking a deep breath, and stared down at the first page. Good God, there were words on there she didn’t even know how to pronounce. Had Bellamy gone nuts with thesaurus.com or something? He didn’t even talk like that in real life.

They’d arranged to meet up on campus after that class for lunch, so that worked out well. She was able to sit down with him at Sbarro and tell him all about the single most mortifying academic experience of her life. He was laughing so hard, he almost choked on his pizza. He _did_ choke on his breadstick and had to drink half his soda to get everything to go down the right pipe. She’d seen Bellamy laugh before, plenty of times, but this was at another level. It was a _literal_ knee-slapper for him. He kept rocking back and forth, tossing his head and cackling as she recounted the incident for him. A couple other customers even gave him curious looks, like they thought he was having a seizure or something.

“It’s not funny,” she argued.

“No, it’s hilarious.”

“I had to read it in front of everyone. I had to answer questions in front of _everyone._”

“Questions?” he echoed. “Oh, god, what’d he ask?”

“Oh, you know, just how I’d done my research, how I narrowed down my topic, how I had generated such ‘unique and interesting ideas.’”

Bellamy laughed some more.

“It was horrible.” He hadn’t exactly referenced Da Vinci and Michelangelo, as she’d quickly discovered. No, he’d referenced the works of a ton of artists she’d never even heard of before, which, as the professor had told the entire class, added to the paper’s uniqueness.

“So what’d you say?” Bellamy asked eagerly.

“Uh, I channeled my stepdad and tried to do what politicians do: answer without really answering.”

“Did it work?”
“I think so, but it was terrifying.” She shuddered, happy to have made it throughout without fainting. Although maybe fainting would have been better, because then she could have sat down sooner. “Oh, and I stumbled over so many words. I mean, what exactly is a basilica?”

He laughed some more, looking on the verge of tears now. “This is awesome,” he said.

“Awesome for you, mortifying for me.”

“But you said you got an A, right?”

“A plus.”

“Well . . .” He shrugged. “I did my job.”

“You did.” She had to admit, as heart-pounding as this whole experience had been today, it was probably worth it. Her grade in that class had been average at best, but this would bump her up. It was the best grade she’d ever gotten on an art history essay, and this was the third art history class she’d ever taken.

“Man, I wonder what your professor would say if knew some low-life street urchin wrote that,” Bellamy pondered.

“Low-life street urchin?” she resounded.

“That’s probably what he’d think of me.”

“No.” She didn’t know what her professor would think of Bellamy, what any of her professors would think of him, but . . . well, truth be told, they probably wouldn’t expect that someone with only a high school diploma could write like that. “You’re very smart, Bellamy,” she told him.

“Not really,” he said modestly. “I just know history.”

He knew history? She was thinking it went a step beyond that. Miller had told her that he had once come home and found Bellamy reading an encyclopedia for fun. When she’d asked him about it, he’d vehemently denied it, of course, but more so and more so, the story was starting to sound legit.

“Well, I could write more for you, if you want,” he volunteered. “I didn’t mind.”

“No, I’d better do it on my own,” she said, not willing to risk another potential public humiliation like this one. Besides, it was technically cheating, and she wasn’t about to make a habit out of that. “I will let you proofread some stuff, though.”

He shrugged. “Yeah, sure. I’m an okay writer.”

“Oh, yeah, just okay.” She picked up what remained of her breadstick and chucked it at him, and that just made him laugh again.

It was kind of nice having Bellamy on campus. He didn’t have to be anywhere until 3:00—apparently that same Diana woman wanted him to do some sprinkler repair, but really, was she needing to use a sprinkler in December? He said he was able to hang out for a few hours, do whatever she wanted. And as much as she wanted to do him, the week before finals, a.k.a. “Dead Week,” was quickly approaching, and she wanted to get a jump-start on it more.

“So what am I helping you study?” he asked as they walked up the steps to the campus library.

“Art history. I have to do really well on that final now. My professor expects ‘exemplary work’ from
He smirked, holding the door open for her.

Right inside the entrance of the library was a desk where students had to check in. Clarke took out her university ID, brought it up to the girl behind the counter, and held it out to be scanned. The scanner flashed a green light, made a beeping noise, and she was good to go. But when Bellamy tried to follow her, the girl said, “Oh, sir, I need to scan your card.”

He and Clarke both stopped, looking unsurely at each other. “Uh, I’m not a student here,” he admitted.

“Oh.” She cringed. “I’m sorry, I can’t let you go in then. The library’s for students only.”

Bellamy lowered his head, a look of disappointment on his face.

“He’s just helping me study,” Clarke said.

“I’m sorry.” Clearly the girl at the desk felt bad, but she was also trying to follow the rules.

Clarke met Bellamy’s eyes helplessly. No, this wasn’t fair. Did it really matter if he wasn’t a student? Was it really that big of a deal? She wanted him there with her. Even though he’d be a little bit of a distraction and she might not be able to focus . . . she wanted him there.

She was about to give up and just leave with him, but Bellamy wasn’t so easily dissuaded. He leaned over the desk, turned on the charm, and said, “Listen, I understand you’re just trying to do your job. But I’d really appreciate you bending the rules for me,” grinning flirtatiously as he said every word.

She shifted in her seat unsurely.

“Please?” he pleaded. “Just this once. It’ll be our little secret.”

*Oh, Bellamy.* Clarke had to hide her smile, because she knew exactly what he was doing. That charisma of his was a powerful thing, and he could easily weaponize it when he wanted to. Case in point . . .

“Okay,” the girl said, blushing. “Just this once.”

“Thank you.” He smiled at her, then fell into step beside Clarke as she brought him up to the second floor where the best study areas were at. “This is nice,” he remarked on his way up the stairs.

When they got up to the second floor, he just stood there for a second, staring at everything in awe. Arkadia was a small university, so its library was on the smaller end, too. But it must have looked huge to him. It dawned on Clarke that he had probably never seen a library quite like this before. There were shelves upon shelves of books, rows and rows of computers that were all in use. It was quiet and smelled a bit musty and probably seemed like heaven to Bellamy. His mouth was slightly agape as he took everything in, and there was a look of pure wonder in his eyes. “Wow,” he said quietly.

She smiled, loving that he was just letting his inner geek flag fly.

Clarke sat down at one of the biggest tables, setting up her study station. Computer, notes that she could barely read, textbook that she dreaded opening . . . she sprawled everything out in front of her, trying to figure out the best way to go about this. Maybe deciphering her notes was a good first step, or having Bellamy look through the book and quiz her on all the vocabulary words?
Bellamy was busy looking at everything, though. He sat down across from her, but his eyes danced
dall over the library, taking it all in. Clarke tried not to make it too obvious that she was watching him,
but it was impossible not to watch him. He looked so energized, which nobody else in the library did.
He looked excited to be there, perhaps because he wasn’t even supposed to be. When Clarke looked
around that library, she saw . . . books. Just a lot of big old dusty books. But Bellamy . . . it was like
he was seeing something else.

“Sorry,” he said, shaking his head to refocus himself. “What do you want help with?”

“Um . . .” She had to break herself out of her own stupor, because she was so damn mesmerized by
him. “I need a book,” she said, locating her wrinkled syllabus from the first day of the class. “A
couple books, actually. There were some things I never read that I was supposed to read.”

“I’ll go get ‘em,” he volunteered eagerly, grabbing the syllabus from her.

“Thanks.”

He was already gone, disappearing into bookshelves with a happy smile on his face. He probably
didn’t even know where these books were located, but he’d have a blast finding them.

Clarke tried to start studying, scribbling down some of the course-related vocabulary after taking a
moment to Google what a basilica actually was. Much to her surprise, she managed to review a fair
amount of material, which scared the crap out of her, because she realized how much she didn’t
remember; but when she finally let herself check the time and saw that nearly thirty minutes had
passed since she’d gotten there, she got up and went looking for Bellamy.

He wasn’t hard to find. At all. He’d planted himself in some hardcore history section with books
about events from the past Clarke had never heard of before, and he sat on the floor, rifling through
the pages of one book while three more lay around him, already opened. He was so absorbed in
what he was reading, he didn’t even hear her walk up on him, and it took her sitting down next to
him for him to glance up from the page and say, “Oh, hey.”

“Hey.” She peeked over at what he was reading, saw a photo of some ancient ruins, and knew
instantly she’d have no interest in it. “Long time no see.”

“Yeah, sorry, I . . . got lost,” he said.


“There’s some cool stuff here,” he said, shutting the book he’d been looking at. “I wish I could
check some of it out.” He sounded so genuinely wistful that Clarke felt her heart go out to him. Sure,
he could go to the Arkadia public library if he wanted to, or he could get online and read anything
about everything. But this must have just felt different for him. After all, if his life had gone
differently, if he and Roma had just taken one different turn on the way to their destination or gotten
in the car a minute or two earlier, then maybe he would have had ample opportunity to sit in library
like this, lose himself in all the knowledge he so desperately craved.

She felt bad, guilty even. Because to her, being here right now and having to study for finals for a
chore. For him, it would have been a privilege.

“I can check out some stuff for you,” she offered, more than willing to do that if he’d seen something
he liked.

“No, it’s okay,” he said. “When would I have time to read any of it?”
He didn’t have time, but she was sure he’d make time, even if it meant using his phone to illuminate the pages during the middle of the night.

“You should go to college, Bellamy,” she blurted suddenly, without really thinking about it. He just . . . he looked so right here. “It’s not too late.”

He didn’t shut down her suggestion right away, but he still shook his head after giving it a moment of thought. “I don’t know . . .”

“I know it’s expensive, but you could take out loans. And you could still work. It’s not like you have to take five classes at a time,” she pointed out. “You’d be so good at it. You’d love it.”

“I would,” he admitted. “Well, you know, never say never.”

She smiled at him, happy to have gotten at least that much. It wasn’t an outright rejection of the mere possibility. Maybe if he had the time to think about it, he’d get serious and give it a shot.

“It’s just hard for me, you know?” he said. “I’ve been out of school for five years. It’s just not the easiest thing to try to go back.”

She supposed she could understand that, as much as possible. Her circumstances were clearly different, but if Bellamy still had a burning passion for knowledge . . . well, that was probably far more important than having money or a completely open schedule was.

“Just think about it,” she urged him. All she wanted him to do was keep the idea in mind.

He nodded mutely, but it was something. It was definitely something.

She didn’t want to put any undue pressure on him or stress him out about it at all, didn’t want to suggest that he might look into teaching because of how he’d tried to teach Octavia to read back when he was only six. For now, this was enough, the mere seed of an idea planted in that brilliant brain of his. Maybe the rest was another conversation for another time.
Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Murphy got a trampoline. Well, technically he convinced Bellamy to accompany him to Walmart, and they bought a trampoline together. When Clarke got off work and headed over to their place, they were putting it up in the backyard. Emori stood around and supervised. They claimed that they just wanted to have it all set up by the time Miller got home, but Clarke suspected they were both just eager as hell to jump on it.

It wasn’t a particularly safe-looking trampoline; there was no net boundary to keep people from bouncing off. But bouncing off would probably be part of the appeal for the boys. They climbed on up there once Bellamy proclaimed it safe and ready to go and started bouncing around like little kids. Soon enough, Emori gave in and got up there with them. Clarke was about to do the same when her phone rang. Her mom’s ringtone. Great. That didn’t exactly compel her to answer, but she did, only because she knew Abby would keep calling all night until she got a hold of her.

Her mom wanted to talk to her about Christmas plans. Or something. Clarke was only halfway listening, because watching her friends jump around like fifth graders was far more entertaining. Emori was getting bounced all over the place by the combined weight of the boys, and Bellamy kept saying he wanted to do a backflip. Murphy had no shame and went full on cheerleader, yelling, “Woo!” as he did the splits in the air.

“Clarke, are you listening?” her mother’s voice snapped.

“Huh?” She really wasn’t.

Her mother sighed impatiently. “I just wanna know if you’re gonna come spend the night here on Christmas Eve,” she said. “Like last year.”

Like every year, Clarke thought. She was still young enough that her childhood Christmas traditions were still her Christmas traditions. Except some things were different now. Like rather than eating a Christmas breakfast the way they used to when her father was alive, they got up and got dressed, showered, all fixed up for the day. Then they sat on the couch and took a family photo, one that would be used in next year’s Christmas card.

It just wasn’t the same.

“Clarke?”

“Um . . .” She didn’t want to commit to anything yet, not when she had this secret Santa thing to take part in, too. “I’ll have to get back to you on that.”

“Well, can you do that soon?” her mother entreated. “I’d like to get a plan in place.”

“Yeah, I’ll let you know.”

“Clarke, come on!” Bellamy shouted.

“What was that?” her mother asked. “Who was that? Where are you at?”

“I’m just with some friends,” Clarke replied vaguely. “I gotta go, Mom. I’ll talk to you soon.” She ended the call, and tossed her phone down atop her purse.
“Get up here!” Bellamy hollered excitedly.

She took her shoes off and climbed up onto the trampoline, and he held out his hand to help pull her to her feet.

“Best purchase ever!” Murphy proudly proclaimed, kicking both legs up behind him as he bounced some more.

Clarke couldn’t remember the last time she’d been on a trampoline. It took her a moment to really find her footing, but when she did . . . it was blast. She bounced and jumped and squealed and giggled. They were probably exceeding the weight limit by about one whole person, but none of them really cared.

Murphy started trying to bounce Bellamy off, and Bellamy started trying to bounce Murphy off, and since Bellamy weighed more than any of the rest of them, he had more success. Murphy lost his footing and fell, landing against the padding on the side, but after a quick, “Fuck!” he got right back up, and started generating some momentum for his bounces again. “Help me out,” he told his girlfriend, grabbing her hand.

“You’re not gonna bounce me off,” Bellamy said confidently.

Clarke moved towards the edge of the trampoline, content to just let it play out.

“Come on!” Murphy said, bouncing higher than Emori. “You gotta bounce, babe!”

Fed up, she shoved his chest backwards, and this time, he did stumble over the side and fall onto the ground. Bellamy and Clarke both just laughed.

“What the hell, Emori?” Murphy yelled.

“Serves you right,” she said, sitting down on the side. “Are you okay, though?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he muttered, unable to keep from smiling at her. “I’m freezin’ my balls off, though. I gotta go inside.”

“I’ll go with you,” Emori volunteered, sliding off the edge of the trampoline. “You guys comin’?”

“Nah, I’m good out here,” Bellamy said, shifting his weight from side to side.

“Me, too,” Clarke replied.

Once Murphy and Emori went inside and it was just the two of them on that trampoline, Bellamy grinned at Clarke mischievously.

“Bellamy, no,” she said warningly.

But he darted across the bouncy surface of that trampoline, trying to grab her anyway. She bounded out of the way, but it was no use. He flung one arm out and hooked it around her waist, pulling her back in. “Bellamy!” she yelped, half-laughing/half-screaming as he whirled her around in the air. He lost his balance shortly after, and they fell onto the middle of the trampoline together.

Fifteen minutes later, when the sun was almost all the way down, after a particularly spontaneous and rousing game of trampoline tag, she and Bellamy lay together on that trampoline. He was on his back, she was on her stomach, and both of them were too lazy to get up and go inside. It was actually pretty freaking cold outside, but Emori had brought out a couple blankets for them, so as
long as they huddled underneath and cuddled up close to each other, it was bearable. And Clarke never took any issue with cuddling up to Bellamy.

“This was probably a dumb thing to buy,” Bellamy acknowledged, “especially with Christmas comin’ up.”

“It’s fun, though,” Clarke pointed out. She wished Polaris had one. Hell, she would have enjoyed a trampoline far more than a gym.

“Yeah, it is,” he agreed. “Oh, well. Gotta splurge once in a while.”

“Once in a while,” she agreed. “Hey, so speaking of Christmas, though, when do we actually do this secret Santa thing?”

He yawned and answered, “Christmas Eve. Then people go do stuff with their families on Christmas Day.”

She supposed that pretty much answered her mother’s question then. She’d just tell her she was spending Christmas Eve with Raven, though, because her mom probably wouldn’t take to well to finding out she was spending it with a boy she wasn’t even dating. Then she could drive home on Christmas morning, do all the gift-opening stuff with her mom and Marcus, do the whole family dinner if that was what they decided to do . . .

_Ugh._ She didn’t want to do another family dinner. One per year was enough. But if nothing else, that would give her an excuse to sext Bellamy again.

“You cold?” he asked, rubbing the back of her thigh.

“A little,” she admitted. They were outside in December in Maryland. Probably wasn’t wise.

“Maybe I should warm you up then,” he pondered, sneaking his hand in between her legs.

“Mmm, maybe.” She crawled on top of him, legs straddling his waist, chest pressed against his. Her hair fell forward when she kissed him, so he tucked it behind her ear for her.

“We should take our clothes off,” he proposed. “For body heat.”

“For body heat?” She wasn’t entirely opposed to the idea, especially since they had all these blankets to conceal them.

His hands smoothed all over her as they kissed, down her sides, around her waist. He rubbed the small of her back, snaking his hands underneath her sweatshirt to caress up and down her spine. They soon went lower, though, giving her backside a good squeeze through her leggings, pushing her hips down against his suggestively.

“Getting warmer?” he asked.

“Mmm-hmm,” she moaned, smiling contentedly. That felt so good. His hands were so hot on her skin.

Unfortunately, they were interrupted when Murphy peeked out the back door and complained, “Really? On my trampoline? We just got that thing. Can’t you wait to contaminate it?”
Bellamy ignored him completely and gave her another kiss.

“Never mind him,” Emori said, shoving her boyfriend aside. “Carry on. Just be careful not to break that thing.” She smirked and shut the door.

“We should probably go inside,” Bellamy murmured against her lips.

“Probably.” But that trampoline was definitely cool, very spacious. So someday, when it wasn’t so cold outside and nobody else was home, it might be a nice, bouncy place to . . . well, bounce on him.

So they left the blankets outside and headed inside where it was warmer. He chased her up the stairs and wasted no time getting her undressed once they were in the privacy of his bedroom. She did the same to him, all about that body heat from his hot, hot body.

“What do you wanna do?” she asked, sitting down on the bed once they were both completely unclothed.

“I don’t know,” he said, lightly stroking his own cock.

She watched him for a moment, wondering what it looked like when he jacked off. A perverted part of her wanted to ask him to do it for her right now, but another part of her thought she might as well do it for him. “Maybe something like this?” she suggested, replacing his hand with her own. She gently squeezed it around the base, twisting her hand back and forth a couple times before she started pumping him.

“That’s good,” he said, gazing down at her with lust in his eyes. “Or . . .”

Her eyebrows arched, intrigued. “Or what?”

He licked his lips and moved her hand away from his shaft. “Come here,” he said, motioning her over to the side of the bed.

She crawled over there, already prepared to lie back and spread her legs.

“No, put your head here,” he said, touching the side of the bed.

“Oh. Well. This was new. “I have a feeling I know where this is going,” she said, swinging her legs around in the opposite direction. She lay down flat on her back, acquainting herself with a . . . a new view, so to speak.

“Is this alright?” he asked, pulling her back a bit further so that her head was dangling over the side.

“Oh-huh.” She’d never actually given a blowjob in this position before, but she was definitely willing to try it. For Bellamy.

“You ready?” he eagerly asked, moving closer so his erection was hovering just above her face.

All of a sudden, she started to get freaked out. Sure, she’d sucked Bellamy’s cock plenty of times, but usually she was on her knees or on top of him when she did it. When they sixty-nined, she was the one on top for that, too. This position was totally out of her control. She wouldn’t just be sucking him into her mouth; he’d be thrusting into it.

“Clarke?” he prompted.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I feel like it’s attacking me.”
He chuckled a bit, putting his hands on her shoulders. “Are you good?”

“I’m good.” She took a few even breaths to steady her nerves.

“We don’t have to do this,” he assured her.

“No, it’s fine.” This was Bellamy. She could do this. Licking her lips, she told him, “Go ahead,” and closed her eyes. Seeing it get closer would be like seeing a dinosaur about to maul her.

Bellamy was always considerate during sex. When he sensed that she was perhaps a bit anxious, like she was right now, he took things slowly and carefully. So he started out just by pressing the head of his cock against her lips. She instinctively opened her mouth and swirled her tongue around it, getting a taste. He tasted familiar, and that made her feel more at ease.

She opened her mouth wide, allowing him to push inside there, and she tried to keep her jaw and throat muscles as loose and relaxed as possible. He started to fuck her mouth, not too forcefully, not too insistently, but he didn’t just stand there, either. As the position required, he moved in and out rhythmically, seeming to go a little bit farther in with each thrust.

She wanted to be able to just lie there and take it for him, like the way more experienced porn stars did. But Bellamy’s length and girth were considerable, and in this position, where she was basically at his mercy, she sort of felt like she was choking on it. Feeling like she was about to gag, she pushed on his legs, wordlessly communicating her need for a break.

Since Bellamy always kept his attention on her, he understood what she was saying right away and pulled his cock from her mouth. “You okay?” he asked, his concern evident.

“Oh-huh.” She had to lift her head up a bit, some of her blood was rushing to it, making her feel a little bit woozy.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized.

“No, it’s fine.” She didn’t want him thinking he’d hurt her when that wasn’t the case at all. It just wasn’t the world’s most comfortable position.

“Here,” he said, putting a pillow beneath her head. “Better?”

Oh, that made a world of difference, though. A world. “Much better,” she confirmed, thinking that she could probably try it again. She wet her lips, waiting for him to put it back in her mouth again, but when he didn’t, she grabbed hold of it, gently tugging forward. “Come on, Bellamy,” she coaxed.

He was definitely hesitant, but his cock was rock hard and dripping pre-cum, clearly ready to keep going. “You’re doing so good,” he told her, stroking her hair.

She shivered, because of course she loved hearing that. Of course.

He put his cock back in her mouth, but this time, he kept his thrusts very shallow. And this wasn’t uncomfortable at all. She was able to concentrate most of her attention on the head of it, which was the most sensitive part anyway, and he still got to quite literally fuck her mouth.

Blowjobs were strange things. Having something so big in her mouth, something that she could actually feel throbbing against her tongue and her cheeks . . . it was a whirlwind. This was different than sucking Finn’s dick, which she’d always just done out of obligation. This was way different than sucking on a rubber dildo with Lexa. This was Bellamy, his taste, his texture. And even though
he was the one controlling the pace and depth of this right now, she was still the one who had the power, in a way, the power to give him pleasure, the power to hold his undivided attention.

It was a complete rush, one that made her rub her thighs together shamelessly and moan.

He stared to pant for air, and his hips began to move on their own accord, faster, farther. Her mouth really did feel more relaxed, though, and she was fine now. She could take it.

She hadn’t even realized she’d been touching herself until his hand came down between her legs, nudging hers aside. He leaned over her, rubbing her wet pussy, stroking his fingers up and down her slit before pressing one into her. Her hips bucked in response, because suddenly, this wasn’t just about giving him pleasure. She was getting it, too.

“You like that?” he asked, soon adding a second digit.

She moved wantonly against his hand, desperately enjoying the stimulation he was providing. This was how he was planning on getting her off, she figured, until he surprised the hell out of her by removing his hand, standing up, and pulling his cock out of her mouth. She lay there with her mouth still open, gasping for air, wiping away the saliva that now coated her lips and chin. “What’re you--”

Her question was cut short when he put his arms underneath her, hoisting her into the air. She gasped, not even sure what was happening at first. She felt her legs go upward, way upward, to the point where they were over his shoulders and flailing to the side. With determined strength, he lifted her up farther, to the point where her thighs were on his shoulders and her pussy was right in front of his face.

“Oh my god,” she managed breathlessly. This was . . . what even was this? Was this an actual position, or was he just inventing a new one? Even though she was upside down, clinging to him like a tree, her face was at the perfect level to suck his cock some more, so a standing sixty-nine was likely his goal here. Indeed, it seemed she was correct when his mouth came into contact with her pussy, zig-zagging up and down her folds before flicking rapidly over her clit.

"Oh god," she thought as volts of pleasure started to zing through her. Oh god.

Bellamy was strong, but even he wouldn’t be able to hold her up like this for long. Recognizing the abbreviated window of opportunity for this position, she took him back into her mouth, sucking aggressively this time, wanting to match his level of oral prowess (even though that was impossible). Since she had to hold onto his waist to keep from sliding down, she couldn’t use her hands to help her this time. All she could do was attempt to bob her head the same way she did when she was on her knees in front of him or nestled in between his legs.

When she started to fall a bit, he hoisted her back up again, even though his arms were shaking with strain, even though his arms had to be killing him. She wasn’t afraid that he’d drop her, but she was still afraid she might fall. His entire body was becoming slippery with sweat because of the physical exertion this required of him. It was a crazy position, one that made her feel wild and daring as fuck, but it wasn’t conducive to anything long-term. She was starting to feel dizzy as the blood rushed to her head, and the last thing she wanted to do was pass out on him.

“Bellamy?” she breathed.

Somehow, that was all she had to say. He carefully laid her back down on the bed, making sure her head was once again on that pillow, but instead of going back to the blowjob position, he crawled up there with her, maneuvering so that he was lying down with his head between her legs.
It looked just like the picture she’d drawn.

“Please,” she begged.

His mouth was already on her, though, almost as if it’d never left. He ate her out greedily, with abandon, not concerned about being sloppy. His heated breath rasped against her as he licked her up and down like she was a popsicle, and he pressed hot, open-mouthed kisses to her inner thighs before gently sucking and nibbling on her clit. She watched him work on her, in awe of what he was doing, because a few minutes ago, she’d been nowhere close, and now, she felt like she could cum at any second.

“Oh . . .” How had this happened? She’d started out giving him a blowjob, and now, even though he hadn’t climaxed yet, he was going down on her?

He was in the zone, clearly. There was no stopping him. Not that she would have stopped him to save the world, because it felt so damn good and her thighs were quivering. Normally he looked up at her when he did this, monitored her reaction. But it was like he was operating an all-time confidence high this time, like he just knew he was giving her everything and there wasn’t anything she wanted more.

“Yes,” she gasped, clutching at the bed sheets. “Oh god, Bellamy!” She came hard and she came suddenly, pressing down hard against his face as her orgasm tore through her. He lapped at every big of fluid her body produced, everything he could get. And when she was done, he almost looked a bit disappointed that there hadn’t been more for him to taste. He gave her a few more lazy kisses, which felt tantalizing to her uber-sensitive flesh, and sat back, gazing down at her with that same lusty look he’d had in his eyes when they’d started. His hand was on his cock, and he was jerking himself off rapidly.

“Bellamy . . .” She felt like she was on another planet right now, but still, she could do that for him.

He shook his head stubbornly and walked forward on his knees, positing the head of his cock above her stomach. With a few more nearly violent pumps, he groaned and got off, shooting his cum onto her lower abdomen. It came out in spurts, white hot and sticky. There was . . . quite a lot of it, so she was pretty thoroughly coated.

The whole thing was incredibly arousing for Clarke. Bellamy had only cum on her body a few times before, but damn, it looked good. He must have thought so, too, because when he was done, he gazed down at her through half-hooded eyes and grunted, “Fuck.”

She smiled dazedly. Fuck indeed.

Afterward, he lay down and sprawled out, but she was in desperate need of a shower. She got cleaned up, ran a quick shampoo through her hair, towel-dried it to the point where she could sleep on it, and then rejoined Bellamy in the bedroom. “Bellamy, can I--” She stopped abruptly when she saw him lying there, though, eyes shut, mouth gently parted as he slept with the light still on. He looked . . . so freaking cute. How someone that cute could turn into such a sex god and become so smoldering was a mystery to her.

She was so distracted by his adorableness that she forgot what she was even going to ask him. Something about his clothes, maybe? Certain t-shirts of his were her favorite to sleep in, so chances were, it was something about that.

Careful not to wake him, she pulled open his top dresser drawer quietly, dug around for a minute, and finally found his black Led Zeppelin one. She threw it on, not bothering with bottoms, and
tiptoed towards the bed. The mattress squeaked when she tried to lie down, and she cringed.

“It’s okay,” he murmured, eyes still shut. “I’m not all the way asleep.”

She settled in the rest of the way, getting comfy on her side, pulling the sheet up over her waist. “Well, you look, sleepy.”

“I am.” He rubbed his eyes, struggling to open them again. “That was good tonight,” he said.

“Yeah,” she agreed. “It’s good every night.” *Wait a minute,* she thought. What if he’d said that because it *wasn’t* as good for him every night as it was for her? “Isn’t it?” she asked warily.

He smiled tiredly. “Yeah, it’s good every night.”

She breathed an inward sigh of relief. She’d figured as much, what with him never really struggling to achieve an orgasm or anything; but it was still nice to have that verbal reassurance.

“I love gettin’ you off that way,” he murmured lowly.

She shuddered, because without a doubt, the sexiest thing about Bellamy’s oral technique was that he seemed to enjoy doing it so much. “I’ve noticed,” she said, wondering if her preferred that or blowjobs. Then she figured she’d might as well ask him, because otherwise, his eyes were going to close again, and he was just going to fall asleep. “What do you like more,” she inquired, “somebody going down on you or you going down on someone?”

His eyes snapped back open, as though this were something he was eager to talk about. “Oh, going down on someone,” he answered without delay. “No doubt.”

“Really?” That seemed weird to her, for some reason. She’d always assumed that guys valued blowjobs more than pretty much anything else. Finn had been nuts—no pun intended—about it, said it was his favorite thing.

“Yeah, I love it. It’s the best,” he raved. “Watchin’ a girl fall apart, all because of what you’ve done to her . . .” He smiled appreciatively. “There’s nothin’ like it.”

*Nothing* like it?” she pressed. “So you like it better than actual sex?”

“Yeah,” he answered a bit too quickly. “No. Wait. I don’t know.”

Her eyes bulged. “You don’t know?”

“Well . . . okay, actual sex is the best,” he acknowledged. “But after that . . .”

“Wow.” She felt . . . selfish suddenly. Because, although she was more than willing to give blowjobs and found it very arousing in its own right, she definitely preferred *getting* head to *giving* it.

“I don’t know what it is,” he went on contemplatively. “But I’ve always loved it. Haven’t always been good at it, but I’ve always loved it. It’s just . . .” He sighed wistfully. “It’s amazing.”

“Better to give than to receive?” she surmised.

“Yeah, something like that.” He closed his eyes again, and she wasn’t sure whether he was tired or just fantasizing, but when he opened them again, she assumed it was the latter. “Well, it depends on who I’m with, too,” he added. “Because if she’s just some random chick I met at the bar . . .”

“As opposed to the classy girl you met at Walmart.”
“Right. Then I might not . . . I might not really care as much,” he confessed. “I mean, I’ll do it if she wants, but I’m a guy. Sometimes we just like to get in and get done. But like with you . . .” He lifted up the sheet, peeking underneath. “I love doing that to you. I can’t get enough.”

She inhaled shakily, trying not to get too turned on by that. He was tired, and she’d already showered. But that low, gravelly voice of his was so damn seductive.

Nope. Time for bed.

“That’s really interesting,” she said. “Surprising.”

He shook his head. “It’s not just me. Lots of guys like it.”

“Better than blowjobs?”

He nodded.

“Some don’t,” she said. “Finn didn’t.”

“Well, Finn sucks.”

“Lexa liked it, though.”

“Then Lexa’s awesome.”

She laughed.

“What about you?” he asked. “What do you like better?”

“Well . . .” She blushed, not able to lie. “I like it all, but . . . yeah, you’re really good at that, obviously, so I like it when you . . . do your thing.”

“Is it your favorite?” he asked excitedly.

“Probably tied with actual sex.”

He smirked, nodding proudly. “Awesome.”

“No, I’m glad you prefer when I do it,” he said. “I like doing things for you, Clarke.”

Good, she thought, blushing. Then hopefully he’d keep on doing them.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

It wasn’t an easy thing to do, but Bellamy knew he had to do it. He swallowed his pride and stepped into the Trikru art gallery for the first time in his life. Octavia had been trying to get him there for the past two years, but he’d always found an excuse not to go. But not this time. There were no other art galleries in Arkadia. This was his one and only option to get . . . what he needed.

The first thing he noticed was how big the space was. It surprised him, because on the outside, it didn’t look that huge. On the inside, though, it seemed to extend forever, displays upon displays. It was very open, very white so as not to distract from the artwork itself. Not very crowded, though it
was just the middle of the afternoon. Lincoln’s friend Nyko was chatting with a small group of people back at what looked like a wintertime exhibit. Meanwhile, Lincoln was admiring an abstract painting of lines with a young woman at one of the exhibits up front. *I Was Vivacious*, a plaque next to the painting read. Bellamy wasn’t sure whether or not that was the title of the painting or the whole exhibit itself.

“It’s a beautiful piece,” Lincoln was saying. “It’d look great in a very daring type of room. Or in a minimalistic space like this, to draw attention to it.”

So this was what the guy did. Huh. Bellamy hadn’t ever given it much thought, but this gallery was Lincoln’s livelihood. And by extension, it was Octavia’s. For now, at least. If they stayed together. This entrepreneurial effort was what had financed their vacation to Mexico and what would pave the way for India or Thailand or wherever the hell they’d said they were going next.

Bellamy wasn’t about to intrude, so he wandered a bit, somewhat drawn towards an exhibit called *All Mixed Up*. This one was all photography, and as far as he could tell at first glance, the whole theme seemed to be mixed race children. He could appreciate that since, even without knowing his father, he knew that was what he was. Some of the photos of just the kids looked like something out of *National Geographic*, but there were a few that had the parents in them, too. Those looked like perfect family portraits: a mom, a dad, a kid or two. All of them smiling.

“Bellamy?”

He spun around when Lincoln said his name. “Hey.”

“Hi.” Lincoln stared at him confusedly.

*Great*, Bellamy thought, awkward right from the start.

“What are you doing here?” Lincoln questioned, eyes suddenly growing wide with panic. “Is it Octavia? Is she okay?”

“She’s fine.” As much as Bellamy still questioned this guy, it was good to know that his sister sprung to his mind so quickly. “I just thought I’d . . . stop by.”

Lincoln frowned.

“I like art,” Bellamy claimed, strolling further through *All Mixed Up*. “This is cool,” he said, pointing to a photo of two parents fused together. One was white, one was black, and neither one of them cared.

“That’s a new exhibit,” Lincoln said. “Popular.”

“I’ll bet.” Bellamy tapped the sketchbook in his hand against his leg, trying to think of a segue into his real reason for being there. “You got a little bit of everything here, huh?” he noticed. “Sculptures, paintings, photos.”

“A variety,” Lincoln said tersely. The guy never really said a whole lot. He was very stoic. Which was fine, except that made it hard for Bellamy to carry on a conversation with him.

“Alright, look, I’m just gonna cut to the chase,” Bellamy finally decided. “I need a favor.”

Lincoln looked surprised. “From me?”

“Yeah.” Oh, the irony . . . it was not lost on him.
Lincoln frowned again, crossing his arms over his chest as if to say that he had no interest in doing favors for Bellamy.

He swallowed his pride again, trying to be nice without being a suck-up. It wasn’t an easy balance to strike. “I know I can be a jerk to you, so I probably have no right to ask,” he acknowledged. “But it’s not for me, really. It’s for Clarke.”

“Clarke?” Lincoln echoed.

“Yeah. I’m her . . . her secret Santa.” He rolled his eyes. “I wanna get her something good, something she’d never get herself, something she’d really appreciate; but when the budget’s fifteen dollars, that kinda limits the possibilities.”

“You wanna buy one of these paintings for her?” Lincoln assumed. “Or one of these photos?”

“No.” There were no price tags on them, but he had a feeling he couldn’t afford anything here, especially not after buying the trampoline.

“Then I’m not sure what I can—”

“Clarke’s an artist,” Bellamy reminded him, “as you know. And she’s—she’s good. She’s really good.”

Lincoln unfolded his arms, but he still looked tense.

“I know you guys do student exhibits,” Bellamy said, slowly walking towards the much larger man. “I was wondering if you could do one for her.”

Lincoln sighed heavily, contemplatively. “There’s a waiting list,” he said. “Every art student at the university wants to have an exhibit here.”

“Yeah, but Clarke’s not every student,” Bellamy pointed out. “She’s your friend.”

“She’s your friend,” Lincoln corrected.

“Yeah, but she likes you. She defends you to me.”

Lincoln subtly rolled his eyes. “Is that her sketchbook?” he asked, motioning to what Bellamy had in his hand.

“Yeah. Here, take a look.” Bellamy handed it over, hoping Clarke wouldn’t be too pissed at him for taking this. His plan for returning it, as of right now, was to smuggle it into her apartment under his jacket and put it back on her desk before she even noticed it was gone. And if she caught him . . . well, then he’d just say he took it so he could jack off to her sexy drawing. That seemed plausible.

Lincoln flipped through the pages, not taking as much time on each drawing as Bellamy would have liked. Lincoln was probably used to doing this, though, looking over artwork quickly, making a judgment on whether or not it had potential. Bellamy hoped he saw what was obvious, that Clarke’s work did have potential.

“She’s young,” Lincoln remarked, “inexperienced.”

Oh, no, Bellamy thought. That didn’t sound good.

“But . . .” Lincoln added, drawing it out. “You’re right. Her drawings are good.”
Damn right, they are. He took the book when Lincoln handed it back to him. “So you think you can help me out?” he asked.

“Let me get this straight,” Lincoln said, narrowing his eyes. “You want to arrange for Clarke to have an exhibit at Trikru. And you want me to make these arrangements by Christmas?”

“Yeah.” It couldn’t have taken that long, right? All he had to do was talk to his buddy and get him to agree to it, set a date or month or whatever they did, and tell Clarke to get some stuff ready.

“We’d need to have the space,” Lincoln pondered aloud. “She’d have to make these drawings into paintings. Drawings don’t sell well.”

“She can paint,” Bellamy promised.

“Have you seen her paint before?”

“No,” he admitted. “But she has a painting in her living room, one she did herself. She can do it.”

“Hmm.” To his credit, Lincoln wasn’t just shooting the idea down; he did actually seem to be thinking about it. “Has she shown anywhere before?” he inquired.

“I don’t think so. She told me she’s sold some stuff at art fairs on campus.”

“Then that means she has no experience putting together a collection.”

“She can do it,” Bellamy insisted, not willing to let this opportunity for her slip right through his grasp. “Please. She deserves this. She’s a good artist, and a good person, and . . .” He swallowed hard, looking down at her feet. “I just wanna give this to her.” He was tired of getting thrift store gifts for this secret Santa thing. Last year, he’d gotten Miller a pair of shoes. Shoes from the thrift store. Granted, that was what Miller had asked for, but still . . . it just seemed pointless to do that with Clarke. She had money, more of it than he did. If she ever ran out of her money, she had her parents’ money to fall back on. She could go out and buy herself nice things. But this? This was something she wouldn’t make an effort to go get. Because even though she probably wanted it, she was too nervous to ask about it, so she’d just second guess the entire thing.

“I’ll talk to Nyko,” Lincoln finally decided. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Bellamy smiled, excited. “Thank you.”

“I’m not making any guarantees,” Lincoln warned.

“I understand.” If worst came to worst and this didn’t work out, then he’d think of something else for a gift. Maybe he’d build her something. He was a handyman, after all. He had tools. “Thank you,” he said. Didn’t have to swallow his pride for that one. He was sincerely and genuinely grateful.

With Clarke’s sketchbook in hand, he started to leave, stopping at the front door, whirling around. “By the way,” he said, “I really am sorry for--”

“Bellamy,” Lincoln cut in sternly. “If you don’t mean it, don’t say it.”

He wanted to say it, just to end the conversation on a good note. But he didn’t really mean it. Not yet. Apologizing to Octavia was easy, because she was his little sister and he loved her unconditionally. Apologizing to Lincoln, however, was very much a work in progress, and it probably would be for a long time. He couldn’t help it. It had become so engrained in him to dislike the guy that doing anything else felt uncomfortable.
“Thanks,” he said again as he walked out the door.

God, he hoped this worked. If it did, if Lincoln came through for him . . . well, then he’d dislike the guy a lot less.
Chapter 16

The entertainment options for the night were either beer pong or Never Have I Ever. Clarke wasn’t particularly good at beer pong, so her vote went for Never Have I Ever. She hadn’t played it since high school, back when she really never had done anything. Most high schoolers probably just lied and made stuff up to seem cool anyway. She sure had.

Bellamy opted for Never Have I Ever, too, but made sure to remind everyone that, as soon as Octavia got there, they had to quit playing, because he didn’t want to know about what she had and hadn’t done. There were a few dissenters in the group, notably Jasper, who was all in on beer pong, and Murphy, who threw out a third option altogether: “Trampoline.”

“Yeah, go have fun on your trampoline,” Miller urged sarcastically. “It’s, like, three degrees out there. I’m sure you’ll have a blast.”

Everyone grabbed a drink and settled themselves in the living room, in spots that were becoming familiar at this point: Bellamy and Clarke on the couch, Miller and Jackson cuddling up in the recliner, Murphy on his bean bag and Emori with her head in his lap. Monty had taken to pulling over one of the kitchen chairs, and Harper gladly sat in his lap. Jasper had to sit on the floor near the bathroom in case he drank or smoked too much and got sick, and Maya, dutiful girlfriend that she was, usually sat down there with him.

“I’m gonna end up drinking so much,” Bellamy warned Clarke. “I’ve done a lot.”

“Pace yourself,” she told him, although since she was the lightweight and he could actually hold his liquor, he’d probably still end up having to carry her upstairs tonight.

“Who wants to start?” Miller invited.

“Oh, me, me,” Jasper said eagerly, raising his hand as if he were in school. “Never have I ever . . . read a whole novel in one day.”

There was a lot of grunting and grumbling in response to that one, and no one took a drink. Except for Bellamy of course, who muttered, “I can’t believe that’s just me,” before he brought the rim of his glass to his lips.

“Your turn,” Jasper said.

“Alright, never have I ever . . .” He thought about it for a moment, shrugging. “I don’t know. Taken food out of the trash to eat it.”

“Ew,” Emori said, and Harper, too, made a face.

“Don’t judge,” Jasper told them. “You can find some good stuff in there.” Instead of drinking, he took a hit from his bong. Jasper played his own version of the game.

“Ooh, I’ve got one,” Harper chirped. “Never have I ever . . . had a crush on a friend’s parent.”

“Oh, here we go,” Bellamy growled.

“Dude! Your mom!” Murphy exclaimed, laughing. “Fuck yeah, am I right?”
“You’re right,” Monty agreed. “Sorry, Bellamy.”

“Just kill me now,” he groaned dramatically, pressing his face against Clarke’s shoulder.

“There, there,” she soothed, patting his head.

“Even I gotta admit it,” Miller said, “and I’m gay. But she’s a MILF, man.” He, Murphy, and Monty all raised their glasses and took a drink, and Jasper just laughed, off his own happy place, dazedly agreeing, “Yeah . . .”

Monty was up next with “Never have I ever cheated on a test.”

Murphy snorted in response and muttered, “That’s the only way I could pass high school,” before he took a drink. Harper and Emori took one, too, and Bellamy looked at Clarke expectantly. “Go ahead,” he urged.

“What?” She’d never cheated on a test before.

“That paper.”

She rolled her eyes. “That wasn’t a test. That was an essay.”

“Same thing.” He beamed at his friends and said, “Clarke here recently turned in an essay that was ‘exemplary work.’ Am I right, Clarke?”

She glared at him, pretending to be angry, and conceded to taking a drink.

For her question, she didn’t really know what to say. There were a lot of things she’d never done that they were used to doing. Secret Santas and the Wop for starters. She threw out something random, though, declaring, “Never have I ever jumped off a roof.” She really didn’t expect anyone to drink to that, but for some reason, Bellamy and Murphy smiled at each other, and they both did.

Sweet little Maya . . . hers was innocent enough. She said she’d never been arrested, and Jasper just threw his hands up in the air and asked, “I gotta take a hit for every time?” Murphy drank to that one, too, and much to Clarke’s surprise . . . even Bellamy took a subtle sip.

“Really?” she said, trying to think what he could have possibly done to warrant an arrest. She wouldn’t have pictured that with him.

“It’s a long story,” he said. And that was all he said about it.

Murphy, of course, could always be counted upon to take any relatively innocent situation and push it down a more perverted path, so he was the first one to offer up anything sex-related when he said, “I’ve never slept with someone of the same gender.”

Miller and Jackson grinned at each other and exchanged a kiss before drinking, and of course Clarke did the same. Everyone started to freak out and when Harper brought her glass up to her mouths, though, too, and Monty stared at his girlfriend in astonishment.

“Oh, sex?” she said. “No, I was thinking just about kissing. Never mind.”

From there on out, everything was sexual. Maya said she’d never had a one-night stand, which nearly everyone else drank to. But not Clarke. She looked at Bellamy and said, “That’s almost what you were to me.”

“Good thing I wasn’t, huh?”
She smiled. Yeah, it was a very good thing.

Monty said he’d never done friends with benefits, staring pointedly at Bellamy and Clarke as he spoke the words. Bellamy held out his glass and said, “Bottoms up, Princess.” She toasted with him to that and took another swig, nearing the end of her beer. Bellamy was already done with his, so when Emori went into the kitchen to get more for Murphy, he asked her to bring him another can, too. He poured some in Clarke’s glass but kept the majority for himself, predicting that he’d need it.

Oh, and he did.

Harper’s claim was that she’d never taken nude photos of herself. Clarke tried to inconspicuously drink to that one, but Bellamy didn’t hide it at all, and neither did Miller and Jackson or Murphy and Emori. After that, though, Bellamy just sort of had to keep drinking.

“I’ve never gone streaking,” Jackson offered up.

Drink.

“I’ve never had sex with more than one person in 24 hours,” Miller claimed.

Drink.

Clarke’s eyes grew wider and wider with shock with every gulp of alcohol he took. When it was her turn, she said, “I’ve never had a threesome,” thinking that that one might be enough to give him a break, but . . . nope, he drank to that, too.

“Bellamy’s gonna get smashed,” Miller chuckled.

Oh my god, Clarke thought. He really is so much more experienced than me. Suddenly, she was picturing him with two women at once (because there was no way Bellamy would do a boy-girl-boy one). In a way, the thought of him doing that was arousing, but it was also intimidating as hell. He could handle two girls and she could barely handle him?

“Okay, I’ll give you a break, Bellamy,” Emori said. “Never have I ever . . . been rimmed.”

Murphy grunted. “Not yet.”

Clarke frowned, trying to think of what that even was while Miller and Jackson both unabashedly took a drink. “What’s that mean?” she asked Bellamy quietly.

“You’ve done it,” he told her. “You liked it.”

She had? How come she couldn’t remember it then? She shrugged and took a drink, figuring it was something he’d done to her without her even realizing it.

“Clarke!” Emori gasped, shocked.

“What?” Why was everyone looking at her like she’d just confessed to murder or something? Jasper’s eyes were wide as saucers, and Harper’s mouth was hanging open in disbelief.

When she looked over at Bellamy, he had his fist over his mouth and was trying not to laugh.

“Oh, what is it really, Bellamy?” she demanded. Clearly he’d walked her into this one.

“It’s an anal sex thing, Clarke,” Emori informed her bluntly.
“What? I haven’t done that!”

Beside her, Bellamy just laughed, and all his friends started to laugh along with him.

“Bellamy!” She grabbed the couch pillow and hit him over the head with it a good number of times. But eventually, he retaliated by tickling her sides, and soon, she was laughing, too.

Murphy was up next, and he’d also been taking plenty of drinks tonight, probably the most of anyone besides Bellamy; so it seemed a little hard for him to find something he hadn’t done. He finally settled on, “I’ve never done a strip tease.”

“Dammit,” Bellamy swore, taking yet another swig.

“Seriously?” Now she got to picture him doing that, too.

“I’m a good dancer,” he reminded her.

Well . . . that was very true. All of a sudden, she was picturing him like one of the Magic Mike guys, and that was one hot picture. That made her want to drag him upstairs and ask him to strip for her.

“Drink up, Clarke,” he said, nudging her side.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute,” Harper said. “Clarke, you did a strip tease?”

“I tried,” she admitted, taking a drink.

“A+ for effort,” Bellamy awarded her.

Towards the end of that round, when they were all feeling very buzzed and perhaps a little tipsy, Jasper proclaimed that he’d never fucked a married person before. No one drank to that, but everyone looked at Bellamy as though they expected him, too. When it was his turn to finish it up, he said, “Alright, never have I ever been paid for sex before,” and that got a skeptical huff out of Murphy.

“Diana Sydney,” he said.

“No, she pays me for working shirtless,” Bellamy corrected. “There’s a difference.”

Later, once Monty and Jasper had taken their girlfriends home for the night, once Miller and Jackson had retired to Miller’s room and Murphy and Emori had done the same to Murphy’s, Clarke stood in Bellamy’s bathroom, brushing her teeth, thinking about tonight’s little game. Bellamy was lucky he wasn’t a lightweight, because he’d easily ended up drinking twice as much as everyone else. Clarke was pretty certain that if she’d said, “Never have I ever been electrocuted,” he would have had to drink to that one, too.

It was head-spinning, honestly. The guy was twenty-three years old, only two years older than her. But it seemed like he’d done so much more. Not just the sex things, either, but . . . everything.

Maybe he hadn’t gone to college like he’d intended to, but that didn’t mean he hadn’t done anything in his life.

When she padded out of the bathroom, she saw that he’d stripped down to a pair of boxers and was already unmaking the bed. “You tired?” he asked. “Or you wanna fool around?”

Normally, her answer would have been obvious, but tonight, she felt a little uncertain. “How are you even into me?” she blurted, feeling like the question had been lingering since for the majority of the
night.

“What?”

“Clearly I’m not your only option. And Bellamy, you’ve done everything,” she pointed out.

“I haven’t done everything,” he denied.

“Oh, really? Because you drank to almost everything down there.”


“Okay, but aside from that kinky BDSM shit, you’ve done everything,” she maintained.

“No, I’ve just had fun from time to time.”

“I know, but . . .” She wasn’t sure how to explain where the sudden insecurity was coming from. It wasn’t that she was judging him or anything. If anything, she respected his spontaneity, his lively spirit. It was just that, comparing her own life experiences to his, she felt like she wasn’t measuring up. “Bellamy, so many of those things you’ve done, I haven’t. Threesomes? Streaking? Rim-jobs?” She threw her hands up in the air. “What even . . .?”

He lowered his head, laughing a little.

“What’s so funny?” she snapped.

“You.” He walked around the bed, meandering towards her sultrily, eyes on hers the whole time. “You thinking that matters to me.”

“Doesn’t it, though?” If he’d done things like that before, with other women, then what if he got antsy to do them again? “I know I’m not a prude or anything,” she acknowledged, “obviously, but . . . compared to all the other things you’ve done, aren’t you bored with me?”

He frowned so deeply, almost as if he were offended she’d ask that. “Clarke.” He touched her cheek with his thumb, shaking his head. “I could never be bored with you. Think of everything we’ve done together.”

She did think of it—the semi-public sex, the standing sixty-nine, the strip-tease, and hell, even the TonDC dancing—and when she really took the time to take it all in . . . well, then yeah, maybe she’d been more adventurous than she thought.

“When I say you’re doing good,” he went on, holding the side of her neck, “I’m not just saying it to turn you on. You really are doing good, Clarke, and trust me . . . I’m more than satisfied.”

Well, that was definitely a bit of a thrill, knowing that she could satisfy a guy who had way more experience than she did. “Me, too,” she told him.

“Great, then why are we having this conversation?”

“I don’t know.” She ran one hand through her hair, shaking her head. “Sometimes it’s just—it’s just intimidating knowing that you have so many other women to compare me to.”

“And you don’t think it’s ever intimidating for me?” He snorted. “You’re bi, Clarke. I gotta think about you comparing me to men and women.”
“Okay, point taken.” She’d been freaking out about nothing. Still, it was nice to have that reassurance from him, though, that he really was enjoying all of this as much as she was, that it really was as satisfying to him as it was to her.

“Hmm,” he said, threading one through her hair. “Maybe this isn’t really about me. Maybe it’s about you.”

She tilted her head to the side curiously. “Huh?”

“You,” he repeated. “Maybe you just wanna try something new and you don’t know how to ask.”

Try something new? Her mind raced with possibilities, some she would consider, and some she wouldn’t? Threesome? No way. Streaking? Maybe if it was dark enough. Anal sex? She wasn’t ready for that yet, but perhaps someday.

“What do you wanna do?” he asked. “I’ll do it with you.”

“Bellamy, I have no idea.”

“Come on, think of something you’ve never done, and we’ll go do it.”

“Right now?”

“Yeah.”

Her eyes widened. God, she loved his passion. It inspired her. He’d definitely rubbed off on her over the past couple months, from that very first night at Dropship onward, so if he wanted to do something tonight, then she was totally down for doing it. But her problem was that, when given the opportunity, she couldn’t decide. Her mind produced plenty of ideas, but she second-guessed every single one of them or talked herself out of them.

“Why don’t you think of something?” she suggested. “Something you think I’ll like. Something you think I’ve never done before.”

He smirked, almost as if that were a challenge. “Okay,” he said. “I got an idea.”

“Already?”

“Yeah. But we gotta go over to your place.”

“My place?” What could they possibly do there that they couldn’t do here?

“Yeah, let’s get dressed,” he coaxed. “Let’s go.”

He already had his clothes on and was looking for his keys when she finally took off his oversized t-shirt and changed into one of her own. Whatever he had in mind, it was a mystery to her, and that really required her to trust him. But that wasn’t hard to do. Never had she ever doubted that he would take care of her.

When they got to her apartment complex, rather than jumping on the elevator and heading up to her floor, he took her hand and led her down the hall instead. They walked past the gym she’d never once ventured into and went to the indoor pool.

“Oh, this is nice,” he remarked.

It was nice. In the evenings like this, the lighting was soft and ambient, and it was usually
uncrowded. Tonight, with it being as late as it was, no one else was down there. It was quiet, and the water was still.

“Swimming?” Clarke said. “I’ve been swimming before, you know.”

“Not swimming,” he said, walking over to the edge of the pool and looked down at the water. “Skinny-dipping.” He grinned at her and started to take off his shoes.

“What? Bellamy.” She immediately looked over her shoulder, worried that someone else would walk in. Just because there wasn’t anyone else in there right now, that didn’t mean it’d stay so vacant. “This is the pool for everyone who lives in this building,” she pointed out.

“Okay.” As he started to remove his jeans, he seemed completely undeterred.

“Anyone could come down here,” she fretted. Hell, there were two people in that gym just on the other side of the wall.

“Clarke, it’s 1:00 a.m. It’s December. Nobody’s gonna go swimming.”

Perhaps that were true, but still . . . “Anyone could find us.”

“Fine. They can watch.” He shucked his pants off, then stepped out of his boxers, too. Naked as the day he was born, he sat down on the side and lowered himself into that water, immediately sinking all the way up to his chest. “Oh, yeah. Water’s warm,” he said. “Get in here, Clarke.”

Again, she looked over at the door. The glass door. A door that people could look through even if they didn’t come inside. “What if we get caught?” she worried. People got arrested for this sort of thing. But then again, according to tonight’s little game, getting arrested was also something Bellamy had already done.

“What if we don’t?” he countered mischievously before he submerged himself completely. When he came back up, he had to shake his thick dark curls out of his eyes. And he looked so damn sexy. “Come on,” he coaxed, not letting up.

Her heart raced with anticipation, some of it the nervous kind, but some of it the excited kind, too. As risky as this was . . . it sounded fun. And chances were, even if they did get caught, whoever caught them would be way more embarrassed than they were. “Fine,” she agreed, toeing off her shoes. She grabbed the hem of her shirt and mumbled, “The things I do with you, Bellamy Blake . . .” as she pulled it up and over her head. She didn’t even attempt to make it sexy as she got out of her pants.

“There you go,” he encouraged, eyes dancing all over her body as it came into view.

Why she’d even put on panties when she’d known very well that she probably wouldn’t need them, she wasn’t sure. But she slipped those off last, dropping them on top of Bellamy’s boxers, then cast one more wary glance over her shoulder.

“Just get right in,” he told her.

She went over to the steps, holding onto the handrail as she stepped down into the water, quickly, eager to get underneath so that nobody could see much of anything even if they did walk in. When she was only knee-deep in the water, though, she realized that he hadn’t told her the truth about its temperature at all. “Shit, Bellamy,” she swore. “This is fucking cold!”

“Don’t worry,” he said, “I’ll make you hot.”
Oh, of that she had no doubt. But that didn’t change the fact that this water was freezing.

“Get in,” he said again, moving deeper in the water so that it was up all the way to his shoulders. “It gets warmer, I promise.”

“God, I feel like I’m in the Arctic,” she grumbled, continuing down the steps. When her feet hit the bottom, she was only deep enough for it to come up to her stomach, so she had to wade deeper, shivering as she managed to get to the point where it was up past her chest. At the very least, now she was concealed. Partially. It wasn’t like the water was hiding much. If somebody walked in . . .

When Bellamy sank under the surface and came back up with wet, messy hair again, she found herself caring less about the possibility of someone walking in on them.

“Better?” he asked, moving towards her.

She nodded mutely, fixated on the beads of water clinging to his chest.

“Yeah?” He put one hand on her shoulder, comfortingly at first, until all of a sudden, he pushed down, dunking her completely.

“Bellamy!” she yelled when she came back up for air, smoothing her hair out of her face.

He laughed playfully.

“Seriously, Bellamy!” First he’d tricked her into claiming she’d been rimmed when she certainly never had before, and now this? “Are you trying to piss me off tonight or what?”

“Yeah,” he admitted.

“Why?”

“Because you’re cute when you’re pissed.”

As much as she was trying to actually be pissed . . . that was difficult to do when he said things like that. Turnabout was fair play, though. If he wanted to mess with her, she’d mess with him right back.

“Oh, I’ll show you how cute I can be,” she threatened, lunging at him. He didn’t really bother to move as she jumped on him, having to use all her body weight to force him under water. She couldn’t hold him there for long, though, and when he came back up, he wasted no time trying to grab her around the waist.

“You wanna play, huh?”

She squealed, managing to slip through his grasp and swim away. However, she made the mistake of swimming towards the deepest part of the water, six feet, where she could no longer touch the bottom, which meant all she could do was tread water as he came towards her. The water went up pretty far on him, too, but standing on his tip toes, he could still keep his head above the surface.

“What’re you gonna do now, huh?” he taunted.

She splashed him, because that was really all she could do.

“Oh, you wanna start that?” He splashed her back more forcefully.

She splashed him again, then unsuccessfully tried to swim towards the side; but he dove towards her, grabbing hold of first her legs, then her waist, pulling her back into his arms, preventing her from
getting anywhere. Before she knew it, he was dunking her underwater again, but this time, he went under with her. Since she didn’t have her eyes open, she was surprised when she felt his mouth on hers.

When they both came up for air, she said, “Did you really just kiss me underwater?”

“Yeah.”

She laughed lightly, blinking the water out of her eyes. “I feel like the little mermaid.”

“Well, she was a princess.” He took her hands in his and pulled her back into the shallower depths of the pool, where her feet could once again touch the ground, even if the water still went up past her chest. They stood in front of each other, eyes locked, catching their breath. He had that look going on, the look where, even though he was having fun, his mind was running wild with the possibilities of what other fun they could have.

Hers was starting to do the same.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said. His eyes dropped to look at her chest, and she couldn’t help but do the same to him.

“You’re not too bad yourself.” Understatement. Sometimes she wanted to put her hands on his body so badly, it felt like her fingertips were burning. Like right now. So she splayed her hands against his chest, delighting in the way his pectoral muscle flinched beneath her touch. His hands moved down well below the surface to rub up and down her sides, and he pulled her entire body in closer. She didn’t even realize he was walking her backwards until she felt the side of the pool against her back and shoulders. His larger body enveloped hers as he pressed her up against it.

She grazed her fingertips against his arms, amazed by the way he was . . . shaking. His arm muscles shivered beneath her touch, and his breathing was starting to come out in the form of shudders. He is cold, she realized as he kissed her with quivering lips. But the strange thing was . . . she wasn’t anymore.

The way he held her there against the side of the pool, the way he moved in closer so that her legs could wrap around his waist . . . it warmed her to the core. She rubbed his arms, shoulders, and back as they kissed, trying to transfer some of that same heat back into his body—his gorgeous body, the one that had so much strength in it as it surrounded her and held her close. He definitely sort of had her trapped there; she couldn’t even try to swim away now. Not that she wanted to.

He stopped shivering as he made out with her some more, and gradually, his kisses started to become more and more insistent. He kissed his way down to her neck and alternated between sucking on her skin and just breathing hotly against it. It seemed like he was getting very aroused very quickly, and all of a sudden, he was reaching beneath the surface to cup and squeeze her backside, to hold her steady so he could rub his groin against hers.

She moaned when she felt how hard he was and gasped, “Are we still alone?”

“I don’t care,” he breathed out in response, lips against her cheek. He pressed the side of his face against hers for a moment, just holding her, and then rasped, “My jeans.”

It took her a moment to realize what he was getting at, but then it dawned on her. He had a condom in there. So she reached up onto the tiled surface, trying to find them. All she felt were his boxers, though. No condom in there.

“I can’t reach,” she said.
Well, that wasn’t a problem. He lifted her up higher in the water, the buoyancy making it easy on him, to the point where she could nearly lie on the tile. The shock of going from that cold water to open air made her breathe in sharply, but she managed to reach his jeans with one hand and start fumbling around.

He held her up with his hands under her ass, legs practically on his shoulders. Of course, since he was at the perfect angle for it, he bent his head and pressed a hot kiss to the juncture between her legs, teasing her with his tongue as she double checked all four of the pockets of his jeans, wondering if she’d missed something.

“You don’t have one,” she informed him.

“What?” Frowning, he frustratedly lowered her back into the water. “Fuck.”

She grazed her hand up and down his chest, sympathizing with his disappointment. Now that they were here, doing this, and they were both to the point where they were sufficiently turned on . . . she didn’t want to stop.

“You’ve got some upstairs, though, right?” he said. “I’ll just run up and get one.” He started to move aside, but she wrapped her legs around him again, squeezing to pull him back.

“No, Bellamy, just . . .” She found his hand and lifted it above the surface so that she had a better grip on it. She didn’t want him to go anywhere.

He immediately abandoned his plans to leave, settling right back in front of her again. Their fingers swirled around each other, intertwining and disentwining, and soon enough, he was just holding her hand, thumb stroking against her palm. They became very still for a moment, both of them gazing at each other, until he brought her arm up to rest on his shoulder. She did the same with her other arm, mimicking the hold her legs had on him as he positioned himself at her entrance.

He had to use one hand to guide himself into her, but once he was there, he reached right back around to caress the small of her back. He held her close and started to rock into her rhythmically, making the water around them splash a little bit.

She clung to him, reveling in the feel of his unsheathed cock. No latex, just his body and hers. He felt so good inside of her, and she loved how his slippery chest slid so easily against hers. The water lapped at their skin, growing evermore disturbed as his thrusts became harder, faster.

There was no need to tell him what he was doing well, to urge him to keep going, or to say anything at all, really. She felt so close to him, so connected in that moment, that it wasn’t even necessary. Besides, she was trying to stay quiet.

He pressed his forehead to hers, giving her a kiss every now and then as he continued to move. She curled her hand upward to tangle in his wet hair, massaging his scalp as her breath mingled with his. When he started to breathe faster, that’s how she knew he was close. She wasn’t exactly far away herself, but she needed a little more. Whether it was his hand or her hand on her clit, that usually seemed to do the trick.

As it turned out, there was no need, though. Somehow, he managed to angle his hips just right so that his pelvis created all the friction she needed. She spread her legs as wide as she could while keeping them coiled around him and rubbed against him desperately, chasing a release that was just within her reach. They bucked against each other lustfully, splashing water all over the place now, and when she cried out and came hard, he followed her shortly after.
He stood there with her afterward, still inside her, holding her up with what had to be tired arms. She brushed his hair off his forehead, not sure if it was wet with water or sweat or some combination of the two, and she smiled at him before remembering exactly where they were.

*Oh. My god.* She whipped her head over her shoulder to check the door and see if anyone else was there. But thankfully, they were still alone. Hopefully that meant no one had seen them or heard them. If they had . . . oh, well.

“Hey,” he said softly, touching her cheek to get her to look at him again. “Can I tell you something?”

She nodded.

“I’ve never skinny-dipped before, either.”

“What?” He’d made it seem like he did it all the time. Or maybe she’d just assumed. “Really?”

“Really.” He smiled happily, like a kid in a candy store. “That was a first for me, too.”

She inhaled shakily, as amazed by that as she was flattered. Doing anything for the first time with somebody was a really big deal, so she was really glad Bellamy had chosen to do this with her, especially when she was doing so many things for the first time with him.

The water had calmed and grown still around them again, and it was back to feeling cold. But she didn’t want to move. Not yet, at least. For now, she just wanted to enjoy being there with him, hands on his skin while he stroked her wet hair.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Octavia still intimidated Clarke—the girl just had a very in-your-face personality. But Clarke figured the best way to overcome that was to spend some time with her, get to know her better. So after finals were done and she was officially on Christmas break, she invited Octavia and Raven out for a girl’s night. Raven initially agreed to go, but then she had to cancel at last minute when some Wick drama arose. Something about him wanting to take the couch after they’d agreed that Raven could keep the couch? Clarke didn’t know the specifics of it; all she knew was that her wing-woman wouldn’t be there, so that left her alone with Octavia. Which was intimidating.

They first went to Dropship and had drinks, which Octavia wasn’t technically old enough to have. But they served her without question, probably because she looked older than she was. (Ironically, they carded Clarke, though, even though she actually was twenty-one.) After that, Octavia mentioned that she needed to find a couple more Christmas gifts for Lincoln, so Clarke offered to take her somewhere where she knew she could find something: Ice Nation.

“I don’t know, Clarke,” Octavia said skeptically as they walked into the shop. “This place looks kinda sketchy.”

“No, it’s fine,” Clarke insisted. “Your brother took me here.”

“Oh, I’m sure he did.” For as skeptical of it as she was, Octavia wasted no time heading straight to a dildo display. She picked up one particularly substantial, particularly rubbery one, and complained that it needed to be darker like Lincoln’s was.

Clarke glanced up to the counter, and Roan was there, of course, unashamed as he watched porn right out in the open. He did notice her, though, and waved. “Hey, Clarke, I’ve got one of those dick-molding kits left if you and Bellamy want it,” he said.
“Ew,” Octavia said, cringing as she put down the fake cock.

“Uh, no thanks, Roan,” Clarke declined politely.

“Are you sure?” he pressed. “Raven and I have really enjoyed ours.”

“Oh, I bet you have.” Clarke laughed, shaking her head at the wildness of her best friend’s current relationship. Sure, she and Bellamy were doing the standing sixty-nine and trying semi-public sex once in a while, but Raven and Roan were at a whole different level. It was quite the switch from Wick, who, by all accounts, had always been a good-looking and funny guy but was notably quite bland in the bedroom. No wonder Raven seemed to be enjoying her time with Roan so much.

She followed Octavia through the store, spotting that same blow-up doll that she and Bellamy had posed with when they’d visited this place, as well as some more of that edible underwear that Raven had purchased. Octavia didn’t really appear to be interested in much of anything. She walked with her hands stuffed in the pockets of her sweatshirt, barely glancing at the merchandise.

“So did you and Bellamy actually buy anything when you came here?” she asked. “Do I wanna know?”

“No, we didn’t buy anything,” Clarke replied, veering towards the lingerie. “Well, technically he bought a book.”


“Yeah, there’s some pretty crazy stuff here. We were mostly just making fun of it.”

“Easy stuff to make fun of,” Octavia said, holding up, holding up a red and white Christmas corset and matching Santa hat. “Seriously?”

“What, you don’t think that’s cute?” Truth be told, that outfit had caught Clarke’s eye right from the start.

“Lincoln and I don’t bother with that roleplay crap,” Octavia informed her.

“Well, it doesn’t have to be a roleplay. You could just put it on and entice him.”

“I can’t do anything with this,” Octavia said. “They make these things for women with breasts. Like you. So maybe you should get it.”

*Maybe I will,* Clarke thought, but it’d feel kind of weird to buy something with Octavia here when *clearly* the intention would be to wear it for Octavia’s brother. “I don’t know, it is a little over-the-top,” she admitted.

“You’d look good in it,” Octavia insisted. “Not me, though.”

Clarke shot her a look. “Whatever. You’re in, like, the best shape ever.”

Octavia shook her head. “Not really. Underneath this . . .” She tugged on her sweatshirt. “Too much vacationing, not enough exercising.”

“Oh, yeah, right.” Clarke didn’t believe that for a second. This girl, much like her brother, had some *unfair* genetics going for her. She looked like a supermodel without the height.

Octavia changed the subject as she wound her way through more racks of clothing, commenting, “Hey, so I heard you guys played Never Have I Ever the other night.”
“Yeah, we did,” Clarke said. “Where were you and Lincoln, by the way? I thought you guys would be there.”

“I got sick,” Octavia explained.

“Oh.”

“Yeah. But what’d I miss? Anything interesting?”

“Oh, plenty.” Clarke put the sexy Christmas corset back, figuring she could return and get it tomorrow when Octavia wasn’t with her. “I didn’t know Bellamy and Murphy jumped off a roof before.”

Octavia rolled her eyes. “Idiots.”

“Or that Jasper’s eaten out of the trash can.”

“Figures.”

“Or . . .” She wasn’t sure whether or not it was a good idea to mention that other thing Bellamy had owned up to, the thing that had spawned many questions in her mind. “Or that Bellamy’s been arrested.”

Octavia spun around, a serious look in her eyes. “He told you about that?”

“Well, he drank for it,” Clarke said. “But he didn’t elaborate.” Try as she might, she couldn’t picture Bellamy getting arrested for anything. Sure, he may have grown up on the so-called wrong side of the tracks, but he was a good, hard-working guy. He’d been a great student in high school, and nowadays, people clearly respected him, as was evident by all the work he did in his neighborhood and beyond.

“He got in a bar fight,” Octavia explained vaguely. “But it wasn’t his fault.”

A bar fight? Clarke couldn’t wrap her mind around that. Yeah, she’d seen Bellamy wrestle with Miller, but that was different. That was all in good fun. She didn’t know what could have provoked Bellamy to fight someone for real, but she wanted to. “What happened?” she inquired.

Octavia’s mouth opened as though she wanted to say something, but then she just shrugged and said, “You know how guys are.” She turned back around and was all of a sudden completely absorbed in the lingerie, even though she hadn’t been before.

Clarke frowned, sensing there was more to the story, and for some reason, Octavia was just choosing to end it there. If there really was something to tell, she supposed she’d rather hear it from Bellamy himself anyway; but he hadn’t brought it up, and now that Clarke knew he’d been arrested for fighting with somebody, she didn’t exactly want to mention it to him, either. Maybe it was a sore subject.

It was a little frustrating, she had to admit. Even though she really had gotten to know Bellamy these past few months, knew him intimately, and even though she knew him well enough for him to open up about Roma . . . she felt like there was still something he wasn’t telling her.
Sorry this one is a few days late. I've come down with the flu, and that is no fun.

Chapter 17

The eggnog hadn’t been out that long when Harper gathered up the girls, brought them upstairs, and told them they needed to go get ready for ‘the surprise.’ All the other guys were intrigued and confused, and Bellamy pretended to be just as confused as they were. But he knew what was happening even before they came downstairs in those red leather—or was it latex?—dresses. Clarke said they’d been working on the outfits for the past week, and they had the Santa hats and knee-high black boots to go with it. Even though Bellamy had only seen the movie that inspired these costumes once, he had Youtubed the dance scene once he knew Clarke was learning it. And then he’d watched it a couple more times just because the actresses were hot. His friends all looked good, and thankfully, his sister hadn’t ended up participating. She was the DJ instead, a.k.a. the one who was going to play the music off the Internet.

“Holy shit,” Jasper swore, his eyes widening to the point where they were about to bulge out of his head. “I already love this.”

“I love it, too,” Monty confessed.

Murphy just cackled, gave his girlfriend a thumb’s up, and then made an overt sex gesture.

Bellamy smiled at Clarke, pretty damn turned on by her in this outfit. Clearly with her voluptuous figure, she filled it out the best out of the four girls.

She shook her head, a panic-stricken look on her face, and whimpered when Harper said, “Okay, ladies, now let’s get in formation.” She didn’t even seem to know where she was supposed to stand, or perhaps she just mistakenly went to the wrong place, because Harper had to grab her and reposition her.

Once the music started . . . it was bad. Really bad. For Clarke, at least, not for the other girls. Bellamy quickly realized his dancing lesson had had no lasting effect, because Clarke faked her way through the whole routine with a grimace on her face. In contrast, Harper looked like one of the girls from the movie, and Emori had enough confidence to pull anything off. Maya just kept a smile on her face and powered through, never moving her hips or butt quite as much as Harper and Emori did. But poor Clarke . . . she was cute as hell but always a beat behind. Bellamy had no doubt she’d memorized the entire thing, but that all seemed to have gone out the window. Stage fright, maybe.

Even though she was easily the worst dancer of the bunch, Bellamy couldn’t take his eyes off of her. Watching her trip over her own feet made him smile, and seeing her accidentally knock her own Santa hat off her head made him laugh. Towards the end of, she was laughing, too, seeming to embrace her own awkwardness and just go with it.

When they hit their final pose, he and the rest of the guys and Octavia all cheered for them and gave them a round of applause. Harper gathered up the girls and made them pose for pictures like they
were a girl band or something. Murphy took the most photos, claiming they were “high quality fap-material.” Bellamy took a few, too, one of the group of them, and a couple of just Clarke. The girl probably had no idea how damn hot she was.

“This is the greatest night of my life,” Jasper declared. “I don’t even wanna get too high tonight. I gotta remember this.”

“I filmed it,” Miller said. “I’ll send it to you.”

“You filmed it?” Clarke shrieked, burying her face in her hands. “Please don’t put it online.”

“I won’t,” he assured her.

Murphy smirked. “I will.”

Following the routine, Clarke, Harper, and Maya headed back upstairs to change, but Emori didn’t need to. Murphy grabbed his girlfriend’s hand and pulled her down the hall to his bedroom. Neither one of them even bothered to disguise what they were going to do, and hell, Bellamy had to applaud them for it. A couple minutes later, after some distinct headboard-hitting-the-wall sounds, they re-emerged, and Miller joked, “Well, that was quick.”

Murphy shrugged, not insulted. “What can I say? I believe in seizing the moment.”

When Clarke came back downstairs, Bellamy wasn’t particularly surprised to see her dressed in his shirt and boxers. That was kind of her go-to look these days. But she’d never just lounged around in his clothes in front of their friends before, so everyone else noticed it.

“Whoa, Clarke,” Emori said. “Didn’t know you were so into menswear.”

“One man’s wear,” Bellamy corrected, wrapping an arm around her when she sat down. “Do you ever wear your own clothes anymore?”

“Yeah,” she claimed. “But yours are comfier.”

Well, fuck, he wasn’t complaining. Seeing Clarke in his clothes was one of his biggest turn-ons.

Bellamy wasn’t even sure who suggested it, but someone mentioned that they should play Christmas charades, even though there was no way to possibly top the Jingle Bell Rock dance. As an incentive, they all agreed that whichever team won could drink the rest of the eggnog, and with that hefty motivation, everyone was all in. They decided it was easiest to just compete as couples, which Bellamy was fine with. He had a definitely competitive streak, so he wanted to win. And Clarke was a smart girl. He had no doubt they could make a formidable team.

And they did. They steamrolled past most of the others, amassing nearly twice as many points as Jasper and Maya, who never stood a chance what with Jasper having fried too many of his brain cells and all. Harper and Monty might have been pretty good if Harper didn’t keep getting disqualified for talking when it was her turn to act something out. Miller and Jackson were decent, as were Octavia and Lincoln, but Jackson was tired after a long shift at the hospital today, and Octavia was tired because of . . . well, Bellamy wasn’t sure why she was tired, but he just prayed Lincoln hadn’t ‘kept her up late.’

Murphy and Emori were the only real competition, it seemed. They did surprisingly well, getting all but one of theirs right. Clarke and Bellamy had the upper hand for the entire competition until the end, when Bellamy failed to guess Mommy kissing Santa Claus. Clarke’s clue was kind of misleading, to be fair. She put one of the Santa hats on Jackson, stuffed a pillow under her t-shirt,
and kissed his cheek. So naturally, Bellamy’s guess was “Pregnant woman kissing gay Santa.” His miss evened out the score between them and Murphy and Emori; so Miller, who had taken to emceeing this great event just like he would soon do with their epic gift exchange, declared a final sudden death round between the two pairs.

“We got this,” Bellamy told Clarke, giving her a confident fist bump as he got up off the couch and walked over to Miller to choose his task. Huh, he thought. *Mailing Christmas cards.* Nobody in their twenties mailed cards anymore, but he figured he could make that work.

“Alright, here we go,” Miller said as Bellamy stood in the middle of the living room. “One minute, starting . . . now!”

He mimed his way through process of writing out a card, folding it up, and sticking it in an envelope, thinking that those moves alone might be enough to get Clarke to come up with the right guess. But she just sat there on the couch, looking bewildered, and said, “I don’t know.”

When he pretended to lick the envelope of the card, that was when she *really* got on the wrong track.

“Oral sex,” she blurted.

Everyone laughed.

Bellamy shook his head, trying to make it more obvious that he was licking an *envelope*. Nothing else.

“Going down,” she tried again. “Eating out.”

More laughter. Another demonstration.

“Bellamy Blake Method™. I don’t know!”

Bellamy switched tactics, pretending to drive to the post office, roll down the window, and drop his invisible card off in the invisible blue mailbox.

“That’s not helping,” she said. “Go back to what you were doing before.”

“Twenty seconds,” Miller warned.

Starting to panic, Bellamy redid all his moves, trying to make it more obvious this time: writing out the card, closing the card, shoving the card in an envelope, licking the envelope to seal it.


He threw his arms in the air, amazed that this was the one they were going to lose on. *Mailing Christmas cards.* Really? She’d fucking guessed ‘reindeer games’ earlier on, but not this?

Time ran out, and he sank to his knees dramatically, sensing that victory had just slipped through their grasp. “Mailing Christmas cards.”

“Oh my god!” she wailed, holding her head in her hands. “I was so close.”

“What the fuck?” he barked. “How the hell were you close?”

“Yeah, Clarke, what exactly is a *Christmas* orgasm?” Harper asked, tilting her head to the side.
“I don’t know,” she replied. “I just saw his tongue, so I thought--”

“Please don’t finish,” Octavia cut in.

“Sorry,” she apologized. When Bellamy sat back down next to her, she said it again. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” he said. “They might screw up, too.”

Murphy was the one acting out the charade, and he looked confident when he saw what he’d be acting out. When Miller started the time for him, all he did was hit his chest twice, then point emphatically to his pride and joy, their Christmas tree.

“Decorating the tree!” Emori yelled.

“Yes!”

They screamed and squealed and jumped up and down, hugging for joy and celebrating as if they’d just won the lottery. But it was eggnog. They’d won what was left of the eggnog.

“I think that was a little easier than ‘mailing Christmas cards,’” Bellamy grumbled, sucking up the loss. “But whatever.”

They finally started the secret Santa exchange around 10:00. Octavia looked like she was going to sleep through it, as did Jackson, but everyone else was still pretty wired. All the gifts were piled under the tree, so everyone took turns getting up and getting theirs. Upon opening it, the idea was to guess who had given it to you. Get it wrong, then drink. Get it right . . . well, then drink to that, too.

With a fifteen dollar budget, the gifts had to be creative to be even somewhat interesting. Bellamy had seen some pretty weird stuff over the years, and this year was no different. The gifts ranged from a poop emoji pillow for Jasper, which he immediately cuddled up to and wouldn’t let go of, to a pink feather boa for Miller, who, even though he wasn’t the flamboyant type of gay, refused to take it off. Octavia got a blanket from Monty that said *Keep Calm and Be a Badass*, and she loved it so much that she didn’t waste any time curling up underneath it on the floor. With Lincoln, of course.

When it was Bellamy’s turn to open up his gift, he prayed it wasn’t another one of those ugly Christmas sweaters like Harper had gotten him last year. Really, he needed to take that damn thing to the thrift store so someone who needed it could wear it. Judging by the small size of the box he had to open, though, it couldn’t be that.

“Well, I wonder who could this could be from,” he said as he pulled out a white coffee mug that said *World’s Okayest Brother* on it.

“I know you don’t really drink coffee,” Octavia said, “but I thought of you the moment I saw it. Because, you know, you’re pretty okay.”

“Well, thank you, O,” he said. “I’m glad I’m okay.”

She smiled at him, the kind of smile that shone through all the teasing and made ‘Okayest’ into the biggest compliment in the world. His little sister loved him, no matter how annoying she found him; his little sister was grateful for him, even though he sometimes pissed her off. He didn’t need much of a gift when he had that.

When it was Murphy’s turn, he seemed delighted to receive the biggest present, the last one left under the tree. “Process of elimination,” he said as he opened the box, “this is either from Bellamy or Clarke. And since it’s not book-shaped, I’m gonna guess it’s not from Bellamy.”
“You’re right,” Clarke said. “It’s from me. I had no idea what to get you, so . . .”

What the hell’s in there? Bellamy wondered. He’d seen a list of ideas for Murphy on Clarke’s kitchen table, but not one of those ideas was big enough for this box. The box had Fragile written on it in Clarke’s handwriting, and when Murphy saw that, he read it as “Fra-gee-lay,” like the dad in A Christmas Story.

“That’s appropriate,” Clarke muttered.

When Murphy opened the box, his entire face lit up like the Fourth of July. “Clarke,” he gasped. “This is a thing of beauty.”

Everyone tried to peek into the box, but Murphy practically dove in, and when he took out the gift inside, everyone immediately understood why he loved it so much.

It was a leg lamp. A replica of the leg lamp from that movie. An iconic novelty gift if Bellamy had ever seen one. It was smaller than the one from the film had been, but still . . . it was a fucking leg lamp.

“Oh my god, Clarke,” Harper said as everyone laughed. “Perfect.”

“Yeah, he’s gonna love this a little too much,” Emori warned.

Clarke explained that she had just searched ‘weird gifts for weird people’ on Google, and that was what had come up. Murphy didn’t take offense to that, of course. He boastfully set the lamp on the kitchen table, plugged it in, and hyperventilated as it flickered to life. “We’re never turning this off,” he announced, thrilled. “Never.”

That left only Clarke to receive her gift, and obviously, with everyone else having already given their gifts, everyone knew it was from Bellamy. She didn’t say anything, but he saw her eyes flitter back to the tree, probably noting the distinct lack of any other presents underneath. Once Murphy’s excitement finally died down, no one seemed to really know how to segue into the next gift . . . because they didn’t know if there was one.

There was, though. There definitely was.

“Alright,” Miller said, “so I guess that leaves us with . . .” He trailed off, looking at Bellamy confusedly. “Did you forget or something?”

“No, I didn’t forget.” Bellamy put his arm around Clarke’s shoulders and assured her, “I got you something, but I’m gonna give it to you later.”

That, of course, was met with a chorus of suggestive Oohs from all his friends and even a bow-chicka-wow-wow from Murphy.

“It’s not that,” Bellamy told them, although he could see why that was where their minds would wander. “I just wanna give it to her when we’re alone.” Well, that didn’t sound any better, did it? “Fuck.”

“Let’s get it on,” Miller crooned, and that made everyone erupt in laughter. Even Octavia, and she had to be grossed out by the thought. Jackson jumped in next with, “Girl if it’s alright, let’s go somewhere and get it on tonight.” And after that, it was a lyrical free-for-all, with almost every single one of them taking turns singing something about sex in an effort to embarrass Bellamy. But hell, that shit didn’t embarrass him. He was proud of his lively sex life. Who wouldn’t be?
“I really did get you something,” he told Clarke. “Don’t listen to them.”

“Okay.” She snuggled into his side, and they just sat there and took the teasing in stride. It was fun for their friends to give them a hard time. They delighted in it, and there were plenty of bed-breaking jokes. Plenty.

An hour later, things were winding down. Octavia had fallen asleep, and since Lincoln was basically her pillow, he pretty much had to settle in right there on the floor, too. Jasper hadn’t stuck to his decision to abstain from getting high tonight, and Maya had to help him walk home because he was so out of it. Monty and Harper left shortly after, and Miller helped a tired Jackson upstairs to his bedroom. That left Bellamy and Clarke downstairs with Murphy and Emori, who seemed to be on a holiday high due to their charades victory. They suggested a Christmas-themed game of Would You Rather, but Bellamy said, “Nah, I think I’m gonna go give Clarke her gift now.”

“Oh, yeah?” Murphy said. “Gonna go ‘mail some Christmas cards,’ huh?”

“Shut up, Murphy.” Bellamy took Clarke’s hand and led her up the stairs, casting a quick glance at Lincoln as he went. Lincoln just nodded, because unlike everyone else who’d been there tonight, he knew all about Clarke’s Christmas present.

Clarke was adorably eager to find out what her gift was, but she said she had something for him, too. She ducked into the bathroom for a few minutes, and when she came back out, she was wearing the bathrobe that hung on the back of his door, the one he never actually wore. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that she had probably put on something sexy underneath it, and he was intrigued.

“My gift first,” she said, holding out her hand.

“Alright, close your eyes,” he told her.

She did, but almost immediately she tried to peek.

“Clarke,” he scolded.

“Fine.” She squeezed her eyes shut and held both hands out expectantly.

He reached into his drawer and took out her gift. Well, technically, it was more of a hint as to what her gift really was: It was a paintbrush. He placed it flat in the palms of her hands and said, “Open your eyes.”

She did so with a confused, furrowed brow, and when she saw the paintbrush, her brow only furrowed further. “Oh.” Obviously she was trying to think of something nice to say and hide her disappointment. But she wouldn’t be disappointed for long.

“I think you should do some painting,” he suggested.

“Oh, well . . . okay.” She coiled her hand around he brush and waved it around like a magic wand a few times. “Noted. Thank you.”

He chuckled, amazed that she was actually thanking him for this. Like he really would’ve just gotten her a paint brush. She didn’t think this was it, did she?

“I’ll paint something really good,” she promised.

“You’re gonna have to paint a few things,” he informed her. “Can you do that?”
“Yeah.” She tilted her head to the side curiously. “Wait, what?”

He smiled sheepishly, looking down at his feet. “I did something.”

“What did you do?”

“I talked to Lincoln.” He tried to resist the urge to roll his eyes, but . . . he couldn’t.

“About what?”

“About you, your artwork,” he replied. “I showed it to him, and he liked it, so . . . if you want, he’s gonna let you have an exhibit at his gallery in March.”

Her eyes nearly bulged out of her head. “What?”

“Yeah. If you want.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.” He got a kick out of how surprised she was. “And listen, he didn’t just agree to it ’cause he knows you or knows me or anything like that. He showed your stuff to his friend, the co-owner, and he liked it, too. So they both wanna give you your own exhibit, not just him.”

The only response from Clarke were a few incredulous laughs. She really couldn’t believe it. “You did this?”

“Well, I just got the ball rolling. It’s probably not much of a Christmas gift.”

“Are you kidding? Bellamy!” She threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly, and he smiled, pleased with himself for being able to do this for her. “This is so amazing,” she said, slowly pulling back. “This is, like, the sweetest, most thoughtful thing anyone’s ever done for me.”

“So you’re gonna do it?” he asked hopefully.

“Yeah, of course I’m gonna do it. It’s a great opportunity,” she said. “I mean, I’ll be a little nervous, but . . . it’ll be good.”

“Yeah, it’ll be great.” If her paintings were even half as good as those drawings were, he was sure her exhibit would be very well-received.

“And I’ll have to thank Lincoln, too,” she said. “I can’t believe you actually went and talked to him.”

“I swallowed my pride,” he admitted. “For you.”

She beamed a smile and rose up on her tiptoes, giving him a quick kiss. “Oh, now I feel bad, though. I didn’t get you a very good gift.”

“What? You didn’t need to get me anything. You weren’t my secret Santa.”

“I know, but . . .” She shrugged, set the paintbrush down on the bed, and scurried over to the dresser, opening up the bottom drawer. That bottom drawer used to be his sweatshirt drawer, but nowadays it was mostly just a lot of her stuff in there. She’d hidden a gift at the bottom, one that was poorly wrapped and had a blue bow on the top that wouldn’t stay stuck. “Here,” she said, handing it to him. “Better than nothing.”

He could tell just from the feel of it that it was a DVD. When he ripped open the paper and saw the
first word of the title, he knew exactly what movie it was. It was a President Kennedy documentary he’d seen twice before on CNN.

“Wow, Clarke, thanks,” he said.

“I checked all your movies, didn’t see this one,” she said. “You don’t already have it, right?”

“No.” He’d removed it from his DVR a couple months ago.

“I’ll even watch it with you, if you want,” she offered. “You haven’t seen it before, have you?”

“Oh . . . I don’t think so,” he fibbed, looking at the back of the case. “Hmm.”

She narrowed her eyes skeptically, shaking her head. “Mmm, you’re lying. You’ve seen it.”

“Once or twice,” he confessed flippantly. “That’s okay, though. I’ll watch it again.”

“Well, is it at least a good one?”

“Yeah, it’s Kennedy. Kennedy’s always good.”

She sighed frustratedly, taking the DVD out of his hands. She stared at it dejectedly for a moment, then tossed it aside. “Okay, I figured this might happen,” she said as she began to untie the robe she had on. “That’s why I had a backup gift.” She opened the robe and lowered it from her shoulders, exposing herself in a very tight red corset in the process. It was a Christmas-y thing with white fluffy fur around the bottom and around the breast line. She looked like the sexiest Mrs. Claus he’d ever seen.

“That is a great present,” he said, practically salivating, “and I can’t to wait to unwrap it.” He gathered her up in his arms and fell down onto the bed with her, on top of that beautiful, curvaceous body of hers, one that somehow managed to look even more curvaceous in that corset.

“You wanna be my ho, ho, ho?” he joked. It was dumb humor, but it made her laugh.

“Sure,” she said, trailing her fingertips down his sides. “I’ll jingle your bells.”

“Whoa, Clarke.” The innuendo was rich with that one. He was so impressed.

He kissed her, ready to give her a truly merry Christmas now.

It was Octavia who woke them up on Christmas morning.

“Bellamy!” she hissed.

Even though it wasn’t her name, the shrillness in Octavia’s voice was hard for Clarke to ignore, and she jerked awake at the same time Bellamy did.

“O, what the hell?” he snapped, pulling the covers up more fully over both himself and Clarke.

“You slept in,” she informed him. “Mom’s already here.”

“What?”

She shut the door rather than answering.
Mom? Clarke thought. As in Bellamy’s mom?

“Shit,” he swore, shoving the covers aside. He sprang from the bed and headed straight into the bathroom, shutting the door. Seconds later, Clarke heard the shower running.

She glanced at the bedside clock, having to rub her tired eyes before she could even read the numbers. 9:42? Crap, she’d intended to be out of here by now, but apparently neither she nor Bellamy had remembered to set an alarm last night. They’d been . . . too busy.

Clarke had only just gotten out of bed when Bellamy re-emerged from the bathroom after the quickest shower in the history of mankind. He had a towel around his waist and his toothbrush in his mouth.

“We should’ve gone to bed earlier,” she said, yawning and stretching.

“Mmm-hmm,” he agreed, brushing his teeth quickly. Holding his toothbrush meant he only had one free hand to open up his drawer and search through it for a suitable pair of jeans. Lots of Bellamy’s jeans were work jeans, but she knew he’d probably want to wear something nicer with his mother there.

He backtracked towards the bathroom to spit and rinse, set his toothbrush back in its holder, then came back out and said, “It’s all yours.”

Though she would have much rather preferred to get in that shower with him, she realized that wasn’t a possibility right now. Besides, it wasn’t just him who had family obligations today. She really should have been in more of a hurry to get going. In fact, she should have already been gone. This was Blake family time now, and . . . well, she had her own family, exhausting as they could be.

By the time she got out of the shower and got her own teeth brushed, Bellamy was no longer in the bedroom. The bed was littered with various sweaters, much nicer than the t-shirts he usually donned. She laughed a little, picturing him running back and forth from his closet to his mirror, trying on all sorts of outfits like a girl trying to find the perfect clothes for a date.

Luckily, Clarke didn’t have that same problem. She’d brought along a very specific leggings and sweater dress outfit, an outfit her mother had gifted her last Christmas and would undoubtedly love to see her wearing today. Her hair, of course, took longer to make presentable than his did, though. Bellamy’s hair was notoriously unpredictable and always a little bit of a mess, so all he had to do (whether it was wet or dry) was just shake it out and call it good to go. But Clarke had to comb through hers and then decide whether to put it up in a wet messy bun or blow-dry it instead. Because yes, Bellamy did own a blow-dryer. He’d used it on his hair as a joke a couple weeks ago, just to show her how much of an afro he could have if he wanted to.

Clarke ended up blow-drying her hair and putting on makeup, too, only because . . . if she was going to meet Bellamy’s mom, she wanted to look nice. Presentable. Maybe even pretty. It wasn’t like she was feeling the stress of trying to impress her as Bellamy’s girlfriend or anything. But still, she was the girl who was about to creep downstairs after spending the night with this woman’s son. There was no way she was going to go downstairs looking like a mess.

Before she left the bedroom, she checked her phone, noticing that she had a couple missed calls and three text messages from her mom. Each one asked if she was on her way yet, and the last one also asked if she was okay. Clarke felt bad for worrying her, so she texted back a quick Be there soon and dropped her phone into her purse.

When she got downstairs, it was oddly quiet. Lincoln sat alone on the living room couch, eyes closed
as if he hadn’t gotten enough sleep last night. Or perhaps he just hadn’t slept comfortably on the floor. He looked over at her when she stepped off that bottom stair, though, and said, “Morning.”

“Good morning.” She had to take a deep inhale because . . . mmm, were those cookies? Something was baking in the oven, and it smelled good. “Where is everyone?” she asked.

“Oh, Miller and Jackson headed home early to spend the day with their families,” Lincoln replied. “I don’t know where Murphy and Emori went, but they’ll be out all day. And Octavia and Bellamy took Aurora into the backyard.”

Clarke peered through the kitchen window, and indeed, there was an impossibly beautiful woman, the same one from so many of Bellamy’s photos, bouncing on the trampoline. Both the Blake siblings were bouncing along with her, and all of them were laughing.

*That would never happen in my family,* Clarke thought enviously. What exactly would today have in store for her? More obnoxious stories from her cousins? More critiques from her grandmother?

“You’ll like Aurora,” Lincoln assured her. “She’s really nice.”

*Oh,* Clarke thought. *So I guess I’m not leaving then.* It wasn’t like she’d been planning to just cut out of there without saying goodbye or anything, but it was past 10:30 now. She probably couldn’t stay much longer.

“Hey, um . . .” Clarke sat down beside him, seizing the opportunity to express her gratitude for his role in her Christmas gift from Bellamy. “I wanted to thank you, by the way, for agreeing to let me have an exhibit at Trikru. You didn’t have to do that.”

“Oh, we’re happy to,” Lincoln said. “Your art’s good, Clarke. It deserves to be seen.”

She hoped that were true. She didn’t know what the theme would be, and she hadn’t actually painted anything for a couple of months. But this was a good chance to get back into that again. “I’ve never actually had an exhibit anywhere before,” she admitted, “so I’m really excited. And very appreciative.”

“Well, I was in your shoes not all that long ago,” Lincoln reminded her. “So if there’s ever anything I can do to help you out with your career . . .”

“Thank you,” she said again. Lincoln really was such a nice, good-hearted guy. “And if there’s ever anything I can do to help you out with Bellamy . . .”

Lincoln chuckled. “Well, we’ve had a few civilized conversations lately. It’s a start.”

“It is a start,” she agreed. “So do you go home for Christmas? Or are you spending the day here with them?”

“Oh, I’ll stay here,” he answered. “I don’t have much of a family, so . . . Octavia’s my family now.”

“Hmm.” That was sweet. Octavia was young, but she had a boyfriend who was *completely* devoted to her. Not many girls her age could say that.

Fueled on by the tempting aroma coming from the kitchen, Clarke got up and went to peek into the oven. Just as she’d suspected, there were dozens of sugar cookies baking in there. They were big and puffy and looked like they were almost done, which meant that Bellamy or his mother or whomever had put them in the oven would probably come back inside soon.
She looked out the kitchen window, watching as Bellamy’s mom lost her balance and fell on the middle of the trampoline laughingly. He helped her back up, and then both he and Octavia stepped over to the edge, giving her free reign to bounce. She hit a few poses in the air, including some that were so flexible and precise that Clarke was led to suspect she’d once been a cheerleader.

“Theyir mom looks young,” she remarked. She also looked a lot like Octavia, too, but not so much like Bellamy. So apparently his father’s genetics were the more prevalent ones.

“She is young,” Lincoln confirmed. “She got pregnant with Bellamy when she was seventeen, had him when she was eighteen, so . . .”

So she was a teen mom, Clarke thought. Not an easy or glamorous role to take on in life, despite what the MTV reality shows seemed to perpetuate. And if she’d had Bellamy at eighteen, that meant she’d had Octavia at only twenty-one. That was still a pretty young age, and from what she understood, neither Bellamy nor Octavia’s father had ever been part of the picture. She’d done a good job raising both of them by herself. Clarke had an immediate respect for her for that.

After about a minute of jumping, Aurora stopped and rubbed her arms as if she were cold, and Bellamy motioned towards the house. Indeed, Octavia was the only one of them really dressed for the outdoors right now, as she was wearing a Trikru gallery sweatshirt that looked huge on her. Probably belonged to Lincoln.

Clarke didn’t know where to stand or what to do as she prepared to meet Bellamy’s mother, so she just waited in the kitchen as casually as possible. The Blakes were a ruckus of laughter as they all piled back in, and she caught the tail end of their conversation. Bellamy was recounting the time Emori had pushed Murphy right off that trampoline, and his mother said, “Well, he deserves it.” She stopped abruptly when she saw Clarke standing there, though, and said, “Hi.”

“Hi,” Clarke returned, unsure of what else to say.

Bellamy jumped in to introduce them, of course, much to her relief. “Mom, this is Clarke,” he said. “Clarke, this is my mom, Aurora.”

“Nice to meet you,” Clarke said, extending her hand.

“You, too,” Aurora said, shaking it and smiling at her. “So you’re Bellamy’s . . . friend?”

She nodded nervously, not sure how much Aurora knew about their . . . friendship. Octavia had probably told her some things, and chances were that she knew her son well enough to know . . . everything. But it didn’t seem to be an issue. There was no judgment or condescension in her tone, only friendliness.

The cookies came out of the oven a few minutes later, smelling even more tantalizing than they had when they’d been in it. Apparently it was a Blake family tradition to decorate cookies together, a tradition Aurora insisted both Lincoln and Clarke take part in as well. Both of her children were all about it. They insulted each other’s decorating skills, purposefully broke off parts of each other’s cookies, and in general just acted like two big kids.

“What is that?” Octavia huffed as Bellamy spread green frosting over the body portion of a Santa cookie. “Is that a green suit? Is your Santa wearing a green suit?”

“It’s called an artistic liberty, O,” he proclaimed. “Thinking outside the box. You should try it sometime since yours are so boring.”

“Mine are classic,” she declared, throwing a handful of sprinkles at him. No one seemed to mind
when they got all over the floor.

“Clarke, yours is really good,” Aurora complimented.

“Oh, thanks.” While everyone else had decorated about four cookies at this point, she was still working on her first one, a Christmas tree that she was determined to adorn with so much frosting and sprinkles that one would barely even be able to taste the actual cookie underneath.

“Clarke’s an artist,” Bellamy informed her. “Of course it’s good.”

“One thing I can do better than you,” she mumbled.

Aurora finished up her reindeer cookie, setting it on the ‘done tray.’ “He is good at a lot of things,” she said.

Clarke and Bellamy exchanged a quick glance, and he arched his eyebrows suggestively. Oh, yeah, Clarke thought. He’s very good.

The cookie decorating was fun, but it took over an hour. By the end of it, Clarke realized she’d totally dropped the ball on getting home at any sort of reasonable time whatsoever, and truth be told . . . she wasn’t sure she wanted to leave. Nobody seemed to have any intention of kicking her out. Sure, she was one more person to feed, but Aurora was in charge of the meal, and it looked like she’d brought enough food to feed a small army.

By noon, she knew she was going to have to make a decision. Her phone was littered with texts from her mother asking where she was, telling her the rest of the family was already there. If she left now, she could get there in time for their afternoon gift exchange and have ample opportunity to mingle before dinner that evening. Not that she wanted to mingle. Not that she gave a damn about the gift exchange. In her family, they pretty much all just got each other cash and gift cards anyway, because nobody knew what anyone else really wanted.

She thought about texting back another Be there soon promise, but her thumbs hovered over the letters rather than pressing them.

Bellamy was busy in the kitchen helping his mother—in fact, he and Lincoln were both helping, while Octavia stood around and “supervised”—so Clarke sidled up to him and said, “Hey, what’re you making?”

“Some kind of stew,” he replied, chopping the end off of sausage. “Want some?” he teased, waving the roll at her face like it was some huge dildo.

“Ew, stop it.”

“Come on, Clarke, I know you like sausage,” he teased.

“Shut up,” she whispered, whacking his shoulder. His mother appeared to be giving Lincoln instructions about how to season the ham right now, but she was still within earshot. She didn’t need to overhear any of their dirty humor.

“You wanna help?” he asked.

Did she want to help? In the kitchen? Not particularly; she’d probably end up blowing something up. But she did want to be there with them, even if it was just in a supervisory role like Octavia. Neither one of them could cook, but they could both eat, and they would both need to, as this was shaping up to be quite the Christmas dinner.
“It’s already almost 12:30,” she informed him. “I probably have to go.”

“Oh.” He frowned and kept cutting up the sausage into smaller chunks.

“Unless . . .” She didn’t want to impose, but she also didn’t really want to leave. “I mean, I could stay, if you guys don’t mind. But if you don’t want me to, then that’s fine, too. I can go.”

“No, you can stay,” he said. “Is your mom gonna be pissed, though?”

“Uh . . .” She squirmed unsurely, thinking that her best bet would be to make up a little white lie. “I’ll talk to her.”

“Yeah, well, you’re more than welcome here.”

Of course she was. Everyone was. There was a reason why this was the place to be on Saturday nights. It was just so . . . so inviting. There, Clarke didn’t feel the pressure to wear the right thing or say the right thing. She didn’t feel stressed or anxious or anything of the sort; she felt relaxed, because being with the Blakes and Lincoln . . . it was just fun.

“Clarke, would you like to help?” Aurora asked. “I’ve got some roast beef that can be seasoned.”

Bellamy snorted. “Do you wanna end up eating arsenic? She can’t cook, Mom.”

“Excuse me,” Clarke huffed, “I made macaroni and cheese the other night, and it was delectable.”

“It was out of the box,” Bellamy added.

“So?” That didn’t change how delectable it’d been.

“You know what? I was gonna make some macaroni and cheese,” Aurora said. “One of my grandmother’s old recipes. Come on, you can make it with me.”

“Oh, um, I will in just a minute,” Clarke said, figuring this was a good opportunity to learn at least a basic culinary skill.

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“Oh, um, I will in just a minute,” Clarke said, figuring this was a good opportunity to learn at least a basic culinary skill. “I have to go call my mom really quick.”

“Oh, okay.” Aurora leaned over her son’s shoulder and said, “Cut those up smaller, Bellamy, will you?”

“Whatsoever you say. You’re the boss.”

Clark took her phone and headed outside to the front porch so she could make her call in private. Her mom sounded relieved to finally hear from her, but the second the relief was over, the questions started in. “Why aren’t you here yet? What’s taking you so long? Are you on your way now?”

“Oh, um, I will in just a minute,” Clarke said, figuring this was a good opportunity to learn at least a basic culinary skill. “I have to go call my mom really quick.”

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“No, I don’t think I can come today,” Clarke said.

“What? Well, how sick are you? Do you need to go see a doctor?”

“No, I’m fine,” Clarke insisted, not wanting to worry her over some illness that didn’t even exist. “I think I’ve just got one of those twenty-four hour flu bugs. It’s been going around campus.”
“Oh, honey . . .”

“Yeah, and I don’t really wanna get everyone else sick, so I think I’m just gonna stay put,” she decided. “Sorry.”

Her mother was sad, understandably. In twenty-one years, this was the first Christmas they’d be spending apart. But she seemed to agree that it was for the best, and they made arrangements to meet up before Clarke’s Christmas break was over so they could exchange gifts. Clarke agreed to call her later, just to check in and let her know how she was feeling. And that was that. Phone call done. She felt sort of guilty, because it wasn’t that she wanted to lie to her mom. But then again, in this case, a lie would probably spare her feelings more than the truth would, because the truth was, she just didn’t want to be there.

When she went back inside, Bellamy and Octavia were faux-arguing about her lack of involvement in the meal. Octavia was vehemently reminding him, “You know I don’t cook, Bell. I never have.”

“Right, because I always did it for you,” he shot back.

“Why break tradition now?” She shrugged exaggeratedly.

“Screw tradition,” he said, chucking a piece of sausage at her.

“Oh, you wanna start that, huh?” she taunted, picking it up off the floor. “Remember last year’s food fight? Remember who won?” She held her arm up, ready to throw it, but her mother took it out of her hand.

“I remember,” Aurora said. “Half our food went to waste. Let’s not repeat that this year.”

“Yeah, O,” Bellamy grunted, still focused on his stew. “See, this is why I’m her favorite.”

“Oh, you are not her favorite,” Octavia growled.

“Yeah, I am.”

“Mom, who’s your favorite?”

Aurora, clearly accustomed to this type of bickering, avoided the question altogether and instead exclaimed, “Clarke!”

Bellamy made a face. “Clarke? Clarke’s your favorite?” When he saw her come back into the kitchen out of the corner of his eye, he warned, “Oh, here we go. Brace yourselves: The kitchen’s about to explode.”

“I am not that bad,” Clarke said. Only twice in her life had her microwave ever caught on fire.

“I’m sure you’re not,” Aurora agreed. “Macaroni and cheese?”

That sounded do-able, especially if she had a more experienced cook guiding her through it.

“Macaroni and cheese.”

A couple hours later, after what was mostly a group effort—Octavia had warmed up the rolls in the microwave; that was her contribution—the meal was ready. There wasn’t enough room at the kitchen table, especially not with that eyesore of a leg lamp on it, so they arranged everything on the counter, buffet style, and everyone just walked through with a plate and got whatever food they wanted. Then they took it into the living room and ate on the couch, the recliner, or in Lincoln and
Octavia’s case, Murphy’s beanbag.

It was a legitimate feast, with both roast beef and ham as the main features. Clarke loaded up more on the au gratin potatoes, though, which Bellamy informed her were his mother’s specialty, and they definitely didn’t disappoint. She devoured the mashed potatoes, too, along with a couple of rolls, a generous helping of Bellamy’s sausage stew, and some honey-roasted carrots. She didn’t have much room for the macaroni and cheese, but that didn’t stop her from dumping some of it on her plate. She even tried a small bowl of Aurora’s cauliflower soup, despite not being much of a cauliflower fan. And it was good. It was all good.

In a weird way, Clarke felt like she was a kid again, like her dad was there, a part of that dinner even though he’d never met any of these people. The food wasn’t exactly the same as what he’d made, but it all had that same home-cooked feel to it. And the way the conversation just flowed naturally and comfortably between the group of them while they ate . . . that reminded her of how things used to be, too. There was a warmth there that had been missing at her family’s Thanksgiving dinner and was probably missing at the Christmas one today.

Even Bellamy and Lincoln were getting along. Which was weird. But nice.

After eating, there was no big rush to do the dishes, only to open presents. Aurora apologized profusely for not bringing Clarke a gift. “I didn’t know you’d be here,” she said.

“Oh, neither did I,” Clarke said. “It’s fine. Don’t worry.”

There weren’t many gifts to exchange, because Lincoln and Octavia were doing presents for each other later. Lincoln did get Aurora a nice gold watch, which she immediately put on, even though it was too big for her wrist; but other than that, most of the gifts were from Aurora. She gave Lincoln his first, and it turned out to be a hand-knitted sweater she’d made. That must have been a lot of work, Clarke figured. Lincoln was a big guy, so that was a lot of knitting.

Octavia, too, got clothing from her mother, but hers wasn’t handmade. It was a nice new leather jacket, one that made Octavia’s mouth gape. “Oh my god, Mom,” she said, holding it up in astonishment. “It’s beautiful.”

“You like it?” Aurora asked.

“Yes. How much did it cost, though?”

“Oh . . .” Aurora waved the question off. “I wanted to get my daughter something nice.”

Cost, Clarke thought. No one in her family ever asked how much something had cost, because they all just assumed it was relatively expensive.

“Thank you.” Octavia got up and went over to the recliner to hug her mom. It was the sweetest thing Clarke had seen Octavia do . . . well, ever.

Bellamy’s gift was next, and his was way more practical: a new toolbox, complete with a new hammer, wrench, and various screwdrivers inside. “This is great,” he said. “Thank you.”

“I know it’s not exciting,” his mother said, “but Octavia told me that’s what I should get you.”

“No, she’s right. I needed it,” Bellamy said. “This stuff will really help me out at work. Thanks, Mom.” He leaned over the arm of the couch and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Ever the adoring children, Bellamy and Octavia of course kept their mother’s gift in suspense until
the end. When they finally gave her present to her—a ticket for a fully-paid spa day—she was floored. “Oh my goodness, you guys,” she said, holding one hand to her chest. “This is too much.”

“Not enough,” Bellamy said. “You deserve a day off. So take one, go relax, get a massage.”

“I will,” she said, opening up both her arms to call them over for another hug.

*Wow,* Clarke thought, watching all three of them in amazement. They really were *such* a close-knit family. Despite how Octavia and Bellamy bickered mercilessly from time to time, they had this profound love for each other that just never wavered, and clearly they both thought the world of their mother, too.

As evening set in, pictures were a big activity. Some were silly, like the ones of Bellamy with reindeer antlers on his head. Others were more significant, like the ones of Aurora and both her children sitting together on the couch, arms around each other. Something told Clarke they weren’t taking these pictures to put on next year’s Christmas card; they were just taking them as a way of storing up memories. Memories of the day, of time spent together. Bellamy would probably put some of these photos in that box in his drawer.

Clarke ended up taking some pictures of the three of them with Lincoln. For the first few pictures, Bellamy was sort of glaring at him, but then he lightened up, pulled his mom in closer, and smiled. Aurora wanted Clarke to be in some of the pictures, too, even though Clarke herself wasn’t about to push for that. She was the unexpected guest today, nothing more.

“No, you need to be in some of these pictures,” Aurora insisted. “Come on, we’ll do one of those selfie things.”

“Selfie things?” Octavia echoed in amusement.

The five of them crowded onto the couch, and Lincoln, having the longest arms snapped the photos on Octavia’s phone.

“Send those to me, O,” Bellamy said. Then he lowered his mouth to Clarke’s ear and whispered, “I’m gonna crop Lincoln out.”

“No, you’re not,” she said, hitting his stomach lightly. He was probably just kidding about that. Probably.

Clarke offered to help Aurora with the dishes after dinner, simply because she figured it was the least she could do. Bellamy didn’t want his mother to bother with them at all, of course, but he got distracted when Octavia grabbed a pillow off the couch and hit him over the head with it. Suddenly, there was a spontaneous Christmas pillow fight going on in the living room, with Lincoln serving as the referee.

“Who do you think’s gonna win that?” Clarke asked.

Aurora smiled at her rowdy children, shaking her head. “Who knows?” she said. “Octavia, probably.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed as she dried off some of the silverware. Damn, her side of the sink was really filling up. Aurora was fast when it came to scrubbing everything clean, so she was going to have to pick up the pace on the drying. As privileged as it sounded, she wasn’t used to doing dishes this way. She’d always had a dishwasher.

“So how long have you known Bellamy?” Aurora asked her.
“Um, about three months now,” Clarke replied.

“How’d you meet?”

“Oh, it was—we were . . .” It was a lot cuter in her head, what with the runaway watermelon and all. But to everyone else, it probably just sounded lame. “Walmart,” she answered simply. “We met in the Walmart parking lot.”

Aurora laughed. “Well, you certainly seem to have gotten close,” she said.

*Oh, you have no idea,* Clarke thought. Or maybe she did. Lord only knew what Octavia had told her about their bed-breaking ways.

“That’s good,” Aurora went on. “It’s good for him to have someone . . . a friend.”

Clarke nodded, happy that she could be that for him. Bellamy had plenty of friends, but . . . well, she got to be a different *type* of friend. But despite all the sex they were having, that wasn’t what had made them grow close. It was all the moments in between the sex—the laughter, the smiles, the conversations—that had.

“He’s, um . . .” Aurora stopped scrubbing at the dishes suddenly, smiling shakily. “He’s a really special person,” she said. “He’s a good son.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. “He loves you and Octavia so much.”

“Oh, we love him, too,” Aurora said. “He’s grown up to be . . . such a good man.” She swallowed hard, and when Clarke took a closer look at her face, she noticed . . . tears. Aurora was blinking back tears.

“Are you okay?” Clarke asked softly.

Aurora nodded, dabbing at the corners of her eyes. “I don’t want him to see me cry,” she said. “He’d worry about me. He always worries about me; he worries about his sister. But we worry about him, you know? He works so hard, and he’s always trying to take care of us, but nobody takes care of him, and . . .” She sniffled, wiping underneath her nose with the back of her hand. “He’s been through some things,” she said sadly.

*Oh.* That was all it took for Clarke to understand what Aurora was getting emotional about. *Roma.* She nodded slowly, keeping her voice low when she spoke so that Bellamy wouldn’t overhear her. “Yeah, he told me about what happened back then,” she said, “with Roma and the car accident.”

“He did?” Aurora both looked and sounded surprised to hear that.

“Yeah.” *Only because I found out on my own,* Clarke thought. But there was no need to bring that up.

“What else did he tell you?” Aurora asked quietly.

*What else?* Clarke thought. *What else?* What else was there to tell? “Um . . .”

A strangled, over-exaggerated cry interrupted them, and when Clarke looked over her shoulder, there was Bellamy, bent over with his head trapped in his sister’s arms. “Mom, help!” he yelled. “She’s choking me!”

“Oh, Octavia, we’ve been through this,” Aurora said, abandoning the dishes as she went to break it
up. “Don’t choke your brother.”

Clarke stood at the sink, a half-dry dinner plate in her hand, trying not to read too much into Aurora’s question. But she’d had a nagging feeling for days now that there was still something Bellamy wasn’t telling her, and a question like that didn’t exactly make the feeling go away.
Chapter 18

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Christmas break didn’t exist for Bellamy, nor did it exist for the rest of his friends. Well, most of the rest of his friends, anyway. Miller, Monty, Emori, Harper, Maya, Jackson . . . they all got up on the 26th of December and got right back to work. Holiday was over. Jasper and Murphy, though they were constantly unemployed, both kept themselves busy with, in Jasper’s case, pot legalization rallies, and in Murphy’s case . . . his leg lamp. Lincoln wasn’t technically a friend, so he didn’t count, but since his income was basically Octavia’s income, he kind of did.

Clarke, of course, was a different story. Sure, she worked a job, but she worked at an on-campus museum that was closed until the new year. That meant she had a week of absolutely nothing on her plate. No work, no classes, just a whole bunch of free time on her hands. Bellamy would have loved to be able to fool around in bed with her all day, or go out and do something fun, but his schedule was the exact opposite: packed full. Things fell apart in the wintertime, and it seemed everyone in the neighborhood needed his help with something. Apparently people had been spreading the word that did good work, because eventually, even people outside of his neighborhood were calling him up, too. It was good for business, he supposed, to get some new customers, but . . . he wasn’t too thrilled about the new customers he was getting.

College students were calling him up like crazy over their Christmas break, probably because they all let things run down over the course of the semester. Then when it was either Christmas vacation or summer vacation, they got all motivated to get it fixed and usually got pissed if he was there even a minute after he’d said he would be. He’d done work for college kids before; it wasn’t like he had anything inherently against them or anything. Hell, Clarke, Raven, Niylah, Wells . . . they were all in college and they were awesome, down-to-earth. He himself would have been in college if . . . well, there was no point in dwelling on that now. Part of him envied all the opportunities these people had, and that was why it pissed him off so much to be laboring away in their houses or in their apartments while they bitched and complained about what their next semester was going to be like.

“I don’t even wanna go back,” one girl whined on the phone while he unclogged all the hair from her bathroom sink. “I wish I could just drop out now.”

That kind of stuff just made him roll his eyes. Some of these people didn’t even know how lucky they were.

Ungrateful people were one thing; straight-up jackasses were something else entirely. Only a few days into Christmas break, Bellamy had his first experience with the latter. Typical frat guys they were, except there were no fraternities on Arkadia’s campus, so they just lived in house with five other male roommates and probably deluded themselves into thinking it was a frat.

There were two guys in particular who called up Bellamy, and he quickly recognized the last name: Sydney. One of these kids, the blonde one who looked like a rejected Baywatch extra, was Diana’s son. He introduced himself politely enough at first, said his name was Trey and then introduced his friend, whose name Bellamy wasn’t inclined to learn. They thanked him for coming, but then things went south quickly. They asked him to clean their house. Bellamy could only stare at them in disbelief for a few seconds before informing them, “I’m not a maid.”

Trey snorted. “Wait, aren’t you supposed to fix whatever needs fixin’, though?”

“Right,” Bellamy confirmed. Right now, he was fixing to pull their heads out of their asses.
“Cleaning, on the other hand . . . you guys can do that all on your own.” Business-sense would have dictated that he had less of a hostile tone with them, but fuck that. He didn’t care if he lost these two losers’ business.

Even though they were disappointed that—god forbid—they’d have to buckle down and clean their own house, they did have a garbage disposal that needed fixing. Bellamy took a look at it, determined it salvageable, and then negotiated the price with them. He could get a new dispenser for fifty bucks, get it installed quickly enough, and get the hell out of there. They agreed on a price of three-hundred for the entire job, so he headed out to Walmart to get the part.

When he got back, those two idiots had attempted to fix it themselves and only made the problem worse. He told them to back off, give him some space, and quickly got to work fixing the problem they had exacerbated. It was a shitty job. It was dirty, smelled awful, and the whole time he was working, those jackasses were saying things like, “Man, I’m glad I don’t do this for a living,” and “See, this is why college is gonna pay off.”

It took everything he had not to get up and leave halfway through the job. He wanted to lay into them—just verbally, not physically (well, kind of physically, too). They thought they were so great and so superior just because they might graduate and might put their degrees to use? They were dumb-asses, and they were driving him up the wall.

He couldn’t leave, though, not when he’d already purchased the disposal. The only way he’d get paid was if he finished the job.

He worked quickly and fixed the problem well, only to avoid having them call him back later and complain. When he was done, he had to interrupt their utterly important mid-afternoon game of beer pong to get his money. Which proved to be an issue. Even though they’d agreed upon three-hundred, Trey put only three fifty dollar bills in his hand.

“This is only half,” Bellamy said.

“Oh, is it?” Trey and his friend exchanged a laugh.

“We said three-hundred,” Bellamy reminded him. Shit, he’d kept the labor cost cheap just because the part itself was cheap. “I told you, it’s on-site payment only. I need the rest of it now.”

“Well, that’s all I got,” Trey said, shrugging, “so . . . take it or leave it.” He picked up the ping pong ball again, bounced it off the table, and then rejoiced when it landed in one of the cups.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Bellamy roared. “You’re gonna stiff me a hundred and fifty bucks?”

“Fine, here,” Trey gave in, reaching into his pocket to take out another fifty. “Happy now?”

What the hell kind of question was that? Of course he wasn’t happy. This was still a hundred bucks less than what they’d agreed on.

“Why don’t you go fix some toilets or something?” the jackass friend suggested pompously.

“Yeah, my mom’s pipes probably need unclogged,” Trey mumbled. Both he and his friend got a laugh out of that one.

Screw this, Bellamy thought. He didn’t even want their money now. What he really wanted to do was march right back over to that brand new disposal and stick that money down into the center of it. Hell, maybe that’d even clog it up again, and this time, they could fucking fix it themselves, or at least try to.
Yeah. That was what he wanted to do.

The harsh reality of the situation, though, was that he quite literally couldn’t afford to do that. Even if it was a hundred dollars less than what he was supposed to be getting, it was still money in his hand, and he still needed it. And of course Trey and his friend knew that; that’s why they weren’t paying him the rest. They knew he’d have to settle.

There was definitely a way to make them pay, but it involved escalating things to the point of a fight; and he wasn’t about to do that, no matter how much he wanted to punch their smug, arrogant faces in. So he sucked it up, swallowed his pride, and left with two hundred dollars in his pocket. One-fifty, technically, due to the cost of the disposal. All that work for a lousy hundred and fifty bucks. That was about a week’s worth of groceries. Not a month, a week.

Pathetic.

That job put him in a bad mood for the rest of his jobs throughout the day. He worked as quickly as he could, but he didn’t finish up until nearly 8:00. His truck struggled on the way home, not because he wasn’t maintaining it but because it was so damn cold outside, and all he could think was, Great. I’ll probably have to use that one-fifty to buy a new engine part.

When he finally got home, his roommates were planted on the couch playing video games again. Murphy had on flannel pajama pants—probably hadn’t changed out of them all day—but Miller was still in his security uniform, so he must have had to work pretty late, too.

“Hey,” Miller said. “Long day, huh?”

“Endless.” Bellamy sat down on the arm of the couch, rubbing his forehead. He had a damn headache. His back hurt, his legs hurt, his shirt was covered in God only knew what crap . . .

“What the hell did you fix today?” Murphy asked. “You smell, man.”

Bellamy pulled his shirt collar up to his nose, embarrassed that Murphy was right. “This fucking garbage disposal,” he said. “You know, I might not have to do all that or work so late if you got a job.”

“I’ve told you before, we should go into business together,” Murphy said, eyes still locked on the screen as Miller kicked his ass at whatever game they were playing.

“And I’ve told you before, that’s not gonna happen,” Bellamy shot back. Murphy had no mechanical abilities whatsoever, and absolutely no potential for acquiring customer service skills. Bellamy loved the guy like a brother, but there was no fucking way he could go into business with him.

“Dropship’s hiring bartenders,” Miller suggested. “You could apply there.”

“Nah,” Murphy said. “I don’t wanna work there. I play there.”

“Do you wanna work anywhere?” Bellamy asked impatiently. “‘Cause that’d be nice.”

Miller paused the game, casting a worried glance up at Bellamy. “You alright?” he asked. “You don’t seem like yourself.”

Bellamy sighed, trying to forget about his crappy day. Usually, to do that, he just reminded himself that he’d had worse. “Yeah, I’m just in a bad mood,” he said.

“Oh, well, here’s something that’ll put you in a better one,” Murphy said. “Clarke’s already
upstairs.”

Clarke? That did make him feel better. She spent so many nights over there, so it wasn’t unusual by any means. But just the thought of being able to go up there and crawl into bed with her, even if all they did tonight was sleep . . . it was a good capper to an otherwise lousy day.

When he got upstairs, he found Clarke sitting up in his bed, sketching. She glanced up when she saw him and smiled. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Awesome, she was wearing his Redskins shirt. And probably nothing underneath. Yeah, getting to come home to a cute girl who had a penchant for wearing his clothes? Didn’t suck. Trey and his dumbass friend may have had money, but he was willing to bet they didn’t have this.

“You’re home late,” she remarked, setting her book down on her lap.

“Yes, long day.” He tilted his head to the side to get a better view of her drawing. All he could make out right now were two sets of legs tangled up beneath some blankets. That had to be them, right? Who the hell else would it have been?

He smirked, loving that she was using their sex life as inspiration for her artwork. Hell, maybe that’d be the basis for her exhibit at Trikru. He didn’t mind.

“Keep drawing,” he told her, stopping to press a kiss to the top of her head before he peeled his shirt off and headed into the bathroom. “I’m gonna shower.”

“Want me to join you?” she offered.

“I’m just gonna take a quick one.” He smiled weakly and shut the door. With aching limbs, he got into that shower and stood there like a zombie, letting the water wash over him and soothe his tired body. Everything hurt. Any day he came home like this with sore muscles and dirty clothes, he was reminded of just how much of manual labor job he worked. Sometimes he got caught up networking with his customers and strategizing on how to get more business, and he let himself believe it was more than that. But at the end of the day . . . no, he was still just a handyman. That was manual labor.

Man, he was down on himself tonight, and he hated feeling that way. But once the regret and self-pity and general miserableness set in, sometimes it was hard to combat. He knew he would—he’d wake up tomorrow and it would be another day. But for tonight, he was just down in the dumps.

He collapsed on the bed with his towel around his waist. His mattress squeaked, of course, but damn, it felt good. He’d been going nonstop for twelve hours today. Even his lunch break had just been a sandwich on the drive from one location to the next. This bed felt good; it felt necessary.

Clarke set her sketchbook aside and scooted in close to him, propping her arm up underneath her head. Poor girl, she probably expected something tonight, sex of some kind. In contrast to how overworked he was feeling, Clarke was bored as hell. Having nothing to do on Christmas break meant that she really wanted to do him.

“How was your day?” he asked her.

“Good,” she said. “I hung out with Raven and Niylah.”

“I bet you guys talked about sex,” he speculated.

“Maybe just a little bit here and there once in a while,” she said. “What about you? You don’t look
like you had a good day.”

“I didn’t,” he admitted. “Oh, well.”

“What happened?” she pressed.

He groaned, not even sure if he wanted to recount it. “Just . . .” Sometimes he felt weird venting his frustrations about college people to Clarke, being that she was one herself. “I was fixing this garbage disposal for these two morons,” he said, figuring it might do him some good to get it off his chest. “And you should’ve seen ’em, Clarke. You should’ve seen the way they looked at me and talked to me. Like they thought they were so much better than me. Like I was just some blue collar trash not even worth their money.”

Clarke frowned, whimpering sympathetically, and leaned down to press a light kiss to his shoulder. “They sound like losers,” she said.

“Yeah, they were.” He knew he was a better guy than them, less of a jackass, but still . . . sometimes his job made him feel like a loser, too.

“Don’t go do any jobs for them again,” Clarke said.

“Oh, trust me, I won’t.” From now on, he’d stick to the people who actually paid the full amount of their bill.

“Just forget about them,” she said, rubbing her feet—damn cold feet—against his legs. “You’re here with me now.”

He sighed contentedly because, here with her? Yeah, it was a pretty nice place to be.

“Maybe,” she said, trickling her fingers down his chest and abdomen, “I can make you feel a lot better.” Her hand stopped at his towel, and she smiled at him suggestively.

Oh, he wanted to have sex with her, no doubt about that. But his body had other plans. “I’m exhausted,” he told her honestly.

“You can just lay here,” she told him. “I’ll do all the work.”

His eyebrows shot up with intrigue. Well, that definitely sounded like something worth pursuing. As much as he loved being a more dominant personality in the bedroom, there were times like this where the thought of letting her take over was so appealing.

What the hell? he figured. Even though he was tired, it wasn’t that late yet. And it definitely would put him in a better mood. If Clarke was offering, he sure as hell wasn’t about to turn it down.

“Alright,” he said.

“Alright.” She unhooked his towel and pushed it aside. He wasn’t hard yet, so she had some work to do, and she wasted no time getting to it. She wrapped her hand around his cock and started pumping him, finding her rhythm right away.

“Uh,” he groaned, closing his eyes so he could concentrate on the feel of that. She had soft little hands. They felt so different than his own.

“You’re not gonna fall asleep on me, are you?” she teased.

“No.” It didn’t matter how tired he was. There was no way he could sleep through this.
“Good,” she said. “Because I really want you.”

His eyes snapped open, and he gazed up at her gratefully. She really was so damn good to him, always knew what to do or what to say.

“You’re Bellamy Blake,” she said, as if solely to inflate his ego. She leaned forward, lips moving against his as she murmured, “And you are so, so sexy.” Her mouth was on his then, tongue delving in between his lips to brush against his. The combination of making out with her while her hand jerked him off was the perfect recipe for getting him hard. Or at least hard enough that he was good to go.

“Well, that was fast,” she said, removing her hand.

“I’m easy to please.”

She sat back on her knees and reached down to the grab the bottom of her shirt—technically his t-shirt—with crisscrossed arms. But she hesitated before pulling it over her head, asking, “Do you want me to leave this on?”

Did he want her to leave his t-shirt on while she got on top of him and fucked him? Hell, yeah, that sounded great. “Sure,” he said, trying to play it cool.

“Okay.” She let go of the t-shirt and stretched over his stomach to pull open his nightstand drawer. He smoothed the shirt up enough so that he could smack her ass while she looked for condoms. Nothing too forceful, just a light hit that elicited a little yelp from her.

His condom supply was nearing its end, but he still had a few left. She found one and sheathed him quickly, then took to touching herself for a moment to get everything going down there. He could have laid there and watched her touch herself forever; it was so fucking sexy. But she seemed to be as easily turned on as he was, because after only a few seconds of that, she was getting on top of him and positioning her entrance above his cock. She teased just the tip of it before changing her mind and turning around instead.

“This is new,” he remarked, appreciating a brand new view. What was this position called? Reverse cowgirl or something? He wasn’t even sure if Clarke had ever done it before, but in typical Clarke fashion, she was willing to try.

There was a period of about two adorable minutes where she had no idea how to get the position to work comfortably. The t-shirt was part of the problem, as it was long enough to cover her hips. She ended up taking her ponytail holder out of her hair and using it to secure the shirt in a knot at her side. Then, on hands and knees, she moved forward, then backward, telling him to help her out and hold his cock steady so she could get on it and go to pound town.

“I thought you said you were gonna do all the work,” he taunted.

“I am, but—” Frustratedly, she changing things up all together, repositioning herself into a squat. “Does this look good?” she asked. “It feels really awkward.”

“It looks good,” he assured her. It was sort of like doggy style in that he had an incredible view of her ass. But she was the one who had the control here, and he couldn’t wait to see what she did with it.

She reached between her legs and took his cock in her hand, holding it still as she sank down on top of it. She went about halfway down at first, bounced a bit, and then tried to go even further. It was an amazing sight to see, her body stretching and making room for him. No matter how many times he
got to bury himself inside her hot, hot heat like this, it always felt and looked so damn good.

“Oh, god, Bellamy,” she moaned, moving up and down at a steady pace. She had to press one hand to his thigh and the other to his chest to keep her balance as she bounced.

“Yeah,” he breathed out, splaying both his hands against her ass. He spread her cheeks open slightly, allowing himself a glimpse of that tight, untouched asshole of hers. God, he felt like such a pervert, but he wanted in there so bad someday. In fact, it took all his willpower to resist giving it a go with his finger right now. But she wasn’t expecting that, and he didn’t want to alarm her. When—if—they got to that point someday, he wanted it to be something he did with her, not to her.

“Oh, this is hurting my legs,” she decided after a couple minutes of that position. She got off of him, turned back around, and straddled him the regular way, sinking right back down onto him easily this time. She rode him at a faster, more experienced pace in this direction, and the way she threw her head back signaled to him that she was enjoying it more.

“Okay, this is hurting my legs,” she decided after a couple minutes of that position. She got off of him, turned back around, and straddled him the regular way, sinking right back down onto him easily this time. She rode him at a faster, more experienced pace in this direction, and the way she threw her head back signaled to him that she was enjoying it more.

“Take this off,” he said, tugging at the shirt. As good as it looked on her, if she was facing him, he wanted to watch those beautiful tits bounce. The shirt was gone in a matter of seconds, and then it was just her naked body and his, the way it was meant to be. She rolled her hips against his almost frenetically, riding him at a desperate pace as if she’d been thinking about this all day. She probably had been, he realized, because unlike him, she hadn’t had work to distract her.

“Fuck yeah, Princess,” he praised, smoothing one hand up her stomach so he could squeeze her breast.

“Uh!” she moaned loudly, and it must have been either the touching or the nickname that spurred her on to sink down onto him even further. He wasn’t exactly balls deep in her or anything, but it was pretty close. He could barely see where he ended and she began. “Oh god, Bellamy,” she gasped, reaching backward to press her hands against his thighs. She arched her back and started to grind against him furiously, clearly feeling something she liked. Bellamy suspected he knew what it was; he’d seen this type of impending orgasm a few times before, and when it hit, usually girls loved it.

“You got it,” he told her, sneaking his hand out to rub her clit. That stimulation combined with the way his cock was hitting her inside sent her flying over the edge in a matter of seconds. She completely surrendered to it, yelling out her pleasure, unconcerned about anyone else in that house hearing her. Her body shook and shuddered as the evidence of her orgasm gushed around his cock. Not quite a squirt, but she’d probably do that soon someday.

It was clearly an intense climax for her, and she must have been so sensitive and stimulated after the fact that she almost had to get off of him. She collapsed beside him, a boneless heap on her side, gasping for air, still basking in the pleasure as it rippled through her.

_Hell, yes_, he thought, grabbing his cock so he could work himself closer to his own completion.

“What was that?” she asked breathlessly.

He couldn’t be sure, but he had a pretty good idea. “I think we hit your g-spot,” he told her. “Did you ever cum like that before?”

“Uh-uh. That was . . .” She trailed off, a blissfully dazed smile on her face. “That was different.”

Different in a good way, he assumed, since she didn’t look like she could even move now.
“But . . .” She tried to reach over onto his lap, but he nudged her hand away. “I was supposed to make you feel better.”

“Don’t worry. You did,” he assured her, more than content to just rub one out and let her rest. She might not have known it, might not have even understood it, but giving her that much pleasure, being the guy who got to make her lose control even when she had all of it . . . to him, it was the best feeling in the world.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Raven’s visit made an otherwise boring day into a potentially fun one. “Here you go,” she said, holding up a green and white ruffled cheerleading skirt. “Bellagio’s been texting me about this for five days straight. My gift to him. Merry fucking Christmas.” She flicked the skirt at Clarke, smirking. “You guys are nymphos.”

Clarke held up the skirt, realizing immediately that it was way too small for her. “Oh, he’s gonna be so disappointed,” she said. “I’ll never fit into this.”

“Yes,” Raven urged, gliding into Clarke’s apartment.

“Fine.” Clarke unbuttoned the back of the skirt and tried to step into it, but she only got it up to mid-thigh when it would go no further.

“Yeah, I had, like, no ass back when I wore that,” Raven recalled. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay. He can use his imagination.” Clarke stepped out of the skirt and put it down on her counter. “So guess what happened?” she said, and without waiting for a response, added, “The worst thing ever.”

Raven’s eyes grew wide with alarm. “Oh my god, what?”

Clarke pouted. “I got my period.”

Raven scrunched up her face in confusion. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

“Well . . .” Clarke rolled her eyes. “Okay, yeah, obviously.” She would’ve much rather gotten it than not gotten it. It was just that the timing was inconvenient. “But New Year’s Eve’s tomorrow night, and Bellamy and I were gonna . . . you know.”

“Fuck in the new year?” Raven filled in bluntly.

“Pretty much.” That was all shot to hell now, though. Last month, Bellamy had dropped a few hints that he wasn’t entirely opposed to period sex, but she was, at least during these first few days when the flow was heavy. By about the fourth day, though, they could do it in the shower. And then after that, as long as they put a towel down on the bed, they’d be fine.

“Just give him a blow-job,” Raven suggested. “Or . . .” She trailed off, shaking her head. “No, you won’t do that.”

“What?” Clarke prompted.

“Nothing.”

“Anal?” Clarke guessed. She wasn’t some pure little virgin who’d never watched porn before; she knew what options were out there, even if she hadn’t yet explored them all like Raven and Roan
probably had.

“That’s kinda painful the first time,” Raven informed her. “Probably not the way you wanna ring in 2018.”

Probably not, but that didn’t mean Clarke was ruling it out for all time. “I’ll do it someday,” she said.

“With Bellagio?”

“Probably.” Hell, he’d gotten her to try a whole lot of things for the first time. It seemed inevitable that someday they’d work their way up to that.

“Oh my god, Clarke!” Raven became faux-emotional and hugged her. “I love this guy. He’s making you into a dirty slut like the rest of us.”

Clarke laughed, taking the teasing in stride. But the truth was, no matter what she and Bellamy did together, ‘dirty slut’ was the last thing he’d ever call her.

She went over to his house after he got home from work and broke the news to him while he stirred some pasta for dinner. All she had to say was, “Bad news,” for him to spout off a litany of period euphemisms.

“Let me guess: It’s Shark Week? Communists are the in the fun house? Somebody’s poisoned the water hole?”

She had to laugh at how ridiculous those were. “Yeah, you could say that.”

He shrugged. “That’s alright.”

“No, it’s not,” she whined. “Not with New Year’s coming up. That’s such a sexy holiday.”

“Oh, come on, Clarke, you’re ovary-acting.” He made himself laugh with that one.

“Ha, ha,” she deadpanned. “Seriously, though, I’m pissed. Why couldn’t it just wait for a few days?”

“You mean you wanted your period to be late?”

“Well, not like that.”

“Clarke. It’s fine,” he said again. “There’s plenty of other stuff we can do to pass the time.”

“Stuff?” she echoed, wondering what exactly he had in mind. “What kind of stuff?”

“Well, we can watch the news,” he said, turning the heat down on the burner. “We can learn to knit.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Nah, there’s stuff,” he said. “Fun stuff.”

_Huh_, she thought, letting her mind run wild. If Raven had thought of anal sex, wasn’t it likely that Bellamy was thinking of the same thing? If he suggested it, she wasn’t sure what she would say. On the one hand, it kind of freaked her out to even think about doing it that way, but on the other hand, if it was with Bellamy . . . well, Bellamy always knew what he was doing in bed. And he always made her feel . . . safe.
Murphy and Miller came inside while Bellamy was draining the water from the pasta, and they were arguing about whether who had won trampoline basketball. How they were even managing to play trampoline basketball without a ball or a hoop was a mystery to Clarke, but whatever. Sometimes it was best to just let the boys do their own thing.

“Mmm, what’re you making?” Murphy asked. “Spaghetti? Do I get some?”

“Sure,” Bellamy replied, “if I made enough. It goes Clarke, me, Miller, you. If we eat everything, you starve.”

Murphy shrugged. “Ah, fair enough.” He wandered over to his leg lamp, ran his hand up the side of it, and said, “I stare at this thing every day, Clarke. It’s the best present anyone’s ever gotten me.”

“Well, I’m . . . glad you like it.” She was letting everyone believe she’d gotten it for ten dollars, but in reality, it had cost thirty-five. No one needed to know she’d gone over the budget, or that the budget wasn’t really much of a concern to her anyway.

“He’d sleep with it, if he could,” Miller said. “He’s obsessed, Clarke. You got him a new obsession.”

“Well, as long as he likes it.” She had to admit, she was sort of enjoying being the only person in that group who had ever gotten Murphy a present he enjoyed.

“Look,” Bellamy said quietly as he dumped an entire can of marina sauce into the pot of spaghetti. “This . . . this is what’s happening in between your legs right now.”

She swatted his arm. “Seriously, Bellamy?” A period joke? A period joke when she was PMS-ing? That was ill-advised.

He just laughed, apparently amused with himself.

Suddenly, a loud boom arose from across the street, startling Clarke until she realized it was just a firework. No one in her neighborhood really set off fireworks around New Year’s, but she knew a few people did. It didn’t seem to faze either Murphy or Miller, but Bellamy immediately grew agitated by it.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” he ground out, setting the spoon he was using to stir down.

“Already?” He completely abandoned the spaghetti, marched across the living room, stepped into his shoes, and stormed out of the house, leaving the door flung wide open. “Hey!” he roared, stomping across the street. “What the hell are you doin’? It’s not even New Year’s Eve yet!”

What? was all Clarke could think as she made her way over to the door. One little firework was getting this big of a big reaction out of him?

“Clarke, do you wanna stir?” Miller asked.

No, she didn’t want to. She wanted to stand in that doorway and watch Bellamy. He was yelling at his neighbor, a scruffy, cigarette-smoking guy with greasy bed-head and a substantial beer belly. That guy and a younger guy—maybe his brother?—had a whole line of fireworks set up on the sidewalk, ready to be set off.

“What the hell is this?” Bellamy demanded. “It’s not the Fourth of July!”

“Ah, shut the fuck up, Bellamy!” his neighbor yelled back at him.

Clarke frowned, not sure what she was even witnessing. She’d seen Bellamy get mad before, at
Lincoln, even at her. But this . . . was different. Weird, even. It seemed like such a small, trivial thing to get upset about it. And Bellamy seemed genuinely upset.

“You realize those aren’t even legal?” Bellamy roared. “I could call the cops on your ass.”

“Yeah, then I call the cops on your little stoner friend.”

“Clarke, shut the door,” Miller said. “It’s cold outside.”

She frowned, reluctantly leaving the two men to their shouting match. She completely did not understand why this had set Bellamy off so much. Sure, fireworks were illegal in their state, but that didn’t stop people from shooting them off. And even though it was a lot more common on the Fourth of July than it was around New Year’s . . . was this really that big of a deal?

“What’s going on?” she asked the guys, rejoining them in the kitchen.

Miller and Murphy exchanged a quick look, and then Miller simply answered, “Bellamy doesn’t like fireworks.”

Well, yeah, she could see that. That didn’t exactly answer her question, though. “Why not?” she pressed.

The two men looked at each other again, but neither one answered this time. Instead, Miller shifted the conversation completely. “Should we make some garlic bread with this?” he asked. “I think we’ve got some in the freezer. You wanna check?”

Garlic bread? Clarke didn’t even care about food right now. She cared about the fact that she could still hear Bellamy’s low, booming voice outside, chewing into his neighbor for something that, to her at least, seemed pretty harmless.

“We should tell Bellamy to come in,” Murphy suggested quietly.

“I’ll go get him,” Clarke volunteered. She went back to the door and poked her head outside, only to find that Bellamy and his neighbor were standing within feet of each other now, close enough that either one of them could take a swing at the other if they felt like it.

“Bellamy!” she called. “Dinner’s ready.”

“Yeah, Bellamy, go eat,” his neighbor said tauntingly. “Go eat your fucking whore.”

She bristled, and Bellamy immediately grew defensive. “What’d you call her?” he bellowed.

“You heard me!”

“You think you can call her that?”

“Bellamy!” Clarke yelled, rushing outside without shoes on. Something told her that this was about to escalate to the point where it would come to blows, so she had to intervene.

“Clarke, stay inside,” he told her.

“No, you come inside,” she said, tugging on his arm. He wouldn’t budge. “Bellamy.”

His feet were planted there, eyes glaring daggers at his neighbor.

She was about to call for Miller, but luckily, he was already there, positioning himself in between
Bellamy and the other man. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s go inside.” He had to grab his shoulders, but he got him to move. Not much, at first, but eventually, Bellamy had turned his back on his neighbor and was walking back across the street, Miller on one side of him, Clarke on the other.

*What just happened?* she wondered, making the mistake of glancing back over her shoulder at the gross neighbor guy. He leered at her, licked his lips, and then grabbed his crotch. “Come back over here anytime, baby,” he called suggestively.

Bellamy stopped, jaw tightening, hands clenching into fists. For a second, Clarke thought he was going to turn back around and go deck the guy, but Miller still had him under control. “Come on,” he said. “Forget about him, man.” They got inside, and Bellamy stormed straight up the stairs without saying a word, completely forgetting about dinner. It was like he’d forgotten about everything except his own anger in that moment, and Clarke still didn’t know where it had come from.

Murphy stood in the kitchen, stirring the spaghetti slowly, eyes downcast at the pot in front of him. He didn’t say anything, and Miller didn’t say anything, either, as he kicked off his shoes and sighed.

Clarke wasn’t about to just *not* say anything, though, not when she had so many questions about what had just happened. “What was that about?” she asked. Since when did Bellamy, who she’d known to be pretty free-spirited at most things, get uptight about somebody setting off a firework?

“He’s fine,” Miller said. And that was all he said before he, too, went upstairs.

_He’s not fine_, Clarke thought. _He’s upset_. He’d been in a good mood, even after a long day of work today. He’d been cooking and joking with her, and everything had been normal. But it was like something had just happened, some switch had been flipped, and he’d gone from zero to sixty on the anger scale in a matter of seconds. It didn’t scare her or anything, because she knew Bellamy would never get angry like that with her; and hell, part of the reason he’d gotten so angry was because that guy had called her a whore. But it *did* confuse her. And what was even more confusing was that Miller and Murphy didn’t seem to want to talk about it any more than Bellamy did.
Chapter 19

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Since New Year’s Eve wasn’t exactly New Year’s Rockin’ Eve until the sun went down, Clarke had no problem getting together with her mother for lunch and for their gift exchange that day. They got some food, then went back to Clarke’s apartment to open up presents together. Her mother questioned why she hadn’t put up a tree this year, and she just nonchalantly replied she didn’t feel like putting one up. No need to tell her that she’d already had a tree (and a topless Mrs. Claus ornament) at Bellamy’s.

Bellamy. Her mind kept drifting back to him, making it hard to concentrate as her mother told her about Marcus’s new ‘campaign strategies.’ He’d been more than a little aloof last night, opting to go to bed early rather than spend much time with her or Miller or Murphy. He’d woken up early and gone to work, and as far as she knew, they still had plans with all their friends to ring in the new year at Dropship tonight. But she wasn’t sure whether he’d be normal Bellamy or angry-at-the-neighbor Bellamy.

When it was 3:00 in the afternoon, Clarke felt like it was time for her mother to leave. She still needed to shower and get ready for the evening, so she offered to help her mom carry gifts to the car. They thanked each other for the gifts, and Clarke reminded her to give Marcus his present—it wasn’t much. Just a couple of new ties, but what else were you supposed to get a politician?

“I know he wishes he could’ve been here today,” her mother said, “but he’s just exhausted with work right now. He needed to rest.”

“It’s okay. I understand,” Clarke said. “We just had a different kind of Christmas this year. It’s fine.”

“Yeah.” Her mother nodded, attempting to smile, but it was more of a sad smile.

“What’s wrong?” Clarke asked her.

“It’s just . . .” Her mother blinked back tears, shaking her head. “I missed you this year,” she said. “We’ve never spent Christmas apart. It wasn’t the same without you there.”

Oh god, Clarke thought, feeling a stab of guilt in her chest. She’d been so caught up in her own day with Bellamy, Octavia, Lincoln, and Aurora that she hadn’t really stopped to think about how the change in plans had made her mother feel.

“It’s okay, though,” Abby quickly assured her. “I’m not blaming you. You can’t help the fact that you got sick.”

That feeling of guilt intensified even more, to the point where Clarke couldn’t contain it any longer. She had to come clean.

“Mom,” she said, “I lied.”

Abby looked . . . devastated. Absolutely devastated and heartbroken, and Clarke felt the need to try
“It’s not because I didn’t wanna see you or even Marcus,” she added quickly. “It’s just . . . sometimes I don’t feel like I fit in with the rest of the family.”

“Oh, trust me, I know they can be a little . . . much,” her mother acknowledged. “But it was Christmas, Clarke.”

“I know.” She didn’t regret her decision to spend the day with different people, but she still did feel bad for lying about it. “I’m sorry.”

Obviously her mother was trying not to cry, but she was hurt, and it happened anyway. A few tears fell onto her cheeks, she quickly wiped them away. “I’m not mad,” she said. “I understand. But it just . . . it breaks my heart, Clarke.”

“I know. I’m sorry I lied,” she apologized.

“No, it breaks my heart that . . .” Her mother swallowed hard, clearly getting emotional about . . . something. Something more than this. “I know things haven’t been the same these past five years,” she acknowledged. “Ever since your dad . . . passed . . . it’s just been different.”

Clarke nodded sadly, because . . . yeah, it had been. There was no denying that.

“I know I haven’t been able to be the same kind of parent he was,” her mom went on. “I know you two were incredibly close, and these past couple years, you and I have drifted apart a lot. I know that, and I know I’m to blame for some of it.”

I probably am, too, Clarke thought. Three years ago, when her mother had told her she was getting married again, she’d been such a brat about it, because in her mind, no one could replace her father. Back then, she’d viewed Marcus as her mother’s version of a replacement.

“But I’m trying, Clarke,” her mother went on. “I’m trying so hard. And it’s not easy. Being a mother, being a parent . . .” She shook her head, blinking back more tears. “It’s not easy.”

Clarke felt her heart go out to her, but now that the truth was out, she didn’t feel as guilty anymore; now she mainly felt empathetic. So she hugged her mom, whispering that she loved her, because she did. Despite the woman’s discomfort with Clarke’s sexuality, her forced cheerfulness at campaign rallies, and her unwavering ability to try to please all their obnoxious family members, Clarke did love her mom. If anything, Christmas with Bellamy and his mom had strengthened her love for her own mother and made her feel like she should be more expressive about it. Bellamy was an unabashed mama’s boy. He loved his mother with every fiber of his being; it was so obvious. And the relationship they shared was so special and unique. Clarke didn’t have that same kind of closeness with her mom, and that was fine; but she still had a mother who loved her. And she loved her mother back.

Despite the emotional turn their goodbye had taken, Clarke and her mom did manage to part on good terms that day—honesty really was the best policy, it seemed. Clarke was in good spirits as she got ready for her night out; she even took the time to straighten her hair. She kept the clothing simple with leggings, boots, and a tunic top, and headed over to Bellamy’s around 6:30, eager to get her New Year’s Eve started.

Bellamy must have had to work late again, because he was still in the shower when she got there. She peeled back the shower curtain and exclaimed, “Boo!” startling him.

“Jesus, Clarke,” he swore.
God, he looked so good with his chest and abs all soapy like that. She wanted to get in there and help him get clean—or keep him dirty, whichever—but her hair and makeup were already done for the night. Besides . . . her damn period was going to limit the holiday fun.

“Are you gonna be ready to go by 7:00?” she asked. From what she understood, their whole group had dinner reservations at 7:30.

“Yeah, I’ll be ready,” he said, threading his hand through his wet hair. “Well, close the curtain, Clarke. It’s not a free show.”

Smiling, she left him to his shower and surveyed her reflection in the mirror. Oh, yeah, the tunic top was a good idea. That time of the month had her feeling (and probably looking) bloated as hell, but this top was loose enough that it was still flattering, and it was low-cut, so, if she bent over far enough, she’d show plenty of cleavage. Bellamy would appreciate that.

She hopped up on the sink counter and waited for him to get out of the shower. It only took him a few more minutes, and when he stepped out, he grinned at her as he bent down to pick up his towel.

“Are you thirsty again, Clarke?”

She totally was, so the sight of his wet skin was literally making her salivate. “Maybe,” she admitted.

“Well, I told you, we’re gonna have fun tonight,” he reminded her as he dried off his arms and chest. 

*Good,* she thought. Last night . . . hadn’t been so fun what with him getting all unusually upset and everything. “So you’re in a good mood then?” she assumed.

“Hell, yeah, I’m in a good mood.” He said it as though it were a given, but after seeing him get so angry with his neighbor . . . it wasn’t.

“You’re not mad anymore?” she asked.

“No, I’m fine.” He wrapped his towel around his waist, tucking it in on the side, and approached the sink, leaning towards the mirror to get a closer look at his face. “I need to shave,” he said, rubbing the stubble on his chin.

“No, you don’t. You look manly,” she said.

“No, I need to shave.” He splashed some more water on his face, then wasted no time lathering up some shaving cream and applying it over his top lip, around his mouth, along his jaw, and under his chin. Clarke just sat there and watched him, unable to suppress a laugh at how ridiculous he looked.

“What?” he said.

“You look like Santa Claus.”

“A hot Santa Claus, right?”

“Well . . .” She shrugged, not sure there was such a thing.

“Whatever, I’m hot.” he boasted. He began to shave quickly, and Clarke watched, somewhat mesmerized. She’d never actually seen anyone besides her dad shave his face before. Bellamy was a lot less precise than her father had been, a lot less meticulous, but he seemed to have his technique down-pat.

“I’m glad I don’t have to shave my face every day,” she remarked, thinking that would be a drag.
“Yeah, but you have to shave . . .” He glanced down at her legs. “. . . other things.”

“Not every day, though.” She held out her hand, feeling playful and determined to keep him in a good mood, and gestured to the razor. “Can I do it?”

He gave her a confused look. “You wanna shave my face?”

“Yes.” It couldn’t be that much harder than shaving her legs.

“Alright,” he said, handing her the razor. “Don’t cut me.”

She had the wrong approach at first, apparently. He gave her a mini-lecture about how she had to shave with the grain instead of against it, but once she understood that, she pretty much had it down. She didn’t go as fast as he did, of course, because she didn’t want to risk nicking him and drawing blood. Besides, she wanted to give him a close and careful shave.

“So who taught you how to shave?” she asked as she gently dragged the razor along his jawline. “Since your dad wasn’t around.”

“My mom,” he answered. “And I was ten when I started getting facial hair, so she had to teach me early.”

“Mmm, see, I was a late bloomer,” she said. “I was, like, the last girl in my grade to get boobs.”

“Really?” He sounded surprised. His eyes flittered down to her chest, and he smiled appreciatively. “Well, once they came in, they came in well.”

She laughed. “I guess.” Her breasts were definitely her best physical asset; they’d gotten her a fair amount of attention over the years. But there were only three people’s whose attention had actually mattered to her, and out of those three people, Bellamy paid the best attention to them.

“So what else did your mom teach you?” she asked, pressing up on his chin so she could better shave what was underneath. “Cooking, I know.”

“Yeah, some cooking. Pretty much everything,” he said. “How to ride a bike, how to climb trees . . . she did it all. She had to. She was amazing.”

Hearing Bellamy talk about his mother was almost enough to make Clarke turn to mush. His love for her and devotion to her was one of the most heartwarming things about him. And she completely understood where it came from. Even after just one day with Aurora Blake, Clarke felt like she had an instant rapport with her. She was kind and genuine and easy to get to know. And there was so much of her in her son.

“I’m envious,” she confessed suddenly, stopping the task of shaving his face. “My mom and I . . . we kind of cleared the air about some things today, but still . . . it’s just not like that.”

“Well, I don’t wanna make it sound like it was easy,” he amended. “I was one of the free and reduced lunch kids growing up. And whenever she was between jobs, we were on food stamps. I got my first job when I was fifteen, and I’ve worked ever since. It sucked, Clarke.”

She lowered her head, feeling bad. Or rather . . . insensitive? She hadn’t meant to make it seem like he and his family had had it easy. “Sorry,” she said.

“No, I’m not mad or anything,” he said. “You can feel envious all you want. But just know, there’s some things about the way you grew up that I envy.”
“I know,” she said, regretting if she’d sounded like some ignorant, privileged girl. “I just wish . . .” She hung her head, mumbling, “I wish my mom and I were close like you and your mom are. Like my dad and I used to be.” She sighed, wishing he had been here to celebrate Christmas, to ring in the new year, to see her exhibit at Trikru come March. But he just wasn’t, and there was no way to change that. “I need to stop comparing her to my dad,” she recognized, because in her head, she did that all the time. And that wasn’t fair to her mom. Jake Griffin was an impossible standard for anyone to measure up to.

“That’s natural, though,” he said. “For a long time, I compared every girl I met to Roma.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

And how do I compare? she thought. But that was a stupid thing to wonder about. Of course she didn’t compare. Bellamy’s relationship with Roma was completely different, and she knew it. And she was okay with it.

“Anyway . . . it’s natural,” he repeated. “Come on, though, are you gonna leave my face like this or what?” He motioned to his half-shaved jawline, tilting his head so she could get back to work. “Shave faster,” he said. “We have reservations.”

Reservations, as it turned out, was a generous word for what they had. They weren’t going out to eat at some fancy restaurant where you had to call three weeks in advance just to get a table—Arkadia didn’t even have one of those. They were going to a cheaply-priced Valentino’s buffet Clarke had never eaten at before, and the place didn’t take reservations. Miller had called yesterday just to give them the heads up that there would be a big group coming in at 7:30. And it was a big group. Raven, Roan, Niylah, and Luna joined the usual Saturday night crew from Bellamy’s house, so Clarke had her friends there with . . . well, with her other friends. Wells was the only one to opt out of coming, probably because the New Year’s nightlife wasn’t his thing.

Sixteen people would have been a lot for any restaurant to accommodate, so the buffet had probably been a good idea. They ransacked the pizza, the pasta, and the lasagna right from the start. Octavia and Lincoln were the only ones to begin on the salad bar. Jasper, ever a little bit backwards from everyone else, began with dessert, and Murphy kind of just mixed everything on his plate up into one giant concoction. It looked disgusting, like actual barf, but he savored it as he ate it, raving, “Mmm, shit, this is the best meal of my life.”

Clarke ate sparingly, not because she was one of those girls who was like, “Oh, two peas? I’m full,” but because her stomach already felt like a helium balloon. Sometimes overloading on food during her period exacerbated her cramps, and she didn’t want to have to deal with that tonight of all nights. Whatever food she didn’t have room for, she piled onto Bellamy’s plate. Or plates, rather. He had collected two heaping mountains of food from the buffet, and he managed to eat all of that plus everything she gave him. By the end of the meal, he looked like he was suffering a bit, and she wondered if he’d be okay to go out.

“What are you gonna make it?” she asked, rubbing his back.

“Yeah, I just need to let everything settle,” he said.

“Oh, so then you won’t make me try to dance tonight?”

“Oh, no, we’re gonna dance,” he assured her.
“At Dropship?” There wasn’t much camouflage there like there was at TonDC.

“It’s New Year’s Eve, Clarke. Everyone’s gonna be drunk dancing anyway. You’ll blend right in.”

She had her doubts about that until she actually got to Dropship and saw what chaos it was. This wasn’t like TonDC, where most everyone was young or young-ish. There were people their age, sure, but there were also people in their forties, maybe even fifties, perhaps. There were men who were balding or going grey; there were women who looked like this was the only time of year they went out and let loose, because their bras and underwear were literally falling off while they danced, and they were too drunk to care.

“TonDC gets too crowded on New Year’s,” Bellamy explained to her. “We like coming here.”

Raven ambled up next to him and said, “God, I haven’t been here in such a long time.”

“It’s probably as trashy as you remember,” Bellamy informed her.

“Definitely.” She nudged him, and Clarke overheard her say, “So, Bellagio, this is where you banged my best friend for the first time?”

“Oh, no,” he said, pointing towards the back. “That was in the parking lot.”

With sixteen people in their group, they were able to pretty much dominate Dropship in the hours leading up to midnight. The pool table quickly became their pool table, where Raven schooled all the boys on how to play. Miller collected spare change from everyone and basically monopolized the jukebox, and Roan knew the bartender, so he got them discounts on drinks. Niylah and Luna cozied up in one of the booths and spent the majority of the evening making out, which all the guys, except for Miller and Jackson, seemed enthralled by. And Lincoln, of course, because he was too busy dancing with Octavia most of the time. Octavia said she didn’t feel well around 10:00, though, wished her brother a happy new year, hugged him, and left early with her boyfriend.

“Fine by me,” Bellamy said, plastering a fake smile on his face as he waved goodbye to them. “Now I don’t have to watch them make out at midnight.”

“Hey, you’re supposed to be nicer,” Clarke reminded him.

“I am being nicer,” he insisted, “to his face. But I get to vent to you, don’t I?”

She rolled her eyes, figuring she could allow that. As much as she liked Lincoln, she was willing to be Bellamy’s soundboard for all his Lincoln-bashing, just so long as it kept things civil between them when they were around each other.

At 10:30, when Clarke was still only on her third beer for the night, the Wop came on, and though there was no table to crawl up onto, all the guys formed their familiar circle around the girls, and Clarke resigned to taking part in it this time. She tried to twerk like Harper, failed miserably, and just owned it. Because at this point, she figured she couldn’t possibly look any more embarrassing than those soccer moms whose tops were falling down.

“Am I getting better?” she asked Bellamy after the song was done.

“No,” he answered honestly. “You’re so cute, though, Princess. You’re so cute.”

She leaned into him, melting against his chest as his arms wrapped around her. He swayed with her in time to a slower hip hop beat, and in her mind, she pretended she was dancing. This was probably about as close as she would get.
The whole evening was just a blast for Clarke, one of the best New Year’s Eves she’d ever had. Hanging out with all her old friends and her new friends was the ultimate treat. And everyone just got along with each other so well. The girls gravitated towards Raven, of course, because Raven just had that magnetic personality. They wanted to know everything from what kind of shampoo she used to why the heck she’d ever decided to study mechanical engineering. Emori talked to her about doing a tattoo for her, maybe matching ones for her and Roan, and Clarke overheard Raven say, “Yeah, maybe, if we stay together long enough.”

Niyalah, once she and Luna came up for air, was always a big hit with the boys, because even though she had a model figure and was beautiful, she could talk about sex like one of the guys. Jasper got comfortable enough with her that he even asked her for oral sex advice, and she didn’t hesitate to give it. Murphy, for as much as he would boast about his own supposed bedroom prowess, was all ears, soaking up every bit of that conversation. Probably because he needed to. He then told Niyalah about his pride and joy in life, his leg lamp, and showed her a picture on his phone and everything.

It wasn’t just that Clarke’s friends were getting to know each other better that made the night so enjoyable; she got the chance to get to know some of their significant others better, too. She talked to Luna for the first time ever, ended up finding out that she was studying to become a marine biologist and was in the process or organizing an ‘aquatic awareness rally.’ Roan, of course, mainly wanted to talk about all the kinky shit he sold in his store, and he kept trying to push that dick-molding kit onto Clarke.

For the most part, though, she spent time with Bellamy. It wasn’t like they were joined at the hip or anything—he left her to own devices out on the dance floor with the rest of the girls while he joined Niyalah for a sex tips seminar with the boys. But whether she moseyed on up to the bar to order another beer or slipped into the bathroom to—ugh—change her tampon, she always found her way back to him. And as the hour hand began to creep closer and closer to that 12 on the clock, she found herself more reluctant to leave his side at all. She didn’t want to risk the clock striking midnight and not being with him then. Because even though they weren’t the traditional couple like all these other couples were, they both knew they were doing the whole midnight kiss thing. In fact, they purposefully limited their kissing all night to build up the excitement for it.

Murphy had a couple of misfires and attempted to start the midnight countdown early, but the bartender had the TV on, showing the annual ball drop in Times Square. As it started to lower, everyone in the bar stood up and shouted out the countdown:

“Ten! Nine! Eight!”
Jasper got so excited, he accidentally dumped his drink on himself.

“Seven! Six! Five!”
Niyalah and Luna started kissing early.

“Four! Three! Two! One!” Confetti rained in the air, noisemakers blew, and everyone shouted, “Happy New Year!”

Clarke cheered and threw her hands in the air, giving Bellamy the perfect opportunity to wrap his arms around her waist. He spun her around crushing his lips to hers, and she draped her arms over her shoulders as she kissed him back. It was the kind of kiss that made all the other people and all the other sounds around them just kind of fade away. All she could think about was Bellamy: Bellamy’s tongue brushing against her lower lip, Bellamy’s hand on her waist, the smell of Bellamy’s cologne, the bulge in Bellamy’s jeans.
Five minutes later, unable to even pretend that he wasn’t her sole fixation for the rest of the night, Clarke found herself locked away in the cramped bathroom with Bellamy, on her knees, sucking his cock. It wasn’t exactly the kind of sex either one of them had pictured ringing in the new year with, but it worked for her just fine. As much as Bellamy raved about how giving her pleasure gave him pleasure, too, the same was true for her. She loved hearing him and grunt and groan as she moved her mouth up and down his shaft, loved the way he tangled his hand in her hair and tried to keep his hips still, even though he probably wanted to let loose and just fuck her mouth with abandon.

He came, and she swallowed, and it was as she licked the salty taste of his cum off her lips that she realized one of the first things she’d done in 2018 was give him head. Good.

They managed to stay at Dropship until 12:30, but neither of them was particularly satiated yet. She could tell Bellamy was antsy from the way he was readjusting his jeans. It was so obvious that sex was the only thing on his mind, and trying to interact with anyone else was becoming a real struggle for him. Finally, he just gave Clarke a look, didn’t even have to say anything, and she knew what he was suggesting. He wanted to leave. Fine by her. As much as she’d loved spending New Year’s Eve with her friends, it was technically New Year’s Day now, and she just wanted to spend time with Bellamy.

It only took them ten minutes to get from the bar to his house, but it was ten minutes of torture. Clarke just wanted to get naked with him, have her first orgasm of the new year. She didn’t require full-on sex for that. Bellamy had gotten her off with just his hands plenty of times. Maybe if he played with her clit for a while, that’d be enough. He was good at that, and he liked doing it. Not as much as he liked going down on her, obviously, but Bellamy hardly liked anything as much as he liked going down on her.

They were clamoring up to his bedroom when a firework shot off across the street again. He growled angrily, but she just kept kissing him, kept her hands on either side of his face so as to keep his focus on her instead of looking out the window. Whatever it was about fireworks that irked him so much, she wasn’t going to let him dwell on it, not when he had his princess so eager and willing and wanting him.

“What’re we gonna do?” she asked, staggering into the bedroom with him.

“You’ll see.” He kicked his door shut, took his shirt off, and immediately got to work undoing his pants. “Take your top off,” he told her.

She lifted her shirt over her head and dropped it on the floor next to his.

“That, too,” he said, nodding at her bra as he stepped out of his jeans.

She reached around her back and unclasped her bra, shrugging it off and letting her breasts fall free.

“Go get the lube,” he instructed as he slid his underwear down.

The lube? she registered, a bit panicked. Did he want to try anal sex tonigh? Because as much as she trusted him and loved trying new things with him, she wasn’t sure she was ready for that quite yet.

Even though she was nervous, she walked over to the nightstand and pulled open the drawer while he started stroking his own cock. Their lube was running about as low as their condoms were, and they didn’t even use it every single time.

“Here you go,” she said, handing it to him, curious to see what he was going to do with it.

“Thanks,” he said, squirting a small amount onto his hand. He rubbed it all over his cock, which did
nothing to assuage her anal sex anxiety.

“Bellamy--” She hated to do this, but she had to put the brakes on.

“Get down on your knees,” he told her.

She frowned, perplexed. Hadn’t they just done this in the bathroom? And why would he lube himself up for a blowjob? Saliva pretty much did the trick there.

Even though she was confused, she lowered her knees to the floor and sat back on her feet, watching him stroke his cock a few more times. He was definitely hard again, definitely ready to do . . . something.

“Come here,” he said, motioning for her to sit up straighter.

She rose so that she was in the typical blowjob position, eye-level with his groin, but he didn’t make any move to put his cock in her mouth. Instead, he squirted more lube onto his hands, rubbed them together, and then pressed both his hands between her breasts, slickening them up.

“Oh my god,” she said, able to figure out where he was going with this now. He was definitely going to fuck a different part of her tonight. Just not her ass.

“You ever done this before?” he asked eagerly, that familiar glint of mischief in his eyes.

“No.”

“No?” He seemed pleased to hear that. He never really talked about it a whole lot, but she knew that Bellamy enjoyed getting to be her first for so many things.

Once he had her breasts all slippery and shiny, he told her exactly what to do. “Alright, press ‘em together.”

She tried to mimic what she’d seen the porn stars do, though she doubted she looked as sultry and seductive as they did. She squeezed both her breasts together tightly, trying not to laugh. This was definitely going to be different.

Bellamy had to bend his legs to get his cock at the right angle to slide up in between her breasts. The lube made it easier, but it also made it harder for her to keep them pressed together. As soon as he started rubbing himself against her, they started to slip from her grasp a bit, and she had to let them go. “Sorry,” she said.

“It’s okay.” He kept his cock pressed against her chest this time, and she pushed both her breasts inward to cover it, creating a whole different channel for him to thrust up into. Since he wasn’t actually inside her here, there was no need to take it slow. He thrust hard and jarringly right from the start, making her whole torso rock back and forth as he fucked her.

“Oh,” she gasped, taking in the sight of it. Bellamy’s huge cock in between her tits? Hell yes. Even though she wasn’t getting much out of it in the way of feeling, the visual aspect of it was crazily hot. And Bellamy seemed to be enjoying himself. She could only imagine how soft and warm it felt to him. And it was something new, too, something he’d probably been fantasizing about for a while now.

“Oh, baby, that feels so good,” rolling his head back, eyes closed.

*Baby,* she registered. When *babe* or *baby* came out of his mouth, that usually meant he was really
feeling it.

“It looks good,” she said, wanting to convey to him that this was turning her on, too. Something like this definitely had the potential to make a girl feel used, but she didn’t feel like that with him. She felt like he was worshipping her body by fucking her in a new and different way. Watching him get off on it was a total rush.

“Fuck yes,” he growled, slowing his pace so he could increase the length of this thrusts. It was so hot to watch his hips move, to see the thin sheen of sweat breaking out on his abs. “God, Clarke.”

*I’m not even doing anything*, she thought. He was the one doing all the work; she was literally just sitting there pressing her boobs together. But it seemed to be working wonders for him. He kept swearing, “Fuck,” and alternating between closing his eyes and looking down to watch his cock sliding against her. She did the same, because seeing the arousal on his face was just as sexy as seeing the head of his cock emerge out of her breasts with every upward jolt of his hips.

“It feels good,” she told him, urging him on. It probably didn’t feel even half as good for her as it did for him, but it felt good to be able to give him this, to be able to just surrender her body to him and let him have at it how he saw fit.

“God, you look so hot,” he breathed, picking up the pace again. “You look so hot with my cock in between your tits.”

“Mmm.” She felt hot, especially when he said something like that. She felt sexy. She felt like the sexiest woman in the world, even though she wasn’t. Bellamy made her feel that way.

“I’m gonna cum,” he warned her. A few thrusts later, he pulled his cock out from its makeshift little hole, jerked it a few times, and then spattered his hot, sticky cum all over her chest. She gasped and took everything that came out of him. Since he’d already had an orgasm back at Dropship, there wasn’t as much of it here. But it was still enough to be . . . a load.

“Uh . . .” he groaned, his whole body slumping when he was done. Obviously exhausted, he bent forward, hands on his knees, panting for air. “Damn.”

She looked down at her chest, thinking she looked like a paint tray with just one color on it: white. The thought made her laugh.

“What?” he said, smiling at her.

She laughed some more. “Look at me.”

“Yeah, you look good,” he complimented.

“Oh my gosh.” She sat back on her feet, taking a moment to appreciate the fact that she could laugh right now. Above all else, sex with Bellamy was . . . fun. They laughed, they smiled, they teased each other, they praised each other. There was no need for it to be so serious like in the movies. They enjoyed sex beyond just the act of sex itself. It was a good time, not just because it felt good physically, but because they were good to each other.

“So that was a titty fuck,” she said.

“That was a titty fuck.” He smiled down at her, stroked her hair, and said, “Here, lay down. I’ll clean you up.”

She crawled up onto the bed, careful not to let her chest or torso come into contact with the blankets,
and lay down flat on her back while he slipped into the bathroom and took a moment to once again appreciate the sight of his cum on her body, because it really was arousing as fuck. She literally had Bellamy’s *semen* on her boobs right now. It was nasty and filthy and disgusting, and she fucking loved it.

He came back out a few seconds later with a wet washcloth and lay down beside her. “Wow,” he said, admiring the view for a minute himself. “That looks awesome.”

“It’s very sticky,” she informed him.

“I know. That’s why I got you.” He brought the warm washcloth down onto her chest and started cleaning her up, wiping away all of the . . . *him* that was left there. Typical Bellamy, he could even make the cleanup feel sexy.

“So how long have you been wanting to do that?” she asked, rubbing her legs together. She was still wet, despite the presence of a tampon. That wasn’t doing anything to soak up her arousal.

“Since the day I met you,” he admitted.

“Was it everything you hoped it’d be?”

“Oh, everything and more.” He finished cleaning her up, headed back into the bathroom to rinse the washcloth off, and then came back out with a dry hand towel. “Here,” he said, tossing it to her.

“Thanks.” She dried off her chest, feeling decidedly cleaner and less sticky now. Well, less sticky on her chest, anyway. That wetness between her legs, on the other hand . . . still sticky.

“You’re so beautiful, Clarke,” he said suddenly, lying down beside her again, propping himself up on his side.

She knew he thought that about her—it was obvious in the way he kissed her, the way he touched her—but hearing him say it out loud made her shiver with delight. “You’re kinda hot, too,” she returned.

“Yeah, but . . .” He smoothed one hand over her chest, down her stomach, hovering at the top of her leggings. “Your body. It’s unreal.”

Well, that was flattering. Like any girl, she looked in the mirror and saw dozens of tiny imperfections. She was comfortable in her skin, and for the most part, she did like the way she looked. But the way Bellamy was talking . . . it was like he didn’t see any imperfections on her at all. And that was mind-blowing.

“You just like my boobs,” she teased.

“I do like them,” he acknowledged. “I love them. In fact . . .” He bent down, pressing a feather-light kiss to one before proposing, “Maybe I should show you how much I love them.”

“Oh.” She definitely didn’t hate the sound of that.

He latched his mouth onto one nipple, sucking carefully but insistently while he palmed her other breast. “I bet I could make you cum just from doing this,” he wagered.

“Maybe.” Bellamy was certainly capable of anything he put his mind to, and she knew nipple-only orgasms *did* sometimes happen. Niylah claimed to have had a few, but to Clarke’s knowledge, they were very rare and very difficult to achieve. Oh, well. Whether he got her there or not, she’d


certainly enjoy all his efforts.

For nearly twenty minutes, Bellamy really did try his hardest; he was so determined. He ravaged attention onto her breasts, kissing and sucking, licking and even biting down on her nipples gently. He alternated from one breast to the other, always keeping his hand on the ‘open’ one so that neither was ever neglected. He squeezed and rolled her flesh beneath his rough palms, occasionally pinched her nipples, and just generally did everything he could to get her off on it. It was definitely turning her on, for sure, and she knew an orgasm was within her reach. But she also knew her body well enough to know that this alone wasn’t going to get her there. She needed more.

“Bellamy.”

He didn’t stop. The guy was a man on a mission.

“Bellamy.” She tugged on his hair, getting him to raise his head. “It’s not working.”

He frowned disappointedly, and there wasn’t anything exaggerated about it. He was genuinely disappointed in himself for failing to get her off on that. “Sorry,” he said.

“Are you kidding? It feels great.” The only downside was that she was all sticky again, with his saliva this time instead of his semen. Oh, well. She could shower tomorrow morning. “I just need a little more,” she told him, lifting his hand off her breast. She brought it down lower in between her legs, and he, of course, tried to dip it underneath her leggings. “Uh-uh,” she said, moving it back out. She was totally down to have him touch her, but for the next few days, it was going to have to be over her clothing only. Once it was no longer “Shark Week” down there, or whatever he wanted to call it, then he had his 24/7 open access invitation reinstated.

“You’re so wet,” he noted as he began to rub her clit through her leggings.

“Oh . . .” she moaned, arching her hips against his hand. “I’m close, Bellamy.” All of their little sexual activities tonight—starting with that bar bathroom blowjob—had her feeling greedy to climax. Even with clothing in the way, he’d get her there.

“Cum for me,” he whispered, lowering his head to suck on her breast again. The combination of his hot mouth surrounding her nipple and his frenetic fingers working her clit sent her over the edge. She came hard, feeling a gush of liquid between her legs. Her underwear and her leggings were absolutely soaked, and she didn’t even care.

Slowly, he lifted his head, right at the same time as he removed his hand and set it on her stomach. Grinning at her lazily, he said, “Happy New Year.”

She smiled back at him, feeling sleepy and very satisfied. Happy New Year indeed.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Boom.

Clarke awoke to the sound of another firework from the neighbor guy. It had to be, like, 3:00 a.m. at this point. A few fireworks around midnight were fine—she didn’t have the same disdain for them that Bellamy did—but this was just ridiculous.

Bellamy stirred, disentangling himself from her and rolling over onto his side. Hopefully he’d just keep sleeping, but Clarke had no doubt that, if there were more fireworks, he’d wake right up, and he’d be pissed about it.
She shut her eyes again, feeling like she could easily drift back off to sleep. She was warm and she was comfortable and . . .

Bellamy was shivering.

She looked over at his naked back, struggling to make out of his form in the darkness. She was lying close enough to him that she could feel him moving, feel the mattress nearly vibrating beneath her; but she didn’t understand why he was so cold.

Another firework boomed across the street, this one lighting up the sky.

And all of a sudden, Bellamy was shaking. Not just shivering, but *shaking*. His whole body.

“Bellamy.” She put her hand on his back, trying to wake him up.

He kept shaking.

“Bellamy!” She sat up and rubbed his shoulder and his arm.

He just shook harder.

“Bellamy, Bellamy!” She wrapped her arms around him, trying to get him to calm down, trying to get him to be still. “Bellamy! Stop! Stop, Bellamy, stop!”

His tremors were nearly violent ones at this point, almost like someone who was having a seizure. The breath was shuddering from his lungs, and he didn’t seem to hear her at all.

“*Bellamy!*” she cried. “Bellamy, please, wake up! Please, stop!” Scared, panicked, she yelled for help. “Miller!” But she didn’t even know if he was home yet. What was she supposed to do? She felt like if she got up, Bellamy would shake himself right off the bed, maybe even hurt himself.

His legs kicked, his arms started to swing, and his entire body thrashed wildly.

“Stop, stop, stop,” she pleaded, continuing to hold him tightly as his shaking gradually died down. “Bellamy, stop.” She kept her arms around him, not willing to let go, not even when, as suddenly as the whole thing had started, it just quit. As if it had never happened, he lay there, body still, breathing even, eyes still shut as he slept. The only difference was that he was sweating now, and she could feel his heart beating fast beneath her hand.

No, not just beating fast. *Racing*. His heart was *racing*.

Her own heart was pounding now, too, because . . . what was this?

She didn’t want to let go of him. For some reason, she felt like, if she continued to hold him, then she could hold him *still*, and he wouldn’t do that again. Whatever *that* had been.

Her mind careened with options. Should she try to wake him up? Go check and see if Miller or Murphy was home? Maybe even call 911? She didn’t know what to do, so she just lay there with him, practically on top of him, trying to cover his large body with her smaller one, almost as if she were a human blanket. He seemed calm now, somehow, and she wanted to keep him that way.

“Bellamy?” she whispered, completely baffled by what had just happened. It wasn’t normal. Whatever ‘it’ had been . . . it wasn’t normal for him or for anyone. He’d seemed completely and utterly terrified, and she’d never seen Bellamy Blake that way before.

That terrified her.
Chapter 20

Clarke stayed awake all night. There was no chance she was going to go back to sleep after what happened with Bellamy, no chance in hell. Even if she hadn’t been scared shitless and worried sick about him, she would’ve been too confused to shut her mind off and go back to bed.

He hadn’t moved much the rest of the night. He remained on his side, and she remained on hers, one arm wrapped around his midsection, holding him in case he started to shake again. He never did, but she feared he might. So when she heard the front door open and heard Miller and Jackson come upstairs, she didn’t move a muscle, didn’t make any effort to get out of that bed. She felt like she couldn’t risk it. If Bellamy had another . . . panic attack or seizure or whatever the hell that had been . . . if it happened again while she wasn’t there, then she didn’t know if anyone would be able to calm him down this time.

For hours, she lay awake, watching the steady rise and fall of his shoulder blades as he slept calmly. Anytime he moved, even just the slightest movement, she tensed up, scared that one little movement would turn into a whole lot of movement. But he was fine.

Except he wasn’t fine, though. He couldn’t be. Something had to be wrong.

At 7:15, his alarm clock went off. It wasn’t much of an alarm, just loud static sounds from a radio station he wasn’t tuned into. His phone rang shrilly after that, doubling the noise, and he reached over onto the nightstand to shut both alarms off. Clarke had gotten used to hearing them, had gotten used to feeling him stir as they woke him up. Normally she kept dozing right through them, but . . . there was nothing normal about this morning.

What do I say? she wondered. What’s he gonna say?

She got the answer to her question when he turned over onto his back, looked over at her, smiled, and said, “Hey.”

That was it? No explanation or anything, just hey? She didn’t know what to say, so she repeated it back to him. “Hey.”

He stretched a bit, rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and yawned. “Oh, I wish I didn’t have to work today.”

What was he doing? Just talking and acting like it was a regular morning, like nothing weird had happened last night? Was he hoping she wouldn’t say anything about it? Unless . . .

Unless he really didn’t remember it. But how could he not remember? It’d been so . . . intense.

“Maybe you shouldn’t,” she suggested, thinking he’d be better off going to see a doctor today than going to fix whatever new problems people were too lazy to fix themselves. “Just stay home.”
“No, I gotta work,” he said, reluctantly sitting up. He reached over and put his hand on her hip, rubbing gently. “It’s early. Why’re you awake?”

*I didn’t go to sleep,* she thought. *Because I was worried about you.* “Couldn’t sleep,” she replied vaguely.

He swung the covers off his legs and got out of bed. “You should go back to bed,” he suggested, making his way around to her side. “You’ve got the day off.” He bent down and kissed the top of her head, then strolled into the bathroom to go about his morning routine. The door shut, and she heard the shower kick on a minute later.

What was this? He was just gonna go about getting ready and heading out for the day like nothing was wrong?

Maybe nothing was wrong, though, at least not to him. If he really didn’t remember anything about last night, then he wouldn’t remember how scared she had been, how inconsolable and unresponsive he had been for at least thirty seconds there.

Having gotten less than two hours of sleep, she was exhausted, no doubt, but there was no way she could lie there and try to get any rest. Her mind was racing with worry, and no amount of telling herself it was nothing was going to make her stop thinking about it. So she got up and headed downstairs, unconcerned with the fact that she was only wearing one of Bellamy’s shirts. It went down far enough on her legs, covered everything worth covering. Miller and Murphy and Jackson and Emori . . . they’d all seen her don this attire plenty of times before.

When she got downstairs, she found both of Bellamy’s roommates in the kitchen, functioning at drastically different levels of competence. Miller was dressed in his work uniform and pouring himself a cup of coffee for the morning. Murphy was slumped over the counter, holding his head as though he had a pounding hangover. “Whoa, Clarke,” he said, squinting his eyes at her. “How bad did Bellamy wreck you last night? You look like hell.”

“Thanks, Murphy,” she said sarcastically. It wasn’t like he looked much better himself.

“You look fine,” Miller assured her. “A little tired, but hey, it was New Year’s.”

*That’s not why I’m tired,* she thought, joining them in the kitchen. She didn’t sit down, just leaned against the center island, not sure how to bring up what had happened last night. She wasn’t even sure she could accurately describe how terrifying it had been.

“You okay?” Miller asked as he sipped his beverage.

“No,” she admitted. “I wish you guys had gotten home earlier last night.”

“Yeah, it was like, 4:00,” Murphy said, laughing. “I regret nothing.”

“Yeah, it was a good time,” Miller agreed.

“I’m fine,” she said, “but last night . . .” She shifted uncomfortably, distressed even just by talking about it. “We were sleeping, and then all of a sudden a couple fireworks went off, and . . . he just lost it. He started shaking.”
Miller and Murphy exchanged a look, once again silently communicating something Clarke didn’t understand. “Yeah,” Murphy muttered, “he doesn’t like fireworks.”

“No, but he was shaking,” she repeated, more emphatically this time. “Like violently shaking, like rattling the whole bed. I practically had to wrap my entire body around him just to get him to stop.”

Miller sighed heavily, staring down at the remaining coffee in his cup, and Murphy just shook his head, mumbling, “Don’t know what to tell you. Sounds like a bad dream.”

“No, you don’t understand. He wouldn’t wake up.” Clarke was growing frustrated. It seemed like they weren’t as alarmed by this as she was, maybe because they hadn’t been there, because they hadn’t witnessed it for themselves. “Don’t you guys think that’s a little weird?”

“Yeah, it’s weird,” Miller agreed, “but he’s alright now, right?”

“Well, yeah, but--”

“He’s fine, Clarke,” Murphy cut in. And the way he said it . . . it was so final, like it was the end of the discussion.

No, Clarke thought stubbornly, he’s not fine. People who were fine didn’t experience that in the middle of the night. No matter how much Murphy and Miller tried to act like it was no big deal, her gut was telling her it was, and in that moment, she sort of hated these two guys for being so tight-lipped about it. “What are you guys not telling me?” she demanded, because at this point, it was obvious that there was a whole lot they just weren’t saying.

They glanced at each other again, neither one of them uttering a peep in response.

Clarke stood there and waited, for anything, even just one syllable. But there was only silence, and it quickly became apparent to her that neither one of them was going to be any help. “Fine, I’ll figure it out myself,” she grumbled, whirling around to head back upstairs.

She marched up to Bellamy’s room, and when she threw open the door, he was already out of the shower, getting dressed for the day. “You’re really not gonna sleep in?” he said as he zipped up his jeans. “I would if I were you. I’d sleep ‘til 10:00.”

“No, I can’t sleep,” she said, shutting the door quietly. “I need to talk to you about something, Bellamy.”

“Right now?” He glanced at his clock. “I gotta be somewhere at 7:45.”

“I know.” Wringing her fingers together nervously, she crept closer to him. “I need to talk to you now, though.”

“Okay.” He sat down in his old blue chair, tugging his shoes on. “What’s up?”

What’s up? she thought, almost annoyed by how casual he sounded. What’s up was that he’d scared her half to death last night, and nobody seemed to think it was as big of a deal as she did.

“Bellamy, something happened last night,” she started in. “Do you remember?”

He snorted, laughing lightly. “Yeah, I wasn’t that drunk, Clarke.”

“No, I mean . . . in the middle of the night,” she clarified.

He slowed down as he tied his shoes, confusion entering his eyes. “Not really,” he said. “I think I
slept pretty soundly.”

She shook her head. “You didn’t.” She didn’t get the sense that he wasn’t just pretending not to know what she was talking about; he genuinely didn’t know. “You really don’t remember?” she questioned.

“No,” He finished tying his shoes and stood up, moving around her so that he could grab a t-shirt out of the drawer. “Why? What happened?”

“You . . .” She struggled to find the words to paint the picture of it in his mind. She needed him to understand that it was a big deal, that it wasn’t something to just dismiss the way Murphy and Miller had. “We were sleeping, and then all of a sudden you were shaking,” she informed him, her own voice quivering as she recounted it for him. “There were fireworks, and . . . you just started shaking, Bellamy.”

“Oh, yeah,” he said, tugging on a shirt. “Doesn’t surprise me. I’m not a fan of fireworks.”

“No, it wasn’t just like you were startled or agitated or something,” she told him. “You were shaking uncontrollably. I couldn’t wake you up; I couldn’t get you to stop, at least not right away.”

“Did I hurt you?” he asked, immediately moving in close to her, touching her arms and cheek and looking at her concernedly as if he were checking for bruises. “Are you okay?”

“No, I’m fine,” she assured him. “Leave it to Bellamy to be worried about her when he was the one who’d practically had a seizure last night. “You’re the one I’m worried about.” She blinked back tears, putting both hands on his chest, feeling his heart beating calmly and evenly now. “It was so scary, Bellamy. You were sweating and your heart was pounding. I didn’t know what to do, so I just laid there and tried to hold you.”

“Well, it worked,” he said, smiling at her appreciatively. “I’m fine.”

He sounded like Murphy, and that bothered her. She wanted him to be concerned just like she was. Although, part of her did want to just accept what he was saying and trust that he knew his body well enough to make that kind of judgment. “Are you sure?” she asked, unable to quiet the nagging worry she felt inside.

“Yeah. I’m sorry I scared you,” he apologized. “But I’m good. I’m normal. I can still . . . touch you like normal.” He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her in close. “Kiss you like normal.” He dropped a soft kiss onto her cheek, then bent forward further to press a light one against the side of her neck.

“No, Bellamy.” She pushed him back slightly, unwilling to be as nonchalant about this as he was and allow him to use his charm as a distraction. “I’m serious. Has this ever happened before?”

He shrugged flippantly. “Maybe once or twice.”

“Once or twice?” Then perhaps that explained why he wasn’t as freaked out about it as she was. But knowing that it had happened before didn’t make her feel any less freaked out on his behalf.

“Yeah, I probably just had a bad dream or something,” he rationalized.

“People have bad dreams all the time. They don’t . . . do what you did,” she argued. “It was like you were somewhere else for a minute.”

“Well, I came back,” he said simply. “Don’t worry about it, Clarke.”
“I am worried, though.”

“Well, you don’t have to be.” He rubbed her shoulders, giving them a reassuring squeeze. “I had a nightmare, it’s over now, I slept soundly regardless . . .” He backed towards the door while he talked, swiping his keys off the dresser drawers. “It’s all good. It happens. Now I gotta go to work.”

She shook her head, unable to accept that this kind of thing just happened, that it was ‘all good,’ as he claimed.

“I’ll see you later, though,” he said, smiling at her as he slipped out the door.

Dammit, she thought, frustration swirling inside of her. Here she’d thought that just maybe Bellamy would be concerned like she was, or at the very least agree that the whole thing was a little weird. But amazingly enough, he seemed even more unworried than his roommates were. How was that even possible?

Unbelievable, she scoffed inwardly, having a hard time fathoming it.

She looked out the window, watching unhappily as he trundled out to his truck, got in, and drove off. Like nothing was wrong. Like finding out what she’d just told him was the equivalent of finding out he snored or something. She felt like she’d done something wrong, like she hadn’t described it well enough for him to sense the severity of the situation.

Or maybe . . . maybe it really wasn’t that severe. Maybe she was blowing it out of proportion. She entertained that thought as she got showered and dressed, as she made the drive home to her own apartment. It was possible, she supposed, and honestly, she would have liked nothing more than to be wrong. But she couldn’t push the incident out of her mind. When she lay down in bed, she could still feel his trembling torso beneath her. When she opened her sketchbook and started to draw, it was only his sleeping form that came to mind. No, there would be no rest or relaxation for her today, not until she got some answers.

Like any good college student, she turned to Google for her answers. She typed in some of Bellamy’s symptoms and read through all sorts of diagnoses that came up. Nocturnal seizures were definitely a thing, but that didn’t seem like the logical conclusion to jump to. She read that most people were diagnosed with epilepsy when they were younger, and she’d never heard Bellamy mention anything like that before, not once. Either that or they tended to be diagnosed in their fifties and beyond. It could develop at any time, but at Bellamy’s age, it wasn’t likely.

Night terrors, a sleep disorder basically caused by horrific nightmares, seemed like a much more plausible option. Either that or nocturnal panic attacks. The sudden sweat and racing heartbeat certainly seemed to fit in with that one. She’d only just begun to read about both of them when her phone rang.

For once, it was a relief to hear her mother’s ringtone. Just the person she wanted to talk to.

“Hey, Mom,” she answered eagerly, eyes never leaving her computer screen. “I’m glad you called.”

“Yeah, I just wanted to see how your New Year’s Eve went,” Abby said. “And to let you know that Marcus loved his ties. He said he’ll get a lot of wear out of them, so it was a good present.”

“That’s great,” she said, scrolling further through the WebMD article up on her screen. There wasn’t much need for that when she had a real life doctor on the phone, though. “Mom, can I ask you about some stuff?” she inquired, setting her computer aside.

“Sure,” her mother said. “About what?”
She sighed, getting used to telling this story now that it was the third time she’d told it today. “Well, see, I have this friend . . .”

Clarke did her best to be as detailed as possible, to use the most descriptive word choice she could come up with in order to make sure her mother had a clear and vivid picture of the whole incident in her mind. She told her about what had happened last night and what Bellamy had said about it this morning, and to her credit, even though her mom had to be thrilled to know that Clarke had a new male friend in her life, she didn’t say anything to derail the conversation. She kept her doctor ears on and listened intently, and that was just what Clarke needed her to do.

“So?” she prompted once she was done telling her everything. “What do you think?”

“Hmm,” her mother said contemplatively. “Well, I’m a general practitioner, not a psychiatrist or sleep specialist.”

“I know, but do you think I’m on the right track with the whole panic attack thing?” Clarke asked. “Or what about the night terrors? It could be night terrors.”

“It could be,” her mother said. “I think you’re probably right that it’s not a seizure. It seems unlikely that he wouldn’t have some prior knowledge about an epileptic condition at his age.”

Since a seizure was pretty much the scariest option, that reassurance put a few of Clarke’s nerves at ease. “So what is it?” she asked, wishing there would be a clearly-cut, well-defined answer.

“I think it could be either one of the other things,” her mother replied. “Night terrors sometimes happen when somebody’s under extreme stress. So has your friend been stressed out lately?”

“Well . . .” She shrugged, recalling how frustrated he’d been after working for those college guys the other day. “He’s been busy with work. I don’t know if that’d be enough to cause it, though.”

“Sometimes it’s more likely to happen if somebody’s experienced a traumatic event,” her mother added. “Maybe there was some abuse when he was younger . . .”

“No, there was no abuse,” Clarke cut in quickly. “I mean, he didn’t have it easy growing up, but it was just him and his mom and his sister. And he loves them more than anything in the world.”

“Well, maybe there was something else.”

Clarke sighed heavily, thinking back to that obituary in the bottom of that metal box in his drawer. “There was,” she said, not willing to divulge that information.

“And the panic attacks . . . well, usually during the day, you can feel them coming on,” her mother continued. “You can try to stop them or calm yourself down. But if it’s the nocturnal kind, it can just hit without warning. Something may trigger it--”

“Like a sound?” Clarke cut in. Like fireworks?

“A sound, a smell, a feeling. A bad dream, even,” her mother answered. “Or it could just be a buildup of stress and anxiety. It could be related to a sleep disorder. It’s hard to say, Clarke.”

“But it’s not normal, right?” she summarized. “It’s not normal for someone to do that in their sleep and then not even remember it the next day.”

“Oh, it’s perfectly normal not to remember it,” Abby corrected her. “But no, I wouldn’t say it’s normal to do it in the first place, no.”
Clarke had to admit, she felt sort of vindicated hearing that. She knew she hadn’t been blowing it out of proportion. As Bellamy’s friend, she had every damn right to be concerned. And if Murphy and Miller and even Bellamy himself weren’t going worry about it, then she just had to worry enough for all of them. “So what should I do?” she asked, needing some advice on how to proceed.

“Well, I would convince your friend to go see a doctor,” her mother suggested.

Clarke’s shoulders slumped, for she sensed that might be impossible. “What if he won’t wanna go?”

“Well, try to convince him,” her mom advised. “Chances are he’s fine, but if it’s happened a couple times before, then it’s worth it to have a doctor check him out.”

Clarke grunted. Yeah, that all made perfect sense to her. But Bellamy would probably be a lot more stubborn about it, and she wasn’t sure she could convince him.

“Thanks, Mom,” she said, grateful for the information and the advice.

“Of course,” her mother said. “Anytime.”

Clarke sort of felt like she was at a loss once she got off the phone. Her research had led her in the right direction, it seemed, but what now? The chances of her convincing Bellamy—Mr. Fix It himself—to go see a doctor in hopes that someone could fix him . . . not likely. Bellamy hated asking people for help. Not to mention, a simple doctor’s visit these days could cost a lot of money, money he probably didn’t just have lying around. She could help him out with that, of course, but he’d be way too proud and way too stubborn to take any money from her.

Luckily, not five minutes after ending that call with her mother, she got a text from Octavia. Harper and I are going shopping, it read. Wanna come?

Clarke wasn’t much of a shopper, and she felt like a zombie after being awake almost all night. But clearly this was an opportunity. If she couldn’t convince Bellamy to go see a doctor herself, then surely Octavia could.

Shopping turned out to be nothing more than a visit to the thrift store, which Clarke had never been to before. The thrift store wasn’t even a store, really; it was an old house, and the people who kept it running were elderly retired women who used to work at the local hospital. They recognized Harper and Octavia right away, said hi to them and asked them what they’d been up to. (The employees at Walmart could definitely use some customer service lessons from these women.) The whole place was impossibly quaint and seemed to have a little bit of everything: furniture, clothing, toys, old electronics. Since everything was donated, everything was inexpensive.

Octavia didn’t seem to be looking for anything in particular, but Harper was definitely looking for some new clothes. “How about these?” she asked, holding up a pair of black pants. “Do these look professional? Would you hire me for a job?”

“Yes,” Octavia said. “But we’ve been through this. Just use your natural talents and become a stripper.”

“Oh, yeah, Monty would love that.” Harper took the black pants, as well as a pair of khakis, into one of the makeshift changing rooms. Back when this place had been a house, that changing room had probably just been a closet, but now it was a room.

“So what does Harper do for work?” Clarke asked. Even though she had spent a lot of time with these people lately, they didn’t really talk about their jobs very often.
“A little bit of everything,” Octavia replied, browsing through some tops that would be way too big on her. “Retail, waitressing, that sort of thing.”

Those kind of sounded like crappy jobs, but Clarke didn’t want to say anything that sounded judgmental.

As if she could read her mind, Octavia added, “We have jobs, Clarke, not careers.”

“Lincoln has a career,” she pointed out.

“Yeah.” She smiled warmly. “He’s amazing.”

Bellamy just has a job, though, Clarke thought sympathetically. He didn’t talk about it a whole lot, but it was obvious to anyone who knew him that he would have loved to get a degree in history, or maybe become an educator and teach history someday.

With her mind back on him once again, Clarke remembered why she had decided to tag along at all today. As much as she liked Harper and was gradually becoming less intimidated by Octavia, she definitely had an ulterior motive for accompanying them on this little shopping excursion. She needed to have a serious conversation with Bellamy’s sister.

“Hey, I need to talk to you about something for a minute,” she blurted.

“Oh, yeah? What’s that?”

“Um . . .” Clarke looked around, not sure this was the right spot to talk about the issue at hand. There were a few other people mulling about, and Harper would come back out at any minute now. “Let’s pop in here.” She grabbed Octavia’s wrist and pulled her into one of the smaller rooms. This one was full of donated toys, books, and games for kids. It was empty, so it would do. Clarke shut the door.

“Look at all this stuff,” Octavia said, her eyes wide as she took it all in.

“Yeah, it’s great,” Clarke said, not really taking the time to notice any of it. “Hey, listen, I need to ask you for a favor.”

“A favor, huh?” Octavia crossed her arms over her chest. “Go ahead.”

“It’s about your brother.”

Octavia made a face. “I think you’re providing him all the favors he needs.”

“No, I need your help,” Clarke insisted. “Something happened last night. We were sleeping, and then all of a sudden--”

“He was shaking uncontrollably?” Octavia cut in. “Yeah, I heard about that.”

“You did?” Clarke couldn’t disguise her surprise.

“Yeah, Miller texted me.”

“Oh.” Well, this was good then. No need to rehash the entire story for the fourth time that day. “Okay. Well . . . obviously it kind of freaked me out, but Bellamy’s acting like it’s no big deal. But I went home and looked up some stuff, and I talked to my mom--”

“Your mom?” Octavia cut in. “You talked to your mom about my brother?”
“Well, yeah, she’s a doctor.”

Octavia grunted. “Clarke. What exactly are you getting at here?”

Wasn’t it obvious? Did she even have to say it? Judging by look on Octavia’s face . . . yeah, she did. “I think he needs to go see a doctor,” she proposed. “My mom agreed with me. But if I tell him to do that, he won’t go, so I was kind of hoping you might . . .” She trailed off, sensing she wasn’t going to get any agreement as Octavia narrowed her eyes at her. “Come on, O, I need your help here.”

“Okay, first off, you can’t call me O,” Octavia informed her. “Only Bellamy calls me that. And second . . .” She sighed heavily, shaking her head. “I can’t help you, Clarke.”

“What?” she spat, her voice rising with agitation. “Why not? Octavia, this isn’t normal. There might be something wrong with him.”

“There’s nothing wrong,” Octavia growled. “This has happened before.”

“I know, that’s what he said, but--”

“But nothing,” Octavia snapped. “He went to a doctor already, the first time. And the second time, they even did one of those overnight sleep studies on him. He’s fine. He doesn’t have some condition; it’s not happening every night.”

“Then why is it happening at all?” Clarke demanded. Something wasn’t right about this. She wasn’t going to concede to anyone on this, not even his sister.

“Because he’s Bellamy,” Octavia answered shrilly. “He worries about everyone else constantly. He works too much, he puts so much pressure on himself, and all of that just starts to build up. But he’s fine. All the doctors said he’s fine. He’s just gonna have these nights once in a while. That’s how his body copes with all the stress.”

Clarke frowned, not exactly sure if she believed that. In all the reading she’d done today, she hadn’t read anything about shaking uncontrollably in the night being a way to cope with stress; it was a manifestation of it. “Octavia, I think it’s more than that,” she insisted, desperate to get this girl to agree with her. “Please. You have to convince him to go see someone.”

“No.” Octavia glared at her defiantly. “Do me a favor, Clarke—in fact, do him a favor: Stay out of this. Bellamy’s been through things, things you can’t understand. He has reasons for being the way he is and doing the things he does. Don’t try to slap some diagnosis on him just ‘cause you’re mom’s a doctor.”

“No, that’s not what I’m trying to do,” Clarke argued, taken aback by the sudden hostility. “I’m just trying to help.”

“He doesn’t need your help, Clarke. He’s fine.”

“He’s not fine!” Clarke yelled, unwilling to back down on this. Octavia was being even more obstinate about it than Miller and Murphy were, and it was starting to piss her the hell off. “And why do I get the sense that you and Miller and Murphy all know more than you’re letting on, that there’s something you’re not telling me?”

“Because it’s not our place to tell you, Clarke,” Octavia snarled, shaking her head angrily as she briskly left the room.

Clarke stood there alone, stunned, trying to take that in. Not their place to tell her? To tell her what?
She’d had a feeling for a while now that there was something about Bellamy she still didn’t know, but she hadn’t pushed it, because she didn’t want to push him away. But how was she supposed to keep doing this, keep being his friend while he kept her in the dark? How was she supposed to lie next to him tonight without worrying that it would happen again? How was she supposed to act like he was fine when she had this guttural, instinctive feeling that he wasn’t? There was something bigger going on here, and everyone seemed to know more about it than she did. She realized they’d known him longer and all their allegiance was to him, but she couldn’t help but feel sort of betrayed that they were keeping something from her. At this point, she didn’t even need them to tell her everything; she just needed to know something.

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The day was a long one. Obviously since she and Octavia had butted heads over what to do about Bellamy, the thrift store shopping excursion had been cut short, so that left Clarke with an entire afternoon of nothing. Raven was at work, Niylah was with Luna, Wells, was at home with his family for the remainder of Christmas break. And all her other friends had probably gotten the don’t-tell-Clarke-anything-about-Bellamy memo that seemed to have gone around.

She went back to her apartment and fell asleep for a few hours that afternoon due to pure exhaustion. Around 5:00, she woke up again, and the first thing she did was check her phone to see if Bellamy had called or texted. He hadn’t, so either he wasn’t home from work yet, or . . .

. . . or maybe he just wasn’t in any big hurry for her to get there. That wasn’t a pleasant thought, but it didn’t dissuade her from getting up and heading over anyway.

Bellamy wasn’t home yet by the time she arrived—a small relief. Miller wasn’t home yet, either, but Murphy and Emori were downstairs on the couch, sharing a bowl of popcorn and watching a movie. “Hey, Clarke,” Emori said. “Wanna watch The Goonies? We just started. It’s a classic.”

“Gonna have to pass,” Clarke said, noticing the way Murphy wouldn’t look at her. Why? she wondered. Maybe he felt guilty for keeping her in the dark about . . . something?

“Well, Bellamy’s not home yet,” Emori said. “You might as well hang out with us until he gets back.”

“Thanks,” Clarke said, but knowing them, they’d end up with their tongues in each other’s mouths fifteen minutes into the film. “I think I’m just gonna go wait for him upstairs, though.”

“Oh, alright,” Emori said. “Get it all ready to go for him, huh?”

Clarke laughed nervously, sensing that she and Bellamy weren’t going to do what Emori thought they were going to do tonight. She slinked upstairs and trudged into the familiar room, flopping down on the bed with heavy, weary limbs. That tired feeling just wasn’t going away, not even after an afternoon nap.

Just as she was about to nod off again, she heard the neighbors’ dogs start to bark, which was usually a clear indicator that somebody was home. The vehicle rumbling to a stop outside sounded a lot more like Bellamy’s truck than Miller’s car, so she wasn’t surprised when the bedroom door flung open a few minutes later, and there he was.

“Hey,” he said, smiling like he was happy to see her.

She sat up and tried to smile back, but it was probably more a grimace. “Hey.”

“Guess what?” he said, kicking off his shoes. “I’m in a good mood. I made some money today.”
“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. Got some good tips. So I was thinking . . .” He sat down beside her, his whole face lit up with excitement. “Maybe we could do something. A movie. Dinner. Whatever the hell you want.”

_Oh god_, she thought, wishing she could match his enthusiasm. Any other night, she would have. But she couldn’t go see a movie with him or go out to dinner or do anything when she was worried about him like this. It was like a big black cloud was hanging over everything right now, and she just wanted things to clear up again.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, brushing his thumb across her cheek. She hadn’t even realized a tear had spilled over until he wiped it away.

“I just . . .” She swallowed hard. “I had a tiring day.”

“Well, we don’t have to do anything then,” he said. “We don’t have to go anywhere. We can just hang out or sleep.”

She sniffled. Could they just sleep right now? Really?

“You’re not still upset about that thing last night, are you?” he asked.

She huffed. “Bellamy, that thing last night scared the hell out of me.”

“I know,” he said, putting his hand on top of hers, linking their fingers together. “I’m sorry.”

“No, you don’t have to apologize for it. Just . . .” She tilted her head backward, blinking rapidly, trying to hold the rest of the tears inside. This wasn’t the time to be getting all worked up and emotional.

“I told you it was nothing, though,” he reminded her.

“Yeah, that’s what everyone’s saying. Miller and Murphy and Octavia—yes, I talked to Miller and Murphy and Octavia about it—they all said you were fine.”

“Well, they’re right. I am fine,” he reiterated.

She groaned, sick and tired of hearing that word today.

“What, would you rather there be something wrong with me?” His tone was a lighthearted, teasing one, so he probably meant for it to come across as a joke, but she wasn’t amused.

“I would rather you talk to me about it,” she said, slipping her hand out from under his, rising to her feet. “I feel like you just wanna pretend it never happened or pass it off as a nightmare, but I know there’s more to it than that. I know there’s something you’re not telling me.”

He stared at her wordlessly for a moment, then shook his head. “What do you want me to say?”

“You know, at this point, anything other than ‘I’m fine’ would suffice.”

He lowered his head, grumbling, “Come on, Clarke.”

“No, you _come on_, Bellamy!” she yelled. “God! Why are you being like this?”

“Like what?”
“So secretive.”

“So secretive?” He threw his hands up at his sides and stood up. “Fine, what do you wanna know?”

Oh, there were so many things. “Octavia told me it’s happened twice before. When?” she questioned.

“Last year on New Year’s, the Fourth of July, and last night. You see a pattern here?”

Of course she did. It couldn’t have been any more obvious. “Okay, so what is it about fireworks that sets you off then?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know.”

That wasn’t true, though. She could tell it wasn’t true. “You’re lying,” she stated.

“How would you know?”

“I just know, Bellamy!”

“Fine!” he roared, stomping around to the other side of the bed. He yanked the curtains shut and spun back around to face her, anger etched onto his features. “They just bother me, okay? And I know why, but it’s stupid. It’s so stupid, Clarke, and I don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Bellamy.” She walked around the bed so that she was standing beside him again, gazing up at him with pleading eyes. “It’s just me. You can tell me--”

“No, I don’t wanna talk!” he yelled. “Fuck, Clarke, you already forced me to tell you about Roma. Was that not good enough for you?”

She frowned, taking a step back. “That’s not what I’m trying to do,” she said, offended that he would throw that back in her face.

“Listen to yourself,” he shot back. “You think there’s somethin’ wrong with me? Well, what’s wrong with you, Clarke? You’re bein’ a fuckin’ bitch right now.”

That silenced her. She could only stare at him in astonishment. Never had Bellamy called her that before. Not even when they were . . . together. It wasn’t a word he used in connection with any woman, let alone her.
“Well,” she said, voice barely above a whisper, “that’s a far cry from Princess.”

He shut his eyes, shaking his head regretfully. “I’m sorry,” he apologized.

“You can call me whatever you want right now,” she ground out. “That doesn’t make me care about you any less or quit worrying.”

“There’s nothing to worry about,” he said, reaching out to her, but she stepped out of his reach. “That’s what I’m trying to tell you.”

“And I’m trying to tell you to open up about whatever’s bothering you.”

He clenched his jaw, shaking his head determinedly. “No.”

“No? Just like that.”

“Just like that.”

She grunted in exasperation, turning her back to him.

“There are things I don’t wanna talk about,” he said evenly. “You don’t have to understand that; just respect it.”

Respect? she contemplated. It was a little hard to respect something she didn’t know anything about whatsoever. But she respected Bellamy Blake as a person, as a man, so . . . “I respect it,” she assured him, turning back around. “I don’t support it.”

He rolled his eyes in annoyance.

“You’re bottling things up, and your friends and your sister are letting you. But that’s not healthy, Bellamy,” she pressed. “And here I am willing to listen, and you won’t tell me anything. And I don’t know why, because I’ve told you so much about me and my mom, and about my dad.”

“Oh, so I owe you something then?” he surmised angrily. “Is that it?”

“No!” She hated that he was putting words in her mouth.

“Because I already told you about Roma, and I didn’t really want to. I didn’t wanna bring all that shit up again, but I did it for you.”

“Bellamy--”

“So if there’s other shit I wanna keep buried, then I’m gonna keep it buried, and I’m not gonna let you or anyone else guilt-trip me into letting it all out.”

“I’m not trying--”

“Yes, you are!” he yelled, fuming now. “See, this is your problem, Clarke: You still wanna control everything. Now you wanna control me.”

“I’m just trying to help,” she insisted, wishing he could understand where she was coming from, especially since he was asking her to understand him.

“No, If I wanna keep something to myself, I can keep it to myself!” he shouted, eyes ablaze with fury. “I don’t owe you anything. I don’t have to tell you anything. You don’t have to know every single thing about me; you’re not my girlfriend, Clarke.”
She opened her mouth to try to respond to that, but nothing came out. His anger . . . it floored her. This was making his Roma reaction seem tame in comparison.

“I know I’m not your girlfriend,” she finally said, pissed that he would even insinuate that she’d thought differently for one second. She wasn’t an idiot; she knew what they were, and nothing was distorting that. “But I am supposed to be your friend. And if we’re talking benefits . . .” She glared at him, disappointed. “I would think the biggest benefit of all would be having a friend who’s willing to listen. But apparently that doesn’t mean crap to you, so . . .” Holding back her tears, she left him standing with all his rage and instead focused on emptying out the bottom drawer of his dresser, where most of her clothes were stashed.

“What—what’re you doing?” he stammered. “Clarke.”

“Do you honestly think I wanna stay here tonight?” she grumbled, stacking all her clothes on top of the bed.

“Come on, just calm down,” he urged.

“Oh, I’m the one who needs to be calm?”

“Let’s just . . . let’s just take a deep breath and go downstairs.”

“You take deep breaths all you want. I’m going home,” she growled, shoving all her clothes into the backpack she kept stashed under the bed. It was there for all those mornings she woke up and went straight from here to class, and right now, it was coming in handy.

“You don’t have to go anywhere,” he said. “I’ll sleep out on the couch tonight if that’s what you want.”

“That’s not what I want.” She marched into the bathroom, fearing the thought of him sleeping alone tonight. But if he was going to shut her out, then she couldn’t very well be there for him. She couldn’t force him to let her in.

“Clarke . . .” He stood in the doorway to the bathroom, watching helplessly as she slid all her makeup and toiletries off the counter, into her bag. “Don’t go.”

“Sorry, I can’t stay with someone who doesn’t trust me enough to talk to me.” She shoved past him, zipping up her bag, and did one last sweep of the room, checking to see if she was forgetting anything important.

“I do trust you,” he insisted.

“No, I trust you,” she corrected. “Because I’ve told you things willingly. And I’ve let you do things to me that . . .” She trailed off as memories of all her firsts with Bellamy flashed through her mind. “No one has ever gotten to know me as quickly as you have,” she informed him. “No one.” She hoped he knew that included Lexa, Finn, even Raven. She didn’t let people in as easily as she’d let Bellamy Blake into her life. He had to know her well enough by now to know how rare that was.

“And it’s just really frustrating,” she said, barely able to get the words out as the emotion bubbled up in the back of her throat, “that there are things about you that you don’t want me to know.” She wanted to be strong and stern as she walked out of that house, but it hurt. Fighting with Bellamy hurt. Her bottom lip trembled, and tears stung her eyes. She slung her heavy backpack over her shoulders, lowered her head, and trudged out of that bedroom, thinking he might try harder to get her to stay, might chase after her or something.

He didn’t.
What the hell? Bellamy thought, stunned. He couldn’t move, could barely even think. He felt like he’d just been hit by a train. Had that really just happened?

He hadn’t expected to come home to this. In fact, when he’d opened his bedroom door and seen Clarke lying on his bed already, he’d been excited. Because even though he knew last night had really freaked her out, he’d assumed that, with his assurance and a day to get over it, she’d be fine.

She wasn’t.

Dammit, Clarke, he thought, pulling back the curtain just far enough that he could look outside and watch her spill across the front lawn to her car. She looked like she couldn’t get out of there fast enough. He couldn’t see the tears on her face, but he knew they were there, because she was frantically wiping them away.

He felt horribly guilty for making her cry. But when she put that pressure on him to get him to talk about things he didn’t want to . . . well, then he just felt horrible in general. She didn’t understand his past, didn’t know what was all there. But that wasn’t her fault. Nobody did.

For a split second, he thought about opening up his window and yelling out something, something to make her come back inside. Because he hadn’t meant for her to leave. But what was the point? When she was unhappy with him and he was unhappy with her, she couldn’t stay.

So he let her go, watched her drive off, back to her palace with its indoor pool and gym and tennis courts. Back to an apartment that was nicer than his whole house. Back to a bedroom that she’d barely slept in for months now. In the back of his mind was the terrifying knowledge that she’d taken her things with her this time, packed it all up as if to say that she wasn’t coming back.

No, was all he could think as he sullenly pulled his curtain shut, letting that possibility marinate in his mind. Please no.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Wow, I've never posted a chapter that has gotten so much feedback before! (And honestly, even though it's an intense chapter, it's not even the most intense chapter of the fic.) I'm so flattered and floored by the response! Thank you all so much for reading and leaving feedback!

Chapter 21

Bellamy was miserable.

He slept like crap that night, got up the next day, and went through the motions at work. Fix the hole in someone’s chain-link fence. Repair someone else’s broken window. Kindly explain to Diana Sydney that there was nothing he could do about her Pekingese’s ingrown toenail. He was a handyman, not a vet.

Between every job, he sat in his truck and checked his phone to see if he’d heard from Clarke. Just a text, something. But there never was one. He thought about texting or calling her, but he didn’t know what to say. Besides, he’d kind of been an ass to her last night, and he figured it might be best to give her some space.

He managed to give her space for one day before he got impatient and drove over to Polaris during his lunch break. He sat out in his truck for a few minutes, debating his next move, but when he finally had the common sense to look around the parking lot, he saw that her car wasn’t even there. So that was a bust. He got back to work and went through the rest of his day.

That night, while his roommates dueled it out on the Xbox, Bellamy lay upstairs, feeling like he had too much space in his bed. Even without Clarke there, he stayed on the left side of that mattress. That was where he’d slept last night, and that was where he’d sleep tonight, too. He wasn’t sure whether that was pathetic or not, but he didn’t really care. If by some miracle she just strolled in there during the middle of the night and decided to cuddle up with him, he wanted her side to be open for her.

It didn’t have to be open, he knew. He could have gone out to Dropship or TonDC, either with or without his friends, and scoped out his options. He could’ve brought somebody home to just . . . fuck. But he wasn’t in the mood for some stupid one-night stand. Clarke may not have been his girlfriend, but for now, she was still the only girl he wanted to sleep with.

Sex wasn’t even a priority in his mind once he got to the third night without Clarke, though. Just contacting her was. He broke down and sent his first text to her since they’d fought, just a simple, Hey, how are you? and then he proceeded to lie in bed for the next hour, waiting for a response. He got none. That night, he fell asleep with his cell phone still in his hand, and the first thing he did when he woke up was check his messages.

Nothing. Nothing from Clarke, anyway. He did have one from Octavia offering herself up as ‘someone to talk to’ if he needed it. But he didn’t really wanna talk to anyone.

Word of his and Clarke’s argument had definitely gotten around, and by Saturday night, Miller and
Murphy were even suggesting that they hang out at Jasper and Monty’s place instead. He didn’t want to be the grumpy old man of the group, didn’t want his downer mood to bring everyone else down, too, so he insisted that they do their normal Saturday thing at their place. When Miller asked if Clarke would be there, Bellamy hung his head and mumbled, “Probably not.”

He sent her another text just to remind her that she was welcome to come by. Once again, though, he got nothing back in response.

He hated this. He hated not knowing anything about how she was doing, anything she was up to. Was she at home tonight or out with Raven and the rest of her friends? Was she sad about the way they’d left things? Mad as hell? Was she just done with him completely? This was the second time he’d lashed out at her, and he knew he’d been a bigger ass about it this time. She hadn’t snooped through his personal effects; she hadn’t done anything wrong. He hadn’t meant to get so angry with her just for being concerned. He hadn’t meant for it to come to this.

The mood on Saturday was a lot more mellow than usual. Nobody asked him what had happened between him and Clarke a few days ago or what would happen now, but everybody was wondering about it, clearly. Each one of his friends made a concerted effort to talk to him about something else, almost as if they were trying to keep his mind off of her. Harper talked to him about her new job. Monty talked to him about the upcoming Winter Olympics. Jasper talked to him about pot, and Maya talked to him about Jasper. Lincoln wisely kept his distance, while Octavia got him reminiscing about the time their mother had taken them to the Museum of National History in D.C. for his birthday.

Clarke’s absence was obvious, though. They all felt it regardless of not talking about it. At this point, Bellamy knew she wasn’t just his friend anymore; she was their friend, too, and they missed her. At one point, as he strolled back into the kitchen to get himself another beer, he overheard Emori tell Harper, “I wish Clarke was here,” but she immediately shut up about that when she saw him standing at the fridge and started talking about her sex life with Murphy instead.

He would have rather heard about Clarke than that, to be honest.

No one felt like dancing or wrestling or braving the cold temperature to go jump on the trampoline. So they popped in a movie instead. Pearl Harbor. They probably all assumed he’d do what he usually did and point out every inaccuracy in that god-awful three hours and four minutes of a film. But he wasn’t really invested in watching. He zoned out, unable to even appreciate how hot Kate Beckinsale looked as a 1940s nurse. She was that movie’s one saving grace, and he didn’t even care. Because he was sitting on that couch alone. That was his spot, his and Clarke’s spot . . . and she wasn’t there.

Around the time the Evelyn and Danny characters were starting to fall for each other in the film, Murphy got up off his beanbag, stretched, put on his jacket, and headed out into the back yard wordlessly, motioning for Bellamy to follow him. Bellamy wasn’t sure what this was about, but he got up, grabbed his coat, too, and headed out back with his friend.

They sat on the side of the trampoline, neither one of them saying much. Murphy didn’t even look like he wanted to bounce, which was weird, because if he’d been able to, he would have bounced on that damn trampoline twenty-four hours a day. Instead, he smoked a joint and just sat there with Bellamy, almost like he’d sensed how badly he’d needed to get up off that couch.

Murphy being empathetic? Considering someone’s feelings other than his own? It was cause for a damn parade.

“Is it over between you guys then?” Murphy finally asked. Bravely asked. No one else would even
mention Clarke to him, like talking about her would send him into a depression or something.

“I don’t know,” Bellamy admitted, reluctant to say much more. Murphy wasn’t typically the best person to talk to about issues of any kind. Miller was much more suited for that role.

Murphy took another puff, blowing some smoke out into the frigid air. “I like Clarke,” he declared suddenly. “She got me that leg lamp. She’s pretty cool.”

Bellamy smiled fondly. Yeah, Clarke was very cool. She was the kind of girl he appreciated for a lot more than just sex. He loved hanging out with her, making her laugh, watching her attempt to dance. And now, he missed all of that more than he ever would have thought possible.

“I think she’s one of your best friends,” Murphy remarked. “You know?”

Oh, yeah. He knew. These past four days without her had made that blatantly obvious. He had his other friends, and they’d been with him through thick and thin. They were like his family. But Clarke, in three short months, had become a part of that family, and it just wasn’t the same without her.

“I think she’s been good for you,” Murphy told him, uncharacteristically serious in that moment. “Really good.”

So do I, Bellamy thought sadly. He didn’t remember anything about the other night, but he did know that Clarke had been the one lying there with him, holding him while he shook uncontrollably. And she probably hadn’t moved or slept for the rest of the night. As angry as he had allowed himself to become with her . . . it wasn’t really that he was upset at her; he was just upset because she made it hard to keep the upsetting things buried down where they belonged.

Later that night, when everyone had either gone home or fallen asleep downstairs, Bellamy sulked up to his bedroom, lay down on the left side of the bed, and took out his phone to send Clarke another text. He wasn’t sure what it would say. Maybe just Goodnight. Or Goodnight, Princess if he really wanted to lay on the charm. But all the charm in the world wasn’t going to make her text him back.

She must have been so frustrated with him to completely cut off their communication like this.

Longing just to hear her voice, Bellamy ended up calling Clarke instead of texting her that night, hoping it might make a difference, that maybe she’d pick up if she saw his name on her caller ID. It rang, then rang again, then rang two more times. And finally her voicemail kicked on.

“Hey, it’s Clarke. You know what to do.”

A shrill beep signaled the start of his message, but he didn’t even know what to say. He didn’t know whether to just talk like he normally would, or apologize or . . . he just didn’t know.

“Clarke . . .” That was all that came out, all he could muster. He stayed on the phone, stupidly silent until another beep signaled the end of his message a minute later. And even though he hadn’t said anything . . . he hoped that said it all.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke was miserable.

Days had passed, and Bellamy wasn’t any less at the forefront of her mind than he’d been the night of that panic attack. And yes, that was her unofficial diagnosis. A nocturnal panic attack. She looked up more information about it, just because he wouldn’t, and she even printed it all just in case he wanted to read about it someday. Of course, that would require them to speak again, which was
seeming like less and less of a possibility as the days wore on.

She got his texts. She got his nearly silent voicemail (and listened to it way too many times). It wasn’t that she wanted to have to ignore him, but texting him back or giving him a call would just give him the wrong idea. She wasn’t willing to pretend that their argument had never happened, nor was she willing to forget about his panic attack. And that was probably what he wanted, to just go back to the way things had been before.

She couldn’t do that.

Classes still were not back in session yet, but thankfully, the museum opened its doors again. She worked a couple hours each day, even volunteering to fill in for some of her fellow employees simply because she needed the distraction from how miserable she felt. But it was a crappy distraction, because campus was pretty much dead until classes started back up. There were maybe two people who visited the museum in the two days that she worked, and most of her time was spent sitting at the front desk, thinking about what she could have said to Bellamy to get him to open up to her. Or how she could have said it.

Raven and Niylah were sympathetic, of course, and quite bummed out themselves. They liked Bellamy, considered him a friend at this point. But they made her their priority and had one girls night after another. They watched Thelma and Louise, Bridesmaids, and Clueless while eating more cookie dough ice cream than should have been legally allowed, and thankfully, Clarke was able to put on her happy face while they were around. They put her in a good mood and managed to get her to smile, because they were the best friends she could have ever asked for. Clarke wouldn’t let them stay the night with her, though, even though they usually offered. Raven had Roan, and Niylah had Luna, and their lives didn’t revolve around her.

When they left and it was just her in that apartment, that was when the loneliness set in. She lay in bed every night, staring at whatever new text Bellamy had sent her that day, agonizing over whether or not she should send one back. It took a lot of willpower to resist. But unless he texted her that he was ready to talk or called and said he wanted to open up about whatever it was he was holding back . . . then no, she wasn’t going to respond to him.

It meant a lot that he wasn’t the only one texting her. Emori, Harper, Maya . . . they all reached out to make sure she was doing okay. She assured them that she was and thanked them for checking on her. Even Murphy texted her after five days, and that shocked the hell out of her: we all miss u clarke, his message read. bellamy does too.

She missed them, all of them, and she wanted to tell him that. But she settled for a simple thanks instead.

By the sixth day, Clarke was really down in the dumps. With no work to distract her that day, she stayed in bed in her rattiest pajamas, hair piled on top her head in a messy bun, and listened to “All By Myself” by Celine Dion on repeat. She drew while eating cookies and gummy snacks and whatever other junk food she had piled on her bed. She filled up pages and pages of her sketchbook with drawings, mostly of Bellamy. Bellamy’s flirtatious smile. Bellamy’s hands and mouth on her breasts. Bellamy asleep with his arms around her. Even Bellamy when he was angry and arguing with her.

The one good thing about misery, she supposed, was that it inspired creativity.

Clarke had the music playing so loudly, she didn’t even hear her front door open. “Oh my god,” Raven gasped in astonishment when she walked into that bedroom. “This is depressing.”
Clarke had no doubt she looked like an absolute mess, a pathetic mess, even. But sometimes wallowing in the misery felt better than trying to combat it.

“Okay, none of this,” Raven proclaimed, crossing the room to Clarke’s window. She tore back the curtains, letting the sun shine in, and Clarke squinted against it. Raven then turned off the music, pulled back the covers and instructed, “Go take a shower. You kinda stink.”

Clarke groaned, dragging herself out of bed. “But I wanna shower with Bellamy,” she whined as she trudged into the bathroom.

“You can’t shower with him. You can shower with me,” Raven volunteered cheerily.

Clarke managed a laugh. “Tempting, but no.”

Even when she was upset with him, apparently she was still thirsty for him, because she touched herself a little bit while she stood under the warm spray of that showerhead. It was barely even pleasurable, though, and sex wasn’t even the thing she missed most about him. So she left it alone, focused on shampooing her hair for the first time in days, and got dressed in some actual clothes afterwards.

Raven was a good friend. She put all the junk food away, made Clarke’s bed for her, and fixed her a turkey sandwich for lunch. Clarke sat at her counter, devouring it, and thanked her friend for stopping by. “All By Myself” had definitely been getting old.

“God, I haven’t seen you like this since you and Lexa broke up,” Raven recalled. “That was bad.”

“That was bad,” Clarke agreed. “And that was even mutual.”

“Was this not?” Raven asked, leaning against the counter.

“Well, this is different. Bellamy and I didn’t break up. We were never really together,” Clarke reminded her.

“Oh, you were together,” Raven asserted confidently. “It doesn’t matter if he wasn’t technically your boyfriend or if you guys were dating or not. You were together all the time.”

“I guess,” Clarke admitted. In these recent months, Bellamy had become one of her closest friends. No one would ever replace Raven, but really, she spent more time with him than she did with Raven, probably more than she spent with Raven, Niylah, and Wells combined. His house had become so familiar to her, almost to the point where it felt like . . . like a home.

“Why don’t you just call him?” Raven suggested. “You said he called you. And he’s been texting you, right?”

“Right.”

“So text him back.”

She sighed heavily, shaking her head. “I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because . . .” It was hard to explain when she’d never really gotten an explanation for the whole thing herself. “He and I both know he’s holding something back; we both know there’s something he won’t tell me. And I can’t just go back to the way things were knowing that. I can’t just fall back
into bed with him and forget about all this.”

“Well, maybe he wants to tell you now,” Raven speculated.

Clarke had thought about that, too, a lot, but in the end, she felt as if it were wishful thinking. “If he wanted to tell me, then he would find me and tell me,” she said. “Until then . . .”

“Until then . . . you’re just gonna sit around and mope?” Raven asked. She made a face. “Clarke . . .”

She knew it was pitiful and that Raven probably couldn’t understand—the girl had dated Wick for years and barely had a bad day since they’d broken up—but Clarke wasn’t quite that resilient. “No, I’m not gonna sit around and mope forever,” she promised. She had her own life to lead, and if Bellamy didn’t want to be a part of it anymore, then . . . well, he didn’t have to be. But if he did finally change his mind and decide to open up to her, then she’d listen. She’d listen to every word he had to say.

“But you are gonna feel sad,” Raven finished.

“Of course.” It was impossible not to.


You have no idea, Clarke thought, surprised that her friend had actually used his real name this time. That meant she was being completely serious.

There was no girls night that night. With class starting back up the next day, she, Raven, and Niylah all needed to get to bed early. Clarke stayed awake, though, doing some more drawing. She drew Bellamy’s anguished face this time, the way he’d looked when he told her about Roma’s death. And as her pencil brought all the lines and edges of him into view, she wondered if that was what he would look like if he opened up to her some more, if that was the expression she’d see in his eyes if he told her why those fireworks set him off the way they did.

The drawing was almost finished when she heard a knock on her door. A slow, heavy knock that definitely didn’t belong to Raven, Niylah, or Wells. She thought at first that maybe it was her grumpy landlord, but what reason would he have to be knocking on her door at nearly midnight?

The knock sounded again, and she slowly got out of bed, tiptoeing towards the door. No way was she just going to answer, not without knowing who was on the other side, so she decided to look through the peephole when . . .

“Clarke?”

She froze, even stopped breathing for a few seconds, and backed away from the peephole. Bellamy.

“Clarke, it’s me,” he said, as if she didn’t already know.

Hand shaking, she reached for the doorknob, because her first instinct was to let him in. Her fingers itched with the desire to turn that knob, open the door, and see his gorgeous, freckly face for the first time in six days. Maybe this was it. Maybe he’d decided he was tired of keeping secrets, and he was going to tell her everything.

“Are you in there?” he asked patiently.

She stayed as quiet as a mouse, trying not to get her hopes up. Maybe this wasn’t it. Maybe he just
missed her, but nothing had changed.

“Everyone came over last night,” he said, “like usual.” A muffled thump led her to believe he was leaning against her door, sliding down to the floor. “It wasn’t the same without you.”

Careful not to make a sound, she sat down on the floor, too, resting her head against the door, feeling like she was sitting back to back with him even though there was something in between them.

“We watched Pearl Harbor,” he went on. “I hate that movie.”

Oh, she knew that, and hearing him complain about it even now made her have to fight the urge to laugh. She’d had the privilege of watching that movie with Bellamy once before—hearing him grumble about how the movie used twenty-first century communications technology in a 1940s aircraft was an experience everyone deserved to have at least once in their lives.

“Apollo 13,” he went on. “Now there’s a good movie. Very historically accurate.”

She smiled, remembering watching that with him, too. He rewound and re-watched so many scenes, had some of the dialogue completely memorized.

“Or Gettysburg,” he added. “But you gotta have four and half hours on hand if you wanna watch that one.”

She didn’t want to, but she would. For him.

“We should watch a movie you’d like sometime,” he suggested. “Something about art, maybe. Like, uh . . . Frida.”

She made a face. Who or what the hell was Frida? She so hadn’t paid attention in her art history classes.

“I hear that one’s pretty good,” he said. “Or, you know, we don’t even have to watch anything about art. Raven said you like Thelma and Louise. I’d watch that with you.”

Clarke smiled warmly at the thought, but that movie was definitely a reserved tradition for girls night only.

He kept talking, rambling, actually, to the point where she wondered if some of her neighbors might hear him, poke their heads out into the hallway, and wonder why there was some crazy man sitting there talking to a closed door. She just sat on the other side and listened, though, while he told her about how his mom’s birthday was coming up and listed off all the ideas he had of things to get her. He said he couldn’t afford most of them, but it was nice to dream. She listened while he assured her that, yes, he was still trying to be nicer to Lincoln, even though it wasn’t easy for him. And she listened while he pleaded with her to open the door. He wasn’t an idiot. He knew she was in there.

It felt good to hear his voice. She’d really missed it.

Nearly an hour after he’d first knocked at that door, though, he let out a heavy, discouraged sigh, and she heard him get to his feet. “Well, alright,” he said dejectedly. “I guess you don’t wanna talk to me, huh?”

She winced, her stomach clenching. Because that wasn’t true at all.

“Goodnight, Clarke,” he said quietly, and then she heard him shuffle down the hall, probably feeling pretty defeated that this hadn’t gone the way he’d hoped. With no reason to remain sitting on her
floor any longer, she got up and sulked back to her bedroom, hoping to finish up her drawing before she fell asleep. All by herself.

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Clarke thought she would feel relieved when second semester classes began, because she would have something to focus on. But getting up at 7:30 was not her thing, especially after staying up late the night before, and getting to campus by 8:30 was more of a chore than anything else. Her earliest class also just happened to be her Capstone Art Experience class, which would be both time-consuming and intensive.

Judging by the bags underneath her classmates’ eyes and the plethora of yawns she noticed when she walked into the lecture hall, she wasn’t the only one feeling tired and unmotivated that first day back. She recognized a few people from prior classes, and waved pleasantly at them when they waved at her. But there was no one in this class who was a legitimate friend or anything. So she found a seat in the back row, figuring she’d best be able to blend in back there.

Just one more semester, Clarke reminded herself as she did the whole diligent student thing and took out her notebook, a pen, and a folder in case any important papers or other materials were distributed. You can do this. She had two more classes later, but she only had one class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and her Fridays were completely free. It wasn’t a horrible schedule for her final semester. She’d have plenty of leeway in balancing school with work, and even though she had to take this Capstone class, at least her final project could probably just be her Trikru exhibit.

Her Trikru exhibit. The one Bellamy had persuaded Lincoln to give her.

Bellamy . . .

She tried not to think about him, but she found herself doodling his name on the top of her notebook paper anyway. Dammit.

It was really hard not to think about him when a muscled man sat down next to her and a familiar, gravelly voice said, “Hey.”

She jerked her head towards him, thinking she was seeing things. What was Bellamy doing in this classroom, in this seat, sitting right next to her smiling at her even though they hadn’t seen each other in a week now?

“What’re you doing here?” she asked, quickly flipping the page in her notebook so he wouldn’t see his name scribbled there.

“I wanted to see you,” he replied. “And Niylah told you’d be here, so . . .”

She rolled her eyes, cursing inwardly at herself for being so oblivious. “Well, that explains why she was so interested in my class schedule.”

“I didn’t know how else to see you,” he admitted. “I stopped by your place last night, but . . .”

“I was sleeping,” she lied quickly.

“Oh, you were sleeping, huh?” The way he said it made it clear he didn’t believe her. “You’ve been getting my texts, right?”

“Uh-huh.”
“And you got my voicemail?”

She snorted. “Wasn’t much a voicemail. You said ‘Clarke’ and then nothing.”

“Well, I didn’t know what to say,” he confessed.

“Really?” That kind of pissed her off. There was a lot he could say, possibly starting with, ‘Hey, Clarke, you were right. I need to open up, so I’m gonna tell you everything.’ But even now, clearly those words were not going to cross his lips.

Up at the front of the classroom, the professor began to talk, getting the class started. He looked old and stodgy and not all that interesting, the kind of professor Clarke would have to force herself to pay attention to. She thought that the beginning of class would effectively put an end to her and Bellamy’s conversation, but he only sat there quietly for a few seconds before leaning over and whispering, “I don’t have many jobs lined up today. You could come over after class if you want.”

“I have to work,” she lied.

“Then you can come over later,” he suggested. “Or I could come to your place.”

“Bellamy . . .” This was exactly why she hadn’t opened that door last night, because he so clearly wanted to pretend like nothing had happened.

“I’m sorry, Clarke,” he apologized, completely oblivious to the way students seated in the next row were craning their heads around to get a look at who was talking. “I didn’t mean to get so mad. I didn’t mean to call you a bitch or throw the whole Roma thing back in your face.” He waited for a response, but when he got none, he twisted his whole body towards hers, blatantly ignoring the fact that he was talking over the professor and that people sitting around them could overhear. “I didn’t want you to leave, Clarke,” he said, sounding sort of desperate. “I hate this. I hate not being able to talk to you. I hate feeling like you hate me.”

She was just opening her mouth to assure him that she didn’t when the professor boomed, “Young man,” from the front of the room.

Bellamy didn’t even seem to realize that was him. Clarke had to swat his leg to get him to realize it was. He looked towards the front of the room, met eyes with the grumpy old man in the sweater vest, and said, “Yeah?”

The professor narrowed his eyes at him impatiently. “I’m curious to know,” he growled, “what could you possibly be talking about that’s more important than my introduction to the semester?”

Bellamy looked a bit caught off guard, like he wasn’t used to getting in trouble in a classroom setting. “Sorry,” he apologized. The heads of all the students in the room turned away from him, apparently anticipating that that would be the end of it, but the professor was relentless.

“Please, enlighten me,” he urged sarcastically. “You were so eager to speak. Why don’t you get up here and teach the class? Surely you have more knowledge than I do. Surely you have more wisdom to impart.”

Bellamy shifted in his seat, and Clarke could tell he was starting to get upset. “I said I’m sorry,” he apologized again.

“If you’re not here to learn, then you have no business being here at all,” the professor kept on, each word dripping with hostility. “This room is reserved for people with bright young minds who actually care about their education, and that clearly isn’t you.”
Oh my god, Clarke thought, her stomach knotting up. Bellamy probably had the brightest young mind out of everyone in there, and it made her uncomfortable to sit there and listen to this professor rip into him like this.

“Do you disagree?” the professor challenged.

Bellamy’s jaw was clenched, a clear sign that he was trying to bite his tongue. But that probably wouldn’t work much longer. He had a low tolerance for bullshit, and that was exactly what this was.

“You have two options,” the professor said. “You can either stay and attempt to salvage your semester. Or you can leave, go home and sleep off the hangover I’m sure you have.”

A few of the students snickered, and Clarke couldn’t believe it. They thought this was funny? This man was going out of his way to humiliate Bellamy, and they thought it was funny?

Bellamy gulped, eyes downcast, and then just nodded in resignation, getting up to leave.

“A wise choice,” the professor taunted as Bellamy walked out. “Please, do not come back.”

There was more laughter, louder now, and Clarke just sat there helplessly, feeling guilty that she hadn’t said something or done something to stick up for him. Bellamy hadn’t deserved that kind of treatment from an adult who was supposed to be a professional. He’d just wanted to talk to her.

She thought about gathering up her things and walking out after him as a sign of solidarity or support or something. But he’d be pissed off now, probably no longer in the mood to talk, and she couldn’t afford to make a bad impression in what would probably be the most important class in her college career. So she just sat there, trying to push him out of her mind while her ass hat of a professor droned on and on about the syllabus she no longer even cared about.

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The only reason Bellamy stayed on campus was because the rec center had a couple punching bags, and that sounded like the perfect therapy right about now. Of course, since he wasn’t a student, he had to pay to get in there. Of course.

He put on some gloves and started swinging, releasing the anger he felt towards that jackass professor, towards his jackass neighbor with those fucking fireworks, towards his jackass self for pushing Clarke away. If it hadn’t cost him ten bucks to get in there, he would’ve come more often. Hitting that punching bag was a good way to let off some steam.

Octavia must have been teaching one of her classes today, or taking one, because she strolled on by in leggings and a workout jacket and spotted him. He kept swinging, not halting his rhythm even when she came to stand beside him.

“Haven’t seen you like this for a while,” she remarked.

“I’m pissed,” he mumbled, alternating between quick right/left punches.

“Really? I never would have guessed.” She took hold of the punching bag with both hands and steadied it. “What’s wrong?”

He took off the gloves, dumping them back on the supply shelf he’d gotten them from. “I saw Clarke today.”

“Ooh.” She winced. “That bad, huh?”
“I fucked things up,” he muttered, jabbing a smaller punching bag with his elbow. “She hates me.”

“She doesn’t hate you,” Octavia assured him confidently. “She probably hates me, though. I shut her down when she tried to get the truth out of me.”

*The truth,* he thought bitterly. Dammit, he hated the way that sounded. Because it wasn’t like he was trying to lie to Clarke or anything; he just wasn’t telling her everything. And it was easy to call that a lie by omission, but . . . he felt like this was different. Excusable.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, feeling like he’d said that a lot today. “I didn’t mean for you to end up arguing with her, too.”

“Bellamy, you’re my brother,” she said. “I’ve got your back no matter what.”

And he was grateful for that; he really was. But he knew his insistence on keeping the past buried put a lot of pressure on her and on his friends, too. And that wasn’t fair to them.

“What should I do?” he asked, needing some advice. It wasn’t typical for him to ask his little sister what to do, because usually he took it upon himself to try to tell her what to do, even if she wouldn’t listen. He was desperate, though, and Octavia knew him better than anybody. She wouldn’t steer him wrong.

“I can’t tell you what to do,” she answered. “Not about this. But Bellamy . . .” She sighed heavily, pausing for a long time as though she weren’t sure she wanted to say what she was about to. “If you do decide to tell her,” she finally said, “it’d probably be a step in the right direction.”

*Yeah,* he thought solemnly, *it probably would be.*

“But if you don’t,” she added, “then I understand. We all understand. But Clarke . . . probably won’t understand.”

No, she wouldn’t. Her standoffishness today had made that clear.

“I guess it just depends,” Octavia said.

“On what?”

She looked him right in the eye, completely serious. “On if you’re willing to risk losing her.”

He gulped, dreading the thought. No, he didn’t want to lose Clarke. He’d already lost too much.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

*Fucking Walmart,* Clarke thought as she stood in the checkout aisle, watching the clerk load up at least ten different sacks for what surely couldn’t be more than thirty different food items. She detested this store more and more each time she went in it; by now, she was at the point where she didn’t even know why she bothered coming back.

“I don’t need so many . . . sacks,” she said weakly, sensing that her clerk either didn’t hear her or just didn’t care. He put the bananas in a sack all by themselves, and she obediently loaded it into her cart.

She didn’t even have to glance behind her to know that Bellamy was there. She heard him clear his throat and smelled his cologne as he approached. “If you hate this store so much,” he said, “why do you keep coming here?”

“Because they have more food options,” she replied, quickly condensing two sacks into one.
“You don’t cook,” he pointed out.

“I mean the microwavable stuff.” She chanced a quick glance at him and . . . big mistake. He looked hot. He was wearing the blue t-shirt. Damn, that blue t-shirt. Plus, he had a watermelon in his arms. And that was all he had. He could have gone through the speed checkout line or the self-checkout line if he’d wanted to. But of course, he’d just happened to wander into her line. Of course.

“Nice touch,” she said, gesturing to the round, green melon in his hand.

“What, am I not allowed to get this now?” he said.

“Get whatever you want.”

He set the melon down on the conveyor belt, and it moved forward a foot behind Clarke’s last grocery items. “I don’t even like watermelon that much,” he admitted. “I just get it for Miller.”

“Hmm.” She reached into her purse and took out her wallet, wishing the clerk would move a little quicker. It would be best to cut this conversation with Bellamy short. The longer they talked, the more tempting it was to go get in his truck and just . . .

She couldn’t do that.

“So how’d that class end up goin’ yesterday?” Bellamy asked her, setting a pack of gum down next to his watermelon.

“It sucked,” she mumbled in response.

“I didn’t get you in trouble, though, right?”

“No.” She thought it was kind of sweet that he’d even ask about that, especially considering how horribly that professor had treated him.

“$138.96,” the clerk told her once the last item was all sacked up.

God, I gotta get out of here, Clarke thought, too impatient to bother with her debit card—it was the chipped kind, and it literally took forever to scan. So she just pulled out a wad of cash instead, handing over seven twenty-dollar bills. “Just keep the change,” she said, catching Bellamy’s intent gaze out of the corner of her eye. He was watching her fork over that cash in amazement. He never walked around with that much money in his wallet. Even if his customers paid him with cash, it got spent right away, whether it was on groceries or bills or some other necessity.

“Thanks,” Clarke told the clerk, trying to quickly load the last few sacks into her cart.

“I’ll pay cash, too,” Bellamy said as the clerk scanned his melon. “Just give me a minute.” He took his wallet out of his back pocket, opened it up, and dug around inside, pulling out a couple dollar bills and some loose change.

“$6.57,” the clerk said in a monotone voice after scanning his gum.

Clarke couldn’t stand there and watch him scrounge around for money. It kind of broke her heart. Bellamy worked so hard, way harder than she did, honestly; and yet she was the one who still had at least fifty dollars in her wallet right now.

“I think I’m a dollar short,” he told the clerk.

“Here.” Clarke pulled a dollar out of her wallet and tried to hand it to him.
“No, it’s fine. I got it,” he said, starting to dig around his pockets.

“Bellamy, it’s just a dollar.”

“I don’t need your money, Clarke.”

She rolled her eyes, exasperated. Of course. Of course Bellamy wouldn’t even take one dollar from her. He never let anyone help him. With anything. “Fine, goodbye,” she said, wheeling her full cart away from the checkout counter.

“Wait, Clarke!” he called.

She didn’t wait, but she did hear him say, “Forget the gum,” as he hurriedly wrapped things up. She scampered out into the parking lot as quickly as she could, trying to duck behind a couple minivans to conceal herself. But Bellamy wasn’t far behind her, and he kept her in his sight as he ran after her.

“Clarke!” he called. She heard a thump, which she assumed to be him dropping his watermelon haphazardly into the bed of his pickup truck. “Hold up!”

“I’m really busy right now,” she said, opening up the back door of her vehicle. She started throwing the sacks inside, not really caring if there was anything in there that would break or go splat. She just needed to be on her way, because this was two days of seeing Bellamy face to face now, and as much as she was enjoying the aesthetics of that, it was also really fucking with her emotions.

“This is kinda cool, huh,” he said, sidling up next to her, immediately being all gentlemanly and lifting some of the sacks out of the cart to help her unload. “This is where we first met.”

“Bellamy . . .” She spun around, snatching the bananas sack out of his hand. She tossed it into the backseat along with all her other crap and told him, “You can’t do this.”

“Do what?” he asked, as if he honestly had no idea.

“This. You can’t be all charming and flirtatious and expect that it’ll just magically fix everything.”

“I’m being flirtatious?” he asked.

“Yes, with the watermelon and, ‘Oh, this is where we first met.’” Even when she dropped her voice down to try to impersonate him, she couldn’t get it anywhere as low as his was.

“I’m not trying to be,” he assured her. “I’m just tryin’ to talk to you. I didn’t even know you’d be here.”

Well . . . she supposed that much was probably true. Niylah didn’t know her grocery shopping schedule, so she couldn’t give that to him. “You should just leave, Bellamy,” she said, continuing to load up her car. And then she felt bad, because that was what the awful professor had told him to do yesterday.

“Why are you so determined to be mad at me?” he flat-out asked, still lifting her sacks out of the cart to assist her.

“I’m not mad. I’m just . . .” She flapped her arms against her sides, finding it difficult to explain. “I mean, it’s not fun knowing that people are keeping something from you, that your friends are keeping something from you. And we both know you are. Your mother’s insinuated that much, your
sister’s insinuated that much. And you even admitted to it. So now it’s like there’s this big, fat elephant in the room, and nobody wants to talk about it except for me. It’s so frustrating.”

He grunted. “Trust me, Clarke, if it was so easy for us to talk about, we would’ve talked about it already.”

“I know, which is why I’m not gonna force you to tell me anything.”

“No, you’re just gonna bribe me,” he corrected.


“Yeah. If I don’t tell you, we’re not friends anymore, right?”

“No, Bellamy . . .” That definitely wasn’t what she was trying to do. But she understood why it may have come across that way. “If you decide you wanna talk to me, I’m here. But if not . . . then I can’t pretend it doesn’t bother me. That’s all.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes.” She really hoped he could understand that, because she didn’t want to make it seem like she was giving him an ultimatum or something.

He gazed at her, his eyes conveying all of his emotion like they always did, and all of a sudden, she noticed how sad he seemed. He had this look of sorrow and longing in his eyes. “I miss you, Princess,” he scraped out quietly.

Oh, god. She hadn’t realized how much she missed that silly nickname until right now. “I miss you, too,” she confessed, “but Bellamy--”

His lips crashed onto hers, preventing her from finishing her sentence. He kissed her pretty aggressively, hands immediately coming to rest at her sides, and for a second, she wanted to get lost in it. She wanted to forget about the frustration and the secret that he wouldn’t let her in on. For a second, she even wanted to forget how he’d lain in bed and shook that night. But when she touched his chest and remembered what it had felt like to feel his heart beating so rapidly, she came to her senses again.

“No, we can’t,” she said, pushing him away gently. He had too many people in his life enabling to keep his past buried; she couldn’t be one of them.

“Why not?” he challenged.

“Because I . . .” Her voice squeaked, alerting her to how close to tears she was. “I don’t wanna kiss you right now. I wanna talk to you.”

“We are talking,” he pointed out.

“No, about . . .” She didn’t even know what about, so she settled for, “The elephant.” Because she literally had no idea what else to call it at this point. “I wish you would just let me be your friend,” she said sadly, “and let me listen.”

He stared down with indecision in those gorgeous dark brown eyes of his now, and she wondered when he opened his mouth if he was actually going to tell her something. Something substantial. But when his mouth closed, that was basically a signal that he was still closed-off. And maybe that was for the best. They were in the freakin’ Walmart parking lot, after all.
“I have to go,” she said, shutting her back door. She gripped the handle of her cart, about to go put it back, when he said, “I got it,” and took it off her hands for her. He guided it across the parking lot to the cart corral, and she couldn’t help but notice the way his shoulders were slumped and how his head was lowered.

Clarke got into her car, took a deep breath, and twisted the key in the ignition. She backed out of the space and took a second to look at Bellamy in her rearview mirror. He was just standing by the carts, watching her leave. He looked as sad as she felt. So that was something.
Chapter 22

Bellamy hadn’t slept particularly well ever since Clarke had packed up her stuff and left. He managed maybe four or five hours every night, but he tossed and turned the whole time, woke up frequently, and sometimes even just lay there thinking about things while he waited for his alarms to go off.

But kissing Clarke again today had made his head spin, and it was making it impossible to fall asleep for even a few hours. Whenever he closed his eyes, he saw the tears in hers, and he wanted to make them go away. He saw other stuff, too, memories: flashing blue and red lights, police tape, tears streaming down his sister’s cheeks.

His mind was awake with sounds, too, and even when pressed his pillow against his ears, they kept invading. He heard Clarke saying his name pleadingly, her voice cloaked in sadness; but he heard those fireworks again, too, even though New Year’s was over no one in the neighborhood was setting them off anymore. And mixed in with those things, he heard Octavia asking if he was willing to risk losing Clarke over all this. And he felt his reaction.

No. He wasn’t.

“Let me listen.” He kept hearing Clarke say that, too.

At 3:00 a.m., he had to get up and move, unable to lay in that bed and not sleep any longer. He paced around his room, rubbing his forehead, raking his hands through his hair, unable to shut his thoughts off. He tried something new altogether when he tore his sheets off his bed and curled up in his chair. That wasn’t comfortable, though, and even if it had been, there was no better likelihood of getting to sleep there. He tossed all his pillows on the floor and tried that, too, with no success.

By 5:00, he knew the night was a lost cause and just decided to hop in the shower and get an earlier start on his day. He stood under that water longer than he normally would have, thinking about what he wanted to do, what he was able to do if he decided on it.

He trusted Clarke. He knew he could tell her. And at this point, as much as he didn’t want to talk about it . . . he was willing to. Not because he couldn’t sleep, and not even because that was the first step on the road to getting her back in his life again. As much as he missed Clarke, it wasn’t about her. It was about him. She’d stirred the pot, awoken some demons he tried so hard to keep at bay. And ever since she’d confronted him about the secret he was keeping, his mind and his heart had been at war with each other. His mind told him to keep it buried, because it’d worked for him so far. But his heart was telling him something different, to just let it out. Because even though he’d gotten used to holding it all in . . . he was so tired of doing that.
Fuck, he thought, slamming his fists against the shower wall as he shook the wet hair out of his eyes. He’d never voluntarily told anyone before. Until now. Until Clarke Griffin.

He was going to tell her.

"Goddammit," Clarke swore when she dropped her pen. She bent forward, reaching underneath her chair, unable to find it. That was her only pen, too. What was she supposed to take notes with, her finger?

She figured she could just ask someone to borrow a pen or pencil and therefore sat up, but somebody was holding her pen right next to her head. Not just somebody, Bellamy. He must have reached under her chair and gotten it for her. He leaned over the back of her chair now, broad shoulders surrounding her, head next to hers.

"Thanks," she said, grabbing the pen from him, trying not to think about how he was so close that she could feel his breath on her cheek. "What are you doing here?" she asked, keeping her eyes on the front of the room where Professor Fuckface (that wasn’t his name, but that was what she was calling him) was getting ready to bore them with day two of the Capstone Art Experience. "If he sees you here, he’ll kick you out again," she warned, hoping to spare him the humiliation this time around.

"I know," he said, sounding unconcerned.

He smells so good, she thought, fighting the urge to turn around and see if he was wearing that tan shirt today. His arms looked great in that one. What was he even doing here, though? Was he just gonna stand close to her and try to entice her? Because if so . . . then it was definitely working.

She was just about to suggest that he leave before the professor spotted him when he murmured in her ear, "I dated another girl after Roma." He swallowed hard, audibly, before adding, "She died, too."

Clarke couldn’t move, but horror engulfed her. At first, she didn’t think she’d heard him right. Or maybe she just hoped she hadn’t.

Another girl? her mind registered. She died, too?

That was all Bellamy said. The professor looked back there and spotted him, but he backed away from Clarke, both hands up as if to demonstrate he wasn’t doing anything wrong. And then he walked along that back row towards the door, wordlessly slipping out as if he’d never even been there in the first place.

She may not have known the full story, but Clarke’s heart instantly broke for him. Her professor started in on the day’s lecture, and she couldn’t pay attention to one word of it. All she could do was think of Bellamy, picturing the tears he’d shed when he’d told her about Roma’s death. And now it turned out there was another girl, another girl who had died? That was the secret he’d been keeping?

Oh god. Her stomach churned. Even without knowing the specifics, she felt sick.

There was no way she could just sit there and pretend to pay attention, not after Bellamy had just dropped this bombshell on her. It had been nine days since their argument, so clearly it hadn’t been easy for him to say this. But finally, he’d worked up the courage to do so, and there was no way she was going to leave him alone in the wake of it. No.
She had to be with him.

Quietly, she gathered up her supplies, put them in her backpack, and got up to leave. That professor, old as he may have been, was eagle-eyed, though, and noticed. He didn’t say anything, but he did sort of give her the same disapproving glare he’d given Bellamy, like he couldn’t believe she would dare walk out at the start of his lecture.

Screw his lecture. Screw the whole class. She didn’t even care. Right now, the only thing on her mind was Bellamy Blake.

Of course, Bellamy walked a lot faster than she did, and he had a head start on top of that. She had campus familiarity on her side, though, and managed to catch up to him in the visitor’s parking lot. “Bellamy!” she called right as he was nearing his truck.

He slowed to a stop, hesitating before turning around to look at her. There was such a sadness in his eyes, rivaled only by the one she’d seen when he’d talked about how Roma had died. He wasn’t just a boy gazing at her in that moment; he was a man who, despite how young he was, had already gone through so much in his life, more than anyone should have had to.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you,” he said. “It’s really hard for me to talk about it.”

“I’m sorry, too,” she apologized, hesitantly stepping towards him. “I didn’t mean to make you feel like you had to--”

“No, I wanna talk about it,” he said. “I wanna be able to talk about it. But . . .” He looked up at the sky when thunder rumbled and suggested, “Let’s get in the truck.”

She was already feeling a few raindrops, so that was probably a good idea.

She’d just sat down in the passenger’s seat and set her backpack on the floor when the rain started to come down. Not a complete downpour, but it was definitely steady. It trickled down Bellamy’s windshield, and he just sat there watching it, lost in thought.

*What do I say?* she wondered. The curiosity was killing her, naturally. She wanted to know more, but if this was all he wanted to tell her . . . well, it seemed like even getting this much of the story out was a huge deal for him.

The whole thing was eerily similar to when he’d sat on her couch and told her about Roma. All the words seemed like they were right there, simmering under the surface, but it took him a minute to feel brave enough to say them. When he started in, he didn’t start by telling her how the girl had died. He started by telling her about . . . about the girl.

“She was named Gina,” he revealed. “I met her when I was twenty, two years after Roma died.”

*Two years,* Clarke thought. It’d probably taken him that long to feel like he was ready to move on. And twenty was an exciting year to be in love. She looked back on it with fondness, because that was year she and Lexa had decided to get serious.

“I wasn’t even really looking for a girlfriend,” he said, turning the car on so they could get some heat going in there. “I was just . . . goin’ from one girl to the next, basically. Not even friends with benefits; just one night stands.”

“Oh.” That . . . sounded sort of miserable to her, but she supposed it had made sense for him at the time. After losing Roma, he probably hadn’t wanted to risk having his heart broken again. But apparently, that had happened anyway.
“Murphy and I were out at Dropship, just out for a drink even though we weren’t old enough, you know?” he said, smiling wryly. “And, uh . . . she was the bartender that night. New bartender. She wasn’t even the one serving us, but she was serving these guys sitting at the table behind us. And they were being horrible to her.” He turned on the windshield wipers, shaking his head in disgust. “They kept callin’ her names and just . . . just saying all this stuff to her that probably made her feel like shit. So I kept tellin’ ‘em to stop, but they didn’t stop. Assholes, you know?”

“Yeah.” She didn’t really know, though. Finn was probably the douchiest guy she’d ever known, but he’d never been outright rude to her.

“It was awful,” her recalled. “I felt like I was on one of those hidden camera shows or something, ’cause they just wouldn’t quit. And I’ve heard men talk to women like that before—I mean, my mom dated a couple losers back in the day—but I just couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Because you’re a good man,” Clarke said.

“Well, the one guy slapped her ass after she brought them their bill, and the other guy pulled her down on his lap.” His hands were clenching into fists now, like all the anger was resurfacing as he forced himself to think back to it. “She was scared. And I mean, why wouldn’t she be? That’s sexual assault. So I got her away from them and told her to go get her manager, but her manager wasn’t there, of course, so . . .” He trailed off, shaking his head. “Anyway, the whole thing escalated, and I ended up gettin’ into his bar fight with these two jackasses.”

“Bar fight,” Clarke echoed, remembering what Octavia had told her. So that hadn’t been a lie.

“I broke one guy’s nose. He busted my lip. Murphy actually got knocked out ‘cause he tried to get involved. And anyway, the whole thing ended when the cops showed up. That’s how I got arrested, by the way.”

She nodded, figuring as much.

“I spent a couple hours in jail, but they didn’t end up charging me with anything ‘cause I didn’t throw the first punch. Plus, Gina told the cops I was just defending her, so . . .” He shrugged. “I got arrested. I don’t care. I’d do it all again.”

She smiled softly, because as far as reasons for going to jail went, this was a pretty damn admirable one.

“Anyway, I went back to Dropship the next night,” he went on, “and she was there, working again. She thanked me for helping her, I thanked her for helping me, and I sat at the bar all night, ’til closing. And we just started talking, hit it off right away.”

“Yeah?” He seemed to enjoy retelling this part of the story, so she wanted to hear more about it.

“What’d you talk about?”

“A little bit of everything,” he replied. “I kind of let it slip that I wasn’t twenty-one yet, but she served me anyway.”

Clarke laughed a little. “She sounds cool.”

“She was,” Bellamy said fondly. “And she was new in town, so she really didn’t know anybody. I told her she could hang out with me and my friends, and . . . soon enough, things just progressed, you know. We started dating, and for the second time in my life, I had a girlfriend.”

It was a bit head-spinning to even think about the fact that Bellamy had had so few real relationships
in his life. His sexual experience levels were obviously through the roof, but that wasn’t the result of having a lot of girlfriends; that was the result of being incredibly good-looking and having a lot of girls who were interested in getting with him. When it came to relationships, he seemed picky. “Did you love her?” she asked, even though she already knew the answer. It was obvious just in the way he talked about her.

“Yeah,” he answered without hesitation. “Of course. There wasn’t anything not to love. She was kind and sweet and smart and . . . I mean, I probably didn’t even deserve her.”

But you’re kind and sweet and smart, too, she thought. Of course he deserved that.

“It wasn’t like it was with Roma,” he admitted. “It was more . . . gradual. Like I felt myself falling in love with her over time, but I had to let parts of Roma go in order to do that.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. So that wasn’t easy. But . . .” He shrugged. “Roma was my first love, and you never forget that, but I definitely loved Gina, too. And so did everyone else. All my friends loved her. She fit right in. Octavia got really close to her, actually, kind of thought of her like a big sister.”

Clarke thought about how Octavia had totally shut her down when she’d tried to ask her about all this. Maybe it wasn’t just that she’d been keeping Bellamy’s secret. Maybe it was hard for her to talk about Gina, too. If Clarke had had any inkling that this was the secret they were keeping, she might not have pushed it so hard, or maybe she would’ve only asked Miller and Murphy about it and not Octavia.

“O wanted me to marry her,” he added. “She thought I was going to.”

Clarke tilted her head to the side, hesitantly asking, “Were you?” It wouldn’t have surprised her. Bellamy was kind of an old-fashioned romantic deep down, so he probably would have been the type of guy to think about marriage at a young age.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe. Probably, yeah. That’s probably the direction it was heading.”

Wow, Clarke thought. She was only two years younger than Bellamy, but marriage had never even once been on her radar. Maybe that meant she had yet to experience the type of love he had experienced. Maybe she didn’t know what it was like to feel the way he’d felt.

“We were together for two years,” he recapped, “so yeah, if she was still alive . . . I might be married to her right now.”

And there it was, the dark turn of this story he was telling. If she was still alive.

Clarke ran through the most realistic possibilities in her mind. Another car crash, perhaps? Some incurable illness like her father had developed? Hopefully it wasn’t something like suicide, but that would have explained why it was so hard for Bellamy to discuss.

She wasn’t even sure if she should guide him in the direction of talking about this woman’s death, or if she should just sit back and let him get there on his own. But he’d fallen silent, and with silence came the risk that he wouldn’t say anything else. And now that he’d started, she felt that it was important for him to keep going, to really open up about it so it wasn’t a burden on him anymore.

“What happened to her?” she asked quietly.

His jaw immediately tightened, and both his hands came up to the steering wheel, fingers coiling
around it and gripping hard. “Something she didn’t deserve,” he mumbled tersely.

That didn’t do much to narrow down the possibilities, but in Clarke’s mind, that didn’t sound like suicide, at least. Besides, Bellamy made it seem like they had been really happy together. So her death . . . it was probably something she hadn’t had any control over. An accident.

“I can’t . . . I can’t talk about this here,” he said, shifting uncomfortably suddenly while the rain began to fall harder.

“Well, we could go to your place,” she suggested, worried that he was going to shut down and quit talking if she didn’t stay with him right now.

“You’ve got class, though,” he pointed out. “You should be there right now.”

“I can miss it,” she assured him. Chances were, she wasn’t missing much of anything.

“No, I—I don’t wanna ask you to do that.”

“Bellamy.” She stared at him determinedly, not willing to get out of that car. “You’re not asking. I’m offering.” She’d promised that she would be there to listen, and now that he was finally talking, there was no way she was backing out on that promise. Class could wait. In the grand scheme of things, being there was nowhere near as important as being with him right here, right now.

“Okay,” he reluctantly agreed. “My place?”

She nodded, hoping he’d feel more comfortable talking about the hard stuff there. Plus . . . she missed his place.

On the drive to his house, he told her a few more things about Gina. Trivial things, mostly, but they mattered to her because they mattered to him. She found out that Gina’s favorite color had been pink, but she always told everyone it was green because she didn’t want to seem too girly. She’d been extremely proud of her naturally curly hair, and Bellamy had never once seen her straighten it. Her favorite movie was *Sixteen Candles*, and he could now quote entire scenes of dialogue because he’d watched it with her so many times. And apparently she had always wanted him to go to college. That one wasn’t so trivial.

It was raining pretty hard by the time they got to his house, so they had to run for the door. He fumbled with the keys and dropped them, though, so once they finally got inside, she realized her hoodless jacket had done her no good. She was soaked.

“Take that off,” he told her as he stepped out of his shoes. “I’ll go get you a towel.”

“Thanks.” She put her jacket on the coat rack and kicked off her shoes, too. The bottom of her jeans were very wet and cold, so she had to stand on her tiptoes to try to keep them off her feet.

He came back out of the downstairs bathroom with a big white towel in his hand a moment later. “Here you go,” he said. “You alright?”

“What?” He’d been the one talking about his second dead girlfriend, and now he was asking her if she was alright?

“You’re shivering,” he said, wrapping the towel around her shoulders.

“Oh.” She hadn’t even realized that. “I’m okay.”
“Sit down. Get under a blanket,” he told her. “I’ll go get you some clothes.”

“Oh . . . okay.” He didn’t really leave any room for debate as he scurried up the steps, taking them two at a time. *Do I really look that cold?* she wondered. It was rain, not snow. Maybe he just felt like taking care of her.

She dried herself off a bit and sat down on the couch, huddling up under his Redskins blanket. It felt good to be back here, sitting on this couch again. She’d always felt so comfortable in this house. In fact, the only room where she felt more comfortable than this living room was . . . well, his bedroom, obviously.

“Sorry it’s not very warm in here,” he apologized as he came trundling back down the stairs. “Heater’s been acting up. I gotta fix it.”

“No, it feels fine,” she assured him. There was always a sense of warmth in this place. Always.

“Here,” he said, handing her a plain black sweatshirt and a pair of grey sweatpants he sometimes wore to bed.

*Clothes,* she thought, hesitantly reaching out to take them. *Bellamy’s clothes.* God, she loved wearing Bellamy’s clothes, but wearing them was kind of . . . intimate.

“I would’ve gotten your clothes,” he said, “but they’re not here anymore, so . . .”

*Right,* she remembered. She was back in this house, but it wasn’t exactly the same. Her clothes were not up in that bottom dresser drawer, and her hair products and cosmetics were not scattered all over his bathroom. For right now, she was a visitor.

Bellamy seemed unsure of what to do with himself for a moment, but finally, he turned his back to her, as if to signal that she should change. “Do you want anything to eat?” he asked.

“No, thanks. I’m good,” she replied, peeling off her damp shirt. Her bra was still pretty much dry, so she left that on as she pulled his sweatshirt over her head. It was huge on her, but it felt so much better and warmer than her shirt had.

“I could make you something,” he offered, diligently keeping his eyes focused on the wall instead of peeking back at her. “I don’t have to work today. I cleared my schedule.”

“I’m fine,” she told him again, slithering out of her damp jeans. The minute she put his sweats on, she felt so much better. Wet jeans were just about as bad as a wet swimsuit.

“Thanks for the clothes,” she said, setting her wet garments down on top of the towel. She draped the blanket over the back of the couch against and stood up, suggesting, “You should probably change, too.”

“No, I’m alright,” he said. “Can I . . .” He trailed off, gesturing over his shoulder.

“Oh, yeah,” she said, “you can . . . turn around now.” It wouldn’t have really mattered to her if he’d seen her change. Nothing he hadn’t seen before, after all.

When he took a look at her, he looked kind of . . . stupefied? Like seeing her in his clothes was something he thought he would never see again.

“Um . . . I don’t know have class the rest of the day, either,” she lied, “so I can . . . I can stay for a while, if you want.”
“Yeah,” he said. “You should stay. It’s gettin’ bad out there.”

As if to prove his point, thunder rumbled. She laughed a little.

“Miller’s at work,” he said, “and Murphy’s out, so . . .”

So it’s just us? she thought. Perfect. They had a conversation to finish up, and it’d be better if they did that alone.

“You sure you don’t want anything to eat?” he asked, venturing into the kitchen.

“I’m sure.” She wondered if he was trying to feed her because she ate such crappy food when left on her own. Lots of Hot Pockets and other microwavable dinners.

He opened his refrigerator, looked around inside for a moment, and then shut it again. He’s stalling, she realized. He was trying to think of things to do that would put off the rest of their conversation.

“Bellamy, if—if you don’t wanna tell me the rest, you don’t have to,” she said. Because as much as she wanted to know and as much as she believed it was in his best interest to get some things off his chest, it was ultimately up to him. If he told her something, she wanted it to be because he wanted to tell her, not because he felt like he had to.

“It’s just . . . it’s hard for me to talk about how she died,” he admitted. But what he added next surprised her. “Because it’s my fault.”

She frowned, not sure what to make of that. His fault? How?

He dragged one hand through his hair, paced back across the living room, and ended up sitting down on the second to bottom step of the staircase. She took a seat beside him, not sure why he was choosing to sit there when they had the whole couch, or hell, even Murphy’s beanbag at their disposal. When he started talking again, though, she quickly understood the reasoning.

“This is where I told her I loved her, for the first time,” he reminisced. “That was a big deal for me. I’d only ever said it to three people.”

She nodded knowingly. “Your mom, your sister, Roma.”

“Yep. And Gina . . . she said it to me about five months into the relationship. But it took me almost a year. She didn’t rush me; she was patient.”

Patient, indeed. Clarke didn’t know if she would’ve been able to be so patient with something that momentous. “Why did you say it here?” she asked, leaning back against the railing.

“I don’t know. She was just sitting here, tying her shoes so we could go run some errands. And I was just watching her and . . . I just said it.” He smiled, his face taking on that same expression it did when he lost himself in memories of Roma. “She was so happy.”

Of course, Clarke thought. Whether a woman was a girly-girl or a tomboy, there was nothing like getting an ‘I love you’ out of a significant other. When Finn had first said those words to her, she’d been on cloud nine. And then when Lexa had said them, she’d been on, like, cloud ten or something. “I’m sure you made her really happy, Bellamy,” she said, “every single day.”

“I tried,” he said, his smile slowly dissolving. “I really tried.”

Brows furrowed, she leaned forward, trying to predict where this was heading. But she had no idea.
A car accident still seemed like the most logical conclusion, maybe another one where Bellamy had been driving, but if that was the case . . . wouldn’t he be almost petrified of getting behind the wheel these days?

“I surprised her for her birthday,” he went on. “I saved up all this money to be able to take her down to Ocean City for a couple days. You know where that is?”

She nodded, having her own memories of some great family weekends with her mom and dad in that place.

“I mean, there’s the beach, the boardwalk, an amusement park . . . it was gonna be so much fun,” he said. “And I got everyone else to come along, too, so it was this vacation for all of us. And Gina was . . . god, she was so happy. She couldn’t believe we were all goin’ out there for her. She said she’d never had friends like that before.”

Clarke understood the feeling well. Bellamy’s friends were so welcoming, and they were practically their own little family. They definitely had their own vibe, and it was a good one.

He looked away from her, lowered his head, and gulped as the story became increasingly difficult for him to tell. “It didn’t . . . it didn’t quite work out the way I planned.”

Her stomach started to knot up. God, if it was this hard to listen to the story, she couldn’t even imagine how hard it was to tell it.

“Everyone else was down on the boardwalk,” he recalled, “but Gina and I were up in our hotel room. She said she just wanted to spend time with me.” His voice shook, and he started having to blink back tears. “We were just laying there and we were just talking, and then I said . . .” His voice caught for a moment, and he had to swallow the lump in his throat again. “I said, ‘I’m hungry.’” He snorted, almost as if he were angry with himself. “Almost midnight, and I was hungry. So she said she’d go across the street to get me something at the gas station.”

Oh no, Clarke thought. It was playing out like a tragic movie in her mind. Even though she didn’t know what Gina looked like, she saw it happening in her head, playing out like it would have on a screen. And she wanted to push the pause button, to keep her in that room with Bellamy and prevent her from ever going anywhere.

“I’d been working all day,” he said, “and right after work, we all drove there, so I was tired. So I . . .” He squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head as he started to cry. “I let her go. And it was the biggest mistake of my life.”

Clarke clasped her hands over her mouth, trying to keep her own emotions in check. Seeing him so anguished made her feel the same.

“She left,” he said, “and I was still just laying there, and I . . . I was almost asleep when I heard this . . .”

Don’t say it, Clarke thought, desperately hitting that mental pause button. Don’t say it.

“It was just this loud noise,” he choked out, “and I—I didn’t even know for sure what it was at first. But I knew it wasn’t good. So I got outta bed, and I went downstairs, and . . . and I remember getting this really bad gut feeling, ‘cause I knew it came from across the street, and I knew . . .” He voice shook uncontrollably, just like his body had the other night. “I knew that’s where she was. And I knew . . .” He started to cry so hard, she could barely even hear him say the next part. “I knew it was a gunshot.”
Clarke couldn’t contain her own tears. She started to cry right along with him.

“So I ran across the street,” he said, “and . . . and I knew I was too late, but I ran in there anyway and . . .” Tears poured from his eyes. There was no holding them back. “She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Oh my god,” Clarke whispered, her voice muffled by her hands. This wasn’t an accident or an illness. This was . . . murder.

“I saw her. I saw her lying there . . .” he choked out, “. . . in a pool of blood.” That particular memory seemed to break him, understandably, and he just started sobbing bending forward to bury his head in his hands.

Clarke felt sick to her stomach. This was the kind of thing that happened in TV shows, not in real life. Not to anyone she knew.

“God,” he cried. “I see that every day. I can’t . . . I can’t forget it.”

“Bellamy . . .”

“And I tried to go to her to see if there was anything I could do,” he went on, “but the cops were already there at that point, too, and they brought me outside. So I just sat there and waited while the paramedics got there, and then they finally brought her out, but . . . but I couldn’t see her anymore because she was . . .” He trailed off, unable to say it, but he kept making this zipper motion with his hands, and she understood what he was saying. When they brought her out, she was in a body bag.

“They took her away,” he said, “and I had to . . . I had to tell everyone. Because everyone was there, on vacation.”

She winced. This whole thing just got worse and worse.

“Octavia just . . . broke down,” he said, more tears overflowing the moment he mentioned his sister. “I wanted to be strong for her, but I broke down, too. I couldn’t . . . I couldn’t handle it.”

“Of course not,” she said tearfully. “God, Bellamy . . . I’m so sorry.”

“No, I don’t deserve that,” he said quickly. “She was there because of me. I was hungry, remember?”

“That doesn’t make it your fault, though.”

“No, it is,” he insisted. “It is my fault. I mean, at the very least, I could’ve gone with her. Maybe I could’ve . . . I don’t know, I think about that all the time. I protected her once; maybe I could’ve protected her again.”

“Bellamy . . .” She scooted closer to him.

“What kind of boyfriend was I, huh? I mean, I got my girlfriend killed.”

“You did not do that.” She understood why he felt that way, but it was just like he’d said earlier . . . wrong place at the wrong time. He was no more to blame for it than Gina herself was. “Bellamy, there is no one else to blame here besides the person who pulled that trigger.”

“Yeah, sixteen year old kid high on cocaine. Thought it’d be a good idea to rob a gas station,” Bellamy said bitterly. “They caught him. He’s in jail now. Not that it matters. It doesn’t bring her
Clarke thought sadly. There was no justice for something like this. There never would be. The murderer had to live with it, Bellamy and his friends had to live with it, and . . . Gina didn’t get to live with anything. At all.

“Do you get why I can’t handle fireworks, though, Clarke?” he said suddenly. “I know it’s stupid—I know it’s so stupid—but I hear that sound, and it just—it reminds me of that gunshot. I hear it, and I’m right back there. I can’t . . . I can’t talk myself down from it or convince myself it’s harmless. I hear it, and all I can do is remember . . . what I did.”

“What you saw,” she corrected. “You didn’t do that.”

“And when that thing happens to me in the middle of the night . . . it just happens, Clarke. I hear that sound, and it’s like I get trapped back there in that memory, and my body shakes like that ‘cause I’m trying to get out. But I don’t feel it happening, and it’s not even like I’m dreaming about it; it’s just that, somewhere in the back of mind, I’m there. Subconsciously, I’m there. But I don’t mean to do it, and I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” Sniffling, trying to collect herself, she reached over and put her hand on his shoulder. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“It happened a year and a half ago,” he said. “I’m still trying to deal with things, that’s all.”

“You’re doing fine,” she assured him. Just the fact that he could even wake up in the morning and put one foot in front of the other, after everything that had happened in his life, everything he’d seen . . .

She couldn’t imagine seeing someone she cared about so deeply lying on the ground in a pool of blood. Her mom, Raven, Lexa . . . him. It would have crushed her.

“I really am trying,” he said. “I’m trying to move on. And I think most days I do okay, but I keep it all bottled up inside ‘cause I . . . shit, I hate getting like this, Clarke. I don’t wanna be weak, and I don’t want people feeling sorry for me.”

“But Bellamy . . .” She was about to point out that everyone with a heart would feel sorry for him, and that there was nothing weak about him. But he shot to his feet and rushed upstairs before she could get any of that out. She heard him open and then slam the door to his bedroom shut, and then she heard him crying some more.

Bellamy Blake, she realized, felt the need to have control over his life, just like she did with hers. And right now, he was out of control; his emotions were out of control. It couldn’t have been a good feeling, but she hoped it would end up being cathartic for him somehow, that he’d be able to look back on this tomorrow and feel relieved rather than regretful that he’d finally talked about it. In the meantime, though . . . she wasn’t going anywhere.

She practically ran upstairs after him, letting herself into his room, heartbroken to find him just standing there by his bed, holding his head with both hands while his tears continued to fall.

She’d never seen Bellamy look like this before. Ever.

“You know, all the doctors and the counselors and the experts . . . they all say the same thing,” he grumbled sorrowfully. “Everyone says eventually, with time, it’ll get easier. Eventually. But it doesn’t get easier; it never does. I think about them every day. I think about how I tried to take my first girlfriend on a drive, and she died, and how I tried to take my second girlfriend on vacation, and
she died, too. And I don’t know why they’re gone but I’m still here.”

She narrowed her eyes at him worriedly, hoping he wasn’t insinuating anything by that. She made her way towards him, took both his hands in hers, and gazed up at him concernedly.

“Don’t worry, I’m not gonna hurt myself or anything,” he said, as if he were reading her mind. “I’m trying to live my life for them, because I know that’s what they’d want. But Clarke . . .” His bottom lip trembled as he stared at her. “I’m twenty-three years old. And both of the people I fell in love with died.”

Bellamy, was all she could think as she rubbed and squeezed his hands in her own. Oh god, Bellamy.

His whole body started to crumple in on itself, and he sank to the bed. She sank along with him, wrapping her arms around him, pulling him in close so that his head could rest on her shoulder. He cried openly, willingly, freely, and vulnerably, and she cried quietly right along with him. Just like it had nine nights ago, his body shook, but not uncontrollably this time. And again, just like nine nights ago, she held him tightly, unwilling to let go.
Chapter 23

It was still raining when Clarke went downstairs that evening. Bellamy had been resting for hours, and she’d even been able to lie down with him and doze off or a while. She was getting hungry, though, and needed something to drink, too.

Emori had come over and was sitting on the couch with Murphy, watching TV. Miller was in the kitchen, bent over as he dug around the refrigerator, but when he saw Clarke, he stood up straight and asked, “How’s he doin’?”

“Okay,” Clarke replied. It had been a long day for him, a tiring day. “He’s asleep now.”

“Good,” Murphy said.

“Yeah, he needs it,” Miller agreed. He took two water bottles out of the refrigerator and tossed one to Clarke. She managed to catch it, even though catching wasn’t her thing.

“Thanks,” she said appreciatively, unscrewing the lid. She took a drink, savoring the cold taste. She hadn’t eaten or drank much of anything all day. Bellamy was going to need some dinner, too, but . . . what could she even cook for him?

“Do you guys have any leftovers or anything?” she asked.

Miller sat down on the other side of Emori and said, “I’ll make something. I’ll bring you both up a plate."

“Thank you so much.” If dinner was left up to her, it was quite possible she and Bellamy might both starve.

“You think he’s very hungry?” Miller asked.

She shook her head. “Probably not.” He’d actually made himself sick earlier just by talking about everything, remembering.

“Well, I’ll make him something,” Miller said. “Pasta, maybe, or a sandwich.”

“Yeah, sandwich would be good,” Murphy mumbled. He looked up at Clarke and questioned, “So what did he tell you?”

Her mind conjured up images of what she imagined Gina to be like, to look like and to act like, as well as some horrible visions of what it must have been like for Bellamy to see her bleeding out in a gas station. “Everything,” she answered, still kind of overwhelmed by it all. She perched herself on the arm of the couch, murmuring, “I can barely believe it.”

“Yeah, sounds like something out of a movie, huh?” Murphy said. “But it all happened.”

“It was awful,” Emori recalled, staring down at her lap sadly.

It was in that moment that Clarke realized she hadn’t just stirred all of this up for Bellamy again; his friends had lost someone they loved in Gina, too, so if he was remembering it, then they were all remembering it. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I know you guys were close to her, too.”
“Yep,” Murphy said, nodding solemnly. “Part of the family.”

The family, Clarke thought. Yeah. That really was what they were to each other.

“I hope you understand that we weren’t trying to keep anything from you,” Miller said. “You’re part of the family now, too. We wanted to tell you.”

“We did,” Emori agreed emphatically.

“But . . .” Miller winced. “Sometimes it’s hard for any of us to talk about, not just Bellamy.”

Clarke nodded, remembering how difficult it had been for her to talk to anyone—besides Finn—about her dad’s death for the entire year after it happened. “I understand,” she assured them.

“And he made it clear he didn’t wanna talk about it, didn’t ever wanna bring it up,” Miller went on. “I mean, you gotta understand, Clarke, the guy doesn’t even look at pictures of her anymore because it’s too painful for him.”

“Really?” That explained one of her lingering questions then. She’d wondered why she hadn’t seen anything Gina-related in that memory box of his.

“Yeah, it was really rough for a while there,” Miller said. “And it got to the point where he would just shut down any conversation anyone tried to have with him about her. So we respected that. We stopped talking about it because that’s what he wanted. We’re his friends, you know?”

“I know.” She didn’t blame them for their allegiance to him, not in the slightest.

“He hardly ever talks about it even now,” Emori said. “When was the last time?” She asked the question to Miller, but it was Murphy who responded.

“Couple months ago,” he said. “Fourth of July.”

Miller sighed. “Yeah, those fireworks trigger it for him. Other than that, I think he’s been doing pretty good, though.”

“Yeah,” Emori agreed. “He’s made a lot of progress.”

“A lot of progress,” Murphy emphasized. “Do you remember her funeral?”

“That was bad,” Miller said.

“What happened at her funeral?” Clarke cut in.

Miller shrugged. “He couldn’t even go up to her casket. He could barely even stand.”

“And you and I were pallbearers,” Murphy said.

“Octavia got up and read that whole thing about her,” Emori recalled. “God, that was heart-wrenching.”

“Worst day of my life,” Miller said, “so I can only imagine what it was like for Bellamy.”

Clarke glanced upstairs, suddenly eager to get back up there to him. If he woke up, she wanted to be there.

“I think I’m probably just gonna stay here tonight,” she said, even though she hadn’t exactly brought
a change of clothes or her toothbrush or anything with her. “Do you guys think that’s a good idea?”

“Oh, yeah,” Emori replied right away.

“Definitely,” Murphy agreed.

“Yeah, that’s probably exactly what he needs right now,” Miller said. “You should go be with him.”

“Yeah, we’re fine down here,” Murphy said, even though they were all much more melancholy than usual. “Go be with Bellamy.”

She nodded, got to her feet, and headed back upstairs. Right now, being with Bellamy was all she really wanted to do.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Bellamy didn’t exactly jolt awake. Jolting was the kind of thing you did when you were having a nightmare, and surprisingly, he hadn’t been having one. He hadn’t really been dreaming at all, actually. Going days without a decent night’s sleep had definitely taken its toll on him, and talking about Gina today . . . well, that was pretty emotionally taxing. He’d been so exhausted, he couldn’t even remember lying down in that bed. But that was where he woke up, and he woke up slowly.

It was dark in the room, the moon outside serving as the only light. Rain still trickled steadily down his window, and in the distance, thunder rumbled. Next to him, Clarke stirred.

Clarke. Next to him. His mind had to take a moment to register that fact. Her side of the bed wasn’t empty. For the first night in over a week, she was there, curled up on her side, wearing one of his t-shirts now instead of his sweatshirt. She must have been tired, too. He’d told her about a lot of things today. It was a lot for anyone to process.

She hadn’t left, though. She’d been there with him all day.

He glanced over at his clock and saw that it was barely after midnight. He felt like he’d been asleep for hours, though. Probably had been. There was a plate of food next to his clock, along with a full glass of water, so he sat up and took a drink. He hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast, so he was hungry, too. He just prayed to God Clarke hadn’t been the one to cook.

He grabbed the plate, willing to eat that pasta even if it was completely cold, but when he picked up his fork, he noticed that his hand was shaking. He couldn’t even hold it steady.

What the hell? he thought. But it really wasn’t all that confusing. He’d gotten pretty worked up today, understandably. But if he was still shaking . . . then that meant he wasn’t done.

Dammit. He put the plate aside again and got out of bed, shuffling towards his window. He looked down at the street, which seemed to be a little river right now. Nobody was out driving in this. Nobody would be. It was dead out there. It was very . . . very dead.

The sound of the rain pitter-pattering on the window lulled him back into his memories, and he remembered another rainy night, one curled up with Gina, hands wrapped around her stomach while he spooned her from behind. He remembered the smell of her shampoo when he nuzzled his face against the back of her neck. He remembered it all, but not as well as he used to.

“Bellamy?”

He kept his eyes focused out the window, even when Clarke said his name. He heard her sitting up,
and he felt bad that he may have woken her.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

He didn’t even bother trying to answer. The lump in the back of his throat wouldn’t let him say anything.

The mattress squeaked as she got off of it, and she came to stand behind him, gently touching his shoulder.

Finally, he found his words. “There’s something I didn’t tell you,” he confessed, staring out the window at nothing in particular. “I’ve never told anyone before. Not my mom, not Miller, not Murphy. Not even Octavia.”

She moved around to his side, taking her hand off of him, staring at him intently. He could see the confusion on her face out of the corner of his eye.

His heart beat out of control in his chest. The words fought in his throat, but he pushed them up and out. “Gina was pregnant.”

Clarke completely froze, saying nothing.

He pictured his hands on his girlfriend’s stomach, lying in bed with her the night after she’d told him the good news. She’d said something about the rain being the baby’s lullaby, and then she’d fallen asleep, too.

He hadn’t been able to sleep that night. He’d been too excited.

“She was about six weeks along,” he revealed, trying to picture that small, barely-there bump, the one his hands had fit over so easily. No one else had even noticed it, and if she hadn’t told him, he might not have noticed it, either. “We just found out a couple days before we went on that vacation,” he said. “We were gonna wait and tell everyone the next night. Because that was her actual birthday.” He smiled wistfully, wishing they’d gotten that chance. “We were gonna surprise them, let ’em know we were having a baby.”

Clarke finally moved, but only enough to take in a deep, shaky breath. Her body language alone said it all: She was horrified.

“It wasn’t planned, obviously,” he admitted. “She was twenty-four, I was twenty-two.” He remembered feeling nervous for a minute until the elation had set in, and then he’d just dropped to his knees, hugged her, and kissed her stomach. “But I was happy,” he added. “I was ready to be a dad.” He hadn’t gotten to experience the thrill of it for long, but while he had . . . it’d been the best feeling in the world. And now all he could do was remember.

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“Ta-da!” Gina waddled into the bedroom with a pillow stuffed underneath her t-shirt. “What do you think?”

Bellamy sprawled out on the hotel bed, taking in the sight. “Damn, that happened fast.”

“Not yet.” She took the pillow out and tossed it onto the bed.

“Ah, give it a couple more months, though.”
“I know. I’m dreading it.” She crawled in beside him, curly brown hair sprawled out on the pillowcase. “Aren’t you?”

“Dreading it?” He shook his head. “No way. It’s gonna be awesome.”

“You want me to look like a hot air balloon?”

“Yeah, I can’t wait.” He lifted up her shirt and smoothed his hand against her stomach, eager to see it expand and get rounder as the baby grew.

“Is this a primal man thing?” she asked.

“I think it’s a primal man thing, yeah.” He kissed her, still rubbing her belly.

“Mmm, I love you,” she purred against his lips.

“I love you, too.” He was glad they hadn’t gone out with their friends tonight. He was tired, and he just wanted to stay at the hotel with her. “And I love you, whoever you are,” he added, sliding down on the bed so that he could press a kiss to her stomach. He stared at it in awe, amazed that they actually had a baby in there, and asked her, “Do you think it can hear me?”

“No,” she said. “Not yet.”

“Hmm.” That wasn’t going to stop him from talking, though. He pressed his mouth against her stomach and whispered, “Hey, kiddo. It’s your dad. I love you, you hear that?” He knew it didn’t, but by the time this kid came out, he was going to have talked to it for hours. “I wanna feel it kick,” he said, pressing the side of his head to her stomach.

“It’s not gonna do that for a long time.”

“You never know.” Last night, he’d gotten online and done some research. Some mothers could feel their babies kick at sixteen weeks. The sooner the better as far as he was concerned.

“Oh, you are gonna be such a good father,” she said, stroking his hair.

He tilted his head back to look at her. “You think so?”

“Yes.” She smiled sweetly. “If it’s a little girl, she’s gonna be such a Daddy’s girl. The apple of your eye. Just like Octavia was.”

He smiled, too, picturing that. God, he’d love a daughter, especially if she was just like her mother. “I know how to braid hair,” he offered, just so she knew he wouldn’t be totally useless with a girl.

“And if it’s a boy,” she went on, “I bet you’re gonna be one of those football dads who never misses a game.”

Football, wrestling, the freakin’ chess tournament . . . hell, he’d be there for all of it.

“And you’ll make sure he grows up to be a good man,” she predicted, “just like you.”

He lifted his head off her stomach, gazing down at it again, still mesmerized that there was a part of him in there. It was a huge responsibility, but he wasn’t scared. “I wanna be a really good dad,” he said, determined to do all the things with his child that his father had never done with him. He’d be there to chaperone every dance, to give driving lessons. He’d pack up school lunches every morning and cook dinner every single night. He wanted to do it all. He couldn’t wait. “I kinda wanna be the best dad ever.”
“You will be,” she said, and she sounded so sure. “Our baby’s so lucky to have you.”

No, I’m the lucky one, he thought, but it was good to know that there was some truth to what she was saying. He wouldn’t be perfect, because no father ever was, but he wasn’t going to be some deadbeat dad, either. He wasn’t a loser. He wasn’t any of the things of his own absentee father was. Not only could he do this, but he wanted to.

“Are you nervous?” he asked her. Because she hadn’t had it easy growing up, either. This was just as important to her as it was to him.

“No,” she answered without hesitation. “Because I have you. And I know you’ll take care of me.” She put her hand on top of his, stroking her thumb over the back of his knuckles. “Of both of us.”

I will, he thought. I will take care of you. He’d start by getting her a ring, putting it on her finger where it belonged.

He moved back up to the top of the bed, lying down next to her again, and gave his girlfriend another quick kiss. Even though it was late, his stomach rumbled, and he murmured, “I’m hungry.”

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Bellamy was surprised he wasn’t crying. Memories assaulted his mind, some of them good, some of them horrible. He must have already cried too much today, because his eyes felt dry.

“Gina was shot in the stomach,” he told Clarke, his insides churning as he thought about what that had meant for their child. “It hit a major organ. She died . . .” No, that wasn’t right. But he wasn’t used to telling this part of the story, so he had to correct himself. “They died . . . almost instantly.” There was no comfort to be found in that, though, and that was what all the doctors and examiners and even paramedics on the scene had told him. Not instantly, but almost instantly. She’d died almost instantly. That meant she’d probably been in pain, probably been so afraid. And he hadn’t even been there with her.

Beside him, Clarke seemed to have been rendered speechless. She just stood there, eyes wide, mouth opening and closing but never saying anything.

“I had a child,” he stated, and it felt so strange to say it out loud. “And then it was just gone.” It was gone just like how Gina was gone, and how Roma was gone. Suddenly, unexpectedly, unfairly. Except this was different, because that child hadn’t ever gotten to live in the first place. “I would be a dad right now if . . .” He trailed off, swallowing hard. He thought about it all the time, how different his life would be if Gina hadn’t gone across the street, or if he hadn’t taken her there in the first place. But none of his friends knew about any of those thoughts, and it was better for them if they didn’t. “Please don’t tell anyone,” he begged, shocked that he’d even told her. “I don’t want anyone to know.”

Clarke looked startled by the whole thing, but she quickly promised, “I won’t say anything.”

“It’s just . . . it was hard enough for them anyway,” he said. “And they all felt bad for me. I don’t wanna put them through any more of it.”

“I won’t tell them,” she said again.

Good, he thought, breathing an inward sigh of relief. Good.

“You didn’t . . . you didn’t have to tell me, though,” she stammered.
“I wanted to.” At this point, he was tired of holding it in. He needed to tell someone, and she was willing to listen, just like she’d promised she would be. “The only other person who knew . . .” He gulped sorrowfully. “. . . is gone.”

Clarke just kept looking at him, not moving much for a few seconds, until . . . all of a sudden, her whole body just crumpled forward, and she started to cry, holding one hand over her face.

“Clarke?” He put one hand on her back.

“I’m sorry,” she said, waving her hand in front of her face. “I’m supposed to be the one comforting you, not the other way around.”

“You’re fine.” He was okay. In some ways, having it all out in the open now . . . it felt better than he’d thought it would, like a huge weight had just been lifted off his chest and now he could breathe again. But she was hearing it all for the first time, and that was probably very overwhelming. “It’s a lot to take in in one day,” he empathized, “I know.”

“Bellamy . . .” She looked into his eyes, blinking back more tears, and shook her head in astonishment. “You are the strongest person I know.”

He shook his head, protesting, “I’m not strong. I keep all this stuff buried because I can’t deal with it.”

“But you’re dealing with it now,” she was quick to point out. “You deal with it every day.”

“Some days better than others.”

“I don’t know how . . .” She stopped mid-sentence, lowering her head as more tears fell. “God, I had no idea. And here I thought losing my dad was hard.”

“That was hard.” He wiped the tears off her cheeks and assured her, “You’re strong, too, Clarke.”

“Yeah, but you . . .” She put her hands on his shoulders, staring at his chest as though she couldn’t look him in the eye.

“Yeah, but you . . .” She put her hands on his shoulders, staring at his chest as though she couldn’t look him in the eye. “You lost Roma and Gina and . . .” Shudderingly, she exhaled. “You had a child, Bellamy.”

A child. That knowledge still made him feel dizzy to this day. “Yeah, I did.” He didn’t have anything to remember it by, though, not one single thing. “I just wish I knew what he—or she—would’ve looked like,” he said. “I don’t have anything to picture in my mind.” Boy or girl, it would’ve had his skin tone, he assumed, maybe his dark hair. That stuff seemed pretty hereditary. But it definitely would have had Gina’s eyes. And her smile. And hopefully the same kind of personality and a whole bunch of her other good traits. “We never even got a sonogram,” he said regretfully. “All I know is it was the size of a sweet pea. That’s what I read.”

She balled up his shirt, clutching it tightly in her hands.

“I never did get to feel it kick, though,” he lamented. That was supposed to feel like popcorn popping, for the mom at least. (He’d read that online, too.) He wasn’t sure what it was supposed to feel like to the dad.

“I was supposed to take care of them,” he said, wishing he’d been able to. “That’s what fathers do. That’s not what my father did, but that’s what I was gonna do.”

“Bellamy, you can’t take care of everyone,” she whispered.
“No, but I should’ve taken care of them.” If there was anyone in his life he’d owed that to, it was the son or daughter he’d never gotten to know. But he’d failed. And he had to live with that knowledge for the rest of his life. “Anyway.” He flapped his arms against his sides and took a step back from her. “That’s it.” There it was, the whole story. There were no other demons in his past or tragic skeletons in his closet. He’d told her all there was to tell, and in a way . . . it felt freeing.

He lifted up his hand, the one he’d used to hold his fork. It wasn’t shaking anymore. He wasn’t shaking. And it finally seemed like the rain was letting up outside. Finally.

“Why did you tell me this?” Clarke asked, sounding genuinely shocked that he had.

It wasn’t just convenience; he was sure about that. It was something more, something he didn’t even have to think twice about. “Because I think you’re my best friend,” he answered finally, not even embarrassed to admit it. It was what it was, and he knew it. Four months ago, he’d met this girl in a Walmart parking lot. And now, somehow, some way . . . she knew something about him that no one else did. So that could only mean one thing.

Clarke Griffin was his best friend.

Fresh tears sprung to her eyes, but not the sad kind this time. Now she just looked . . . touched. When her arms wrapped around his neck, his encircled her waist, and he pulled her in close, comforted by the feel of her. Bending his head, he buried his face against her neck and just hugged her, grateful to have her there. It was everything he wanted from her in that moment, and exactly what he needed.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

At this point, you might be asking yourself, how is it possible that there are still 40 chapters? While some may be more pivotal than others, trust me when I say that there is a plan. There is a journey. :) Thank you for the feedback, as always!

Chapter 24

“Clarke, wake up.”

“Hmm?” Clarke blinked her eyes open when she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder, shaking her awake. Bellamy stood over her, dressed in different clothes than he’d fallen asleep in. “Are you okay?” she asked, immediately propping herself up.

“Yeah,” he said. “I gotta go to work.”

She couldn’t keep the surprise out of her voice. “You’re working today?” Yesterday had been such an emotional drain on him; she’d assumed he would take another day off.

“Well, yeah, I have to,” he said. Typical Bellamy, right back at his responsibilities. “Do you need me to drive you back to campus so you can get your car?”

Oh, yeah, that was still sitting there in the commuter parking lot, wasn’t it? She’d totally forgotten. “Probably,” she said. “Or maybe Miller could just take me.”

“He already left for work,” Bellamy informed her. “So you either go with me or Murphy.”

Him or Murphy? No decision to be made there. “I’m coming,” she said, tossing the covers off as she swung her legs over the side of the bed.

The drive back to campus was . . . kind of a quiet one for them. But not the awkward kind of quiet. It actually felt sort of comfortable. He made a few comments about how wet it was outside and about how she had to be careful driving home in case any streets were flooded. He even offered to follow her.

As they got closer to campus, he cleared his throat and said, “Hey, can you promise me something?”

She already knew what he was going to say, and she’d already promised it. “I won’t tell anyone, Bellamy, I swear.”

“No, something else.”

She frowned. What else was there?

“Promise me everything I told you yesterday won’t change the way you think of me,” he implored.

She studied him closely, seeing something new in the lines of his face now, in his eyes. She’d known Bellamy Blake had been through a lot in his life, but she’d had no idea just how much had happened
to him. “I can’t promise that,” she said, looking out the window.

“Why not?”

“Because it did change the way I think of you.” He couldn’t just expect her to forget that he’d been a father once, that he’d had a child and lost a child in the blink of an eye. “Knowing everything you’ve been through . . .” She smiled at him softly. “Now I respect you even more.”

He cast a quick glance at her and then turned into the parking lot, seemingly unwilling to take any credit for enduring all that he had. As far as she was concerned, though, he was one of the bravest people she knew. In fact, the only person she could think of who’d been so brave in the face of such an overwhelming obstacle in life . . . had been her dad.

He parked close to her car, and they both got out of the truck. He came around to her side, muttering, “Thank you. For listening,” as he kicked at the ground.

It’d been one of the saddest stories she’d ever listened to in her life, but she didn’t regret offering herself up to be that soundboard for him. “I’m glad you told me,” she said. “I just wish . . .” She swallowed the emotion that picturing the shooting conjured up in her mind. “I wish none of that had happened. I can’t even imagine . . .”

“Don’t imagine,” he cut in, shaking his head. “You don’t want to.”

He was right, she didn’t want to. But imagining kind of went hand-in-hand with feeling as sympathetic as she did. Bellamy hadn’t just lost another girlfriend, not that that would have been easy on him. He’d lost his own flesh and blood, or at least something that would have become his flesh and blood over time. It wasn’t hard to picture Bellamy as a father. He had such a big heart, and his family was everything to him. Any child of his would have been the most loved child in the world. She couldn’t help but imagine how elated he’d been to find out the big news. He’d probably started looking up baby names that very same night.

“I don’t know how you do it,” she said, in awe of his resilience. He’d lost a literal part of himself that night in Ocean City, and he’d never get it back.

“Do what?” he asked.

“Everything.” He’d been in love twice and buried the girls he loved twice, along with some other little person, or at least the beginning of a little person. And nobody else even knew that person existed. “You’ve lost so much,” she said empathetically, “and yet you’re still this charming, charismatic guy everyone wants to be around.”

He shook his head modestly. “I don’t know about that.”

“Yes, you are. You’re like the leader. You have this magnetic personality. You work your ass off every day and take care of everyone else.” Sometimes he took care of her, even when he didn’t have to. It was like it was second nature for him. “You laugh, and you smile, and you haven’t let your past destroy you. But it could’ve.”

“Yeah, well, it’s left me with some issues,” he acknowledged.

“Hey. We’ve all got issues.” His issues were traumatic in nature, though. A weaker man would have been done in by them.

“Yeah, at least I don’t have dancing issues like you,” he managed to joke. “Or cooking issues.”
She laughed little. It felt good to laugh after how heavy yesterday had been.

“For real, though, it’s . . . it’s hard,” he admitted. “It affects me.”

“Well, of course.” How could it not?

“I mean, I know a big part of the reason why I’m so protective of Octavia is because I’m scared to death I’m gonna lose her, too,” he muttered. “So backing off and letting Lincoln be the one to take care of her . . . I hate that. I wanna take care of her.”

She touched his cheek, because that ambition was as sweet as it was naïve. “I’m pretty sure Octavia could take care of herself,” she pointed out.

“No, not financially. But . . .” He sighed resignedly. “It’s okay. I gotta let up on her, I know that.”

“Yeah, but . . .” Knowing what she knew now, she could totally understand where he was coming from when he went into overprotective big brother mode. He’d probably always been like that, to a degree, but suffering loss brought it out in him even more. “You’re doing your best.”

“I’m doing my best,” he agreed, shrugging.

She narrowed her eyes at him, staring at him closely, still trying to figure him out. She knew so much now, more than even his own sister did, but there were still some parts of him that had her curious.

“Is it . . .” She had a feeling this had affected his other relationships, too, and she wanted to ask about it, but she wasn’t sure if she even should.

“What?” he prompted.

Well, too late to back out now. She decided to ask, hoping she wasn’t overstepping her bounds. “Is losing Roma and losing Gina and losing that baby . . . is that what made you decide you don’t ever wanna be a in a real relationship again?”

He pressed his lips together tightly, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“Define real.”

“A romantic relationship.”

“Honestly?” He thought about it for a moment, then nodded. “Yeah. After I lost Gina, I decided I wasn’t gonna risk that again. I can’t . . .” He jaw tightened as he shook his head. “I can’t go through that with anyone else. You understand that, right?”

“Yeah. I understand.” She hadn’t questioned it before, and she definitely wasn’t about to question it now. Learning all that she had about him yesterday . . . it shed a lot of light on why Bellamy was the way he was. She felt like she knew him so much better now. “Alright, well . . .” She could have stayed there and kept talking to him all day, but she knew she was preventing him from going about his routine. “I better get you to work, I guess.”

“Yeah.” He picked up her hand in his and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Thanks for staying with me yesterday.”

“No problem.” Even though she had class, she wouldn’t have minded staying with him today, too, just in case he needed it. He looked like he was gonna be fine, but just in case he wasn’t . . . she would have loved to have been with him today.

She walked a couple parking spaces down to where her car was at, reaching into her purse to grasp her keys. She fumbled them around in her hand, not sure if it was even worth it to try to sit through
class today. And work . . . she could call in sick. Dante would understand.

“I could stay with you today, too,” she offered, whirling around. “If you want.” But if he wanted space, she could give that to him. Whatever he needed.

“Yeah?” he said.

“Yeah. I just need to go home and change first.” She plucked at the t-shirt—his t-shirt—she currently had on. That was definitely the kind of thing she could wear around the house, but maybe not out in public.

“Okay,” he said. Since he didn’t even try to convince her to go to class, she figured that meant he hadn’t been very eager to part ways with her today, either. “I hope you don’t mind watching me fix toilets and stuff.”

She would have rather watched him walk around the campus library and get lost in the history section. But watching him work was fine, too. “I don’t mind,” she said, smiling at him.

And even though yesterday he’d cried harder than she’d ever seen him cry before, today, he managed to smile back.

Bellamy followed her back to her place and waited out in her living room while she went into her bedroom and changed. They hustled out to his truck after that and headed back to his neighborhood, where a woman down the street needed a doorbell installed. How Bellamy knew how to install doorbells, Clarke wasn’t sure—probably one of those things he’d taught himself over the years. So she just hung back and watched him work, trying not to get in his way.

After that, they visited the home of an elderly couple whose sink was clogged. He seemed to do a lot of jobs for them, because the woman got up when he came in, rolled her walker towards him, and gave him a kiss on the cheek like a grandma would. When he offered to unclog their sink free of charge, she said, “Oh, bless you, Bellamy. You don’t have to do that for us.”

“It’s not a problem,” he assured her.

“Oh, thank you.” She hugged him, and Clarke felt herself melt a little bit inside.

The old man in the living room recliner mumbled something that sounded like a thank you, then told his wife to come back in there because their “program” was almost on.

His wife was still busy talking to Bellamy, though. “And who’s this?” she asked, motioning to Clarke. “A new girlfriend, perhaps?”

Clarke laughed nervously. “Hi, I’m Clarke,” she introduced herself. “I’m his friend.”

“She’s gonna help me unclog your sink,” Bellamy said, handing her a wrench. “She wants to learn the business.”

“I do?” Clarke looked at the tool in her hand, no idea what to do with it.

“Yeah, I’m gonna teach you,” he said. “I’m good a teacher.”

They tried to keep it down in the kitchen, because the adorable couple seemed to like playing The Price Is Right in the living room together; but at one point, when water started to squirt out of the drain, Bellamy boomed, “What the hell did you do?” and had to take the wrench from her. “Back away! Back away!” He thankfully managed to fix her mistake, the couple was too absorbed in their
show to notice, and they laughed about it on their way out. If the art career failed, Clarke decided she’d have to rule out a career in plumbing. She didn’t have the skills for it.

Bellamy got a phone call after that from someone named Zoe who seemed to be a regular customer, and he whipped a U-turn on the street, telling her he could squeeze her in today. Clarke heard her professing her thanks over the phone, and when he ended the call, she eagerly asked, “What’s next?” This job, as much as it went over her head, was not boring. He did so many different things, so there was a definite spontaneity to it.

“Clogged toilet,” he replied.

“Ugh.” She made a face of disgust. “I’m not helping you with that one.”

“Yeah, it’s gonna be gross,” he predicted. “Zoe’s cool, though. I went to high school with her. You’ll like her.”

When they got to Zoe’s house, Clarke was struck by how small it was. Bellamy’s house was old, sure, but it was pretty big. This was a one-story box, pretty much, and when Clarke walked inside, she couldn’t believe how cramped it was.

At first, Clarke thought the girl walking around the living room might be the daughter of the mother living here. But she quickly realized that, no, she was an adult. Zoe was young, but she had a crying baby on her hip.

Clarke nearly froze. A crying baby.

“Hey, have you met Lukas yet?” she asked Bellamy.

“No, I heard about him, though. Congratulations,” Bellamy said, smiling and waving at the kid.

“Here, you can hold him if you want,” she offered.

Oh god, Clarke thought. In light of everything he’d revealed last night, was that such a good idea? Bellamy was completely calm about it, though. He held that baby and laughed when his tiny hand wrapped around his thumb. “Wow, he’s amazing,” he said. “I bet Sterling’s happy.”

“Sterling’s . . . overwhelmed,” Zoe admitted. “But we’ll make it.”

“Yeah, you will,” Bellamy agreed, making a face at the baby boy. The baby giggled, and Bellamy handed him back to his mother, congratulating her again.

Clarke breathed a small sigh of relief. He’d done it. He’d been fine.

Since the toilet job was disgusting, she stayed out in the living room while Bellamy got to work. She was allowed to hold the baby, too, which was less natural for her than it was for Bellamy. She wasn’t good with kids. When little Lukas started to cry, she sent his mother a look of panic, and she took him into the bedroom and settled him down. When she came back out, she mumbled, “I swear, he’s gonna make me grey before I’m thirty.”

“Yeah, I bet he’s a lot of work,” Clarke empathized.

“Ah, he’s worth it.” Zoe sat down beside her after Bellamy yelled something from the bathroom—it sounded like he was actually yelling at the toilet—and then grumbled, “Son of a bitch.”

“You think he’s gonna be able to fix that?” Clarke asked. It seemed to be taking a while.
“Oh, yeah,” Zoe replied confidently. “He fixes everything.”

Almost everything, Clarke thought, looking down at her lap. There were some things even Bellamy couldn’t fix.

He finally did win the battle with the toilet, emerging from the bathroom with a small block in his hand, the kind a child would play with. “Maybe don’t let Lukas near the toilet,” he suggested, handing it to Zoe.

“That kid . . .” She shook her head in dismay and turned to Clarke. “Grey before I’m thirty, right?”

Clarke laughed.

Money was definitely tight for Zoe and her family, and Bellamy must have known that, because when she asked how much she owed him, he just said, “Whatever you can manage.” She opened up her wallet and took out a twenty. Clarke wasn’t a plumbing expert by any means, but she knew that wasn’t enough. Bellamy didn’t make it an issue, though. He pocketed the twenty, reminded Zoe to call him whenever she needed his help, and he and Clarke left.

“Nice to meet you, Clarke!” Zoe called on the way out.

“Yeah, you, too.” Clarke smiled at her and waved goodbye.

When they got out to the truck, she asked Bellamy, “Okay, so how much did she really owe you?”

He shrugged, twisting the key in the ignition. “A clog like that? Probably at least one-thirty.”

Clarke’s eyebrows shot up. “And you took twenty?”

“Well, you saw her house. She’s struggling, you know? They got a kid. What am I gonna do, break their bank?”

“No.” It was just extremely generous of him, that was all. He’d worked three jobs so far today and barely had any money to show for it, because that first customer was the only one who’d actually paid him what was owed. Not many people would be willing to be as understanding as Bellamy was being.

“It’s okay, though,” he said. “Diana’s got me workin’ on remodeling her whole kitchen now. I’m gonna make a lot for that.”

Since they had about an hour until they needed to be at Diana’s, Bellamy took her out for lunch. Nothing fancy, just Subway. He must have gone there for lunch a lot, because all they asked was, “The usual?” when he walked in, and he gave them a nod. “What do you want?” he asked Clarke.

“Oh, um . . .” She surveyed the menu, unfamiliar with the options. “I don’t know.”

“Go for the meatball sub,” he suggested. “I know how you like meaty balls.”

She rolled her eyes, happy to be the target for his teasing again. It meant he was in a good mood. When it was her turn to order, she did indeed go with his suggestion.

Of course Bellamy paid for her meal, too, even though she was plenty capable of paying for herself. She took out her wallet and everything, but before she could even pull out any cash, he gestured to both their sandwiches and told the cashier, “I’m payin’ for both of these,” and Clarke knew better than to even try to argue with him. He got her a chocolate chip cookie, too, so within a minute, that
twenty dollars he’d just gotten for unclogging the toilet was nearly cut in half.

They sat down at one of the tables and ate, and even though she didn’t know what was even all on his sandwich, he seemed to be enjoying it. He was already halfway done when she still had yet to chomp down on her first meatball.

“So what do think has been the most riveting job of the day?” he asked.

She finished chewing what was in her mouth and replied, “Well, the doorbell was kinda cool. ’cause it actually rang and everything.”

“That was the goal.”

“But I like the old couple. They were sweet.”

“Yeah, grandmas love me,” he bragged.

“And then the last one . . .” She trailed off, not sure if she should even talk about the last one. But how ironic was it that he’d held a baby not even twelve hours after confessing he’d almost had one of his own?

“You can say it,” he urged her.

With that permission, she found her words. “Okay, I promise I’m not gonna bring this up every time we hang out together,” she assured him, “but . . . what’s that like for you? Seeing a baby, holding a baby . . .”

He took a drink, nodding, but said nothing.

“Is that weird?” she asked. “Or hard?”

He shrugged. “Not really. I mean, I think about it, yeah, but . . . people have babies. I gotta deal with it.”

“Just like that?” He made it sound simple.

“What choice do I have?” He set the rest of his sandwich down and leaned back in his chair. “It’s like when Murphy and Emori have their anniversary here next month. Two years. What am I gonna do, sit there and be jealous ’cause I never got two years with Gina?” He shook his head. “I can’t do that. That’s debilitating.”

“It’d be understandable, though,” she pointed out.

“Yeah, but it’d be miserable.” He linked his hands behind his head, locking eyes with her. “You don’t have to worry about me, Clarke.”

“I know. But you said you think about this stuff every day.”

“I do,” he confirmed. “This whole time that I’ve known you, I’ve thought about it every day. And I’ve been fine, haven’t I?”

“Yeah.” With the exception of those firework nights, he’d been fine.

“See? I can think about it without dwelling on it,” he stated confidently. “It doesn’t mean it’s easy, but it’s what I have to do.”
“I guess,” she said, looking down at her sandwich. She wasn’t quite as hungry as he was, so hopefully he’d finish hers off. “If you ever do wanna dwell, though . . .” she said, lifting her eyes to meet his again.

“Then you’re here for me,” he finished. “I know.”

She smiled, glad he knew. Yes, she was here for him. And she wasn’t going anywhere.

That afternoon, they went to that god-awful Diana woman’s house. Since this wasn’t a quick job, Clarke couldn’t very well sit and wait in the car, but she didn’t get a particularly welcoming feeling from Diana. The woman did not seem to like her, if only because she was a girl who had shown up with Bellamy. She even brazenly asked Bellamy at one point, “Why is she here? She doesn’t need to be here,” to which he replied, “She’s my apprentice,” and brought her into the kitchen with him. He had to pretend to be teaching her things for the rest of the day, and she had to say things like, “Hmm,” and “I see,” and pretend to be interested in learning them. But good god, it was all just going over her head.

Diana didn’t like her, but she definitely liked Bellamy. And he played that up to his full advantage, of course, taking his shirt off while he worked. Diana practically stood around and salivated over him. Clarke wasn’t jealous or anything. That woman could look all she wanted to, but at the end of the day, Clarke was the one who got to actually feel that beautiful body of his.

Or . . . maybe not. She wondered about that while he worked on installing new cabinets and she pretended to help. Sure, she’d been hanging out with Bellamy all day, but he hadn’t kissed her yet. It was possible that that kind of intimacy was something they’d have to . . . get back.

She hoped it wouldn’t take too long.

By the time they left, it was 5:00 in the afternoon, already getting dark outside, and Clarke felt exhausted, even though she hadn’t really done much of anything today. Bellamy drove her back to her apartment, which was kind of disappointing. She would have much rather gone back with him to his place. But he walked her upstairs and said, “Thanks for hanging out with me today,” as she pushed open the door to her apartment.

“Yeah, it was fun.” She set her keys down on her counter and spun around, wondering if there was some possibility that he might want to stay here tonight. He did that once in a while, even had a toothbrush in her bathroom.

“Alright, well . . .” An unusual awkwardness began to encompass them, like neither one of them knew quite how to say goodbye for the night. “I guess I should go,” he said.

*Should you?* she wanted to say. But “Okay,” was all that came out.

“Okay.” He just stood there for a few seconds, not moving, until finally, he looked down at his feet, repeated, “Okay,” and said, “Bye,” on his way out the door.

“Bye.” She wrinkled her forehead in confusion once that door was shut and she was alone in there. What a letdown. They’d had a good day together, a surprisingly lighthearted one in the aftermath of a very intense night. Why did it have to just end so quickly?

She threw her purse down on her couch and sulked into her bedroom, grabbing her sketchbook off her desk. She was already in the middle of one Bellamy sketch, but she had to draw him crying now, too. It wasn’t pleasant, but seeing him so vulnerable like that had really been a beautiful thing.

She’d already resigned herself to another night alone with her drawings when she heard her phone
And it was Bellamy’s ringtone, which, yes, was “You Sexy Thing” by Hot Chocolate. She bolted out into the living room, grabbed her phone out her purse, and answered, “Hey.”

“Hey.” There was a long pause, though nowhere near as long as his silent voicemail had been. Finally, he asked, “You wanna stay with me tonight?”

She breathed out a heavy exhale of relief. Did she want to? Now what kind of question was that?

Murphy and Miller were both home when they got there, planted on the couch in the midst of yet another video game. “Hey, man,” Murphy said, eyes barely leaving the screen.

Miller, however, noticed Clarke walk in behind Bellamy, and nudged his friend.

Murphy actually stopped playing when he saw her, a rare feat for him, and said, “Oh, hey, Clarke,” a hint of a surprise in his voice.

“Hey.”

“She’s got a bag,” Miller noticed.

Clarke readjusted her backpack on her shoulders.

“That means she’s staying,” Murphy proclaimed. “Pause the game. Let’s go shout it from the rooftop: Clarke Griffin is in the house tonight.”

“I was in the house last night, too,” she pointed out. Last night had been an extreme circumstance, though. This was . . . kind of back to normal.

“I’m gonna kick their asses for a minute,” Bellamy said, snatching the video game controller out of Murphy’s hand.

“Okay. I’ll be upstairs.” She left the boys to their toys and walked up to his bedroom, happy to be back under that roof under a more familiar circumstance. Sure, they probably weren’t going to sleep together tonight, not in the sexual way. But she could still fall asleep next to him and wake up next to him without worrying that he was going to start convulsing in the middle of the night. Today had reassured her that he really was the same old Bellamy. The only difference now was that she knew him better.

She didn’t bother unpacking her clothes, because that was probably a bit presumptuous. She did put her toothbrush back in its holder on the sink, though, and wasted no time stripping down and getting into the shower. She hadn’t showered since yesterday morning, so she was definitely feeling a little gross.

The water was warm on her skin, and she felt so relaxed that she didn’t even feel like shampooing her hair. She just stood there, letting the water rain down on her, rolling her neck from side to side, working out the kinks in her muscles. This shower, in all reality, was nowhere near as nice as hers was. Hers had a sliding door, the temperature didn’t fluctuate as much, and it was bigger. But she was so glad to be back here tonight that she didn’t care how small it was, or that she constantly had to readjust the temperature of the water so it didn’t get either too warm or too hot.

She’d just turned the knob slightly towards the left to warm it up a bit when Bellamy pulled back the curtain, startling her.

“Sorry,” he said. “I just heard you in here, and I thought . . .” His eyes dropped down to take in her naked body without shame. He didn’t even try to disguise it. “Can I join you?” he asked.
She was pretty sure her heart rate must have doubled in that moment, because being naked around Bellamy was one thing, but being naked while he was naked . . . another thing entirely.

“Sure,” she said, trying to play it cool even though she was freaking out inside.

He put the curtain back in place, giving her a chance to mouth, ‘Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god,’ silently while he took his clothes off. She could hear him unzipping his jeans, pushing them down to the floor. She heard the waistband of his underwear snap before they came sliding down, too. She’d let herself imagine this while Bellamy had worked shirtless in Diana’s kitchen today, but she hadn’t allowed herself to get her hopes up.

*Shit*, she thought, looking down at legs. She hadn’t shaved her them in nearly six days, so the early stages of a fur coat were happening down there. But at least . . . other parts of her were shaved.

When he pulled back the curtain again, she couldn’t even really look at him, because she had that weak in the knees feeling going on, the same feeling she’d felt when she first met him. She moved around to make room for him, and eventually, she did get a glimpse of that gorgeous body of his. First it was his broad shoulder blades and sculpted backside, but then he turned around, and . . . well, there was his cock, not exactly hard right now, but still impressive in size and impossible not to stare at.

Was it wrong for her thirst to be back already? Because it totally was.

He wet his hair quickly, then re-maneuvered them so that she was the one standing under most of the water. He stayed pretty close, though, hands on her waist, eyes roaming all over her unabashedly.

*Touch me*, she wanted to say. His hands made a warm shower feel even warmer, and it’d been so long since she’d really gotten to feel them on her body. She craved it.

There was lingering doubt in the back of her mind, though, even as he smoothed his hands around her back. Maybe it was wrong to be thinking about things like this, fantasizing, even, the night after he’d told her about Gina. Maybe he needed some time.

He moved in closer, rubbing her spine while he held her close. She felt like an idiot, unsure of what to do with her own hands, so she just put them on his hips and tried to keep her breathing even. Not an easy thing to do when there were lines of water trickling down his chest.

She started to get the sense that this was going to be a different kind of shower for them, though, when he squirted some shower gel onto his hands and then began to rub it all over her body. Arms, stomach, sides . . . when he even rubbed her breasts, she took in a shuddering breath. It didn’t seem like it was any kind of foreplay, though. It was sensual, no doubt, but it was . . . a real shower. It was about getting clean.

He had to use more shower gel to lather up her back. He began up at her shoulders, then glided his hands downward, resting only momentarily in the small of her back before following the curve of her ass.

Oh god, it felt so good.

She wanted to do the same and tried smoothing her hands up his chest, but he grabbed her arms and turned her around instead. Out of habit, she almost bent over, because that was typically what she did when he turned her around: She bent over and he fucked her. But his arms encircled her before she embarrassed herself by doing that. One of them wound around her stomach, the other around her chest, still massaging her skin while the water rinsed the soapy shower gel away.
She readjusted the temperature again, making the water just *slightly* colder this time. With him in there, it was easy to get too hot.

He reached for the shampoo next, squirting a generous amount into the palm of his hand. Even though it was his shampoo and not hers, it would work. Her hair wouldn’t have its usual floral scent, but that was fine. She was more than willing to sacrifice that to let him do this for her. Sure, she was more than capable of doing her own shampoo, but Bellamy was all about taking care of people. And since he hadn’t been able to do that with Gina and he’d just relived all of that for the first time in months, he probably needed someone to take care of tonight.

She closed her eyes as he massaged her scalp and worked the shampoo through her tresses. He kind of had a thing for her hair, she’d noticed. Not to the same extent that he did with her breasts, but still . . . he liked it, so sometimes he’d brush it out of her face when it wasn’t even *in* her face to begin with, and if they were going at it pretty hard, it wasn’t uncommon for him to pull on it.

When she felt like he’d worked in all the shampoo pretty well, she turned around again, tilting her head backward so that the water could wash it all out. He threaded his hands through her hair, twisting the ends around his fingers, and smiled at her adoringly.

After she was all good and clean, it was his turn. She grabbed the bar of soap off the shower ledge and rubbed it over his arms and chest, taking the time to trace every line and every muscle she could get her hands on. His biceps, his pectorals, and that fascinating V thing that all toned men seemed to have on their abs. What even was that? She didn’t know, but she loved it.

He turned around so she could wash his back and shoulders for him, and she was struck by just how much *more* of him there was than her. She loved his broad shoulders and loved it when they made a cocoon around her. And she loved everything about being able to have her hands all over them right now. She just felt so happy to be there with him. Sex wasn’t even necessary. This just felt like . . . everything. Everything she’d dreamed about for nine days.

She set the soap back down and snaked her arms around his waist, linking her fingers together atop his abdomen. She moved in close behind him, pressing her chest to his back, and rested her cheek on his shoulders so she could breathe in the fresh, clean smell of him. God, she felt so close to him right now. Not just physically, but emotionally, too. She felt . . . connected.

They stood like that for a few minutes before Bellamy turned back around, keeping himself close to her. Both of them wrapped their arms around each other, and finally, he bent down and kissed her. Just a soft kiss. Simple. Sweet. But nonetheless, it made her heart flutter in her chest, because sometimes, the simplest kiss was the best kiss.

He cupped her face with both hands then, and pressed a feather light kiss to her forehead, lips barely grazing her skin. She couldn’t remember him—or anyone, really—ever being so unbelievably tender with her. It made her feel beautiful, because it felt so nice.

It felt nice enough that she was in no hurry to get out of that shower, not even when her fingertips were starting to shrivel up. There was a definite intimacy to this quiet moment they were having, one that she wanted to prolong and wasn’t willing to give it up for the entire world.
“Oh, shit,” Clarke swore when she opened the door to find Octavia standing on the other side. “I mean, hi.”

“Hi.” Octavia surveyed what she was wearing and asked, “Seriously, Clarke, do you even own your own clothes anymore?”

She tugged down on Bellamy’s t-shirt, shrugging innocently.

Octavia slipped into the bedroom, took one look at the clearly slept-in bed, and remarked, “So I take it you guys are back together again.”

“Well, we just slept last night,” Clarke said, quickly tugging on a pair of her jeans. “Not together. Well, I mean, we slept together, but we didn’t sleep together.”

Octavia gave her a curious, confused look. “Okay, I don’t really care whether you guys had sex or not.”

“No, there was no sex,” Clarke clarified. “We just spent the day together. And the night.” That still sounded a lot more R-rated than it had actually been. They’d laid in bed together and played some trivia games on her iPad—it was really embarrassing how badly Bellamy had kicked her ass. And after he’d fallen asleep, she’d stayed awake to catch up on some reading from the class she’d missed yesterday. Especially by their standards, it had all been pretty tame.

Octavia straightened out the bedspread and sat down. “So did he tell you everything?” she asked.

Clarke nodded slowly. “Yeah, he told me . . . everything.” It blew her mind, in a way, to think that she knew something even Bellamy’s sister didn’t know. But she’d meant what she said about keeping it a secret for him. If he didn’t want anyone else to know, there was no way she was telling them.

Octavia stared down at her lap for a moment, then looked up at Clarke. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you,” she said. “And I’m sorry if I was a bitch about not telling you.”

“It’s okay,” Clarke assured her, “I understand.”

Still, Octavia seemed to want to explain herself. “It’s just not the most pleasant topic of conversation for me, either. I mean, that night in Ocean City was easily the worst night of my life.” Her eyes glazed over for a moment, as if she were remembering, but she literally shook herself out of it. “And I promised Bellamy I would never tell anyone about it without his permission. He’s my brother. I can’t go against what he wants like that.”

“It’s fine,” Clarke reiterated. “I really do get it, Octavia. You don’t have to explain.”

“I wasn’t trying to . . .” Octavia paused for a moment, as if apologizing were maybe difficult for her. “I wasn’t trying to hurt your feelings,” she said. “Actually, I’m really glad you cared about him enough to push him to open up like that. He’s needed to do that for a while. I think this is good for him.”

*I hope so,* Clarke thought. That had been the goal.
“Anyway . . .” Octavia patted the empty space beside her and said, “Sit down. I wanna show you something.”

Clarke sat down, unsure of what Bellamy’s sister could possibly want to show her until she whipped out her cell phone. *Pictures*, she realized as Octavia quickly navigated towards a specific photo album. She brought up the first picture and handed her phone over to Clarke for her to get a better look.

Clarke recognized Octavia, Emori, Harper, and Maya in the photo right away, even though they were all in costume and it must have been taken on Halloween—they’d all dressed up as the Spice Girls, by the looks of it. But there was a fifth girl in the photo, wearing a red wig so she could pull off the Ginger Spice look. “Is that Gina?” she asked.

“Oh,” Octavia smiled affectionately. “She wanted to be Scary Spice, but Emori wouldn’t let her.”

Clarke chuckled, swiping to the next photo. It was just Octavia and Gina this time, standing on the front lawn outside a house Clarke didn’t recognize. They were hugging each other and grinning from ear to ear. “Wow,” she said, finally able to put a face with the name. Gina had curly light brown hair and big doe eyes. She was pretty and very natural, the kind of girl who probably didn’t even wear makeup because she looked fine without it. “She looks nice,” Clarke commented.

“She was,” Octavia’s smile gradually faded from her face.

“I know Bellamy said you were close to her, too.”

Octavia nodded and urged, “Look at the next one. It’s funny.”

Clarke swiped to the next photo and had to laugh, because it was the same location, except Bellamy was standing in between them now. They were both up on their tiptoes, giving him a kiss on the cheek, and he was making a face as though he hated it. But he probably didn’t.

“That was on Thanksgiving,” Octavia explained. “Gina didn’t have any family in the area, so she came to our place. I think that was the first time she met our mom, actually.”

“Looks fun,” Clarke remarked. There were more pictures outside the house that she now figured to be Aurora’s, more of the three of them and a few of Bellamy and Gina by themselves. He’d lifted her up bridal style for one of them, and she’d hopped onto his back for another. They looked so jovial and playful and . . . just genuinely happy.

“There’s a lot more,” Octavia said, standing up. “You don’t have to look through all of them.” She strolled over to Bellamy’s dresser to look at the pictures he had there of himself with her and their mother.

Clarke looked through a few more of the photos on Octavia’s phone, struck in particular by the one of Bellamy and Gina asleep together on that couch downstairs. *That’s where I sit now*, she thought, wondering if that used to be his and Gina’s spot on Saturday nights. When she took a closer look at Gina’s shirt, she saw that it said *Future sister-in-law*. So clearly that had been a gift—and a gigantic hint—from Octavia.

“Tell me you have all these backed up somewhere,” Clarke said, swiping through the photos faster. There were probably hundreds. She couldn’t look at them all.

“Oh, of course,” Octavia said. “Actually, someday I wanna print ‘em all out and make a scrapbook for Bellamy. Even if he’ll never look at it.”
Clarke set Octavia’s phone down, frowning. “He didn’t keep any pictures of her?”

“Nope.” Octavia ran her hands through her long, dark, hair and shook her head. “Too painful.”

Clarke couldn’t imagine that, just getting rid of all of those memories. But people did strange things when they were grieving, and she wasn’t about to judge Bellamy’s response to grief.

“Clarke . . .” Octavia sat back down again, looking her right in the eye with a serious expression on her face. “My brother’s lucky to have you.”

Clarke’s eyebrows shot upward in surprise; there was no disguising it. For Octavia Blake of all people to say this felt like a really big deal, because it wasn’t just that Bellamy was protective of her; she was protective of him, too. Hearing her say that felt like getting an official sisterly stamp of approval.

“I’m lucky to have him, too,” she said. Maybe she hadn’t had all sorts of traumatic events in her past to get off her chest, but Bellamy had really been there for her these past few months. He’d listened to her talk about her dad and the issues she felt with her family, he’d arranged for her to have an exhibit at Trikru, and in terms of her sexuality . . . well, he’d really opened up some doors for her there. More than that, though, he’d been her friend. And it was definitely the most unique friendship she’d ever had, which made it feel all the more meaningful.

Bellamy wanted to be around Clarke. Simple as that. Nine days without her had been torturous, and now that he had her back, he wanted to spend as much time with her as possible. So he did.

That Saturday night was her first night “back” with the group. The girls especially were happy to see her. Harper played with her hair, Emori drew fake tattoos on her arms, and Maya picked her brain about college. Monty was pretty chill about the whole thing, though he did say it was good to have her back. Jasper was unsurprisingly more spastic. He squeezed onto the couch with them, curled up next to her, and fell asleep with his head on her shoulder. Clarke must have thought it was a little weird, but since Maya assured her it was okay, she just let him sleep there until he started to drool on her.

Bellamy was more than happy to share his time with Clarke. His friends were her friends now; they adored her and wanted to spend time with her, too. So when it started to snow and Monty suggested they all go outside and try to have a snowball fight, he didn’t object. But when it was just the two of them curled up together for the night, that was still his favorite time with her. Because it was just the two of them.

They weren’t having sex again yet. And he was weirdly fine with that. They could ease back into that kind of intimacy.

For the entire week, they spent so much time together. They got a little drunk at Dropship and came home and made out after. It was awesome. The next night, they stayed in and monopolized the Xbox. Clarke wasn’t very good at video games, but she seemed willing to learn. Later that week, they went out to TonDC, and he got to see how much her Wop had improved. On Friday night, he crashed her girls night with Raven and Niylah and ended up falling asleep on her couch during the middle of the horribly overrated Pretty Woman. He woke up as the credits were rolling with makeup on, which he figured had been Raven’s doing since Bellagio was written on his arm in lipstick.

He knew very well that he was a major distraction for Clarke, so he made sure to set aside time at night to help her study. Sometimes it was quizzing her over the notes she’d scribbled down in class
that day, other times it was actually reading the chapters out of her textbook with her. He found most of the information pretty damn interesting, if he was being honest, and he liked studying with her. It made him feel like he was in college, too.

Of course, work occupied the majority of his time during the day, and as much as he would have liked to drag her along with him for all his jobs, he couldn’t very well do that. He got more done when it was just him, so even though it wasn’t as fun without her there, he had to suck it up. It was worth it when he finished the remodeling job on Diana Sydney’s kitchen faster than he’d anticipated. He could practically already see the wheels of her mind spinning with the next job she would have him do—probably a full-on bathroom remodel, if his suspicions were correct. Hell if he cared, though. Her kitchen looked good, and he gladly accepted the check she wrote out for him. It was the heftiest sum he’d ever gotten at once, enough to pay the bills for the next couple of months, buy his mom a nice birthday present, and take Clarke out to dinner.

On Saturday, it worked out that she had no plans for the day, and neither did he. So he suggested an impromptu visit with his mother. She was down for it, so they got in the truck and took off.

“Where does she live?” Clarke asked as she fiddled with the radio.

“Edge of town.” It wasn’t the best neighborhood, lower-income than his was, even. He hated the thought of her living there alone, especially since there had been some robberies nearby lately. But that was part of why he wanted to drop by today. He’d picked up some home security products for her with some of the money Diana had paid him, and he wanted to install them for her, hopefully make her home safer.

When they pulled up out front of the small blue house, she asked, “So is this where you lived growing up then?” as she got out of the truck.

He shut his door and shuffled around her to her side. “Not really. We lived in a trailer for a while. Then we rented a house. This is the first house she’s ever owned. We only moved here my senior year.”

“So you have a bedroom then?”

“Clarke . . .” He gave her a mock scolding look. “Not in my mom’s house, come on.”

She rolled her eyes. “No, I just wanna see it, that’s all.”

“Well, you can.” He took her hand and led her up the snow-covered sidewalk to the front door. “I don’t even know if she’s home right now, though.” Knowing his mom, she was working overtime. She claimed she didn’t do that as much anymore, but he knew better than to believe her.

He tried the doorbell, but that didn’t seem to be working—he could fix that quickly while he was here—so he knocked instead. No one came to the door, so he used his key to get inside.

“Mom?” he called. No response. “No, she’s not home.”

“That’s too bad,” Clarke said. “I’d love to see her again. She was really nice.”

“She’ll probably be back later.” He kicked off his shoes and said, “Go ahead, make yourself at home.”

Clarke was polite, of course, calling the house cute and cozy when, in reality, they both knew it was arguably smaller than her apartment was. His mom was proud of it, though, and she took good care of it. Owning a home was a big deal to her, just like it was to him.
“Let’s see this bedroom,” she suggested excitedly.

He led the way upstairs, pointedly reminding her, “I was eighteen years old. I was a senior in high school. I was horny all the time.”

“Has that last one even changed?”

“Well, no, but . . .” He took a deep breath and pushed open his bedroom door.

“Oh my god!” she exclaimed, immediately breaking into laughter when she saw the huge collage of *Playboy* posters on the wall above his bed. “You really weren’t kidding about the horny thing.”

“I told you.”

“Your mom let you put that up? *Roma* let you put that up?”

He shrugged. “It’s not like they could stop me. Look at this, though.” He shut his door to show her all the historical posters taped to the back of it. There was an Uncle Sam poster, back from when he’d been considering joining the army, a Rosy the Riveter poster that he’d gotten for Octavia but kept for himself when she showed no interest in it, and a Barack Obama *Hope* poster that he actually kind of wanted to put up in his current bedroom, just because he refused to accept that that man was no longer president of the United States.

“Oh, okay, so you had layers,” she said, still more fixated on the *Playboy* posters. They were probably turning her on just as much as they’d turned him on back in the day.

“Which one do you like?” he asked her.

“Hmm . . .” She surveyed them all for a few seconds, then pointed to a buxom redhead.

“Miss January,” he informed her. Yeah, she was a good one. He’d always been partial to the blondes, though, hence the reason why Miss July was at the center of his collage. Plus, her poster had the American flag in the background, so that was a bonus.

Clarke was very snoopy when it came to his bedroom—big shocker. He didn’t mind, though. He’d removed all the Roma reminders years ago, and even if there was something leftover . . . whatever. She knew about that now. Hell, she knew about everything.

It didn’t take her long to find the dirty magazine stash under his bed, nor did it take her much time at all to locate the neon green glow-in-the-dark condoms in his bedroom drawer. Yes, he’d worn glow-in-the-dark condoms back in the day, thinking it was cool. (It wasn’t.)

“Do you think these are still good?” she asked, eyeing the box for an expiration date.

“No, probably not.” Plus, if he recalled, they’d been a little snug.

Somehow, they ended up lying down on his bed, him on top of her, full-on making out the way he used to make out with Roma right in that very room. It felt a little weird to be in that bed with anyone other than Roma, but good, too. He and Clarke had never gone this long without having sex, and he was starting to feel the effects of it. He’d had some *interesting* dreams last night, ones that had prompted him to jack off in the shower this morning. If he was feeling it, Clarke probably was, too.

*We could do it right here,* he fantasized, thinking she might kind of get a rush out of the location. Hell, he might, too.
“Bellamy,” she whispered against his lips.

“Mmm-hmm,” was all he could muster in response. Fuck yes, he wanted to do this. Waiting a little bit had been a good idea, one they’d both seemed to mutually agree on without even talking about it. It’d given them a chance to reconnect on a more emotional level first, and he’d needed that time to deal with all the Gina memories that had resurfaced. But he was ready for things to get back to normal now.

“Bellamy,” she said again, but it wasn’t the breathy, lustful sound he was used to hearing when he turned her on.

“Do you want to?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she said, rubbing the back of his neck as he kissed his way down to hers, “but I think . . . your mom’s home.”

“What?” His head shot up, and he listened as the front door closed. The TV came on a few seconds later, so she was right. “Crap,” he swore, glancing down at his crotch. He’d already started getting hard. But this was a major boner killer. He could wait until later.

So as not to startle his mother, he called, “Mom!” as he headed downstairs.

“Oh, Bellamy.” She rushed towards him and hugged him. “Oh, what a surprise! What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “Had some free time today. Figured I’d stop by. I, uh . . .” He motioned towards the stairs when he heard Clarke coming down. “I brought Clarke with me.”

“Oh, hi, Clarke.” His mother met her at the bottom of the stairs and hugged her, too. “Good to see you again.”

“Yeah, you, too,” Clarke replied. “I loved seeing Bellamy’s old bedroom, by the way. Please, don’t ever change anything about it. It’s hilarious.”

His mother shook her head. “Typical boy, am I right?”

“You didn’t tell me to take any of it down, so . . .” Bellamy trailed off, shrugging. “Anyway, please tell me you weren’t at work, Mom. It’s Saturday.”

“I wasn’t at work,” she assured him.

He narrowed his eyes skeptically.

“I wasn’t,” she insisted. “If you must know, I was out on a lunch date. With a man.”

“Oh, okay.” That was really all he cared to hear about that then. His mom was still young, and men tended to find her beautiful. She could do her thing, but he didn’t want to think about it.

“I’m betting you two need some lunch, though,” she said. “Want me to make you anything?”

“I’m good,” Clarke said.

“I’ll take something,” Bellamy requested. Hell, he wasn’t about to turn down his mom’s cooking. “I’m gonna fix your doorbell, though, and install some home security stuff.”

His mother knew better than to tell him he didn’t need to do that, or to offer to pay him. Whenever he
came by, he found something that needed fixing.

While he worked on the doorbell, his mom fixed him a roast beef sandwich. Clarke sat at the kitchen table, occupied by one the old family photo albums his mother had gotten out for her. It had to be one of the ones from his elementary school days, because she kept saying, “Oh my god, he looks so young,” and, “Look at how cute he and Octavia were.”

At one point, he cleared his throat and said, “Excuse me, Clarke, but I’m still cute.”

She smiled and rolled her eyes.

The security products he’d picked up proved to be a little harder to install than he’d thought. As much as he hated to do it, he had to take a look at the instructions to figure it all out. He ate his sandwich while he worked and while Clarke and his mom sat on the couch together, looking through another album, one from high school. He overheard his mom saying things like, “I got so nervous during those wrestling matches, but he loved it,” and “I think this was at the National Honor Society induction.”

“Such an athletic nerd,” Clarke teased.

He shrugged. Athleticism and smarts. He could’ve done worse.

Once he’d finally finished installing all the new products and testing them to make sure they worked, his mother and Clarke had moved on to the old home videos. He leaned over the back of the couch and watched in mortification as a six year old version of himself and a three year old version of his sister came up on the screen. They were in the park at an Easter egg hunt, both of them standing by the Easter bunny, but he was crying. “Oh god, could we not?” he begged. This was one of the most embarrassing videos his mom owned of him.

“What happened?” Clarke asked.

“Just . . .” He motioned to the screen. If she watched, she would know.

When the Easter bunny went away, his mother, who had been the one filming, asked his adorable little six year old self, “What’s wrong, Bellamy?”

In the midst of his wailing, he managed an answer: “Octavia stole all my eggs!”

“Aw!” Clarke cooed, holding one hand to her chest. “That’s so cute.”

In the video, his mother zoomed in Octavia and her very full basket of eggs and suggested, “Octavia, why don’t you give some of those eggs back to your brother?”

Toddler Octavia pouted stubbornly and yelled, “No!” before running away from the camera. And six year old Bellamy kept crying like a little wimp.

“That still pisses me off to this day!” Bellamy roared. “I had a good strategy. I ran to the back of the course and got all the eggs back there while everyone else was up at the front. And then O was all mad ’cause she only got, like, three, so she took all of mine.”

“And she never did give them back,” his mother recalled.

“No, she never did.”

“Well, maybe this Easter she will, honey,” his mother said, reaching up to give his arm a squeeze.
“Yeah, maybe this is the year.” He shook his head doubtfully, then groaned as the video changed to a new event: a school talent show. Not his, thankfully, but Octavia’s. “This is bad,” he said. “We almost sent this in to America’s Funniest Home Videos.” He watched as a preteen Octavia came up on the stage in her karate outfit—karate had been a good outlet for her rage—and he came up onstage along with her, basically as a prop master. He set up her punching board while she said some things to the audience, and then he stood back, holding one of the wooden planks she was going to attempt to break. She was supposed to kick her leg high enough to make contact with the board and break it, but she kicked too low instead, drilling him right in the nuts, causing him to fall to his knees, yelling in pain.

“Oh my god!” Clarke exclaimed, covering her mouth with her hands. “Oh my god.”

He cupped his package and winced, remembering how badly that had hurt. “I still think she did that on purpose.” His sister had always been brutal with him. In fact, the first wrestling matches of his life had been with her.

“Listen to the crowd,” his mother said. “Listen.”

He rolled his eyes as the audience actually started to laugh at his misfortune while he crawled off the stage in agony. “Yeah, they thought it was all part of the show.”

“That’s awful,” Clarke said. “Hilarious, but awful.’

“Luckily I didn’t sustain any permanent damage,” he said, giving her a pointed look. Luckily. His equipment was in fine working order, and they both benefited from that.

“So is this where you get it?” she asked. “The tendency to keep all the old pictures and articles and stuff? Do you get it from your mom?”

“Probably,” he admitted. “You gotta keep all the memories, right?”

“That’s right,” his mother agreed, fast-forwarding to another video. “I didn’t even have a smart phone until a few years ago, so that old video camera served us well.”

“It did,” Bellamy agreed. There was something cool about having all these old VHS tapes and photo albums, too, rather than just having everything stored online.

Later that afternoon, he had a moment alone with his mom while Clarke watched more old home movies. Once she got past the one of him singing in his sixth grade school play, he felt relieved because nothing could really be any more embarrassing than that. He left Clarke on the couch to listen to his graduation speech—better than that dumbass valedictorian’s speech—and took a couple minutes to explain to his mom how her brand new home security system worked. Well, it wasn’t technically a whole system yet, just an alarm and a camera she could access through her phone, and it was the cheapest stuff he could find. But once he remodeled Diana’s bathroom, he’d get some more money, and he could buy her some more products, like these automatic outdoor lights he’d heard about. Those really deterred the burglaries.

His mom seemed more interested in him than she did in his explanation of how to reset the alarm, though. She smiled at him, smoothed down his hair, and noted, “You seem happy, Bellamy.”

He paused his explanation long enough to admit, “Yeah, I am,” before resuming with the alarm. “Okay, so you have to hit this button first, otherwise it won’t reset. You see?”

She wasn’t even looking at the alarm, though; she was still just looking at him. “Clarke’s a good friend to you, isn’t she?”
“Yeah.” One thing he appreciated about his mother was that, even though she probably wanted Clarke to officially be his girlfriend, she wouldn’t be pushy about it. “She’s, uh . . .” He glanced over at the couch, where Clarke was getting a kick out of one of the jokes he’d put in his speech—“Shout out to sidewalks, for keeping me off the streets.” Yeah, that was funny, and all his classmates had laughed. It made Clarke giggle, too.

He’d meant what he told her the other night, about how she was his best friend. It was crazy, in a way, because he’d known Miller and Murphy way longer. But Clarke was the one who knew about the baby, because there was just something special about her, something that made him feel like he could tell her anything now. If that wasn’t the mark of a best friend, then he didn’t know what was.

“I told her about Gina,” he informed his mom, because he knew she’d be happy to hear that.

“You did?” Her eyes widened in surprise. “Oh, Bellamy . . . that’s a big deal.”

“Yeah.” This past week, he’d felt so much better about things, too. Clarke was the first person in his life he’d ever voluntarily had that conversation with. All his other friends and his family . . . they’d already known.

“That’s a really big deal,” his mother said. “I’m proud of you.” She gave him a hug, the kind that went on a while, because any mention of Gina got her a little emotional, too.

Maybe someday he’d tell her and Octavia the rest of the story. Maybe someday he’d tell them about the son or daughter he’d almost had. But for now, he knew about it, and Clarke knew about it. For now, that was enough.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

For some reason, Bellamy seemed to think that seeing all those home videos was going to turn Clarke off to the idea of having sex with him. She kept insisting, “You were cute,” and “I thought they were sweet,” but he just shook his head and claimed, “Those should be banned. No girl I’m sleeping with should ever be allowed to see those.” It was, of course, a moot point, since she’d already seen them and it wasn’t making her want him any less.

Sex with Bellamy had been on her mind since she’d woken up that morning. This past week had been amazing, getting to spend so much time with him and be back in each other’s orbits again. But it was only a matter of time until they started having sex again, and she wondered if tonight was that night. Especially since today’s little make-out session in his old bedroom had left her wanting more.

“Where is everyone?” she asked when they walked in the front door. Usually on Saturday nights, people were starting to show up by now, Jackson and Emori at the very least.

“They’re gone,” Bellamy said. “Whoa.”

She gave him a knowing look. “You planned something, didn’t you?”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “Not a plan, really. I just requested that we have the whole house to ourselves tonight.”

“The whole house?” An excited tingle zipped through her body, because that could only mean one thing: Tonight was definitely the night.

“I wanted to spend some time alone with you,” he said, stroking her hair. “Is that okay?”

“That’s . . . more than okay.” As much as she liked hanging out with the whole group, this was what
she’d been craving for two weeks now. This was what she wanted.

She’d sensed that tonight might be a big one for them, so she’d brought a special outfit along for the occasion. It was upstairs, though, hidden away in the bottom of the dresser drawer that she’d reclaimed since she’d been back. She had to go put it on, because she’d bought it just for him.

“I have a surprise for you,” she said, “but you have to wait down here.”

“Ooh.”

“Yeah. It’s gonna be good,” she promised, heading up the stairs. “Wait down here.”

“Alright.”

She scampered into the bedroom, her whole body alive with anticipation. Visions of Bellamy’s naked frame danced through her head, and she changed quickly from her clothes to the lingerie Raven had helped her pick out at Ice Nation the other day. No, it wasn’t the edible kind, which Roan had tried to promote. It was just a silky white corset top with matching ruffled boy-short panties. Bellamy would love it, though, because, being a corset, it really pushed her boobs up and drew attention to them. It’d come with these white lace stockings, too, that went up to mid-thigh. She wasn’t sure if that would look over-the-top or not, but she figured she might as well go for it. So she put them on, along with a pair of white high heels to give herself a little added height.

Once she was dressed, she went into the bathroom to touch up her makeup, keeping it very soft and simple-looking. She put her hair up in a loose bun and pulled down a few tendrils to try to frame her face. She was definitely going for the innocent, angelic look tonight, even though the fantasies running through her mind were far from innocent.

“She’s coming?” she heard Bellamy yell from downstairs.

_That’s the plan_, she thought, readjusting her top. It’d been a while since she’d had an orgasm, and she was really hoping Bellamy’s hands, mouth, and _other_ body parts would work some wonders tonight.

When she was at the top of the stairs, she already knew he had a surprise of his own in store. There was some romantic music playing in the living room, and it looked like he’d dimmed the lights. When she crept down the stairs, she saw that the whole living room and kitchen were aglow with candlelight. It looked warm and beautiful in there, and it was impossible to miss the fact that he seemed to be making some kind of bed in the middle of the floor.

“Okay, don’t laugh,” she said, as she stepped off the bottom stair.

His back was to her as he laid out some pillows and blankets, but when he spun around and saw her, his mouth dropped open.

_Good reaction_, she thought, glad that the lighting was too dim for him to notice her blush under his gaze.

“Wow,” he said, smiling slowly in amazement. “Is that for me?”

“Yeah.” She certainly hadn’t bought this outfit to wear as pajamas, now had she? “Is this for me?” motioning around to the ambiance he had created.

“Oh, it’s all for you, baby.” He draped a blanket over the bed of pillows he had set out, grinning.
Swaying towards him, she surveyed the makeshift bed, very interested in what he had in mind for her. “Looks comfy,” she remarked.

“Looks good,” he said, his eyes sweeping over her as his arms wrapped around her waist. “Damn, Clarke.”

“You like it, huh?”

“I love it.” He traced his hands up and down her sides, seeming to appreciate the way the corset emphasized her figure and made her look even more hourglass in shape. “You look so sexy.”

“I feel sexy,” she admitted breathily, draping her arms around his neck. “The way you touch me . . .”

“You like the way I touch you?”

“Yes.”

In response, he slid his hands around further to cup and squeeze her backside. “How do you want me to touch you?” he asked, his voice low and seductive.

They’d barely started, and already, she felt dizzy with pleasure. “However you want,” she invited. More so than ever, she was willing to put herself in Bellamy’s hands tonight. So to speak.

“However I want?” His eyes gleamed with mischief as he bent down to massage the backs of her thighs. At eye level with her breasts then, he pressed a few hot kisses to her cleavage before standing up straight again and winding his hands around her back. His fingers got tangled in the crisscrossed strings that held the corset together, and he immediately started fumbling with them, trying to get them untied. “How the hell am I supposed to get this off, Clarke?” he questioned.

“It’s a little complex.” He had nimble fingers, though, so she had no doubt he’d figure it out.

His lips occupied hers with slow, lazy kisses while his hands got to work, moving swiftly and determinedly through the ties. “Not that this doesn’t look great on you,” he murmured against her lips, “but it’d look even better on the floor.”

“Fine by me.” It was tight and wasn’t the most comfortable thing to wear anyway.

“Turn around,” he whispered, pushing gently on her hips.

She did as he instructed, giving him better access to this corset contraption. Now that he could see the strings, he could untie them better. He had to start at the top and work his way to the bottom. “You’re so pretty, Clarke,” he said as the corset began to open and her back came into view.

Oh god, she’d missed this. Not just the feel of his hands all over her flesh, but . . . the praise. She’d been reluctant to even admit to herself how much she wanted that—no, needed it—in bed, but when compliments like that came spilling across his lips, she just turned into Jello.

Finally, he had the whole corset untied, and it fell off her shoulders. She shrugged it to the floor, letting her breasts spring free, and in an instant, his arms were around her, hands on them. He massaged and squeezed gently, rolling her nipples between his fingertips, and she leaned back against him, arching her chest against his brazen hands.

He pressed the side of his face against hers, a day’s worth of stubble scratching against her cheek. “What do you want, Clarke?” he asked her. “What do you want me to do?”
She moaned, rubbing her legs together, trying to create some friction down there to accompany the way he was fondling her breasts.

“Tell me,” he urged.

God, he sounded so dominating tonight. Which was fine. She had absolutely no qualms about surrendering control to Bellamy, not when it came to sex. “I want you . . .” Normally she would have just begged him to fuck her, but somehow, in the midst of all these flickering candles with the romantic music playing in the background, that just didn’t sound right. “. . . to make love to me,” she finally finished, worrying the minute the words left her mouth. Maybe she shouldn’t have said that. What if that was only something he’d done with Gina and with Roma? Maybe it wasn’t her place to ask for such a thing.

Thankfully, he didn’t seem freaked out, though. He pressed a hot, open-mouthed kiss to her cheek, then to the side of her neck, before raining kisses across her shoulder and down her arm. He sank to his knees behind her, hands stroking down her body, and Clarke started to turn around. But he put his hands on her hips, keeping her still instead.

She felt self-conscious, because her ass was basically in Bellamy’s face; but as usual, one touch from him could make her nerves fall by the wayside. When he skimmed his fingers across the round flesh of her backside, she felt adored.

“Beautiful,” he said, hooking his fingers into the side of her panties. He dragged them down over her ass, stopping at mid-thigh, and she gasped when she felt his lips on her backside, pressing a soft, affectionate kiss to each cheek. Bellamy had never really ventured down there with anything except his hands before, but damn, that felt nice.

Her knees shook, and her underwear fell to the floor. She kicked her heels off and then stepped out of her panties, clad in only the thigh-high stockings now. She thought he might lower those for her, too, but instead, he stood up, picking her up in his arms.

“Bellamy!” she squealed as he swung her around. He lay her down on top of the pile of pillows on the floor, crawling on top of her so he could kiss her some more. She grazed her hands up and down his sides, inching his t-shirt up so that she could feel his warm skin. Here she was, nearly naked, and he still had all his clothes on. That hardly seemed fair.

It seemed like he could have spent a long time kissing her, but he eventually sat back on his knees and pulled his shirt over his head. His body was a beautiful landscape of tan skin, tight abs, and adorable freckles. She felt privileged to be the one who got to see it, and in this candlelight, he looked even more like the cover of a romance novel than he usually did.

Since she couldn’t reach him with her hands, she brought her feet up to rub against the lean muscles of his stomach, but he seized her ankles, holding her legs steady. She felt like she was lost in the narcotic power of his eyes as he grabbed the top of the lacy stocking on her left leg and pulled it down. He was devilishly slow with his movements, removing that stocking an inch at a time. He grinned when he finally got it down to her foot and pulled it off all the way. Then he did the same with the other leg, taking his time, seemingly delighted by this sweet form of torture.

At long last, she was completely naked, and it felt so good. She wanted Bellamy to take all his clothes off, too, but sometimes he got so eager to taste her that he left his pants on longer than he needed to. So as not to distract him, she closed her legs, twisting to the side, and said, “Your turn.”

He grinned, hands going to his pants. His eyes remained locked onto hers, handsome, hypnotic, and powerful as he unfastened his jeans and pushed them down over his hips. He had to sit down on the
pillows so he could kick them off, but he didn’t bother to remove his boxer briefs along with them. Instead, he spread her legs apart again and settled in between them so he could get back to kissing her.

She moaned into his mouth when she felt the bulge in his underwear press against her. God, she couldn’t wait to feel him inside her again. It’d been so long, too long.

His hand slithered down in between them, stopping at her breasts for only a moment before traveling further south and slipping between her legs. The moment she felt his long, rough fingers stroking her, she tore her mouth away from his to gasp, “Oh . . . oh, yeah.” She wanted him to touch her there, right there when he rubbed her clit.

“I’m gonna make you fall apart,” he promised, capturing her mouth in his again. His tongue mimicked his fingers. When his index finger traced up and down her slit, his tongue brushed against her lips. When he gave her clit a little pinch, he gave her lips a puckered kiss. When he pushed two fingers inside her, he dipped his tongue into her mouth.

Her thighs clenched around his hand, because holy fuck, that felt so good. She could cum just because of his fingers, no doubt that that. It wouldn’t have been the first time, wouldn’t be the last.

As he moved his fingers in and out of her, his tongue swirled around with hers. That combined with the way his muscled chest was sliding against hers . . . it was a lot of different sensations to take in at once, and it all felt so incredible. She didn’t want him to stop, and he didn’t, not for a few minutes. Gradually, though, he slowed down with his fingers before withdrawing them from her completely and sitting up again.

She wasn’t sure what he was doing until she saw him grip his package. He was straining hard in his underwear, and the sight of his leaking erection springing free when he pushed them down filled her with pride. She did that to him. Even though she hadn’t touched him there yet, just giving her pleasure worked him up so much.

With Bellamy now as naked as she was, she thought they might cut to the chase. But she should have known better. He was a master when it came to foreplay, after all, and going down on her was his favorite thing to do. He wasn’t going to just skip over that part after two weeks without it.

“You know what I’m gonna do?” he teased, as if he were reading her mind. He loomed over her, gazing down at her alluringly. “You know what I’m gonna do to you?”

“I know what I’m hoping for,” she said.

Grinning, he planted one more kiss on her lips before he kissed his way down the slender column of her throat. He lingered on her breasts, of course, lips grazing her pebbled nipples before he tried to engulf them, sucking greedily. He alternated from one to the next, going back and forth a couple times before he continued his pursuit, trailing kisses down her stomach to the juncture of heat between her legs.

Her thighs were already damp and quivering because of the work his hand had done. If he put his mouth on her, she might cum right that instant.

“You gonna hold out for me?” he teased, gravelly words uttered against her flesh. “Make me work for it?” The minute his mouth closed in on her, she hauled in a breath and tensed. Startled by his intimate kiss, even though she’d known it was coming, she clutched at the blanket beneath her and dug her head back into the pillow. God, this felt amazing, and she’d missed it so much.
With consummate skill, for what felt like at least ten minutes, his tongue teased her, zig-zagging up and down her folds in between the hot, wet, slurping kisses he kept delivering. Every once in a while, he’d press it flat against her and lick her like she was popsicle, and then he’d lift his head for a minute, lick his lips, and swallow, as if he were savoring the taste. His mouth never let up on its tender assault for long, though. Boldly, his tongue caressed her, his mouth sucked on her, and his teeth nibbled gently on her clit. He knew exactly how to coax her to abandon without saying a thing, but when he did speak up and murmured, “I want it, Princess,” she almost lost it.

Her breath hitched, because she wanted to give it to him, but she’d been trying to ‘make him work for it,’ as he’d put it.

“Give it to me,” he coaxed.

She was so close. She could feel orgasm swirling inside, ready to explode. Since it always worked her up to watch him, she opened her eyes and took a good look at the sight of him down there, his head nestled between her legs as he poured every ounce of his energy and concentration into eating her out. He was just so into it. Fireworks could have gone off outside right now, and she doubted he even would have heard them. It was like this—her, her body—was his whole world right now, and he wanted to devour everything he could get.

There was no need to grind herself down onto his face, not when she was only a few more licks, nips, and kisses away. She just lay back, letting him work his magic, and then cried out as her climax consumed her. She felt like she was floating. Tingles ricocheted throughout her entire body, from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. Her pussy clamped and clenched as the evidence of her orgasm dripped out, and Bellamy lapped it all up hungrily.

Coming down from an orgasm always felt a little bit like falling onto a cloud and drifting back down to earth. She felt dazed and mellowed afterward, and it was hard for her to even open her eyes. She liked to see Bellamy, though, to see if he was looking at her or looking at her pussy like he wanted more. His eyes were on her face this time, smiling at her appreciatively. With a heart-stopping tenderness, he kissed her clit, which was so sensitive at the moment, it made her entire body squirm.

“Did you like that?” he asked, moving back up so that he was eye-level with her.

Wasn’t her orgasm an obvious answer to that question? She nodded dizzily, trying to pull the pieces of herself back together, because he had made her fall apart, as promised. Bellamy had yet to get off, though, and she wanted him to.

“Do you need a minute?” he asked considerately, even though his cock was poised at her entrance, the tip of it pressing against her wet folds.

She probably did, but she shook her head, too eager to feel him inside of her to wait.

“No?” he asked, stroking her cheek sweetly. “You sure?”

She nodded again.

“Did you lose the ability to speak?” he teased.

That got a giggle out of her. Even in the most sensual of situations, Bellamy could always make her laugh. She quickly got serious again, though, and told him, “I want you,” and then, just to ramp up the dirty talk a bit, she added, “I want you inside me.”

That seemed to do the trick. His eyes seemed to go a shade darker, and at the gentle persuasion of his knees, she spread her legs farther. The muscles in his back and legs flexed as he slowly pushed into
her, groaning as his cock disappeared into her body. The sensation was so familiar, but at the same time, it felt almost new. His cock was so much bigger and fuller than her fingers or her vibrator. There was nothing that felt quite the same as him, as Bellamy, sliding into her, filling her up, deliberately stretching her beyond what she thought was possible.

It was good that he didn’t start thrusting right away, because she needed a moment to adjust, to reacquaint herself with the feel of him. He hovered over her, waiting patiently, and she just lay beneath him, breathing deeply already. Her head fell to the side, but he cupped her cheek, turning her to look at him again. He had this questioning expression on his face, as if to ask her if she was ready, and she just nodded wordlessly to communicate that she was.

His thrusts began slowly and shallowly enough, the kind that barely jostled her body. He peered down between them to watch, a delighted smile on his face as he saw his cock sliding in and out of her. She wished she had a better view of it herself, but all she really needed was the feel of it. Being penetrated by Bellamy’s thick, hard dick was the most exhilarating experience of her life.

Gradually, he increased both the pace and the force of his thrusts, driving into her harder and further, making her body rock back and forth more. Her knees clamped his naked hips as she tried to match his rhythm, tried to lift her hips up off their makeshift bed to meet his. But he was pretty dominant in this positions, his movements overpowering hers. Eventually, he was grinding her down into the pillows, relentlessly rolling his hips against hers as he sought out his release. She didn’t even care if she got off again. This was all about him right now as far as she was concerned. He was the one who needed to cum.

“Bellamy,” she gasped, not even sure if she wanted to tell him something or just wanted to say his name.

“What is it?” he asked, his hips slowing but not stopping.

“I can—I can feel it,” she stammered.

“Feel what?” He kissed her sloppily.

“Your cock,” she answered, “inside of me.”

He groaned low in his throat, and that spurred him on into a frenzied pace again. He was in deep, not deep enough to bottom out or give her one of those g-spot orgasms, but she could tell a regular one was fast approaching. So she just lay there and let him pound into her furiously until suddenly, she came again, without warning. She clamped down on his cock and dug her fingernails into his arm, riding out another molten wave of pleasure. This one was quicker than the last, and as she came down from it, he slammed into her a few more times, finding his own release. His hips jerked into her spasmodically as he came, his body molded intimately against hers. She could feel his cock throbbing inside as he unloaded himself. God, she loved it when he didn’t wear a condom. It was like she could feel everything.

He collapsed on top of her afterwards, his body heavy and sweaty as he panted raggedly for air. She lay underneath him, feeling boneless and lethargic with spent passion, but also completely unwilling to move.

“Fuck,” he swore as they radiated each other’s heat. “I missed that.”

“I know.” She’d missed it, too, but it’d been good to wait. They’d needed a few days to reconnect on other levels before reconnecting on this one.
Finally, he rolled off of her, onto his back, and pulled a blanket up over both of them. “Should we just sleep down here?” he asked.

“Sure.” Miller or Murphy would probably walk in on them tomorrow morning, but hell if she cared anymore. Besides, if they went upstairs right now, they’d probably break the bed.

“Do you care if my tongue’s between your legs when you wake up in the morning?” he asked suddenly.

She laughed, because it was both a ridiculous question and tempting thought. “No.”

“Good,” he said, “because that’s where it’s gonna be.” He opened up his arms and said, “Come here,” urging her to snuggle close. She curled up against his side, draping one leg over his, holding onto his chest. This felt good. This felt better than good. Even though she’d spent the last couple of nights in that house, tonight, being in Bellamy’s arms like this . . . tonight, she felt like she was home.
Chapter 26

Clarke knew she’d been distracted ever since she and Bellamy had . . . reconnected. Sex with him was pretty much a top priority, but she had other priorities, too. School, her Trikru exhibit, her job, her friends. Not necessarily in that order, as friends were a way bigger priority to her than work was. When Raven, Nylah, and Wells stopped by the art museum, she was half-tempted to fake an illness just so she could leave and hang out with them.

Wells wanted to know about all the artwork, but Raven and Nylah just wanted to know how things were going with Bellamy. “Is his technique as good as you remember?” Nylah questioned, but Clarke didn’t even get the chance to answer before Raven asked, “What’s the wildest thing you guys have tried so far?”

“I need to get out of this conversation,” Wells mumbled, walking around the information desk. He veered off into the Renaissance art room and must have been happy to avoid the sex talk.

“Spill, spill,” Nylah urged. “We feel like we haven’t seen you forever.”

“I’m sorry,” Clarke apologized.

Raven made a face. “You’re getting laid, Clarke. What’s there to apologize for?”

“Well, I don’t wanna be one of those girls who spends all her time with a guy.”

“Oh, please,” Nylah scoffed. “You already are. But that’s okay, because he’s a good guy, and we approve of him.”

“And you went, like, a week without sleeping with him,” Raven added.

“Two weeks, actually,” Clarke corrected.

“See? You’re making up for lost time. Nothing to feel guilty about,” Raven reassured her. “We do wanna hang out with you sometime this week, though. We have stories of our own.”

“Major stories,” Nylah emphasized. “I tried a strapon for the first time.”

Clarke gasped. “Oh my god, are you serious?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Wow.” That was a big deal then. Nylah had always been more of a trib type of girl. “Who wore it, you or Luna?”

“Me.”

Clarke’s eyes bulged. That was something she’d never felt comfortable with, which was why, on the rare occasions that she and Lexa had used one, Lexa had always been the wearer.

“Not gonna lie . . . I may have gotten a little advice from your man,” Nylah admitted.

“What? Bellamy doesn’t know anything about strapons.”
“No, but he works the real deal, so I figured what’s good for the goose . . .” She trailed off, smirking.

Clarke leaned forward on the counter, enjoying the girl talk. As usual, it was sex-infused, and it was the perfect distraction from an otherwise boring, monotonous day of work. “So did you like it?” she asked.

Niylah shrugged. “I don’t know if I’d do it every night or anything, but it did make me feel kind of powerful.”

“Speaking of power,” Raven cut in, shifting the subject. “Roan wants me to tie him up.”

Clarke laughed. “Of course he does.” That guy was so off the grid when it came to his sexual interests; Raven would probably soon be wearing a strapon of her own.

“I think I’m gonna do it,” Raven said. “Why not, right? Get him all sprawled out, completely at my mercy . . .” She licked her lips excitedly. “I like it.”

“Well, you guys have fun with that,” Clarke told them. “Bellamy and I are gonna stick to what’s working.”

“Which is . . .?” Niylah prompted. “Come on, Clarke, we didn’t hold out on you, don’t hold out on us.”

Before she could answer, Wells, popped back out of the Renaissance room, asking, “Are you guys still talking about sex?”

“Yes,” they all answered in unison.

“Okay.” He quickly disappeared back into the room.

*Poor Wells,* Clarke thought, laughing lightly. He had a girlfriend now, but as far as she knew, they were still waiting. The sex talk would either make him uncomfortable or too turned on.

“So . . .” Niylah was clearly not about to let Clarke off the hook. “Give us the details.”

“Fine,” Clarke relented, though she wasn’t going to say too much. “We started up again a couple days ago. It’s been great.”

Niylah frowned. “Those aren’t details, Clarke. That’s a summary.”

“Oh, I definitely am.” It’d all started with the truck. Then there was Dropship and the dressing room and the pool. Not to mention the standing sixty-nine and the titty fuck, both of which had been completely new experiences for her.
“Well, let’s make a pact,” Raven declared suddenly. “As good as our sex lives are, we need to set that aside at least once a week and have friend time. Even if our significant others are there with us.”

“Why not tonight?” Clarke suggested. “Murphy wanted to drag us all out to some lame movie. You guys should come along, bring Roan and Luna.”

“If it’s not porn, Roan won’t be interested in it,” Raven anticipated, “but I can probably convince him to come.”

“Yeah, that sounds fun,” Niylah agreed. “I can thank Bellamy for the penis advice in person.”

Niylah did thank Bellamy for the advice; in fact, the first thing she said to him when they all met up at the movie theater that night was, “Thanks for telling me how to work a dick.” Once they’d all gotten their popcorn, drinks, and other movie snacks, they piled into the theater to see . . . Clarke couldn’t even remember what it was called. *Saving Dennis? Sailing with Danny?* Something that didn’t sound even remotely interesting, but Murphy had wanted to see it for weeks now and had somehow convinced everyone but Octavia and Lincoln to tag along.

“This is gonna suck,” Bellamy predicted as he led Clarke past their friends and up towards the back row of the theater.

“Why are we sitting all the way back here?” she asked.

“You’ll see,” he replied, grinning.

“What the hell?” Murphy spat from a few rows down. “Why are you guys up there, huh?”

“It’s fine,” Emori said. “Now we don’t have to listen to him nitpick the entire movie.”

“You guys are gonna have sex back there, aren’t you?” Jasper said a little too loudly. Monty and Maya both immediately hushed him, but it was too late. He’d drawn the attention of a couple of teenagers up towards the front.

Clarke settled into her seat next to Bellamy, trying to hide by sitting low until the teenagers turned around.

“It’s just a better vantage point up here,” Bellamy claimed, “better view.”

Their friends knew better than to believe him, though. They all rolled their eyes and said, “Whatever,” and Clarke even heard Raven say, “They’re totally gonna get it on.”

“Don’t worry,” Bellamy leaned over and assured her quietly, “we’re not gonna have sex here.”

“Then why don’t we go sit down by them then?”

“Just wait,” he said, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Oh, he definitely had something up his sleeve, but if it wasn’t sex, she was clueless. So she waited. She waited through the trailers, through the first long, drawn-out scene of the movie, and eventually through the entire first half. She and Bellamy were sharing popcorn and drinks, which was a mistake, because they finished those early on. Bellamy was so disinterested in the movie—which was typical Ben Stiller trash—that he got up, went back out to the concession stands, and bought some candy and more pop for the both of them.

The more the movie wore on, the more bored by it she became. Murphy was howling with laughter,
as though it were the most hilarious thing in the world, and it probably would have been his favorite movie ever if only a leg lamp had been involved.

“This is awful,” she groaned, finishing off her Skittles.

“Yeah, it’s pretty bad,” he agreed, holding out his cola. “Thirsty?”

She gave him a look, knowing very well that he was making fun of her sexual appetite rather than offering to quench her actual thirst. She took the drink from him anyway and slurped what was left it through the straw. “This is a horrible movie,” she said. “Like one of the worst I’ve ever seen.”

“I know,” he said, putting his hand on her lap. “I don’t even care how it ends.”

“Neither do I.”

He rubbed her leg, slowly sliding his hand up her thigh, and Clarke had a feeling she knew what he’d been making her wait for.

“What are you doing?” she asked anyway.

His response was to plunge his hand in between her legs, rubbing her through her leggings.

“Oh . . .” she breathed out.

“Shh,” he whispered. “Watch the movie.”

Screw the movie, she thought. She hadn’t been focused on it before, so she definitely wasn’t focused now. She understood what he was telling her to do, though. She had to keep her eyes up there on that screen and keep herself quiet, otherwise anyone in that theater could turn around and possibly see what they were up to. It wasn’t just their friends who could spot them. Over to the left, just two rows below them, was another young couple, and of course there were those teenagers down in the front who probably didn’t need to become any more corrupted than they already were.

Bellamy kept his eyes on the screen, too, but his attention was definitely all on her as he touched the most sensitive area on her body. “You’re getting wet,” he noted quietly as he circled his fingers.

She had to stifle a moan. “I thought you said we weren’t gonna have sex in here.”

“We’re not having sex,” he pointed out as he slipped his hand under the waistband of her leggings. “I’m fingering you.” When he started rubbing her again, there was no fabric in the way, just his middle finger in between her slick folds, stroking more insistently, making her wetter.

It was torture not to say anything, to try to sit there without making a sound or even making a move. She wanted to grind herself down onto his hand, but if she did that, then she’d likely get noisy, and the movie theater incident would join the bed-breaking incident as something their friends could always taunt them about. Besides, there was something so thrilling about doing this right underneath their noses, getting away with it. Bellamy’s public sex kink was definitely rubbing off on her, and she wasn’t even ashamed of it.

When he curved his finger and pushed it into her, she squeezed her eyes shut, and her pussy clamped involuntarily. “Stay relaxed,” he urged as he also inserted his index finger. He pumped them in and out of her almost casually, like it was no big deal to be sitting in a public place with his fingers inside her pussy. His relaxed demeanor only further fueled her arousal, and soon enough, despite trying to stay still, she was squirming on his hand, desperate to get off.
It must have been his plan to finger her through the end of the flick, because he didn’t seem to be in any big rush. But when the movie all of a sudden did one of those flash-forward things and said 3 years later on the screen, Clarke got the sense that it would be coming to an abrupt end. “Bellamy, hurry,” she said.

He picked up the pace with his fingers, but it was when his thumb pressed down on her clit that she really felt herself getting close. She breathed in sharply, still biting her tongue to keep from saying anything, and reveled in the external stimulation. He rubbed his thumb in circles over that little bundle of nerves so quickly and so expertly that she felt herself rapidly ascending towards an orgasm. It hit right as the movie came to an end and the credits started rolling. When the lights came back on, he quickly removed his hand and used his napkin to wipe it off. But she was helpless when it came to getting clean. Her orgasm had left her pussy and inner thighs damp, and even though she was wearing black leggings, if someone looked close enough, they could probably tell what had just happened.

“Best movie ever,” Murphy declared, stretching as he stood up. “I picked a classic.”

“Complete waste of time,” Miller declared.

“Yeah,” Harper agreed, “I can’t believe we all spent money on that.”

Money well spent, Clarke thought. Her legs were shaky.

“Here,” Bellamy said, helping her to her feet.

“I’m all sticky now,” she told him, hoping the theater was good about cleaning.

“You can change when we get home,” he said, walking close behind her as they shuffled back through the row of seats, “change into my clothes.”

“Mmm.” That was definitely another one of his kinks, her wearing his stuff. Although that was probably a pretty common one.

Bellamy’s sexual appetite was just as strong in the days to follow the movie theater escapade. He seemed to want to seize every opportunity he could to put his hands on her, whether they were alone or not. On Saturday, Raven, Niylah, Roan, and Luna all joined up with the usual crew at his place, which meant that the living room was even more crowded than usual and they had to share the couch. Well, Bellamy didn’t mind. He pulled her down onto his lap and moved her hips in circles over his groin, groaning, “Oh, yeah, that’s good stuff right there.”

Octavia, of course, was grossed out, and shielded her eyes, mumbling something about going to her ‘happy place’ so she didn’t have to see this.

Roan, who was sitting next to them with Raven similarly perched on his lap, suggested, “I think you guys should just do it right here and let us watch.”

“Ew, no!” Octavia squealed, plugging her ears. “Happy place, happy place . . .”

“You should let us film it,” Raven added, “for science.”

“Oh, I’d film it,” Bellamy said, hooking his arms around her waist. “She won’t.”

Yeah, a sex tape was definitely something she wouldn’t be willing to try. “That’s because I don’t wanna end up like Kim Kardashian.”
“Uh, first of all, our sex tape would be way hotter than Kim Kardashian’s,” he boasted confidently.

“Can we talk about something else?” Octavia yelled pleadingly.

“Second,” he went on, “I would never release it. I’m not like Kanye.”

“She was with Ray J in the sex tape, FYI,” Murphy piped up. “Trust me, I’ve seen it.”

“I . . . don’t doubt that, Murphy,” Bellamy said. He kissed Clarke’s cheek and whispered, “I don’t really wanna make a sex tape.”

“Good.” She wasn’t going to.

That night of course resulted in more sex once they were upstairs in his room, two orgasms for Bellamy and three for Clarke. He was just insatiable. Maybe it was because they’d gone those two weeks without it—three in a way, because the week before that, she’d had her fucking period—and now he was trying to make up for what they’d missed out on. Physically, it was quite the workout, and Clarke ended up falling asleep most nights within minutes of wrapping up. But as long as the sex was good, which it always was, and she and Bellamy were enjoying themselves, which they always did, she didn’t see any reason to let up.

It got to the point where they were even squeezing in sex before going out for the evening. Tuesday, she and Bellamy were supposed to go with Murphy and Emori to TonDC to see some local band Emori was a fan of. But just as they were about to leave, Bellamy threw her down on the bed, undressed them both in record timing, and crawled under the covers with her to fuck her hard. And yes, it was straight up fucking this time. No foreplay, not even a whole lot of kissing, definitely no taking his time or going slow. Bellamy was really good about making sure they had variety in their sex lives, and a rough-and-tumble like this definitely switched it up.

“I’m gonna cum pretty fast,” he warned as his hips bumped against hers.

“Do it.” Even if she didn’t get off, it was still enjoyable. And hey, she had no complaints since he managed to get her there most of the time.

Unfortunately, Murphy opened the bedroom door right as they were going at it and demanded, “Are you guys almost done or what?”

Bellamy stilled on top of her, but neither one of them had to move since they were covered by blankets. “I’m not finished!” he barked when his roommate just kept standing there.

“Fine, hurry up,” Murphy mumbled, shutting the door again.

Bellamy rolled his eyes, and Clarke laughed. True to his prediction, he did come fast when he resumed thrusting again.

That night ended up being an interesting one, because when they got to TonDC, they found that it had been closed for an entire week due to a cockroach infestation. In a town like Arkadia where there weren’t many options for nightlife anyway, that definitely changed their plans. Clarke assumed they would go to Dropship instead, but Murphy was actually the one to suggest Mount Weather.

“Let’s go show those college freaks a real party,” he suggested, adding, “No offense” for Clarke’s benefit.

She had no problem going to Mount Weather. Whereas they knew everyone there was to know at TonDC, this was her crowd. She saw people from her classes, and a lot of them waved or said hi to her, which made her look a lot more popular than she really was. Wells and his girlfriend, Sasha,
were there, so they sat at their table and sort of made it a triple date.

Bellamy had never seemed particularly impressed with this club, so she had a feeling he was already thinking about how to get out of there. She could practically see the wheels of his mind turning as he stared out onto that dance floor, lost in thought.

“Hey,” she said, leaning over to squeeze his knee. “We don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.”

“No, it’s fine,” he said, brow furrowing almost . . . contemplatively. “Are they gonna turn on that fog machine or what?”

“Uh, yeah, probably pretty soon.” She didn’t understand why he’d even ask about it, though; he’d made it clear that he thought it was lame.

“How thick is it?” he asked.

“What, the fog?”

“Yeah, can you see through it?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know, not really. At least not the red fog.”

“Huh.” He looked down at his lap, nodding slowly as if an idea had occurred to him.

“What?” she asked, wanting to be clued in to this thoughts.

His eyes met hers, and he smirked. It was the kind of facial expression that led her to believe he was about to behave badly, and he wanted her to behave badly with him.

Somehow he convinced her to get out on the dance floor and move around a little bit even before the fog kicked on. But once it did, it was the red kind, and just as she’d told him, it was pretty thick. In just about the riskiest move he’d ever pulled with her, he unzipped his pants, hiked her dress up, and pushed her panties aside, penetrating her from behind right out there in the middle of that dance floor. It was so hot and so public that she almost came right away. As long as that fog kept swirling around them, they were pretty well concealed, but if it dispersed, then their naughty behavior would be on full display for everyone.

“Oh, fuck me,” she begged, leaning back against him, trying to stay upright.

The truth was, Bellamy wasn’t the only insatiable one lately.

“I’m fucking you,” he rasped in her ear, pressing his hips forward in time with the music.

“Don’t ever stop,” she moaned lustfully. God, what did this guy have her saying? She felt like a porn star. “Oh, please, don’t ever stop fucking me.”

“I won’t,” he breathed out hotly, molding his body against hers. “I promise.”

The whole thing was sexy and filthy as hell, and she came right out there on the dance floor. The fog cleared before he was able to find the same release, but she followed him into the bathroom, got down on her knees, and took care of that for him before their friends even noticed they were gone.

Since Miller and Jackson were having their own night alone at the house, Murphy headed back to Emori’s place when they left, and Bellamy and Clarke drove to Polaris for the night. Clarke couldn’t even find her key at first—it’d been days since she’d even been there at all, which meant her key was buried at the bottom of her purse. She said, “Aha!” when she pulled it out and they stepped off the
“Good, now we don’t have to sleep in the hall,” he said.

“I’d sleep in the hall with you.”

He raised an inquisitive eyebrow. “And by sleep you mean . . .”

She shoved his shoulder playfully. “Stop it, I won’t have sex with you everywhere.”

“Well, we did it out on the dance floor tonight,” he pointed out. “Take a minute to wrap your mind around that, Clarke. We fucking did it on the dance floor.”

“I know.” It was definitely one of the most daring things she’d ever done, but she didn’t regret it one bit.

“You’re so good, you know that?” he said, putting his arm around her. “I’m not even just saying this, but sex with you . . . it’s like I’m on acid. Not that I’ve ever been on acid, but that’s how I imagine it would feel like.”

She laughed. “Okay.” That was a compliment, right?

“It’s the best sex I’ve ever had in my life, Clarke.”

Okay, clearly a compliment. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

Well, that was a relief, since sex with him blew everything else out of the water. He obviously had a lot more people to compare her against, though, more than she had, so for him to say she was the best . . . she definitely recognized it as huge praise.

“You always take everything I give you,” he said, tickling her side as she inserted her key into the lock.

“Well, you always give it to me good.” She pushed open the door, tumbling inside with him as he continued to tickle her. “Stop, stop, stop,” she squealed, squirming away from him. “I don’t wanna wake the neighbors.”

“Oh, we’re gonna wake the neighbors,” he boasted.

“We’ll see.” She was so tired, but if they got into bed and he started touching her . . . well, she’d probably wake right up.

He plopped down on the couch, kicking off his shoes, and lay with his hands behind his head. “So where do you wanna have sex that we haven’t done it yet?” he asked.

“I don’t know.” She took off her jacket and put it away in the closet, thinking about it. “I kind of just follow your lead with that.”

“Any ideas, though?” he asked.

“Well . . .” She took off her shoes and swayed over to the couch. “Okay, we’d have to be really quiet, though.”

“Where?”
She blushed. “The library.”

“Oh, hell, yeah.” His whole face lit up. “My two favorite things in the world: sex and books.”

“Yeah, so . . .” She shrugged, sitting down on the arm of the couch. “That’d be my idea. What’s yours?”

He grinned eagerly motioning behind his head to her sliding door.

“What?” she said. “My balcony?”

“Uh-huh.”

“You wanna have sex out on my balcony?”

“In broad daylight.”

“Bellamy!” she yelped. “We would get arrested for that!”

“Then we can have sex in jail. Wait . . .” He made a face, shaking his head when he must have realized how wrong that sounded. The sex men had in jail was probably not the kind of he wanted to have. “No, never mind. Scratch that. Nighttime it is.”

“I’d do it out there at nighttime,” she offered. “Not tonight, though. I’m spent.”

“Yeah, I’m kinda . . . tired, too,” he said, yawning. He motioned for her to move closer and said, “Come here.”

She carefully lay down on top of him, loving that he was like a comfy human pillow and a warm blanket all rolled into one. “Mmm,” she purred contentedly, “this is nice.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, tangling his hand in her hair, massaging her scalp. “I bet we could just fall asleep right here.”

“I bet we could.” She lifted her head, resting her chin on his chest. “But I should do some drawing before I go to bed tonight.”

“Yeah? How’s your exhibit stuff going?”

“Pretty well,” she said.

“And what is your exhibit exactly?”

“Well . . .” She wasn’t one-hundred percent decided yet, but she definitely had one major idea in mind. “I’ve been drawing a lot of you lately.”

“Of me?” He sounded . . . somewhat surprised, actually. “Am I gonna be your exhibit?”

“Well, I was thinking you could be. I could call it ‘A Handsome Friend.’ Because that’s what your name means.”

“That is what my name means.” He chuckled. “It’s fitting.”

“Very fitting.” When she’d first looked it up, she’d honestly thought it was a joke or something. Because . . . honestly. And here her name just meant clerk. “Is that okay, though,” she asked, “if I do that?”
“Yeah, sure,” he answered quickly. “I’m happy to inspire art.”

“But it’s not all, like, sexy stuff or lighthearted stuff,” she confessed. “I mean, I’ve done drawings of you crying and . . . looking the way you looked when you told me about Gina and when you told me about . . .” She trailed off, because even though he’d told her about the baby, she tried not to say the word a whole lot. “I know that’s all really personal for you, so if you don’t want me to use those . . .”

“No, go ahead,” he urged quickly.

“Are you sure? Because I can do other stuff.”

“Clarke.” He stroked his thumb against her cheek softly, looking her right in the eye. “I trust you.”

She breathed a sigh of relief, happy to hear that even though she’d already known it. To be granted that permission was a really big deal, because these past few months, she’d entrusted him with so many physical things; it was nice to know that he in turn trusted her with something so emotional.

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When Clarke’s car wouldn’t start, Bellamy had to drive her to class. She seemed to feel bad about having to catch a ride, but it wasn’t any hassle to him at all. Hell, had she been going to a class without an ass-hat professor, he would have been tempted to go sit in there with her. But that probably just would have distracted her, and he had things to do today anyway. A couple of jobs, but mostly running errands. The Walmart grocery store was one destination calling his name.

“Thanks for the ride,” she said as she unhooked her seatbelt.

“I’ll give you a better ride later,” he promised.

“Ha, ha.” She leaned across the gearshift and kissed him.

“Oh, keys,” he said.

“Oh, yeah.” She dug around in her purse and pulled out her full set of keys, not bothering to separate the car key from the rest of the massive clump. “If you aren’t able to fix it today, don’t worry about it.”

“Nah, I’ll get around to it,” he said. “Kind of an open day, so . . .”

“Okay. Thank you.” She gave him another quick kiss and got out of the truck. “See you later.”

“See ya.” He watched as she scurried up the steps and into the building where one of her many art classes was being held. He wasn’t sure which class it was, just that her professor hated him and he wouldn’t be welcome in there.

Alright, Walmart, here I come, he thought as he began to pull away from the curb. He hadn’t driven far, though, only about a block, when he had to stop at a red light. And as he sat there, waiting for it to turn green, something caught his eye.

The sign outside one of the bigger buildings on that campus read Washington Hall. An apt name since below it was written Department of History.

He couldn’t help but feel curious and wonder what kinds of classes were going on in that building right now. Maybe something he’d be good at? Probably something he’d be interested in. Whether it was American history or world history or even just geography or civics, he loved that stuff, and it’d
been so long since he’d actually gotten to sit in a classroom and learn anything in a formal setting. High school seemed like a long time ago, and he wondered if he’d be lagging behind if he set foot in a college classroom these days.

The light turned green, and he should have gone straight. But instead, he turned right, not quite sure what he was doing. Groceries. Work. Clarke’s car. He had things to do today and didn’t have time to indulge himself in any of this. It was a waste of time, and he shouldn’t have been there.

Even though he kept telling himself that, he got out of the car anyway and followed a small herd of students into Washington Hall. Unlike them, he had no idea where he was going, and also unlike them, he didn’t have a backpack on his shoulders. He felt like he stuck out like a sore thumb, so he tried to just blend in and act like he knew where he was going. He wound through the halls and up a flight of stairs until he found a lecture hall. Since students were still walking in, he figured the class hadn’t started yet. And it was a big enough space that there was no way the professor knew all the students by name. He’d be just another face in the crowd.

There was plenty of conversation, and Bellamy heard bits and pieces of it as he slinked through the back row to try to find a good seat. Some of it was asinine, like the douchebags who were openly arguing who had gotten the drunknest and puked the most at a party over the weekend. But some of it was more substantial, too. He heard people talking about politics, about current events, and even about local news. He really wanted to sit down and join one of those conversations, but since he couldn’t draw attention to himself, he kind of just had to be invisible.

He sat down next to a girl with oversized headphones covering her ears. She had her eyes closed and was moving her head in time to whatever song she was listening to; she looked like she would have rather been anywhere else. He caught sight of her notebook, though, which had HIST 327 written on the front in graffiti lettering. So he’d walked into one of the upper-level courses. That meant he’d really be out of his league.

“Excuse me,” he said, reaching over to tap her shoulder. “What class is this?”

She gave him a confused look, which . . . yeah, he understood. What kind of idiot would walk into a class without knowing what it was? “Twentieth Century Europe,” he replied. “Are you ghosting?”

“Am I . . .” He wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but since he was trying not to be noticed, he assumed that was what he was doing. “Yeah,” he said. “Don’t tell anyone.”

She snorted. “I wish I liked this class enough to voluntarily sit through it.” Then she closed her eyes again and turned up the volume on her music loud enough that even Bellamy could hear the song she was listening to—Nirvana, nice choice.

He looked around the lecture hall as more students piled in. How many of the rest of them were just like this headphones girl and didn’t really want to be there? How many of them viewed it as a chore to have to show up? Did they even know how lucky they were, how much of a privilege it was that they could actually pursue an education? He doubted it.

About two-thirds of the seats were filled by the time the professor showed up and started teaching. Bellamy thought all the information might go over his head, or that he might be rusty, but surprisingly, he felt like he was keeping up fine. The class was in the middle of talking about World War I and how the Germans had sunk the Lusitania, and even though World War I wasn’t his biggest area of expertise, he remembered learning about that briefly back in the day. This professor went a lot more in depth than his high school teachers had, though. He hadn’t realized that only six of the forty-eight lifeboats had launched, or that it only took eighteen minutes for the ship to sink. All the little details of the event fascinated him and sparked his interest even more, even though it seemed
to bore most of the other students.

The lecture lasted the entire fifty minutes, and after that, the class was done. The professor reminded them to do some reading over the weekend, which elicited a groan out of the girl sitting next to Bellamy. But hell, he would’ve read it. He wanted to be able to go home and do the reading. But he didn’t have the book, nor did he have the time.

Truth be told, he would have sat through another fifty minutes of that class if he could have, and he was halfway tempted to go find another one and sit in on it, too. But when he got in his truck, he forced himself to drive off campus and get on with his day. He couldn’t afford to waste any more time. He quite literally couldn’t afford it. So he went about the rest of his day, fixed a broken showerhead and a broken garage door—real dire shit like that—then ran his errands, stopped back at home to put all those groceries away, and swung by Polaris to work on Clarke’s car. It wasn’t much of an issue; it just needed a jump-start.

Because her car needed to be driven around a while, he hopped in and drove it back to campus that afternoon instead of his truck, meeting her at the art museum at the time she’d told him she’d be off work. When she saw her car, she climbed in and exclaimed, “Yay, you got it to start again!”

“Young your battery was dead,” he informed her. “You gotta drive your car more.”

“You hate wintertime,” she groaned, slinging her backpack into the backseat. “Thank you for fixing it, though.”

“Yeah, no problem.” He backed out of the parking space, put the car into drive, and pulled out onto the street. “So guess what I did today?” he said.

“Fixed something for Diana what’s-her-face?”

“Good guess,” he said, chuckling, “but no. I, uh….” He cast a glance at Washington Hall as he drove by and shook his head. “It was stupid,” he said. “I went and sat in on a class today.”

“A class?” she echoed.

“Yeah, a history one.”

“You just . . . walked in and sat down?”

“Mmm-hmm.” He nodded. “Apparently it’s called ghosting.”

“Huh.” She studied him closely for a moment, then asked, “What made you decide to do that?”

“I don’t know.” He turned onto the street that would lead them off of campus, feeling now like it had been a dumb idea. All it did was make him realize what he was missing out on, which kind of sucked. “Steve Jobs dropped out of college and lurked in all sorts of classes, you know that?” he said. “That’s how he learned. But I’m not gonna make a habit out of it or anything.”

“Well, why not?” she challenged.

“Because, I’ll probably get caught.”

“Bellamy.” She gave him a look. “We have had sex in a dressing room, a pool, and out on a dance floor. You never once cared about getting caught in any of those places.”

Well, she had him there. “Yeah, I just need to suck it up and remember I’m not in college, though,”
he mumbled.

“But you could be.”

He shook his head, unwilling to entertain that faraway dream. “No, I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I work. I have bills to pay. I don’t have enough money lying around to just enroll in classes.”

“No, they have scholarships for adult students, too,” she persisted. “They’re called, um... non-traditional student scholarships. I looked it up.”

“You looked it up?”

“Yes. They’re harder to get but not impossible.”

“Clarke--”

“And I think you’d be the ideal candidate. You were a great student in high school, I’m sure you could get people to write glowing letters of recommendation for you--”

“Clarke, just...” It was sweet, he supposed, that she’d even bothered looking up anything for him, but he didn’t want to get his hopes up. And if she kept talking, that was exactly what was going to happen. “I’m not goin’ to college,” he said. “It’s fine. I made peace with that a long time ago.”

“But you’d love college,” she kept on. “And you’d be so good at it. That paper you wrote was ‘exemplary work,’ remember?”

“That was one paper.”

“I mean, if money’s the issue...” She hesitated a moment, biting her lower lip nervously before offering, “I could help.”

He shut that idea down immediately. “No.”

“Bellamy, I have some scholarships. And I’m lucky enough that my parents pay for the rest. I’m not gonna graduate and have tons of debt. I could help.”

“You’re gonna be done with college soon,” he reminded her. “You’ve got your own future to think about, your own career.”

“I have money in savings I’ve never even touched.”

“Clarke.” His tone was stern and serious as he gripped the steering wheel tightly. He adored this girl, and he knew she was just saying all of this because she cared about him, but sometimes she pushed things a little too hard. He needed her to let up on this, because there was no way he would ever take her money. And she knew him well enough to know he’d never consider it.

“Okay,” she said, “I’ll back off. But if you change your mind...”

He sent her a sharp look. No, he wasn’t changing his mind. He wasn’t. No matter how much he’d enjoyed that class today.

“Okay,” she said again.

Not anymore.
Chapter 27

Clarke released the last section of her hair from the curling iron and threaded her fingers through it to loosen it up a bit. The curling iron made her natural curls bigger, rounder, more structured. She felt a bit Miss America when she took a look at herself in the mirror, but that was kind of what she was going for. “I’m gonna look pretty for you tonight, Bellamy,” she called out into the bedroom.

“You always look pretty,” was his swift response. He sounded like he was over at his closet, probably trying to find something to wear. “Now what’s this thing called again?”

“The Arkadia Art Department Professional Dinner,” she replied, using the exact wording that had been on the invitation she’d received in the mail.

“And you have to go?”

“Yeah, it’s technically part of my capstone class.” She used a small clip to secure her hair in a half ponytail, pulling down a few tendrils to frame her face.

“And what happens there?”

“You go, eat, mingle with your fellow students and with the professors.” She rolled her eyes, hoping she could avoid Professor Fuckface the entire night. “They critique your capstone collection, or the idea for your collection if you haven’t started on it.”

“What if it’s not a good critique?” he asked.

“Well, then you just stand there and smile and act like it doesn’t crush your dreams.” She put in her medium-sized hoop earrings, hating the feel of them. Normally she didn’t wear anything more than just small earrings, but this was a fancy event. She had to look fancy. “Thanks for agreeing to go with me,” she told him. When she’d casually mentioned it and hinted that she could get one guest in free with her, she hadn’t been expecting him to volunteer to come along. Although she’d certainly been hoping for it.

“Hey, when you said there’d be food, I was automatically in.”

“Well, it’s not, like, good food,” she warned him leaning towards the mirror so she could touch up her makeup. “I think they serve caviar.”

“And snails?” he guessed. “And squab?”

She made a face. “What’s squab?”

“I think it’s pigeon.”

“Ew.” That sounded horrible, but she wouldn’t put it past the art department to serve that. “Who knows? We’ll have to stop for burgers on the way back.” She grabbed her silver clutch, turned off the bathroom light, and took two steps into the bedroom when . . . she had to stop. Bellamy was at the closet, his back to her as he straightened out his suit jacket. But she could tell he looked good. When he whirled around, she was able to see just how good he looked. The word that came out of her mouth was the one that often came out of his when he saw her wearing something nice: “Wow.”
He smiled at her. “I could say the same thing.”

She swayed towards him, so unused to seeing him all dressed up in a suit like this. He looked so manly and so mature, but still very much like Bellamy. He wore form-fitting dark jeans for pants, and he kept his black suit jacket open to show his white button-down underneath. No tie, which was fine by her. Ties made people look too arrogant and stuffy.

“You look so good,” she said, hooking her fingers into his belt loops.

He let her pull him close and placed his hands on her hips. “So do you,” he said. “I like this dress.”

“Thanks.” It was a form-fitting white halter that showed plenty of back and had a horizontal slit in the midriff section. She’d been worried that it was a little too sultry for a professional dinner, but hell, it went almost all the way down to her knees. She could look sexy and still look professional at the same time. It definitely hadn’t cost a thrift store price, though. Nor a Walmart one.

He growled low in his throat and said, “We have to go right now, otherwise I’m gonna rip this thing off you and throw you down on the bed.”

She tossed her head back and laughed, wishing he would. She wouldn’t have minded being late to this stupid dinner.

Bellamy drove and got her to campus on time—well, fifteen minutes late, but no one wanted to be the first one at a dinner party, especially not this dinner party. They had to park blocks away in the commuter parking lot, because they’d taken his truck, and he didn’t have a parking permit dangling from his rearview mirror. She didn’t mind walking with him, because he was really sweet and held her hand; but since she was in heels, it wasn’t exactly easy on her feet. She didn’t want to go barefoot, so he told her to hop up onto his back, and then he carried her piggyback style down the sidewalk.

“Bellamy!” she squealed as her dress hiked up. “I think my ass is hanging out.”

“Good thing it’s a nice ass then.”

“Ooh, Bellamy!” He was definitely feeling super horny tonight, and she liked that. If he kept saying stuff like this to her, then it’d help her make it through the dinner. “Keep talking dirty to me even when we get in there,” she told him. “Okay?”

“Alright. You might get wet, though,” he cautioned.

“Mmm.” That was the idea. She wasn’t wearing any underwear, in case they decided to slip away for a minute and just . . .

The art department building was already bustling by the time they showed up, because they’d definitely made it a leisurely stroll across campus. Bellamy put her down on her feet while they were still outside on the sidewalk, but for some reason, a couple of other people who were walking inside at that same time gave them these disapproving glares. Like how dare anybody show up to this thing and attempt to have actual fun. God, some of these people who sat next to her in class every single day were so pretentious and pompous, and they thought the world revolved around them and their art. There was a reason why she wasn’t good friends with any of them.

The actual dinner party was being held in one of the largest classrooms. Clarke led Bellamy there, and his eyes got wide when he walked in. “Whoa,” he said. “This is fancy.”

“No, not really,” she said. “They just decorated everything to look fancy.” Underneath those lacy
tablecloths were still the same old tables students sat in every day. And if none of these people mulling about were dressed up, they’d look like every other college student who rolled into class in their pajamas.

“Oh, look who it is,” he said, averting his eyes as their least favorite professor cast a glare over at them. “My biggest fan.”

“Ugh, miserable old man,” she growled, wrapping her hands around his arm. “Let’s try to avoid him tonight.”

“Good idea.” He rubbed his hands against the legs of his pants, trying to be inconspicuous about it, but she wondered if he had sweaty palms or something. This definitely wasn’t his usual crowd, and it was possible he felt out of place. “So who do you wanna sit with?” he asked.

She looked around, seeing a few faces she recognized and many she didn’t. She shrugged.

He gave her a look. “Really?”

“I don’t like these people. I don’t know them very well.”

“Hmm.” He motioned to an empty table off to the side and said, “Should we go be loners over there then?”

“Yes, let’s go be loners.”

“Alright.” He grabbed her hand and led her in that direction.

The first thing Bellamy said when they sat down at their own little table was, “I wish I could go down on you right now.”

A heated blush swept over her cheeks.

“What?” he said innocently. “You told me to talk dirty to you.”

“Yeah, but . . .” When he said stuff like that, she had to fight the urge to jump his bones right then and there.

He put his arm around the back of her chair and rubbed her shoulder. “I used to sit alone at my own lunch table like this,” he revealed.

She frowned, confused. “But I thought you were popular.”

“I was, when I was older, but not when I was younger. Nobody wanted to sit with me. I was that nerdy kid with glasses. Darker skin, poor.” He shook his head. “No, not popular.”

“Aww.” She pouted. “That’s so sad. I would’ve sat with you.”

He laughed. “No, you wouldn’t. I was scrawny back then, too.”

“Oh, I know. I’ve seen the home movies.” He’d definitely changed a lot since then; it was astounding. “Who would’ve known you’d grow up to be such a sex god, huh?”

“A sex god?” he echoed laughingly. “I like that.”

“Mmm-hmm.” She liked it, too. Very much. She liked the way his fingers were stroking her arm right now, and she wished they’d venture down south to do some real good, like they had in the
Besides that?” He eyed her up and down, smirking obscenely. “I’d bend you over, lift your pretty little dress up, smack your ass, and shove my cock in you. Fuck you hard.”

The mental visual alone made her shiver with delight. “Just like that, huh?”

“Well . . . something tells me you’re already wet enough.”

Just hearing him say that made her feel even wetter. “Maybe you should check and make sure,” she suggested, spreading her legs just slightly.

His eyes bore into hers, and he licked his lips anticipatorily. He turned his body toward hers and was just about to slip his hand up under her dress when a couple of people approached their table.

“Maybe not,” she said, crossing her ankles and pushing his shoulder to keep him away. “Hi,” she greeted politely.

A young girl and two older people—her parents, presumably?—smiled and said hello back. “Can we sit here?” the father asked while his daughter was already taking her seat.

“Sure,” Clarke said, although she was kind of bummed. She liked being a loner with Bellamy, and it was so much easier to talk dirty when no one else was around.

“Looks like we got popular,” Bellamy remarked quietly as two more people approached their table: the girl was someone Clarke recognized from a lot of her classes, and the guy must have been her boyfriend, because she didn’t recognize him at all.

Since it was harder to be perverted or canoodle or even flirt now, Clarke and Bellamy both got up and made their way through the food line, both of them wrinkling their noses at the options. There was some kind of meat, but it definitely didn’t look like anything normal people would eat. “Squab,” Bellamy proclaimed. “See?”

She put some on her plate, just to be polite, really hoping it wasn’t pigeon. She took small helpings of everything else, but she didn’t intend to really eat any of it. She’d just do like the little kids did and move things around her plate, making it look like she’d eaten a lot when she really hadn’t eaten anything at all.

Bellamy, to his credit, was very daring and adventurous. He got a little bit of everything and tried a little bit of everything from salmon jerky to truffles. He usually didn’t take more than a couple of bites of any one food item, but that worked out fine, because he’d gotten small portions of everything. “I’m still tryin’ to figure out what this meat is,” he said, picking it apart with both his fingers and his fork. “I don’t know whether it’s duck or lamb.”

The father at the table cleared his throat and informed him, “I think it’s stuffed rabbit, actually.”

Bellamy froze in mid-chew, eyes growing wide in alarm. “I’m eating rabbit?”

The man nodded.

Bellamy just sat there for a few seconds, then bolted from the table, running out into the hallway. Clarke could hear him spit up what was currently in his mouth, and she wouldn’t be surprised if the rest came up later. Seriously, what kind of people served rabbit? Maybe it was a delicacy in some circles, but all she could picture when she thought of rabbits were adorable, fluffy bunnies, and
Bellamy probably pictured the same.

He came back a minute later, declared himself done with the meal, and then ventured up to the
dessert table instead. He came back with a bowl of unusually green ice cream, but he seemed excited
about it. “Thank God,” he said, digging right in. “Normal food.” The minute the ice cream entered
his mouth, though, he made a face and shook his head. “Nope, not normal. What the fuck is that?”

“I don’t know.” She wasn’t about to try it.

“I thought it’d be mint,” he said. “I think this is . . .” He took another bite as a taste test. “Avocado.”

“Yuck.” Avocado ice cream? Who even thought of that? Why would anyone attempt to destroy one
of the greatest foods ever invented?

“Here, try some,” he said, holding out a small spoonful.

“No, I’ll take your word for it.”

“Come on, just try it. I ate rabbit.”

Well . . . he really had. And she’d played it safe this whole time with the gourmet cheeses. “Fine, one
bite,” she said, letting him feed it to her. She wrinkled her nose and shook her head as she swallowed
quickly. “Nope, I don’t like that.”

“Man, we are stoppin’ for burgers and pizza on the way back,” he proclaimed. “Screw this shit.”

“Yeah, really,” she agreed emphatically, remembering a bit too late that there were other people at
that table, people who were perhaps more accustomed to this type of food, as they were all eating it
without problem or complaint. She and Bellamy met their eyes a bit awkwardly and attempted to
smile.

There was very little conversation, and what little conversation did bubble up was . . . stilted. The girl
with her parents didn’t seem to like social situations very much, because she sat all hunched over,
like she was purposefully trying to be as small as possible. Clarke did catch her sneaking a few
glances at Bellamy, though, at various parts of Bellamy, so . . . well, she liked him.

The other young couple was—in fancy vocabulary—atrocious. The guy openly bragged about how
much money he had and how he was going to use it to help his girlfriend there launch her career
after she graduated. “Yeah, she won’t even really have to do any of the work,” he said. “I got it all
handled for her. We’ll open her own gallery up in D.C. All she’s gotta do is paint.”

“And leave the business stuff to you,” she added.

“That’s right. I take care of my girl.”

She smiled at him, and they exchanged what had to be the least affectionate peck on the lips Clarke
had ever seen.

They of course asked Clarke what her plans were, and she shrugged and answered honestly. “Don’t
really know yet. I’ve gotta figure some things out.”

They nodded pleasantly enough but seemed unimpressed.

When they got up to go get some of that avocado ice cream, Bellamy snorted and muttered
sarcastically, “Sorry I can’t buy you a whole gallery, babe. Or build up a whole business for you.”
“Don’t worry about it.” She leaned in close, whispering in his ear, “I bet he doesn’t even make her orgasm.”

“Probably not,” he agreed. “But that’s what I’m gonna make you do tonight. I’m gonna make you cum so hard.”

“Shh!” she hushed him, but it was too late. He’d spoken a little too loudly, and that poor family had overheard. They all stared down at their plates with round, mortified eyes, like they weren’t in any way used to hearing this kind of conversation over dinner.

“Mmm.” Bellamy pressed his lips together tightly. “Crap.”

“You know what? Let’s go look at my artwork,” she suggested, hastily getting up from the table.

“You’re artwork, yes,” he agreed. Of course, on the way out the door, he gave her ass a little smack, and hell, she couldn’t even pretend to be mad about it.

They laughed as they tumbled together down the hallway and up the stairs to what was basically deemed the ‘work room,’ where every enrolled art major had the space and supplies to work on their creations. “God, we so don’t belong here,” she said, pulling him into the corner of the stairwell so they could kiss a little bit before going up the next flight.

“Well, you belong,” he murmured against her lips. “I don’t.”

She frowned, not because he said he didn’t belong, but because . . . “You really think I belong with these people? They like avocado ice cream, Bellamy. They eat rabbit.”

“Well, you don’t belong,” he corrected, sliding a knee in between her legs. “But you can fit in if you have to. I . . . can’t.”

Her fingers toyed with the buttons on her shirt, and she pouted. “I thought you fit in just fine.”

“I was the only guy without a tie, Clarke.”

“So?” It was a tie. What did it even matter? “You know what, Bellamy, honestly, I’ve always felt more comfortable around you and all your friends than I do around any of these people. Or any of the people my parents know, or my neighbors.”

“Clarke, my neighbors, the ones across the street . . . both got arrested last year for a ‘domestic dispute,’” he said, using air quotes. “The guy down the street sells crack. There’s a teenage couple moving in on the corner who decided it’d be a good idea to have two kids before they graduated, and hell, even Jasper’s a pothead. I mean . . . is that really where you wanna belong?”

Her frown deepened, because she wasn’t sure what point he was trying to make. “Bellamy, I don’t care about your neighborhood. I care about you and your place and your friends.”

“Yeah, well, we’re all in that neighborhood,” he pointed out, “and trust me when I say that isn’t where you wanna belong. This, all this . . .” He motioned around them to the building they were. “This is what’s gonna take you someplace better.”

She stared at him curiously, wishing he wouldn’t have phrased it like that. Because he made it sound like, wherever she was going in life, he didn’t think he’d end up there with her. And right now, when she thought of the future . . . all she thought of was Bellamy.

“Let’s go,” he said, taking her hand, starting up the remainder of the stairs. “Show me this artwork.”
She managed a smile, pushing the momentary worry out of her mind. He was just being his usual self, wanting the best for someone else and thinking he deserved nothing for himself. That was all.

The work room was bustling by the time they got up there. Clarke brought Bellamy over to the corner, where her in-progress paintings were currently occupying two easels. She still had a lot of work to do, because so far, all she’d worked on was a portrait of him smiling, along with the close-up picture of his mouth at her breast. He said he liked the smiling one and that she’d made him look good, but he was partial to the sexy one. “Are you gonna do any others like that?” he asked. “Like maybe . . . my head between your legs?”

“It’s in the works,” she assured him. No way was she going to forget to paint his favorite thing.

Even though it was supposed to be the professors who were mulling about offering their professional opinion even when the students didn’t ask for it, most of them were still downstairs enjoying the dinner. In the meantime, there were, of course, a few students who were arrogant enough to think they were professors. One guy in a fedora strolled by, took a close look at her paintings, and declared, “Pretty good. Don’t let your brushstroke get sloppy, though.” And then he was on his way. But a minute later, a girl in a pantsuit made her presence known when she tapped Clarke on the shoulder and said, “Excuse me? I just wanted to say, this . . .” She pointed to the sexy painting. “It’s good and all, but I’m not really getting a sense of any real passion.”

“Oh, there was passion,” Clarke assured her. “Believe me, there was passion.”

“Well . . .” The girl rolled her eyes and mumbled, “Whatever,” as she went on her way.

“Damn,” Bellamy said, laughing in disbelief. “What the hell’s with these people? I thought art majors were supposed to be free-spirited hippies or something.”

“Oh, if only.” She sighed, covering up the sexy painting, because as more and more people filtered into the work room, she grew a little self-conscious about having her breast technically on display. “It happens all the time. They come into the program with all these great, creative ideas, and then they get so caught up in the technical side of it that they just lose all their originality.”

“No, you, though,” he said, taking a step back to survey his portrait. “This is good.”

“Well, it’s a work-in-progress,” she admitted, “and I know I’m not, like, the best artist here. But seriously, there’s one girl in my class who’s painting vases for her final project. Vases, Bellamy. And do you know why? Because she thinks it’ll score well on the rubric.”

He snorted. “Screw the rubric.”

“My thoughts exactly.” If this was going to be her final project and her Trikru exhibit all rolled into one, it was sure as hell going to be something she felt passionately about. And she most definitely felt passionate about Bellamy.

When the professors began to enter, every student pretty much took their place beside their work and waited obediently as they made their rounds. Bellamy got interested in a couple of particularly fancy piñatas hanging from the ceiling and left her on her own a bit, but he stayed within earshot, as though he wanted to hear what all these experts had to say about his face. Most of them were quite complimentary over both paintings and offered her some helpful suggestions for finishing them out. She had to explain the vision behind her collection, of course, which she herself still wasn’t entirely sure of. She described it as a character study of one man, except instead of being a character study in the traditional literature format, it was all visual. She told them about her upcoming exhibit at Trikru, and they were very congratulatory about that. One of the oldest professors even made Clarke laugh.
when she said, “And you say it’s called ‘A Handsome Friend,’ right?” She wriggled her eyebrows, pointing to the painting of Bellamy’s face, and said, “I can see why,” before going on to the next person.

Bellamy overheard that of course, looked over his shoulder, and did a celebratory fist pump at his side. Then he returned his attention to the piñatas and a whole bunch of other artwork lying around that seemed to have been abandoned so far this semester, but he was definitely still listening intently to every critique Clarke got.

Of course, just when Clarke thought he’d forgotten about her, good old Fuckface had to saunter her way, arms crossed over his chest, face scrunched up in . . . discontent wasn’t even a strong enough word for it. Disdain, perhaps? Complete and utter contempt?

“This is what you’ve done with your in-class work time?” he snarled.

“Yes.” There were plenty of other students there who hadn’t even started putting together the finished product yet, and were only able to have the professors critique their ideas so far.

“Hmm.” He scratched at the disgusting grey beard on his chin and shook his head. “No, I don’t really like it,” he said bluntly. “I think you could choose a better subject.”

Clarke bristled, not about to roll over and play dead here just because he was the one assigning her grade. Of course he didn’t like her subject. He didn’t like Bellamy and probably recognized him. But that was a good thing. She wanted it to be realistic. “I think I have a great subject,” she stated confidently. “These are only two of the ten paintings. There’s gonna be a variety.”

“Oh, is there?” he challenged.

“Yes.” She’d left her sketchbook there the other day, right behind one of the easels, so she swiped it up and quickly flipped to the pages where all her drawings of Bellamy were. “It’s like a character study,” she said, “see?”

“Some of these are a bit graphic, don’t you think?”

She shrugged. “You never said it had to be PG.”

“Hmm, I suppose I didn’t.” He flipped to one of the last drawings she’d done, and also one of the ones that was closest to her heart: an agonized Bellamy crying as he recounted all the gruesome details of Gina’s death for her.

“See, whatever he’s going through, I want people to feel like they’re going through it with him,” she explained. “I think that’s gonna come across.”

“And what’s he going through here?” the professor asked. “The message doesn’t convey.”

She cast a quick glance at Bellamy, who was inconspicuously moseying closer to her now, his back still towards them, almost like he was trying to disguise himself from this jackass. He was pretending to be all interested in some abandoned bowl that someone had attempted to make but left behind.

There was no way she was going to stand here and tell anyone what he’d been crying about that night, let alone this complete asshole of a man, so she simply said, “It’s open to interpretation,” hoping he’d leave it at that.

But of course, he didn’t. “I’m not arriving at any solid interpretation. I’d like you to explain it to me.”
She sighed frustratedly, not about to do that.

“Oh, for Christ’s sakes,” Bellamy muttered, finally making his presence known. He stomped up to them, grabbed the sketchbook right out of the professor’s hands, and said, “Oh, yeah, that one? That’d be when I told her about my dead ex-girlfriend. Any other questions?”

The professor was, for once, speechless. He had no sanctimonious parting shots as he told Clarke, “Carry on with it,” she shuffled over to the next person.

Bellamy slammed her book shut and handed it back to her. “I really hate that guy,” he muttered.

“Yeah.” She looked at him sadly, hoping he hadn’t done that just for her. “I’m surprised you just blurted that out, though.”

“Well, I’m not gonna let him dock your grade just ‘cause he doesn’t get it.”

“He doesn’t have to get it.” She didn’t care what he thought or what she ended up getting on this assignment. She’d pass the class, even if it was just a C. She was a good enough student to get by even when her professor hated her subject and, by extension, probably hated her.

“It’s fine,” Bellamy insisted. “I don’t know about you, but I’m ready to get outta here, though.”

Oh, she was more than ready. She’d been ready ever since they’d walked in. “Let’s go home?” she suggested hopefully.

He wound one arm around her waist, echoing her words. “Let’s go home.”

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Bellamy was such a good guy. Clarke didn’t even have to complain about how her feet were still hurting her for him to swoop her up in his arms and carry her into the house. “How romantic,” she teased, because he was carrying her the bridal style way, but it became less romantic when her head hit the doorframe.

“Oh, sorry,” he said, and they both started laughing until they caught sight of . . . the living room. The very full living room. It wasn’t just Murphy and Miller hanging out, or even just the two of them with Emori and Jackson. It was everyone. Jasper, Monty, Harper, Maya, Lincoln, and Octavia. Everyone fell silent when Bellamy and Clarke came in.

“Hey, guys,” Bellamy said, setting Clarke down on her own two feet. “What—why’s everyone here?”

“We were waiting for you two,” Miller said. “What took you so long?”

Bellamy still looked confused, but he answered anyway. “We had to stop and get something to eat.”

Murphy snorted and mumbled to Emori, “I bet they ate out, if you know what I mean.”

“What’re you guys doin’ here?” Bellamy asked again. “Not that I mind or anything, but . . .”

“Octavia told us all to come here,” Harper jumped in. “We don’t know why.”

Clarke was beginning to feel as puzzled as Bellamy was. They were a close-knit group, for sure, but usually the only time they all got together was on their Saturday nights or when they all decided to head out to TonDC. Something felt . . . kind of off.
“Sorry,” Octavia apologized, “it’s just that your place is bigger than mine and . . . well, it only seemed natural to do this here.”

“Do . . . what?” Bellamy asked skeptically.

Octavia took a deep breath, looked at Lincoln, got an encouraging nod from him, and then faced the group of them again. “Okay, well, we wanted to tell you guys all at once . . .”

_Oh god,_ Clarke thought, immediately checking for a ring on the girl’s left hand.

Octavia’s whole face lit up, and she exclaimed, “I’m pregnant!”

Every single person in that room—including Clarke—gasped in disbelief. Except for Bellamy. He didn’t say anything, didn’t move, didn’t make a sound.


“You’re not pregnant,” Murphy said doubtfully.

“No, I am,” she insisted.

“You don’t look pregnant.”

To prove him wrong, she lifted up her sweatshirt, indeed revealing a very small baby bump underneath. Everyone gasped again.

“I’ve been wearing sweatshirts and jackets to try to keep it hidden,” she explained, “and so much of the reason why Lincoln and I haven’t made it to every single night out and every single night here is because . . . well, I’ve kind of been nauseous.”

Harper let out a high-pitched squeal of delight, running at Octavia gleefully. “Let me see!” she yelped, putting her hands on her best friend’s stomach. “Oh my god, that is a bump!”

Everyone else started crowding in on Octavia, swarming her like bees to a honey jar. Even the guys wanted to get a good look at the baby bump, but the girls were definitely the ones interested in feeling it. There were a lot of congrats being thrown around to both her and Lincoln, and Lincoln was very gracious about it while Octavia finally snapped, “Okay, stop touching me!”

Clarke cast a glance up at Bellamy, who still hadn’t really moved. He just stood there, eyes wide, mouth halfway open, staring at his sister in . . . amazement? Horror? She couldn’t really tell, but he definitely looked stunned.

Obviously Octavia cared about his reaction the most of all. She ignored all the questions about how far along she was and how long they’d known and instead smiled shakily at Bellamy, obviously hoping to get some kind of positive response out of him. Clarke could see it in her eyes. She was pleading with him to just be happy for her and not to be mad.

“Go,” she urged, pushing gently against his back.

He slowly shuffled forward, and his friends made room for him so he could give his little sister a hug. “Congratulations,” he said quietly.

“Thank you.” Octavia wasn’t one for crying, so maybe it was the hormones or maybe she was just super relieved when she blinked back tears.

_Oh my god,_ Clarke thought, sidling up behind Bellamy. This was . . . a bomb. Octavia had literally
just dropped a bomb on the rest of them. Especially her brother. None of them had seen this coming, but really . . . they probably should have. Octavia hadn’t had one drink at TonDC for months. She hadn’t worn any tight clothing. She’d been “feeling sick” on more than one occasion. Now that she thought about it, it just seemed so obvious.

When it was her turn to congratulate Octavia, she settled for just a hug rather than trying to touch her stomach; she could only imagine how much pregnant women hated that, and Octavia didn’t even appear to be that far along yet. There would be plenty of stomach touching to come.

Out of the corner of her eye, she watched as Bellamy and Lincoln shook hands, but it was one tense handshake. Not on Lincoln’s end, of course, but Bellamy . . . oh god, Bellamy couldn’t even look him in the eye. The hand that wasn’t shaking Lincoln’s was balled up into a fist at his side.

“We’re excited,” Octavia said. “We wanted to tell you guys sooner, but we also wanted to get a little further along first.”

“How far along are you?” Maya asked. “Four months?”

“Four months?” Octavia shrieked, shooting her a warning glare. “No, just a little over three.”

Miller traced his finger in the air, as if he were doing the mental math. “So that means you got pregnant during . . .”

“Vacation, yes,” she confirmed.

“Wait a minute,” Murphy interjected, “does that mean the baby’s Mexican then?”

“Shut up, Murphy,” Octavia snapped.

“Well, it was conceived in Mexico.”

That got a laugh out of everyone . . . or almost everyone. Not Bellamy. He looked shell-shocked, almost catatonically lost in his own thoughts while everything just swirled around him. And he stayed like that the rest of the time Octavia was there. She and Lincoln talked about whether they thought it was a boy or a girl, whether or not they wanted to find out, and Lincoln mentioned that they were probably going to start looking at houses so they could move out of his apartment and design a nursery. Bellamy breathed a sigh of relief when they assured them that they’d stay in Arkadia, though. His sister wasn’t going anywhere.

Harper and Emori both made their sales-pitches to be the godmother, and Murphy threw his hat in the ring for that for some reason, too. “What?” he said. “I gotta be in the running for something. Everyone knows Bellamy’s gonna be the godfather.”

Bellamy tensed, but no one else seemed to notice. Clarke found his hand and gave it a good squeeze, not even sure what was going on in his mind right now. He was going to be an uncle. His little sister was having a baby. Was he happy? Was he pissed? Was he something else entirely that Clarke didn’t even have the vocabulary for? She had no idea, and more so than ever, she wished she knew what was going on in his head.

A lot of them had to work tomorrow, including Lincoln, so no one stayed over too late. Octavia and Lincoln were the first to go, and Octavia made sure to get another hug from her brother before she left. “We can talk more about it whenever you’re ready,” she said, and he just nodded in response. Monty, Jasper, Harper, and Maya all left shortly after that, but Jackson and Emori decided to just stay over.
“Come on, John,” Emori said, grabbing her boyfriend’s hand, leading him down the hall. “Let’s go make our own baby.”

“Uh, let’s not,” he said emphatically as they shut the bedroom door.

“Let’s go adopt a Vietnamese orphan,” Jackson joked as he and Miller headed upstairs. Miller played along. “Yeah, let’s do that.”

When it was just her and Bellamy left down there in that living room, Clarke bravely asked, “Are you okay?” knowing that was a complex question for him to answer right now.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he said, getting to his feet. He walked straight into that kitchen, pulled a six-pack of beer bottles out of the refrigerator, and marched right out into the back yard, like he was on a mission or something.

Oh, no, Clarke thought. Beer and standoffishness. Not a good combo.

She went to the kitchen window and watched as Bellamy unscrewed one beer, chugged half of it, and then threw what was left at a tree trunk. It shattered, and he yelled, “Fuck!” at the top of his lungs before grabbing himself another beer.

Murphy meandered out of his bedroom wearing nothing but his underwear around the time the second beer bottle hit the tree. “Well, this doesn’t look good,” he remarked.

It definitely didn’t. But Clarke thought it might be good to give him some space. Once he smashed a couple more beer bottles, maybe he’d feel better.

Miller joined them downstairs at that kitchen window by the time Bellamy was onto his third bottle. He had taken to chugging the entire thing now, so he was probably making himself sick.

“He’s gonna feel this later,” Miller warned. “One of us should go stop him.”

“Good idea,” Murphy said. “Clarke.”

She glanced back and forth between the two of them. Both guys were looking at her like they expected her to be the Bellamy whisperer. “Me?” she said. “Why me?”

“Well, you’re sleeping with him, so . . .” Murphy shrugged. “It’s like your spousal duty.”

“But I’m not his spouse,” she protested. Hell, they were his roommates, and they’d known him longer.

“Close enough,” Miller said, grabbing her by the shoulders. “Good luck, Clarke.” He steered her in the direction of the door and gave her a gentle shove out onto the back steps. Crap, she thought, worried that she would say something wrong and upset him even more. How did one talk to the world’s most protective big brother about his newly pregnant little sister? She had no idea where to even start.

“Hey,” she said softly, rubbing her arms. It was chilly out there, and she hadn’t put on a coat. Her dress was definitely not meant for this winter weather.

“I don’t wanna talk right now, Clarke,” he warned. “You know how every time I say I don’t wanna talk, you try to get me to talk?”
“Yeah?”

“Well, don’t do that right now.”

She sighed, wrapping her arms around herself tightly. “Okay.” Maybe if she just stood here and waited, then he’d decide to open up on his own.

He threw that third beer bottle at the tree, but he missed this time, and that seemed to piss him off even more. Growling, he reached down into the six-pack for the fourth one and started drinking.

_I’m gonna freeze to death out here_, she thought, shivering. But if she went inside, then Bellamy might stay out here the whole night, and that wouldn’t help anything.

“You know what?” he said, keeping his back to her. “I’m not mad.”

“You’re not?” How did he explain all these broken beer bottles then?

“No. I mean, not at her. It’s . . .” He trailed off, shaking his head. “I don’t know. It’s complicated. ‘cause I am mad, but . . . maybe I’m just mad at Lincoln.”

Good, he was already talking. This was good. “Why?” she asked. “Just because he got her pregnant?”

“No, because he—” Bellamy spun around and stopped short when he saw how cold she looked. “Shit, Clarke,” he swore, immediately taking off his jacket. He draped it over her shoulders and rubbed her back and arms for her. “You should go inside,” he told her.

She shook her head stubbornly. “No, I wanna stay out here with you.” She wasn’t going inside unless he did.

“Clarke . . .” He turned back around and took another drink, warning her, “I could be out here a while.”

“That’s fine.” She slipped her arms into the sleeves of his jacket and pulled it closed around her chest, already feeling warmer.

“It’s just . . .” He tossed his whole head back, downing a significant portion of the booze inside that bottle, and swirled what was left around at the bottom, and then threw that bottle at the tree. He connected this time, and it shattered into tiny pieces. “Dammit,” he swore, dropping into a squat. He raked his hands through his hair, then clasped his hands over his mouth in a prayer position. “My sister’s pregnant,” he said, and then he said it again as if to convince himself it were true. “My sister’s pregnant—my little sister. She’s twenty years old. He’s twenty-six, you know that? And now he did this to her. He changed her whole life forever.”

Clarke hesitantly squatted down beside him, a little awkward in her dress. “It does take two, you know,” she pointed out.

“I know. And I know she hasn’t been a virgin since she was eighteen. I knew they . . . did that. But now there’s . . . there’s this baby. There’s proof. And now . . . she’s never gonna go to college now,” he lamented. “She’s gonna have the kid and settle down with Lincoln and . . . that’s that. For the rest of her life, she’s gonna be connected . . . to him.”

Clarke stood up when Bellamy did, quietly reminding him, “Lincoln loves her. She loves Lincoln.” There were definitely worse people for Octavia to be forever connected to.
“Yeah, but it just feels so official . . .” He exhaled heavily, shaking his head in defeat. “It’s over,” he said. “I’m not the one who gets to take care of her anymore.”

Just the way he phrased that . . . in his mind, it wasn’t that he was no longer ‘the one who had to take care of her anymore,’ but rather ‘the one who got to.’ The sense of responsibility he felt towards his sister was a privilege for him. And it broke her heart to hear him say that, because she knew where he was coming from with all of this. On some level, he was incredibly happy for her, and once he had time to digest this and realize that he was actually going to be an uncle, he’d probably start to get really excited about it. But Bellamy was the guy who was willing to devote his whole life to taking care of the people he loved, and he viewed his past experiences with Roma, Gina, and his own unborn child as a failure to do so. He wanted to be the one to take care of Octavia, but now he had to let her go. At least some of her.

“You’re her brother,” she reminded him. “She’ll always need you. You’ll always help take care of her.”

“Yeah, but it’s Lincoln’s job now.” He grabbed another beer, opened it, and took only a small sip this time before sulking over to the trampoline. She followed and sat down on the side next to him, tucking her bare legs up underneath herself to try to keep them warm.

“Bellamy, I don’t think anyone can ever take your place in her life,” she assured him.

“I know,” he said. “Deep down, Clarke, I know everything your saying is true. It’s just, right now . . .” His sentence faded into another heavy sigh.

“You’re processing it,” she said. “It’s a big change. It’s okay, Bellamy. You don’t have to be bouncing off the walls over this.”

“But I am happy for her,” he insisted. “I probably didn’t act happy, though. Fuck, I’m such a jerk sometimes.”

Clarke rubbed his back, feeling the tenseness of the muscles there. “She understands.”

“Does she? I don’t even know if I understand myself half the time.” He dragged his hands through his hair again, frustrated now. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I don’t know why I can’t just be happy for her and leave it at that.”

“Bellamy, you told me yourself, you’re so protective of her because you feel like you couldn’t protect . . .” She paused before saying their names. “Roma and Gina.”

“Yeah.” He nodded sadly. “Couldn’t protect them.”

“And even when there’s nothing to protect Octavia from, like right now, you still feel like you need to protect her. And maybe . . .” She hesitated, not sure if it was a wise idea to even bring up the other person he’d lost. But he was actually being pretty open and conversational about all of this without putting up much of a fight, so she figured she had to strike while the iron was hot. “Okay, don’t get mad at me for saying this,” she prefaced, “but do you think part of the reason why you’re having such a strong reaction to this is because . . .” She winced, hating to even bring it up. “Because if things had worked out, you would already be a parent yourself right now?”

He rubbed his forehead, taking a moment before admitting, “Maybe. I don’t know.” Then he changed his tune, though, and said, “No. No, I’m not jealous or anything.”

“Because it’d be okay if you were.”
“I’m not,” he insisted. “I mean, yeah, finding out O’s gonna have a baby . . . it makes me think of Gina, it makes me think of . . .” He trailed off, shivering himself now. “But I think of that every day, so this is nothing new.”

“It is new, though,” she said. Thinking about Gina and the baby he’d never gotten to know was one thing; but seeing his sister’s baby bump and knowing that she and Lincoln were going to have what he’d lost . . . that had to be a lot to deal with.

“I think I’m just . . . I’m adjusting,” he decided. “I gotta adjust.”

“And you will,” she assured him, squeezing his shoulder supportively. “Do me a favor, though? If you have to vent, vent to me. Don’t vent to Octavia.” She was an expectant mother now; she didn’t need that stress.

He nodded in agreement. “Deal.” Then he raised his bottle to his lips as though he were about to take another drink, but he never did. He lowered it back to his lap, grimacing.

“What?” she asked.

“Oh, I feel like I’m gonna be sick,” he cautioned, holding one hand to his stomach.

“Is it the beer or the rabbit?” she asked.

“Both.” He leaned forward and launched the contents of his stomach onto the ground. She squeezed her eyes shut and twisted away, but still, she stayed right there next to him. He’d probably go inside soon now, and either go to bed or proceed to throw up some more, but as long as he was sitting out there, she was sitting out there with him. Simple as that.
Almost all night, Bellamy lay awake, thinking about how he was going to be an uncle in a few months. It was surreal. Even though he’d always known it would happen someday, he’d always figured it would be a couple years down the line. He hadn’t expected it so soon. Octavia wasn’t even old enough to legally drink yet, but now she was having a baby.

It kind of made his head spin.

He rearranged his work schedule the next day so that he could pay a visit to his sister. Talking with Clarke last night had him feeling calmer today, and he wanted to make sure she understood that he was actually happy for her. Because something told him he hadn’t made that clear enough last night.

When she opened the door to her apartment and saw him standing there, her whole face lit up with surprise. “Hey,” she said. “What’re you doing here?”

“Just thought I’d stop by,” he said. “Can I come in?”

“Sure.” She stepped aside and held the door open for him.

Stepping foot into her living room was almost . . . disorienting. It didn’t look like he remembered it at all. Clearly she and Lincoln had rearranged some things, and . . . “Did you get new furniture?” he asked.

“No. You just don’t recognize it because you never come over here.” She smirked.

He scratched his eyebrow, smiling sheepishly. “Sorry.” He didn’t really feel the most comfortable here. Technically, it was Lincoln’s apartment and she’d just moved in with him a couple years ago. Lincoln paid the rent, and Lincoln had been the one to buy all that furniture he didn’t recognize.

“It’s good to see you,” she said, shoving her hands in her back pockets. She was wearing a black t-shirt, no longer hiding her body under oversized sweatshirts and jackets. It was so glaringly obvious now that she was knocked up. How the hell had he not noticed that before? He felt guilty for being so oblivious to it.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, concerned.

“Good,” she said. “No nausea this morning.”

“Good. That’s . . . good.” He thought of his own nausea last night, and he felt bad that she was going to have to deal with it potentially on an everyday basis. It sounded like she’d already dealt with her fair share, so hopefully it let up as the pregnancy wore on. “I could go get you some ginger ale or something,” he offered. “Doesn’t that help?”

“It does,” she said, “but don’t worry, Lincoln’s already gotten me some.”

“Oh. Alright.” Good old Lincoln. As much as it stung to entrust his sister’s well-being to that guy . . . he had to do it, especially right now. And at least it sounded like Lincoln was taking good care of her. He’d mentioned something last night about reading books for expectant fathers and how excited he was to go to Lamaze class with Octavia.
“Listen, O,” he said, trying to cut to the chase in case she had things to do today. “I just wanted to let you know I *am* happy for you. And I probably did a really crappy job of showing it last night.”

“It’s okay, Bellamy,” she assured him. “I know how you are.”

“But I shouldn’t be like that,” he acknowledged. “I am happy for you, really. I mean, it threw me for a loop, yeah; I didn’t see it coming. But I’m still happy.”

“Me, too,” she said. “And just so you know, I didn’t see it coming, either. It’s not like it was planned or anything.”

_Good, _he thought. He’d been wondering about that, and he’d hoped that Octavia wouldn’t have purposefully tried to have a baby at the ripe old age of twenty.

“One too many tequilas in Mexico,” she said. “But I won’t go into detail.”

“Yeah, please don’t.” It didn’t matter how open-minded he was trying to be about this whole thing; he still didn’t need to hear all that. “How long have you known then?”

“For about two months.”

“Wow.” The only other secret his sister had kept from him for two months was . . . well, Lincoln.

“I wanted to tell you,” she said, “but anything can happen in the first few months, so we wanted to get past those risks before we said anything.”

“Makes sense.” Part of him wished he would have known, but another part was grateful he hadn’t. Dealing with everything he had around New Year’s had been enough on its own. He couldn’t imagine piling this on top of all that.

“I’m due at the start of June,” she informed him. “Crazy, huh?”

“Yeah.” That didn’t really seem all that far away. “Holy shit, O, you’re gonna be a mom.”

“I know.”

“Mom’s gonna be a grandmother.”

“Yeah, I haven’t told her yet.” She cringed. “I was kinda hoping you’d help me with that?”

“Yeah, sure.” They could go visit her on Sunday. Octavia could do all the talking, but he’d be there for moral support. “She’ll be excited for you,” he predicted.

“You think?”

“Yeah. She was seventeen when she got pregnant with me, so . . . at twenty, you’re like an old woman compared to that.”

She laughed nervously. “Yeah, well, I know you guys both wanted other things for me. College and . . . college, mostly.”

“Octavia . . .” Yeah, he’d wanted that for her, in large part because he’d missed out on it himself. But clearly life was taking her in a different direction, and as long as she loved what she had . . . then that was all that mattered, he supposed. “You’re happy, right?”

“No, don’t be nervous,” he cut in. “You’ll do fine. You’ll be a great mom.”

“And you’ll be . . . the world’s okayest uncle,” she joked.

“An uncle.” Even though he still had some lingering concerns for her, he couldn’t deny that the thought of having a niece or nephew excited him. “Wow.”

“Come here, Bellamy,” she said, walking towards him with open arms.

He opened up his arms, too, and hugged her back tightly, more tightly than he had in a long time. In a couple months, she might be too big to hug for all he knew. But even then, she’d still be his little sister. She’d always be that to him. “I love you so much,” he told her. Even though he did a lot of things to show that, he didn’t outright tell her very often.

An even rarer thing, though, was for her to tell him. But today, she did: “I love you, too, big brother.”

As long as that was always true . . . then he was fine.

He didn’t leave Octavia’s place emptyhanded that day. He left with a photo, a very special photo he looked at for ten minutes straight over his lunch break: an ultrasound. She’d gotten him a copy of her most recent ultrasound. It was a little weird to be looking at a picture of something his little sister had actually conceived, but it was cool, too. At three and a half months, the baby was looking like an actual baby. He could make out the head and the body, and the image would only get clearer over time. Octavia claimed she could make out a penis, too, so she was convinced it was a boy, but she said Lincoln wasn’t giving up hope for a girl yet.

That night, he sat on the bed with Clarke and showed her the ultrasound picture. She’d never seen one before, so she was mesmerized. “This is so surreal,” she said. “I can’t believe that’s actually . . . in her right now.”

“I know.” It had to still be pretty small, because her stomach was pretty small. Octavia was a thin girl, so she probably wouldn’t put on a whole lot of weight all over. She’d look like she was walking around with a basketball underneath her clothes soon enough, though. That was when it would become more real than surreal.

“So are you still doing okay with it?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’m alright.” He sighed as he looked down at that sonogram in his hand, wishing he could quell the feeling of . . . envy. There was envy eating away at him right now, and there had been all day. It felt ridiculous to be envious of a pregnancy his sister had managed to accomplish after “one too many tequilas.” But he was.

“I never got one of these,” he lamented, wishing he had just that much. Sure, his kid wouldn’t have looked like much more than a speck, but . . . it would have been something. Something to hold onto. “Maybe I am a little jealous,” he reluctantly admitted.

She leaned into him, resting her head on his shoulder, giving him that silent support he needed. She didn’t seem surprised to hear him admit that. Hell, she’d probably known before he did.

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Bellamy Blake was not an easy man to buy presents for. He liked some rather peculiar things, what with his interests in history and Greek mythology and all that. But he already had so much history stuff that Clarke wasn’t sure whether she’d be getting him something he already had or not. Besides,
maybe he got tired of receiving history-themed gifts all the time.

When Raven stopped by in the afternoon, Clarke was in full-on Amazon Prime mode, browsing the search results for “cool gifts for guys” on her laptop. And she was having no luck whatsoever. There were lots of novelty gifts, stupidly funny t-shirts and mugs, tools, and even toys. Nothing that Bellamy would really want or need, though.

“What’re you doing?” Raven chirped, plopping down next to her on the couch.

“Trying to find a gift for Bellamy’s birthday,” she answered.

“Oh, yeah? When’s that?”

“A week after Valentine’s Day.”

“Well, think about Valentine’s Day first,” Raven suggested. ‘What’re you getting him for that?’

“I don’t know, I figured I’d just stop by Ice Nation and pick up some more slutty lingerie. He seems to like that.”

“Well, of course he does; he’s a guy,” Raven said. “You know what you should get him, though?”

“Raven, if you try to persuade me to get that dick-molding kit again . . .”

“It’s really awesome, though,” Raven insisted. “Easy to use, and since it technically sculpts around the outside of his dick, you end up with something even bigger than he actually is.”

“I can’t handle anything bigger,” Clarke confessed. “Do you know what it’s like taking Bellamy’s cock in your vagina? It’s like trying to put a Summer sausage in a doughnut hole.”

“Okay, interesting visual.” Raven laughed, then peered over at Clarke’s computer screen. “What’re you finding?”

“Not much,” Clarke muttered. “Donald Trump toilet paper. That’s kind of the top option right now.”

“You cannot get your man toilet paper for his birthday. Let me see that.” Raven seized the computer for her and started typing rapidly, navigating off of Amazon altogether. “I’m sure there’s plenty of other interesting stuff out there.”

“He’s hard to buy for,” Clarke complained. “And after he got me an entire art exhibit for Christmas . . . I feel like I kinda have to get him something good.”

“You do,” Raven said. “You will.” She tilted the computer towards Clarke to show her a really nice watch, but Clarke shook her head. She’d never even seen Bellamy wear a watch before.

“So where is old Bellagio today?” Raven asked as she kept looking. “Asleep in your bedroom?”

“No, he and Octavia are visiting his mom. Breaking the news.”

“What news?” Raven questioned.

“Oh, yeah, I didn’t tell you. Guess what? Octavia’s pregnant.”

Raven’s eyebrows shot upward. “What?”

“Yeah. Big shocker. But she’s got the bump and everything to prove it.”
"That’s crazy,” Raven said. “Isn’t she still pretty young?”

“Twenty.”

“And she and Lincoln are having a baby. Wow,” Raven said, astonished. “I can’t even picture that for myself right now.”

“Oh, I know, me neither. But she seems excited, so . . .” Clarke trailed off and shrugged. “Bellamy wasn’t too thrilled about it at first, but he calmed down.”

“Yeah?” Raven found another gift, an NFL history book, and Clarke wrinkled her nose and shook her head. Bellamy watched some NFL games when nothing else was on, or if the Redskins were playing. But other than that, he didn’t seem to have a major interest in it.

“Why don’t you get him something uncle-ish then?” Raven suggested.

“I think I’ll leave that to Octavia.”

“Then take him somewhere.”

“Ha!” Clarke laughed. “Yeah, right. He won’t let me pay for anything. Food, movies . . . if we ever go anywhere, he wants to pay for it all.”

“Just take him to Ocean City for the weekend or something.”

Clarke tensed at the mention of that place. “No, I can’t take him there.”

“Why not? Just pay for the hotel in advance and let him know the room’s gonna go to waste if he doesn’t go with you.”

“No, Ocean City is not . . . it’s not an option,” she said definitively. She didn’t blame Raven for suggesting it, though. Raven didn’t know that was where Gina had died. Raven didn’t know about Gina at all.

“Well, just take him anywhere you want,” her friend said. “Hotel rooms are fun. You get to check in, fuck, and check out without cleaning up.”

“Yeah, but I still wanna get him a real gift, though.” Sex was great, of course, and they’d certainly have a lot of it on his birthday; but he could have sex with her anytime. She wanted to give him something tangible, too. “Maybe I’ll run some ideas by Octavia,” she said, figuring his sister would know him better than Raven did. “I’m sure we can come up with something.”

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All Bellamy wanted to do when he got home from work was take a shower, get something to eat, and maybe play some video games for a while. Miller’s company had him working an event tonight, and Murphy was out with Emori, so he had to play alone, but he didn’t care. Clarke would come by later, and he could teach her some things about how to play DOOM. She had decent hand-eye coordination, so if she played a little more, she’d be better than Murphy.

Or they could just go upstairs and have sex. He was fine with either option.

He’d only been playing for about five minutes when there was a knock on the door. Weird, he thought. Most of his friends just walked right in.

He paused the game, set the controller aside, and got up to answer the door. But when he saw who
was standing on the other side, he wished he’d left it shut. “Lincoln.”

Octavia’s boyfriend smiled at him. “Hi, Bellamy. Can I come in?”

*Do you have to?* he wondered. But this was his niece or nephew’s father now. He had to play nice. So he stepped aside and let the man in.

“All thanks,” Lincoln said. “Do you have a minute to talk?”

Oh, he had plenty of minutes, but he didn’t want to spend any more of them talking to Lincoln than he had to. “Sure,” he answered tersely.

“Great.” Lincoln took a heavy breath, looking . . . uncharacteristically nervous. Maybe he thought Bellamy was going to pummel him or something. But Bellamy wasn’t an idiot. He knew Lincoln was large enough to crush him.

“So you’ve had a couple days to . . . take in the news,” Lincoln said. “How are you feeling about it?”

“All honestly?” He felt better than he had the night they’d told him, but he was still a little worried. “I’m happy for you guys. I’m excited to be an uncle. But you gotta promise me you’re gonna take care of her.”

“I will,” Lincoln vowed. “That’s why I’m here, Bellamy. I want to take care of her. Forever.”

Bellamy tensed. *Forever?* Oh, crap. He knew where this was going before Lincoln blurted out his reason for being there.

“I’d like to ask Octavia to marry me.”

And there it was. He really didn’t know what to say or how to react, because, even though he’d always told himself this was probably inevitable, he hadn’t expected it so soon. Much like Octavia’s pregnancy.

It was all just happening so fast.

“You would like to ask? Or you’re going to?” he challenged. It sounded like Lincoln was asking him for his permission, the way one typically asked the girl’s father. But even if he didn’t get some kind of blessing out of Bellamy, he’d probably just do it anyway.

“I already spoke with your mother about it,” Lincoln informed him. “She supports it. But I was hoping . . . I was hoping you would, too, because I know how much you mean to her and how much she means to you.”

Bellamy told himself to remain calm. His little sister wasn’t so little anymore. She was going to have a baby, and in a way, he was damn grateful the baby’s father wanted to marry her. It was still head-spinning, though, and a lot to take in.

“You love her?” he asked.

“You know I do.”

“You’ll always love her?”

“I will.”
Bellamy sighed shakily, swallowing his pride and whatever was left of his resistance, and he did what needed to be done. He nodded, looked Lincoln in the eye, and said, “I think you should ask her then.”

Lincoln blinked rapidly, as if he were surprised. “You do?”

“Yeah. In fact . . . I think it’d be good if you married her before the baby’s born.”

“That’s what I’d like, too,” Lincoln said. “I think it’s . . . right.”

Bellamy nodded in agreement. If Gina had lived, he would have married her, too. Because it was the right thing to do, especially when you loved the person. It was old-fashioned and traditional as hell of him, but he didn’t like the thought of his sister having a child out of wedlock. So if she and Lincoln tied the knot before then . . . well, it would just make him feel a lot better about things.

She’d have a different last name, though. They wouldn’t both be Blakes anymore.

“Thank you,” Lincoln said. “I know you still have your doubts about me, but . . .”

“No, it’s not even that,” Bellamy cut in. This guy loved Octavia. He’d known that for a long time now. And he wasn’t a bad guy, so that was a comfort, knowing he’d never treat her badly. “It’s just strange for me to be letting go,” he attempted to explain. Because as close as he and his sister would always be, there was no denying that that was what he was having to do here: let go of her. At least a little bit of her. And that didn’t come naturally to him.

“She’ll have both of us to take care of her,” Lincoln said confidently, “and so will . . . our son.”

Bellamy’s eyes widened. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Lincoln grinned sheepishly. “We decided to find out. It’s a little early still, but the doctors think it’s a boy.”

A son, Bellamy thought. They’re having a son. He was going to be an uncle to a nephew, maybe a nephew that might even look the slightest bit like him.

Wow.

“Congratulations,” he said, and he really did mean it this time. He held out his hand and did something he’d never really done with Lincoln: He initiated a handshake.

“Thank you, Bellamy,” Lincoln said again. “It means a lot.” And then he did something that surprised Bellamy. He pulled him in and hugged him. Bellamy barely even hugged Miller or Murphy, let alone this guy, but . . . well, he just went with it. Might as well, he supposed. ‘This guy,’ after all, wasn’t just Lincoln anymore, wasn’t just his sister’s boyfriend or even her baby’s father; as soon as Octavia said yes to his proposal, then he was his future brother-in-law.

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God, it felt good to get fucked by Bellamy.

Every thrust of his hips pushed Clarke’s body forward, to the point where he had to grab hold of her sides and pull her ass back again, keeping her bent over the railing of her balcony. He slammed into her repeatedly, never breaking his rhythm, and she groaned, “Oh, fuck,” as his skin slapped against hers. Screw trying to be quiet or subtle. Anyone could look out their window or pull into that parking lot and see exactly what they were doing, and she didn’t even care. She just wanted him to make her
Bellamy was starting to make these growling sounds low in his throat—so primal, so animalistic. Obviously he was getting close, so he reached one hand around her hips to play with her clit. “Oh . . .” she moaned. That felt good, but she didn’t want him to stop the pounding, either. “Keep fucking me,” she begged, and his hips started to drive into her again. “Oh god, I wanna cum.”

“I’ll make you cum,” he promised, bending forward to whisper the words in her ear. “I’m gonna make you cum, baby.”

“Uh . . .” A strangled moan found its way past her lips, and she felt like her orgasm was within reach. The combination of his cock inside her and his fingers on her clit was an unbeatable one, worked every time. Even if he got off first, that’d be fine. Feeling his hot, sticky cum spurt inside of her would definitely be enough to get her off, too.

This was all so fucking filthy, and she was loving it.

Unfortunately, a small black car pulled into the parking lot, and she thought it looked familiar. It distracted her from her pleasure, even though he didn’t let up on her, but when she recognized the dark-haired girl who climbed out, she said, “Bellamy, stop,” and tried to move away.

“What?” he asked, still fucking her.

“Stop,” she said again, but it was too late. Down below them, Octavia glanced up while he was still inside her.

“Oh, shit,” he swore, pulling out quickly and yanking his pants up. She did the same.

“Ew!” Octavia yelled. “Were you guys doing it?”

Luckily it was so dark that she probably hadn’t seen much. But neither one of them bothered to deny the obvious.

“That’s disgusting!” Octavia lambasted, shielding her eyes. “Ugh!”

“You’re the one who’s pregnant!” Bellamy yelled back.

“Yeah, but I didn’t get pregnant out on a balcony!” She shuddered exaggeratedly and announced, “I’m coming up!”

Clarke glanced around at the neighboring apartments. A few people were pulling their curtains back and looking out now, apparently curious to know what the commotion was all about. Her and Bellamy’s sex sounds hadn’t been enough to interrupt their evening, but the Blakes’ yelling was.

“What’s she doing here?” Bellamy wondered as they headed back inside through the sliding glass door.

“I don’t know,” Clarke replied, “but that was horrible timing.” She buzzed Octavia in, reluctantly accepting that her orgasm would have to wait.

“I gotta finish up,” Bellamy announced as he made a move to duck into the bathroom.

“Wait, what?” He was going to finish without her? That wasn’t fair.

“Clarke, look,” he said, pointing to the massive bulge in his jeans. “I have a hard-on the size of Texas. Do you have any idea how uncomfortable this is?”
“Fine,” she groaned, rubbing her legs together, trying to create some friction. It was no match for what Bellamy had been doing to her, though. Her climax would have to wait. Even though she’d been left hanging, it wasn’t painful for her to have her pants up like it was for him.

While Bellamy was in the bathroom jacking off, Octavia knocked on the door. When Clarke answered, she had one hand over her eyes and was grimacing. “Are you guys decent?”

“Rarely, if ever,” Clarke joked. “Come in.”

Octavia slowly, warily lowered her hand and smiled at Clarke. “You guys are crazy, I swear,” she said, gliding inside. “Where’s my brother?”

“Oh, he’s, um . . .”

Before Clarke could answer, Bellamy came out of the bathroom, proclaiming, “Oh, babe, your pussy feels so much better than my hand.”

“Bellamy!” Clarke hissed.

Too late, he noticed Octavia in the kitchen and muttered, “Crap.”

“I’m so grossed out right now, I can’t even function,” Octavia said dramatically.

“What’re you doin’ here?” he asked, quickly changing the subject.

“Miller told me you guys were over here tonight. Just thought I’d swing by,” Octavia answered. “I’ve never actually seen the inside of this place before. It’s really nice. Nice pool, nice gym. Although . . .” She gave Clarke a look. “I suppose my brother makes sure you get your cardio.”

“Well, not everyone’s a workout fanatic like you are, O,” he said, sauntering into the kitchen. “You want something to eat? Clarke has . . .” He pulled open the refrigerator, a look of disappointment sweeping across his face. “Yogurt.”

“Well, I spend so much time at your place,” she said. “I haven’t needed to get groceries.”

“Oh, I don’t need anything. I’m not really gonna stay,” Octavia interjected. “I just wanted to . . . come and see you guys.”

“Well, you saw us,” Bellamy muttered, taking the yogurt container out of the fridge. He grabbed a spoon out of the silverware draw and dug in.

When Octavia ran her left hand through her hair and then rather obviously let it linger at her shoulder, Clarke noticed the big honking ring on her finger. A large round diamond. She felt like an idiot for not noticing it before. “Uh, Bellamy?” she said, trying to get his attention away from what he was eating.

“Hmm?”

She motioned sharply towards Octavia, who was wriggling her fingers now with a big, excited smile on her face.

Bellamy froze with his spoon in his mouth for a few seconds, then put it down and nodded. “I heard about that. Congratulations.”

“You heard about it?” Octavia frowned. “How? You’re the first person I’ve told.”
“Lincoln came and talked to me yesterday,” he explained. “Asked for my permission, I guess.”

“He did?” Octavia sighed wistfully, but then her eyes bulged incredulously. “And you said yes?”

“Yeah.” He shrugged. “You guys are gonna be parents. You should get married.”

“So you’re okay with this?” Octavia breathed a sigh of relief and walked over to him, hugging him tightly. “Thank you so much.”

“For what?”

“Just being supportive and not freaking out. It really means a lot.” She pulled back from the hug and looked to Clarke. “Is this your influence?” she asked. “Are you making him more open-minded?”

Clarke shrugged cluelessly. “I have no idea.” They had talked about this, though, among other things. So hopefully that did help.

“Well, I’m very relieved,” Octavia said. “And excited. I’m engaged, Bellamy.”

“You’re . . .” He scratched his eyebrow, smiling nervously. “That’s crazy.”

“I’m gonna get married. I’m gonna have a husband. And a son.”

“Octavia, I’m really happy for you,” Clarke said, moving closer to the siblings.

“Thank you, Clarke.” Octavia enveloped her in a hug, too, the first Clarke could recall ever getting from her. Finally, at long last, this girl didn’t seem so intimidating anymore.

She cast a look at Bellamy over Octavia’s shoulder as she hugged her, gauging his reaction. He wasn’t freaking out, but he still looked a little tense. This was a huge moment for him and his sister, but it was also a huge adjustment.

Later, when Octavia left, she wanted to make sure he was okay. No longer feeling the aching need to get off, she instead lay down in bed with him and cuddled a bit. Cuddling soon turned into massaging, though, and soon enough she was perched on top of his backside, straddling him, rubbing the tense muscles in his back and shoulders.

“Are you really doing okay?” she asked, assuming he’d be honest with her. “Or are you flipping out on the inside?”

“No, I’m really okay,” he said. His face was pillowed on his arms, and he looked pretty relaxed, all things considered.

“Really?” she pressed. “Because you can tell me if you aren’t.”

“I know. But I’m fine,” he insisted. “I mean . . . it’s a lot, yeah, but she seems excited. She seems happy. So I’m gonna be happy for her.”

“Good.” She circled her thumbs in between his shoulder blades, trying to work out one of the knots she’d found. “I think she really appreciated the way you reacted,” she told him.

“Yeah, she wasn’t expecting it.”

“No. I wasn’t expecting it, either.” She felt proud of him for being as calm as he had been about it. He could have very easily been standoffish or, worse, disapproving. But he’d been congratulatory instead, and that was exactly what Octavia deserved.
“I think it helps that Lincoln talked to me about it in advance,” he said. “Not that he really needed my permission or anything—I mean, I’m not her father, and even if I was, what guys really needs permission anymore?—but you know.”

“Well, you’re still fatherly, though,” she pointed out. “And I know the whole asking for permission thing is outdated, but it’s tradition. Guys still like to do it. I mean, you would’ve asked Gina’s parents for permission, wouldn’t you?”

He snorted. “Gina didn’t get along real well with her parents. So probably not.”

“Oh.”

“But Roma . . . yeah, I guess I probably would’ve asked her mom. Not her dad, though. Her dad was a stupid drunk.”

Clarke smoothed her hands up and down Bellamy’s back, frowning as a thought occurred to her.

“Wait, who’s gonna walk Octavia down the aisle then? You said she doesn’t even know her dad very well, right?”

“Right.” He thought about it a moment, then said, “I don’t know. I could. I would. Maybe my mom might? I don’t know. Maybe she’ll just wanna walk herself.”

“I think it’d be cute if you walked her,” Clarke said, picturing it in her mind. That would be so fitting. Hopefully Octavia considered it.

“Well, we’ll see what she wants,” he said. “I won’t be a groomsman, so it’d give me something to do on the big day.”

“Maybe if you’re nice to Lincoln, you will be a groomsman,” she said.

“And maybe you’ll be a bridesmaid.”

“Oh, no, I’m sure Harper and Emori and Maya have that covered.” She would have liked to do that, sure, because she’d never been a part of anyone’s wedding before. But it probably wouldn’t happen, and that was okay. She wasn’t expecting anything.

“You might be one. Octavia likes you,” Bellamy said.

“Really?”

He chuckled. “What? You didn’t know that?”

“Well, she’s hard to get to know. I can’t tell with her sometimes.”

“No, she likes you,” he said. “She says you’re good for me.”

“Oh, well, she is right about that.” Clarke bent down and pressed a soft kiss to Bellamy’s shoulder, letting her hands linger on his lower back as she whispered in his ear, “You’ve been pretty good for me, too.”

He smiled, looking more relaxed and content than she had ever imagined he could be after seeing an engagement ring on his sister’s hand for the first time. “It helps,” he said, “having you to talk to.”

“Mmm.” She rested her chin on his shoulder, glad that she could be more for him than just an orgasm buddy. Their relationship, after all, was friends with benefits. Being someone who could listen to him, advise him, encourage him, and even console him . . . it was more important to her than the sex
was, in all honesty. And she hoped he knew that.
Chapter 29

Valentine’s Day was far from Bellamy’s favorite holiday. In fact, in some respects, he hated it. In his mind, it was little more than a commercially manufactured money trap to try to get couples to buy things for each other they could buy at any time of the year. Martin Luther King Day, Columbus Day, on the other hand . . . those were real holidays.

The one nice thing about Valentine’s Day, he supposed, was that it was an obviously sexual holiday. Hell, he’d lost his virginity back on Valentine’s Day of his freshman year of his high school. (The plan had been to wait for Roma to finally notice him so he could lose his virginity to her, but that had taken a couple more months, so he’d gotten a practice round in first.) A couple years ago, he and Gina had spent the entire day in bed. The entire day. And it’d been one of the greatest days of his life.

This Valentine’s Day was different. Busier, for one, because Diana’s bathroom remodel took up most of his day. But it was different because he had Clarke this year, too. Unlike last year, there was no need to go pick up some random chick at Dropship or TonDC. But Clarke wasn’t his girlfriend, so that made getting her a gift difficult. He didn’t want to just do chocolates or roses or something generic like that, but he couldn’t do something overly-sentimental like a promise ring, either.

In the end, he ended up purchasing her about a half a dozen Harlequin Romance novels at the thrift store—not because they were cheap, but because she’d mentioned once that one of her guilty pleasures was reading sappy, poorly-written erotica. He’d even found a couple books at home in her desk drawer once, one called *A Taste of Paradise* and the other called *Scoundrel’s Captive*. Of course, most of the books he found at the thrift store were older and outdated, so there weren’t any progressive female/female ones in the bunch. That left him with no choice but to get online and purchase one called *The Fling*, which looked halfway decent. He read it, too, in his truck over his lunch breaks. The storyline was crap, but the sex scenes weren’t half bad.

He didn’t wrap presents unless he absolutely had to, so he came home from work with all the books in a plastic bag, hoping she wouldn’t mind. “Clarke, I got you something,” he announced as he pushed open the door to his bedroom. But Clarke wasn’t there. The bathroom door was peeking open, though, light coming from inside, so he set his bag down on the bed and slipped in.

“Hey,” he said, marveling at how beautiful his girl looked lounging in his bathtub.

She turned her head to the side and smiled at him. “Hey.” When he came closer, she picked up some of the bubbles on the water’s surface and blew them at him adorably.

“You look comfy,” he said, not used to seeing her take a bath. Usually he left for work earlier than she left for class, so he didn’t even get to shower with her all that much. But he knew she had a problem waking up when her alarm went off, so chances were, she never had time to lie in the tub for a good soak like this anyway.

“I needed to get clean,” she said. “I’ve been so dirty lately.”

He grinned, catching her double meaning. “Nah, just . . . dance floor sex, balcony sex. What’s dirty about that?”

“Everything.” She skimmed her hand across the surface of the water, spreading some of the soapy
bubbles around. Her body was still concealed from his view, though. She was low enough in the water that it went all the way up to her shoulders.

“Smells good in here,” he remarked. “Smells girly.”

“Sweet pea bubble bath,” she explained. “I hope you don’t mind, but I didn’t really get you a gift. Me in the bathtub is kind of supposed to be your gift.”

“Fine by me.” He toed off his shoes, ready to get undressed and get in with her. “Got room in there for me?”

“Of course,” she said. “But I kinda wanna . . .” Trailing off, she glanced at his groin for a second, then lifted her eyes to his.

“You wanna what?” he prompted.

She blushed, and goddammit, if that wasn’t the sexiest thing he’d ever seen. It was so hot knowing that Clarke had all sorts of dirty thoughts and ideas in her head, but it was so cute when she was embarrassed to verbalize them.

“Maybe I should get naked, too?” he suggested, reaching for the hem of his shirt.

“No,” she said quickly. “Just . . . pull your pants down.”

He raised an inquisitive eyebrow, not really sure where she was going with this until she moved around, getting up onto her knees. She pushed the suds away, and he was able to watch the water trickle down her torso to her inner thighs. The sight of it dripping from her pussy made him salivate.

“Go on,” she urged, gripping the side of the tub.

Stupefied, he shook himself out his daze and did as she requested, unfastening his jeans. He stood up and pushed them down to his knees, motioning to his boxer-briefs questioningly. “These, too?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

She’s gonna blow me, he thought, pushing his underwear down to his jeans. His cock sprang free, already semi-hard, and she reached for it immediately.

“Come here,” she said.

He inched closer, legs hitting the side of the tub, and watched her small hand stroke his length several times before she pressed a kiss to the tip of it. She kept stroking him for a minute or so after that, getting him fully erect and aroused, and he expected her to open her mouth at any minute, take him all in, or at least as much of him as she could. But she surprised the hell out of him when, instead of doing that, she told him, “Bend down a little bit.”

He frowned, confused until he realized what part of her body was lower than her mouth. “Really?” he said, surprised.

“Yeah.” With his cock now at the right level, she placed it in between her breasts and smothered them around it, pressing them tightly together with both hands as she smiled at him excitedly. “Is this okay?”

“Uh-huh.” This was so far above and beyond okay. He knew titty-fucking was something girls pretty much just did for guys; it wasn’t like they got the same thrill out of it or anything. But he didn’t
doubt that she at least enjoyed it, though, because she liked giving him pleasure much in the same way he liked giving pleasure to her.

“Okay, I wanna be the one to do it,” she told him, readjusting her breasts around his cock. “Okay?”

“Ohay.” He loved watching her go to work on him, whether it was with her mouth or her hand, so he was sure he’d love watching her work her breasts all over him, too.

It was a bit of an unusual motion for her to get into, one she wasn’t used to and had never tried before. The only and only other time he’d done this, he’d taken care of the thrusting. With him just standing there, it wasn’t as natural and fluid for her as jerking him off or sucking him off was. She didn’t get frustrated, though; she stuck with it until she had a nice rhythm going. She slid her breasts up and down on his cock, watching intently, making sure it always stayed nice and snug for him. If she ever lost hold of her breasts, she stopped, gathered them up again, and wrapped them around his stiff manhood tightly before she got into her rhythm once again. Eventually, when she felt comfortable enough with what she was doing, she started to look up at him, almost questioningly, like she wanted to know how she was doing.

“Good job, Princess,” he praised, loving the feel of this. Her boobs were so big, so soft, so fleshy. Fucking her here felt a lot different than being inside her, but it still felt so damn good. Plus, the lower she moved her tits, the more the head of his cock poked up through the top of them, nearly hitting her chin, and that was a pretty arousing sight.

Damn, he’d always been fascinated by the female body, especially the parts of it that were so different than his own, but Clarke’s body was on another level. Her curves . . . he practically had them memorized at this point, but they never got old. He loved seeing and feeling her breasts on him, and he loved catching a glimpse of that round, gorgeous ass of hers, covered in suds right now. He loved the way her damp hair clung to her back and shoulders, and he wanted to run his fingers through it. God, he wished he could touch every inch of her at once, because every inch of her deserved to feel adored.

The still water around her grew a little less still when she started moving more insistently, more determinedly. She frowned, as if she were disappointed he hadn’t cum yet, and groaned, “Come on, Bellamy.”

“What?”

“Just . . . do it.”

“Do what?” he teased.

She growled frustratedly, really starting to titfuck him at a rapid pace now. “Cum.”

Oh, it was hot as hell hearing her be all demanding like that, almost enough to make him shoot his load, but he held back, shaking his head. “No.”

“No?” She didn’t stop moving. “Why not?”

“Because, I wanna cum in you, not on you.”

“Oh, I see.” Slowing her movements, she let go of her breasts, letting them fall away from his cock, and sat back on her feet. “Ow,” she said, “my knees hurt.”

“Get comfortable,” he told her, pushing his jeans and underwear down to the floor. He stepped out of them, then stripped out of his shirt, licking his lips excitedly as she lay back in the tub, spreading
her legs. He couldn’t be certain, but it looked like she was touching herself beneath all those suds.

“What?” she asked innocently. “You said to get comfortable.”

Oh, she was a frisky little vixen tonight, wasn’t she? He was digging it. He watched her for a moment, watched the tiny waves her hand was causing beneath the surface, and stroked his cock in response. She noticed what he was doing and moaned impatiently. “Bellamy, please,” she whimpered.

“Please what?”

“Get in here with me.” She started to squirm wantonly, and he wondered just how hard she was fucking her own little hand right now.

“Sit up,” he instructed, and when she did, he stepped into the tub, sitting down behind her, legs on either side of her. She reclined against him, the crack of her ass and small of her back sliding against his dick. It felt so good, and again, he had to fight the urge to cum. All he could do to keep from spilling his seed was to think, *Her first, her first*, over and over again in his head.

“Do you touch yourself a lot when I’m not around?” he asked her, rubbing his hands on her arms and shoulders.

“Yes,” she admitted without hesitation, still fingering herself underneath the water. “It’s never as good, though.”

“Well, I’m here now,” he said, reached around her stomach to lift her arm out of the way. “I got you.” He snaked his hand between her legs and wasted no time inserting his middle finger into her. He pumped it in and out steadily, purposefully rubbing the base of his hand against her clit as he did so.

“Oh, yes,” she moaned, tossing her head back onto his shoulder as she writhed against him. “Bellamy . . .”

He loved the sound of his name on her lips, especially when it sounded like such a whispered, pleasured prayer. “You want another one?” he asked, not even waiting for a response as he plunged his index finger inside her, too. Oh, she wanted another one. He already knew.

“Oh god,” she gasped, breathing heavily now. “I’m so close.”

He couldn’t decide if he wanted to make her cum on his hand and then try to make her cum again when he was inside her or just cut to the chase here and get her groin up onto his lap. He loved giving Clarke multiple orgasms, but that titty-fuck she’d given him still had his cock straining, and if she came, chances were, that’d be enough to make him cum, too.

Making a quick decision, he withdrew his hand, eliciting a groan of protest from Clarke. “Get on up here,” he said, grabbing her hips. He lifted her up into his lap, angling his hips so that his cock was pressing against her entrance.

“Mmm,” she purred, sinking down onto him without hesitation. She ground her hips against his, riding him with desperate need. She had to hold onto the sides of the tub to get the leverage she needed, and god, she looked hot, just using his body to her satisfaction.

“Yeah, fuck it,” he encouraged, leaning his head back against the tile wall, closing his eyes as he just reveled in the sensation of it. Having his cock sandwiched between Clarke’s breasts felt great, but nothing compared to having it here. Being inside her was intoxicating, and he was so addicted to
how good it felt.

“Bellamy, I can’t—I can’t—” she panted raggedly, circling her hips deliberately to get the friction she needed. “Uh!” she cried out, her entire body stilling as she came. Her pussy clamped down on his cock like a vice, and it felt insanely good. So close to his own climax, he grabbed her hips and held her steady, thrusting up into her a few times before he shot off inside of her. Fuck, that felt good, especially since he’d been holding it in for a while now.

“Oh my god,” she moaned, going a bit boneless. She slid off his cock and sat back down in the tub again, between his legs, leaning forward.

“So good,” he said, rubbing her back. He smoothed some water over her skin, threaded his hands through her hair, and then bent forward to press a soft kiss to her shoulder blade. “You’re so good to me.”

She laughed lightly. “I try my best.” Completely spent, she leaned back against him, nearly lying down in that bathtub, using him as a recliner and a pillow. He rested with her, rubbing her stomach and her breasts, breathing in the scent of her floral shampoo mixed with the scent of them.

When they were both sufficiently shriveled, they got out of the bath, dried each other off, made out for a little bit against the sink, and then meandered back out to the bedroom. She unwrapped her towel, dropped it onto the floor at the foot of the bed, and flopped down on the mattress naked, lying on her stomach. “Mmm,” she murmured, “I feel refreshed.”

“Yes?” He dropped his towel to the floor as well and grabbed the sack with her gifts in it. “Happy Valentine’s Day,” he said, lying down next to her. “Sorry I’m too lazy to wrap.”

“Ooh, a present?” she squealed, rolling over onto her side. She pulled out the first of six books, and her face lit up. “Oh my god, I love these!” she exclaimed. “They’re so awful!”

“I know, I read one.”

“You read one?”

“Well . . . only the lesbian one.”

“You found a lesbian one?” She hurriedly looked through the covers and laughed delightedly when she saw The Fling. “Oh my god, I can’t wait to read these!” She opened one of them to a random page and said, “Oh, okay, listen. Listen to this.” She cleared her throat and used an overtly sophisticated, stuffy tone to read one of what had to be many ridiculous lines. “‘With each breath, her chest heaved like a bulimic after Thanksgiving dinner.’”

“Ugh.” He made a face, shaking his head. “Who the fuck writes that?” In no way did a reference to an eating disorder turn him on. He picked up one of the books, flipped it open to the middle, skimmed the scene, and found a ridiculous line of his own. “‘Her embrace made his manhood swell like . . . week-old roadkill on hot asphalt?’”

Clarke wrinkled her nose in disgust. “That’s sick! Why would anyone compare a penis to roadkill? That’s not sexy.”

“That’s just the tip of the iceberg. I already see another line comparing it to the vice president.”

“What even?” She flipped a few more pages through the book in her hand and said, “Oh, here’s another classic. Brace yourself.” She cleared her throat again and read, “‘Her sun-glazed back formed a golden arch as he moved his face toward her happy meal.’” She clasped one hand over her
mouth, trying unsuccessfully to stifle her giggles. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Oh, great, now we’re comparing vaginas to fast food, huh?” He shook his head in outrage. “That’s sacrilegious. That’s a gourmet meal right there.”

“Oh, these are fun,” she said, closing the book, putting it back in the sack. “Thank you. That’ll give me something to read when I’m not paying attention in my capstone class.”

“Good.” He lay flat on his back, one arm behind his head, enjoying the relaxation of this. It was still early evening. He and Clarke could do whatever the hell they wanted for the rest of the night. They could go downstairs and watch TV, fix something to eat, or just lay up here and cuddle and maybe fuck again. It was nice to come home to this kind of companionship, for sure.

“This is a good Valentine’s Day,” he said, yawning. “And I hate Valentine’s Day.”

“I’m usually kind of indifferent about it,” she said, pillow her head on her arms again, “but this has been good. And next week’s gonna be even better.”

“My birthday?” He’d be lying if he said he hadn’t thought about it, especially since his birthday fell on a Friday this year. But he wasn’t expecting some huge party or anything. “You know you don’t have to get me a gift, right?” he told her. “Just . . . hang out with me, have sex with me. That’ll do.”

“Oh, I’m getting you something,” she said. “It’s already in the works.”

“Clarke--” He didn’t want her spending money on him.

“But I’m still gonna sex with you, of course. In fact . . .” She smiled at him cutely, asking, “Is there any certain type of sex you want for your birthday?”

“Hmm.” That was hard to narrow down, but he was a guy, so one idea came to mind before the others. “Lots of doggy style, preferably.”

“No, not just a position, a . . . type of sex,” she reiterated. “You know, like . . .” She pressed her face against the pillow for a moment, mumbling, “The regular kind or oral or . . .” She trailed off, just barely peeking at him as though she were embarrassed.

The only other sex that came to mind for Bellamy was . . . “Oh.” He was pretty sure he understood where she was going with that, because . . . where else was there to go? “Oh.”

“Oh my god.” She hid her face against the pillow again.

“Wait, let me get this straight: You’re asking if I want . . .” He, too, trailed off, not because he was embarrassed to say it, but because he didn’t want to be the one to bring it up, just in case she was thinking of something else.

She lifted her head and finished his sentence for him. “Do you wanna have anal sex?” she asked quietly, her face and entire body blushing red.

“Uh . . . yeah,” he answered honestly. Most guys were down for it, and he’d done it before and enjoyed it. Once with Roma. Multiple times with Gina. “Yeah, I want to,” he admitted. “Someday.”

“Your birthday,” she suggested.

Oh, it was tempting, especially since he’d been dreaming about having anal sex with Clarke for a long time now. But his birthday was only seven days away, and what he had in mind for Clarke
would take longer than seven days.

He grazed his fingers over the curve of her ass, loving the way it looked as she lay there, two perfect round hills waiting for him to . . . god, now he was the one sounding like a cheesy romance novel. He wondered how good it felt. He did. And here she was, giving him the perfect opportunity to find out, all in the name of him turning twenty-four. Maybe some other guys would think he was crazy to turn it down, but that was what he had to do. For now, at least.

“Not on my birthday,” he told her.

She frowned, clearly not expecting that answer. “What? Why not?”

“But you’ve never done it before,” he pointed out.

“Please,” she scoffed, “half the things we’ve done have been completely new to me. And haven’t I enjoyed them all?”

He thought back and replied, “Yeah, pretty much.”

“I don’t wanna hurt you,” he cut in.

“You won’t hurt me. I—I trust you,” she stuttered. “I trust you more than anyone in my life.”

“More than anyone?” he thought. That was . . . a big deal. Just as big as the idea of anal sex was. He gave her a soft kiss on the lips, appreciating that.

“I know you, Bellamy,” she said, “and I know you wouldn’t do anything to hurt me.”

“It does hurt, though,” he informed her, “the first time.” Roma had cried, hence the reason they’d never tried it again. And Gina . . . well, the first time with Gina had been more of an accidental penetration than anything else, and it’d caused her to walk funny for the rest of the week.

“My first time having regular sex hurt,” she pointed out. “I got past it.”

“Yeah, but I . . .” He struggled to find the words to explain his reluctance. “I don’t wanna hurt you, though. If we—when we do it like that someday, I want it to feel good for you, just like it feels good for me.”

“It will,” she insisted naively.

“No, it won’t. Not if we rush into it.”

“Seven days is rushing?”

“For what I’ve got in mind, yes.” He’d thought about this, about how he would lead up to it with Clarke. Anal sex was his ultimate fantasy, and even though he had some experience, he wouldn’t
exactly call himself an expert. He had to read up on some things himself, make sure he did everything he could to make her feel comfortable and at ease.

“We have to take our time,” he said, “build up to it.”

“Okay, let’s start building then.”

He chuckled, getting a kick out of how eager she was. “We will,” he said. “Slowly. And then when it happens . . . hopefully, you’ll enjoy it just like I do.”

“We could enjoy it on your birthday,” she said, bending down to nibble on his ear.

“I don’t want there to be any pressure or any deadline,” he said. “You said you trust me, right?”

“Right,” she echoed.

“So trust me on this. Okay?”

She sighed in resignation. “Okay.” Then she snuggled up against his side and draped one leg over his waist. He pulled the covers up over the two of them, content to cuddle and maybe fall asleep for a while. The aftermath of having sex with Clarke Griffin was just as good as the sex itself. And now that she’d brought all of this sex stuff up . . . well, he knew what he’d be dreaming about tonight.

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Bellamy decided it was best to go pick up some—ahem—supplies from Ice Nation by himself. Clarke hadn’t brought up the anal sex thing for a few days, but the idea of it was still at the forefront of his mind. He didn’t want to bring her along, though, just in case she saw all the stuff they needed to get and freaked out.

The first and most important thing he needed to stock up on was lube. Lots of lube. He had some but not enough, because quite frankly, Clarke’s natural arousal was usually all the lubrication they needed. He picked up several tubes of both KY and Astroglide, because he’d read they were both good for anal, but he didn’t know which one was best. Then he headed over to the anal sex corner—which was more than a corner; it took up about half the store—and tried to inconspicuously browse the butt plug kits. Because . . . he had some girth to his package, and if Clarke intended to take it up her ass—her tight, untouched, unpenetrated ass (god, he got worked up just thinking about it)—then she needed to take some smaller things first.

He felt like a first-timer himself, overwhelmed by all the options. Was it better to use a beaded plug or just more of the straight up dildos? And did color matter? Probably not, right? She wouldn’t be able to see it. But maybe she’d like the neon ones better than the plain black ones. And why the hell did some of them have raccoon tails and fox tails hanging off the end? What the fuck kind of weird fetish was that?

“Hey, stranger.”

He startled when Raven sidled up beside him. “Oh, hey.” He of course looked away from the butt plugs, like a kid being caught with a nude magazine, and pretended to be into some other toys instead. He didn’t even know what they were or what they were meant to be used for. Possibly gay stuff, because it was the anal sex area of the store, after all.

“Just you today?” Raven asked. “No Clarke?”

“No, Clarke’s got class.” He looked around for Raven’s boyfriend, surprised not to see him there.
“Just you? No Roan?”

“Nope. Roan’s at a small business workshop today,” she informed him, “so I volunteered to run the store for him.”

“Huh. Sell anything interesting yet?”

She shrugged. “Strapons and handcuffs. Pretty standard.”

“Oh.” Handcuffs were standard now? He didn’t even own a pair.

“What’re you here to buy?” she asked.

He tried to conceal the lube in his hands and shrugged. “Just lookin’.”

“For what?”

“Whatever catches my attention.”

She narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously, then looked over to the kits he had been eyeing. “No way!” she exclaimed. “You and Clarke are gonna have anal sex?”

“Well, yeah, eventually.”

“Clarke. Clarke Griffin?” She laughed incredulously. “Wow, what have you done to her?”

“It was her idea.”

“The sexual revolution of Clarke Griffin, I swear. You have really gotten her to broaden her horizons.”

“Well, she’s bisexual,” he pointed out. “I’d say her horizons are pretty broad.”

“Yeah, but I never thought I’d see the day . . .” Raven trailed off, shaking her head. “Here,” she said, handing him a kit with four black dildos, each one shaped slightly differently than the others and varying in size. “Use this.”

He wasn’t about to ask, but he took her suggestion to mean that she’d tried out that same kit before. “Thanks,” he said.

“That’s so considerate of you to think of her and think about how to make sure she’s ready,” Raven said, sighing wistfully. “Wick didn’t. But I digress.”

“Alright, I think I got everything I need for now,” he said. “Can you check me out?”

“Oh, Bellagio . . .” She swayed towards the counter, teasing, “I was checking you out the moment I saw your picture on Clarke’s phone.”

He chuckled and followed her up to the front of the store.

Raven rang up all his items and asked, “So when are you guys doing this? Your birthday? I hear that’s coming up.”

“We’re not on a timeline,” he said. “You have any idea what Clarke’s gettin’ me for my birthday, by the way?”
“Oh, yeah.”

“Yeah? She’s not spending too much money, is she?”

Raven shrugged. “Not really.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, let her spend money if she wants to spend money.”

“Is she taking me somewhere?” he guessed. The other night when he’d gotten home, she’d been on the phone with . . . someone. Kind of sounded like a hotel company. She’d been reading her debit card number over the phone like she was reserving a room.

“She’s . . . my lips are sealed,” Raven said. “But let it be known, I suggested Ocean City for the weekend.”

He tensed at the mere mention of that place.

Noticing his reaction, she asked, “What, you don’t like it there? Have you ever even been there?”

“Couple of times,” he muttered.

“It’s fun.”

*It wasn’t fun last time,* he thought, trying not to picture that gas station, walking in there and seeing . . .

Trying not to picture *that.*

“Well, she’s not taking you there,” Raven assured him. “Maybe she’s not taking you anywhere. Who knows? I don’t know.”

“You said you *do* know.”

“Of course I know.” She hit the total button and said, “$65.98. But Roan authorized me to use the good friend discount where I see fit. You got fifty?”

Even fifty bucks was a hell of a lot of money to fork over for some sex toys and some lube, but . . . well, it’d be worth it. He took two twenties and a ten out of his wallet, which basically left him with only a five and a couple ones, but he could always hit the ATM if he needed to. It never hurt to have a little cash on hand.

When he got in his truck, he took out his phone and texted Clarke. Nothing lengthy, but in a way, it was major. *You can tell Raven about Gina,* he typed out. He had no issue with her knowing, or even Niylah, for that matter. Clarke’s friends were his friends, too, at this point. And if they knew, then they could avoid any awkward mentions like this Ocean City one. He didn’t want to be the one to tell that whole story again, though; telling it to Clarke had been hard enough. But she could tell them. He trusted her with that.

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When Bellamy had first given her permission to tell her friends about Gina, Clarke wasn’t sure what to think. She didn’t want him to feel like he was obligated to let them in on that part of his past, so she talked to him about it and made sure it was what he wanted. He said he didn’t see the point in keeping it a secret from them, but he did remind her not to say anything about Gina’s pregnancy. Not
that she needed a reminder about that. But she assured him that she wouldn’t mention a word about it. Never. Never ever.

It was a good thing, she supposed, that he wasn’t so determined to carry his past around like a deep, dark secret anymore. And she completely understood why he didn’t want to rehash the entire thing again. Talking about it was an emotional experience for him, and just because he was okay with them knowing, that didn’t mean he was okay with them watching him break down about it.

She got them together for a girls night and, prior to the start of one of the worst movies of all time, Crossroads, she told them there was something Bellamy wanted them to know about but couldn’t tell them himself. And then she proceeded to tell them about Gina. She kept it as succinct as possible, letting them know that Bellamy had dated and loved another girl after Roma, that they’d been together for almost two years before she passed away in Ocean City. She let them know that Gina had been shot in a robbery, that Bellamy had run across the street and seen her lying there in her own blood. But she didn’t let them know that he felt guilty about it, that he blamed himself for letting her go over there alone, or that something as simple as the sound of a firework explosion could trigger the memory of that gunshot and set him off.

Raven and Niylah were both devastated for him, of course, and Raven immediately face-palmed and regretted mentioning Ocean City to him at Ice Nation the other day. She asked Clarke if she should apologize, and Clarke told her it wasn’t necessary. Bellamy wasn’t mad at her or anything. She hadn’t known, so it wasn’t like she’d done something wrong.

They never did get around to the movie after that, because they just wanted to talk about Bellamy. At one point, Niylah said, “No wonder he won’t make you his official girlfriend. He’s already lost two.”

And a baby, Clarke thought. Bellamy had endured more tragic loss than anyone should have had to endure in a lifetime, and it still amazed her that he’d been able to pick himself up and move on from it.

It was nice to have that whole conversation out of the way by the time Friday night rolled around. Bellamy’s birthday. She asked for the afternoon off work for a “doctor’s appointment,” but really, the only appointment she had was with Octavia and Murphy at Bellamy’s house. They’d all agreed to set up for his party together and make a whole big deal out of it. Octavia and Clarke put up a vast array of cheesy decorations while Murphy worked on the cake. Around 5:00, Octavia hissed, “Hurry up, dammit! He’s gonna be home from work in an hour!”

Perturbed, Murphy set the tube of blue frosting down and glared at her. “You can’t rush art.”

Art may have been an overstatement, but Clarke had to admit, Murphy’s cake was turning out pretty well. It was just a single layer, but he had a lot of fancy, swirly designs going around the sides, and he was even attempting some frosting flowers. It looked like a girl’s cake of course, but it also looked good. Apparently cake-making, much like Christmas tree-decorating, was one of John Murphy’s secret talents.

At 5:30, everyone else already started to show up, each one of them with a present in hand, even Lincoln. “I got him a Greek mythology poster,” he told Clarke quietly. “I didn’t know what else to get him.”

“Oh, no, he’ll love that.” He’d never admit that he loved that, since it was from Lincoln and everything, but deep down, he’d think it was cool.

They’d just gotten all the gifts stacked on the kitchen table next to the leg lamp when Miller yelled, “Shit, he’s home early!” and they all scrambled to find a hiding spot as quickly as they could.
Murphy took one more last loving look at his cake before he flipped off the lights, and they waited in the darkened living room and kitchen for the front door to open. When Bellamy walked in, they all jumped up and yelled, “Surprise!” and he had to act surprised. Clearly he’d seen all the cars parked out front, though, and had to know something was up.

“Whoa,” he said. “What is this? I had no idea.”

Bellamy got so embarrassed when he was the center of attention, but Clarke could tell part of him liked it, too. His focus was always on everyone else, so to have this day where it was just all about him must have been nice. He’d worked all day, and now he got to party all night. She was excited for him.

He balked at Jasper’s desperation to get him to wear a pointy party hat, but eventually he put it on anyway. He took one look at all those presents and said, without even knowing what they were, that everyone had spent way too much money on him. He surveyed Murphy’s cake when it came out of the oven and remarked, “You spelled my name wrong.”

“What?” Murphy shrieked. “No.”

“Yes.”

Clarke peeked over Bellamy’s shoulder and saw that Murphy had indeed put two e’s in it. “Happy Birthday, Beelamy,” she teased. “Nice, Murphy.”

“I’m dyslexic, okay? I tried my best.”

“No, it looks good,” Bellamy told him. “Thanks, man.”

Murphy wouldn’t let anyone else help arrange the twenty-four candles on top of the cake—he had a vision in his mind and didn’t want anyone else screwing it up. Once they were all lit, they sang a horrible rendition of the birthday song for him—seriously, it was so off-key—and told him to make a wish. Clarke had no idea what he was wishing for but assumed it was related to Octavia and her pregnancy in some way. He blew out all those candles in one big breath and said, “Alright, let’s dig in.”

The cake was good, but Clarke couldn’t help but notice Murphy cut himself the biggest piece.

Bellamy didn’t get much of a chance to eat with presents constantly being set down in his lap. There was a lot of history stuff he’d like, plus a lot of practical stuff for work he could use. There were plenty of weird, unusual gifts, too, like the slingshot flying screaming monkey from Murphy, which the guys had fun throwing around the living room for a good ten minutes, and the Star Trek Spock oven mitt from Monty. By far, though, the funniest gift was actually from Niylah. She got Bellamy a book, one that made him laugh really hard when he read the title.

“What?” Clarke asked.

He was barely able to get a word out, let alone read it. “This is awesome,” he said. “How to Live with a Huge Penis: Advice, Meditations, and Wisdom for Men Who Have Too Much.”

Everyone erupted in laughter, and Niylah stood up and took a bow. “Don’t even ask me where I find this stuff. I’m just a genius like that,” she boasted.

“That’s appropriate,” Clarke told her. Quietly, just to Bellamy, she said, “I don’t think you have too much, though. I think it’s perfect.”
He smiled and gave her a quick peck on the lips.

Once the presents were opened and the cake was devoured, Clarke told Bellamy to come upstairs with her. There were plenty of “Oh, here we go, time to ‘mail Christmas cards,’” jokes from their friends—even since that charades game, mailing Christmas cards seemed to be the euphemism they liked to use for sex—but when Octavia followed them, they realized they were wrong and said, “Maybe not.”

“What’s this all about?” Bellamy asked as they went into his bedroom.

“Sit down,” Clarke said. “One more present.”

“From both of us,” Octavia added.

Bellamy sat down on the foot of the bed, looking a little confused and intrigued. “Okay . . .”

Clarke pulled a wrapped-up box out from underneath the bed and set it down in Bellamy’s lap. “Here you go,” she said, glad he hadn’t looked under there and found it these past couple days. Every morning before leaving for school, she’d peeked underneath to make sure it was still undisturbed.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Open it and find out, old man,” Octavia urged.

Bellamy tore off the wrapping paper, tossed it aside, and opened the cardboard box where his gift was housed. He had to remove multiple layers of tissue paper to pull out . . . something he definitely didn’t know how to react to. “A teddy bear?” he said, trying to smile.

“From the Build-a-Bear workshop,” Octavia said. “It’s a high-quality teddy bear.”

He was speechless as he nodded, glancing back and forth from the two of them to the stuffed animal in his hands.

Clarke and Octavia shared a giggle, both loving how clueless he was in that moment, and Clarke told him, “Squeeze its stomach.”

He did, and that was when sound filled the room. Not just any sound, though. Laughter. Female laughter. He must have recognized it right away, because that confused smile fell from his face, replaced by a more serious expression at once.

Here we go, Clarke thought, butterflies in her stomach as she watched him squeeze the bear again. This time, instead of laughter was singing. Clarke didn’t recognize the song, but Bellamy did right away. It was Gina’s favorite song, if what Octavia had told her was true. And Gina was the one singing it.

“How’d you guys do this?” he asked, looking mesmerized as he listened to his ex-girlfriend’s voice playing through a speaker in that bear.

“It was Clarke’s idea,” Octavia said. “I just sent her some videos and stuff. Of Gina.”

“And then I sent the sound files to the company when they took my order,” Clarke explained. “I didn’t even really do anything much.”

He seemed to think otherwise, though, as he squeezed the bear again. Gina’s voice came through
once again, this time saying, “I’m not really funny. I’m just mean and people think I’m joking.”

Bellamy laughed sadly, starting to cry. “That’s her,” he said.

Octavia dabbed at the corners of her eyes and bent down to give her brother a hug.

“Squeeze it again,” Clarke told him. She knew what soundbite came next.

Sniffing back tears, he gave that bear’s stomach another good squeeze, and this time, the response was Gina saying, “I love you, Bellamy,” and his whole torso shook with a sob. It wasn’t the sad kind, though. This . . . it made him happy. It made him happy to hear her voice again; it touched him.

“Thanks, you guys,” he said, holding the bear to his chest. He lifted his head toward the ceiling, trying to keep the tears inside, but it was no use. They were flowing freely down his cheeks now.

“Wow.”

“Do you need a minute?” Clarke asked him. Having lost someone herself, she knew sometimes . . . you just needed to be alone in order to feel like you were alone with them. And right now, this bear was the closest thing Bellamy had to Gina.

He nodded tearfully, telling them once again, “Thank you.”

“Love you,” Octavia said, kissing his cheek before she got up and left.

“We’ll be downstairs,” Clarke said, putting her hand on his shoulder. He lifted it in his own, brought it up to his lips, and gave the back of it a kiss. “Thanks, Clarke.”

“You’re welcome.” Her Kennedy documentary Christmas gift had pretty much been an epic fail, so she’d been determined to give him something he would really love for his birthday. And she could tell that he really did love this.

When she and Octavia came back downstairs without Bellamy, a few of their friends noticed and gave them questioning looks. “He’ll be back down soon,” Octavia said vaguely. No other explanation needed. She motioned for Clarke to follow her outside onto the front porch where they could talk in private. “Damn,” she said once they were out there. “That almost got me goin’.”

“Yeah, me, too,” Clarke said. One of the things she loved about Bellamy was that he wasn’t afraid to cry. He didn’t do it very often, and only a select few people ever got to see it. But he wasn’t afraid of it the way some men were.

“That was a great gift, Clarke,” Octavia complimented her. “How’d you come up with that?”

“I saw some videos on Twitter,” Clarke admitted. “Not very original of me.”

“No, it’s awesome, though,” Octavia insisted. “And I’m glad I could help.”

“Yeah, we made a good team.”

“We did,” Octavia agreed. She shivered, wrapping her arms tighter around herself as the wind whipped past. “You really care about him, don’t you?” she said.

Clarke smiled and nodded. “Yeah.” Bellamy was very special to her. In four and half months, he’d gone from being a complete stranger to being one of the most important people in her life. She couldn’t imagine not knowing him, not being close to him.

“How much do you care about him?” Octavia asked.
Clarke shifted a bit, feeling like she was put on the spot with that question. “What do you mean?”

“Well . . .” Octavia rolled her eyes. “Okay, I know you guys aren’t really dating, or so you say. But you act like you’re dating. You fuck like you’re dating. Hell, even when you fight, you fight like you’re dating.”

“Octavia . . .”

“So if my brother woke up one day and said, ‘Hey, Clarke, I thought about it, and I want you to be my girlfriend’ . . . would you go for it? Is that what you’d want?”

Clarke averted her eyes, uncomfortable with the question. Because she couldn’t say yes, but . . . she couldn’t exactly say no, either.

“I’m just curious,” Octavia said.

“I know, but . . .” That wasn’t just some casually curious question to her. It was a major one, one she didn’t even have an answer for because it was so damn complicated. “Listen, when it comes to me and Bellamy, I can’t . . .” She trailed off, shaking her head, trying to prevent all sorts of truly couple-y images from filling her mind. “I can’t think about that.”

Octavia stared at her long and hard, but much to Clarke’s surprise, she didn’t push the question anymore. “Okay,” she said, reaching for the doorknob. She slipped back inside the house, but Clarke stayed out there on the porch by herself for a moment, letting out a shuddering exhale as Octavia’s question faded from her mind.

*It’s all good,* she thought. *It’s all good.* She and Bellamy were what they were, and she’d gotten used to it a long time ago. She liked it, even. It was easy. It was nice. It was . . . it was different.

Sometimes it was best to just leave it at that.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

This is a really smutty chapter.

Chapter 30

Bellamy was really surprised when his friends started to leave the party as early as they did. Before 9:00, half of them were already gone. And it was Friday night. When he asked Clarke what the hell was up with that, she was vague. “We have things to do,” she hinted, and he assumed that meant she wanted to take him upstairs and have sex with him. Fine by him. By the time everyone except Jackson and Emori had left, he was getting a little horny himself, and he suggested, “Let’s go get it on, huh?” wriggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“How not so fast,” she said, instructing him to stay down on the couch while she went upstairs and got something.

While he waited for her, he asked Miller and Murphy if they knew what was going on, but they just shrugged like dumbasses and pretended they had no idea.

When Clarke came back downstairs, she was hauling an overstuffed duffle bag behind her. It nearly bowled her over as she tried to make it to the bottom step, so he sprang to his feet and took it from her. “What’s this all about?” he asked.

“We’re going somewhere,” she revealed. “Tonight.”

“Tonight?” It was already almost 9:00.

“Yeah, I packed stuff for both of us in there. That’s why it’s so heavy.”

He slung the bag over his shoulder, staring at her skeptically. “Where are you taking me?”

“Just into the city for the weekend. D.C.,” she replied.

“For the weekend?” He had work lined up tomorrow. The only day he made a priority to take off every week was Sunday.

“Just call Diana, tell her you’re sick and can’t work on her bathroom remodel tomorrow,” she suggested.

That might have worked, except knowing Diana, she’d seriously offer to nurse him back to health.

“Come on,” she said, grabbing his hand. “Let’s go.”

Clearly she had a whole weekend planned out for him, which excited him even though he hated the thought of her spending so much money on him. The bear was enough of a gift. Really, that was . . . that gift was everything.

“Have fun!” Emori called after them as they walked out the door.
“Have fun fucking!” Murphy added.

Bellamy flipped his roommate off as he followed Clarke outside.

They got in his truck, and she insisted on driving. “I just want it to be a total surprise,” she said, basically pushing him out of the driver’s seat.

“Have you ever driven a truck before?”

“No, but I’ll be fine.”

“Alright, if you say so.” He may have said a little prayer before they left. Just because.

Since Clarke’s mom and stepdad lived in D.C. and she made that drive a lot, she was pretty comfortable with it, for the most part. She did complain how it was too hard for her feet to reach the pedals, though, and at one point she even attempted to move the seat forward while switching lanes. Bad idea. She almost took out the much smaller Ford Taurus to her left. “Oops, sorry,” she apologized, and he wasn’t sure whether that was directed towards him or the other driver.

The city was a big one, big enough that you could get lost in it even if you had grown up in the area most of your life. And indeed, that was what Clarke proceeded to do. She drove in circles, joking that they were just taking the “scenic route,” but eventually she told him to look up the hotel on his phone. “It’s the Hyatt Regency,” she informed him.

“The Hyatt?” He’d never stayed in a Hyatt before, which probably meant it was nice. He’d been expecting Super 8 or Motel 6 or something. “You didn’t have to spend so much money, Clarke,” he said, typing the hotel into his phone.

“I wanted to make sure we were getting a good hotel,” she said. “Have you seen those shows where they shine the special lights on the rooms? And you see all the filthy crap left behind?”

“Yeah, that’s pretty gross,” he agreed, setting the hotel into his GPS. Good God, it said they were twenty minutes away. She’d nearly driven them out of the city. “Turn left here,” he said, lurching forward as she slammed on the breaks. “No, at the light,” he clarified.

“Oh.” She slowly drove forward again. “Don’t even try to pay for half, okay? It’s your birthday, your present.”

“Pretty nice present,” he said. A weekend away? He hadn’t had one of those in a long time.

“Oh, you have no idea.” She smirked. “We’re staying tomorrow night, too. And I’ve got some things planned.”

“Sexy things?” he asked. “Or, like, sightseeing?”

“Mmm, a little a bit of both.”

“Little bit of both, huh?” Sounded like the perfect combination to him. He sucked it up and decided he wouldn’t ask her about the cost of everything. Just this once. He wasn’t going to start letting her pay for him from now on, and if they went out to eat this weekend, he was still paying for both their meals whether she liked it or not.

When they finally got to the hotel—the big, fancy hotel—she had a problem parking the truck. At first she tried to whip it into a way too tight space, and he swore, “Oh, fuck no, don’t try that,” and nearly had a stroke. They ended up parking way down at the end of the lot, and it took her multiple
attempts to squeeze into the space. She kept having to back up and pull forward again, and he had to
tell her which way to readjust the wheel. It took almost five minutes before she got it. It was proof
that he should’ve driven, and it was . . . adorable as hell, really.

Bellamy wasn’t sure why, but seeing Clarke behind the wheel of his truck . . . it really turned him on.
So much so that, by the time they got out, he scammed around to her side to grind into her from
behind, pushing her up against the door.

“Someone’s eager,” she noted.

“Yeah.” Chances were, this room was going to be nicer than any hotel room he’d ever stayed in
before. He couldn’t wait to get her up there and just fuck the hell out of her.

“Are you gonna do me right here?” she asked, circling her ass suggestively against his groin.

He put his hands on her hips, stilling her. “You serious?”

“Yeah.”

Holy fuck, right out here in the parking lot? She was down for that? He did a three-sixty, checking to
see if anyone else was really around. He didn’t see anyone, and they were pretty well concealed
between his truck and someone else’s minivan. No one would see.

Semi-public sex was his one of his kinks, just like praise was one of Clarke’s. He really was
powerless to resist it.

“You spoil me,” he told her, tugging down on her leggings. Oh, fuck yes . . . she wasn’t even
wearing any panties, so he had the easiest access he could’ve hoped for. He yanked his jeans and
underwear down just far enough to release his cock, stroked it a few times, ran it up and down the
crack of her ass, and within no time at all, it was hard enough to shove into her.

“Oh,” she breathed out shudderingly, leaning against the truck for support. “God . . .”

There really was no time to waste when they were out here, so he started pounding into her straight
away, trying to keep his thrusts shallow so his thighs didn’t make too much noise slapping against
her ass. “Stay up,” he told her, wrapping his arm around her stomach to lift her torso when she
started to bend. If anyone looked out their window and saw them, he wanted it to look like they were
just standing back to front, nothing indecent or unlawful going on.

“Just cum fast,” she told him, glancing at him over her shoulder.

Oh, that wouldn’t be a problem. Normally, he had more stamina than this, but the more public the
location was, the more likely it was to be a quickie.

Unfortunately, even though he was getting close, he wasn’t quite there yet when another car rolled
into the parking lot, lights illuminating more than he would have liked. He stilled his hips entirely,
hoping the natural darkness of night would be enough to conceal them as that car drove past. It went
down to the very last parking space, just a couple of spots away, and swung in.

“Dammit,” he swore, “we gotta stop.”

She groaned frustratedly when he pulled out of her and zipped his jeans back up. She tugged her
leggings back over her ass and said, “We’ll finish in a minute.”

“In a minute,” he agreed, lifting that heavy duffle bag out of the backseat.
Check-in took longer than it should have, because the girl at the counter didn’t really seem to know what she was doing. She was hot, though, so they both kind of ogled her while she verified all their reservation details and made their electronic room keys. At one point, she turned around, bent over, and gave them the perfect view of her ample round ass. Bellamy couldn’t help but tilt his head to the side to get a better look, and when he glanced at Clarke, she was doing the same thing.

He chuckled. Damn, the fact that his girl liked other girls was so hot.

They’d only managed to make it onto the elevator before the lust kicked in again. Clarke pushed the seventh floor button, but Bellamy had other ideas, because he couldn’t even control his own damn libido. By the time they were up to the fourth floor, he pushed the Stop button, bringing the elevator to a halt, and dropped the duffle bag on the ground. He spun Clarke around and bent her over this time, and she gasped as he jerked her leggings down again. He freed his cock, jammed it back into her, and resumed the frenetic thrusting he’d begun in the parking lot.

“Oh god, yes.” Her words tumbled out on a wave of passion, spurring him on.

He held onto both her hips and fucked into her hair, no longer concerned with being quiet, and glanced up into the corner to see a small blinking red light. A security camera, most likely. If someone just so happened to be watching that elevator right now, they’d see the two of them going at it like bunnies.

“Fuck,” he swore, slamming into her one last time as he came abruptly. That hadn’t taken long, not long at all. He felt bad for not getting her off, too, but, hey, he was only human. That happened once in a while. Besides, they were apparently getting a room with a king-sized bed, so . . . he could give it to her real good on that.

“Nice,” he said when they walked into the room. It wasn’t some huge suite or anything, but it beat the hell out of the Super 8. The bathroom was big, the TV was big, and there was even a minibar with snacks and alcohol underneath. The bed was huge—it put his queen-sized to shame—and there were a mountain of pillows up at the top of it.

“Oh, good, it actually looks like the pictures,” she said. “Look at that big bed.”

“One-tract mind,” he teased.

“Oh, come on, you know you’re thinking the same thing.”

Hell, he’d just cum. He was good for a while. But if she wanted to work him up again . . . yeah, he could have it hard in five minutes and be ready to go.

“Why don’t you get comfy?” she suggested, taking the duffle bag from him. “That’s what I’m gonna do.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah.” There was a glint of mischief in her eyes as she slipped into the bathroom and shut the door. Knowing Clarke, she’d probably packed some more sexy lingerie. He usually couldn’t go very long without taking it off of her, but . . . that corset outfit she’d worn last month? Fucking amazing. He wouldn’t protest if she decided to put that on again.

He toed off his shoes and socks and went over the window to pull the curtains back and look outside. No balcony, but they did have a great view of the pool down below. Too bad it was an outdoor pool, though, and way too cold to go swimming. The Hyatt building ran in multiple directions, wrapping around the pool, and it looked like there was a bar downstairs, maybe a bar and
restaurant. The food and drinks probably both cost a fortune, but he wouldn’t mind taking Clarke down there, showing her off to all sorts of people he didn’t even know.

Pulling the curtains closed again, he took off his jeans, kicked them into the corner, and flopped down on the bed in his t-shirt and boxers, testing out the pillows and mattress. Shit, this thing was comfy. Not too soft, not too firm. After the long day of work he’d had, he’d have to be careful not to fall asleep while Clarke was still feeling frisky.

“Oh, Bellamy?” Her voice rose from the bathroom in a sing-song tone. All thoughts of sleep vanished from his mind when he watched her walk out of the bathroom wearing . . . not much. Just a silky, white slip that went down to mid-thigh. It clung to every dip and bend in her body, accentuating all her curves when she moved, and the thin fabric did little to conceal her pebbled nipples beneath. Her hair was loose and wild on her shoulders, shaken free from its signature half-ponytail.

“Oh, best birthday ever,” he raved, practically salivating over her. Forget being a princess. Tonight, she looked like an angel.

“Do you like it?” she asked, smoothing her hands up her sides. She lifted the bottom of the slip up on her thighs, then let it fall back down again.

“Yeah, you look so good,” he complimented. “Your body, Clarke . . .”

“What about it?”

Did she want a soliloquy? Because he could probably give her one. “Sexiest thing I’ve ever seen,” he told her, and he meant it. He’d hooked up with plenty of women in his twenty-four years, but she definitely had the best figure out of all of them. The most perfect proportions. The smoothest skin.

“Sexy?” she echoed, slipping her fingers beneath the thin strap on her right shoulder. “Like . . .” Pulling the string down, she smiled sweetly. “Sexy?”

The slip didn’t fall, but just seeing her shoulder completely naked like that was enough to make his mouth water. “Sexy,” he confirmed.

“You’re not too bad yourself,” she said, swaying closer to the foot of the bed. She leaned over, putting her hands down on the mattress, giving him a good view of her breasts. “How do you want me?” she asked huskily.

That question made his cock twitch, and he had to give himself a good rub through the fabric of his boxers. How did he want her? What kind of question was that? He wanted her on her back, on her knees, on top of him, bent over . . . he wanted her any way and every way he could have her. It was impossible to narrow down. “Give me some ideas,” he urged, eager to see what she’d come up with.

“Hmm . . .” She looked around the room, her eyes zeroing in on the small table next to the TV. “Maybe like this?” she said, bending over it, sticking her ass out for him. The slip rode up enough that he could see that she was wearing very little underneath, just a matching white thong, which looked hot as hell.

“Or . . .” She turned around, leaning back against the table, and he was immediately struck with an idea.

“Yeah, get up there,” he told her, making no move to get off that bed. He kept his hand on his re-stiffening cock, not stroking himself. Not yet.
She climbed up on the table, like a patient at the doctor’s office at first until he told her, “Spread your legs.”

Her breath hitched, and she did as he instructed, opening them wide for him to see what he most longed to. He was too far away to see if she was wet, or to catch a whiff of her arousal, but he knew she still had to turned on as hell. He’d left her hanging in both the parking lot and the elevator. While he’d achieved his own satisfaction, she had yet to.

“Are you wet?” he asked, just because he wanted to hear her admit it.

“Yeah.”

“Yeah?” It was hard to resist getting up and going over to her, bending down to give her a few good licks. “Push your panties aside,” he told her, “let me see your pussy.”

She seemed a bit surprised that he wasn’t just over there doing it himself, but she played along obediently, doing as she was told.

“Damn.” Wet had perhaps been an understatement. Her arousal was glistening on the lips of her pussy, almost as if she’d already cum. But she hadn’t. Though she deserved to. “Touch yourself,” he said, wanting to watch. He’d only accidentally walked in on her doing this a couple of times, and usually, if he did, he just took over for her. But it would be hot to watch Clarke get herself off, to see if she touched herself like he touched her. She had to have a pretty solid technique, considering she’d fingered another girl before.

“It’s not as good as when you do it,” she said, hesitantly reaching down between her legs to start up with it. She stroked her middle finger in between the lips of her pussy, then rubbed her thumb on top of her clit. She alternated motions for a minute before moving the two in tandem, letting out little moans of pleasure here and there, nowhere near as loud as the ones she unleashed with him.

“You gonna fuck yourself?” he asked, eager to see her put her fingers inside her body.

She leaned her head back against the wall, scooted closer to the edge of the table, giving him a better view, and inserted two fingers into her beautiful, glistening pussy, still using her thumb to rub her clit.

“That looks so good,” he said, sliding his boxers down far enough to let his cock jump out. It lay flat against his stomach, completely erect and ready to go again. He had no doubt watching her do this to herself could get him off, but he wanted to take it easy, build himself up so he had some gas left in the tank when he got inside her. He stroked himself lazily, and when she opened her eyes and saw his hand on his own flesh, too, she started grinding down against her hand, her whole body writhing as it sought release.

“Can you make yourself cum?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she choked out. “Bellamy . . .”

“Make yourself cum.” He wanted to see it so badly. This was what he imagined Clarke to look like on the rare nights they weren’t together, or whenever she wanted him and he just wasn’t around. She looked so sweet and innocent in that little outfit of hers, but the way she was fingering herself was downright filthy. The contrast drove him wild.

“Bellamy . . .” She kept whispering his name, even though he wasn’t the one doing anything to her, and he wondered if she was imagining her fingers to be his cock. The faster she pumped them in and out of her gorgeous pussy, the faster he stroked his length, making sure he spread the pre-cum
around so that he’d be all ready for her. When she came, her whole body shook with pleasure, and
he stilled with his hand on his balls, marveling at the sight of the liquid that seeped out onto her
thighs, onto her hand, and even onto the table. Not quite a squirt, but close. He felt like he could get
her to do that tonight if he managed to give her a g-spot orgasm.

“You did so good, baby,” he told her, appreciating the show. “I liked that.”

She just had to sit there for a moment, recollecting herself, but he didn’t want her to get too comfy.
No, he wanted to capitalize on her pleasure and give her some more before she had too much of
chance to come down from it; so he said, “Come here,” and motioned her towards the bed.

It must not have been one of the most intense orgasms—those usually left her unable to walk for a
couple minutes—because she got up and made her way towards him, looking down at him
questioningly.

He took the hand she’d just used to get herself off and took her fingers into his mouth one at a time,
swirling his tongue around them to lick them clean. Her nipples hardened to the point of sharp peaks
beneath her slip, a clear sign of how arousing it was for her to watch him do that.

“You taste so good,” he said, wanting to taste more. He slid down on the bed, his head almost
completely off the pillows, and said, “Sit on my face.”

Her eyebrows shot upward inquisitively.

“Don’t be embarrassed,” he told her, quickly removing his shirt and discarding it on the floor. They
didn’t really do this a whole lot, unless they were sixty-nining, but it was really no different than him
having his head between her legs.

After only a moment’s hesitation, she climbed up onto the bed, around his chest level, and scooted
forward, her dripping pussy hovering just above his face. That thong was threatening to get in the
way, though, so he grabbed the side of it and ripped it, leaving it dangling on just her right leg as she
slowly lowered herself onto his face.

He held his tongue out, not really having to do all that much work as she grinded down hard on his
mouth. She was already coated in her own juices, just like the ones he’d tasted on her fingers, and
this angle was perfect for the tip of his tongue to poke into her. He curled his arms up around her
thighs, holding her in as close he could, not even caring about breathing in that moment. As long as
he could breathe in the potent, heady scent of her, that was all he needed.

He tongued her wildly, addicted to the taste of her.

“Bellamy, I’m gonna cum again,” she warned.

*Good*, he thought. *That’s the idea.* He kept tasting her all the way through her orgasm, fortunate
enough to be able to drink a whole lot down this time. He licked and lapped at her, not wanting to
waste a drop, because it tasted so damn good, and she was so damn precious.

“Oh my god,” she whimpered, grabbing hold of the headboard. “Bellamy . . .”

His cock felt like it was about to burst again, and he wanted nothing more than to bury it inside her
before it did. “Can you handle one more?” he asked, fully prepared to back off if she said she
couldn’t. He usually gave her a break after two orgasms—usually needed one himself, to be honest
—but tonight, he just didn’t want to stop.

“I . . . I think so,” she stammered, sliding down a bit so that her soaked pussy was rubbing against his
“Can you go open the window first?” he asked her, grinning.

“But it’s cold out,” she protested.

“I’ll have to make you hot then.”

She giggled lightly, getting out of that bed with shaking legs. Literally shaking.

“You sure you’re okay?” he asked her. He didn’t want to overdo it or anything.

“I’m good,” she said, pulling the curtains aside and pushing open that window. A gust of cool wind swept in, and she shivered. “Do you want people to hear us or something?”

“Yeah.” That was precisely what he wanted. She hadn’t opened the curtains all the way, so chances were, no one would see them. And that was fine. Because he was still thinking they’d given someone a show on that elevator. But if people heard them . . . hell, yeah, he wouldn’t mind that.

“Do you wanna be on top?” she asked, kicking off her broken thong, peeling the slip off shortly after.

“No, you can do it,” he said, lifting his hips to slide his boxers down to his feet. He kicked them off and sat up against the pillows, sort of in a reclining position where he’d be more than able to help her out if she needed it. “Ride my cock, Princess,” he told her, loving how verbally dominant he was getting to be tonight. “Don’t hold back.”

With what looked to be a great deal of effort—the girl was exhausted but still so eager to please him—Clarke swung leg over his lap and straddled him, settling into the position quickly. She placed the head of his cock at her entrance and moaned as she sank down onto it. She was so slick, so damp with arousal, that it felt like they’d just used half a container of lube to get her that way. But it was all her.

“How’s that feel?” he asked, though the look on her face was enough of an answer.

“Good,” she said. “Your cock feels so good inside me.”

His eyes nearly rolled back in his head. Hearing her say stuff like that never failed to excite him. “Take some more,” he urged, wondering how deep she could take it given how wet she was.

She pressed her hips down further, about as far as she could get them. This wasn’t the best position for a balls deep type of penetration, but she had most of him in there. Her warm pussy felt like a glove around his dick, except it squeezed him tightly, too, and he couldn’t tell whether she was doing that purposefully or involuntarily.

“That looks so hot,” he said, reveling in the sight of her body accepting his length. She was so small, so tight. How the hell did she make room for him like that? How did he even fit in her?

“Are you gonna cum?” she asked him, her voice shaky with pleasure.

“Yeah.” Not until she did, though. He’d already decided that. “Bounce on it, babe.”

She bent forward a bit, holding onto his chest and shoulders for support, and her torso stayed relatively still as her hips rode his cock up and down. Her whole body was covered in a sheen of sweat at this point, and she was so slippery, he could barely keep his hands in place as he grabbed at
her sides, her hips, her ass.

“Oh god, yes,” she whispered, closing her eyes.

That window was still open, though, and whispers wouldn’t cut it. He wanted to be loud, wanted to be obnoxious, even. He wanted the other people at that hotel to absolutely hate them for the noise they were making, and more than anything . . . he wanted their next door neighbors to know his name. He slammed his hips up into her suddenly, causing her whole body to jolt and a strangled, “Bellamy!” to spill from her lips.

Yeah, he thought, just like that. He did it again.

Same response. “Oh, Bellamy!”

He took over for her after that, fucking up into her like an animal while she practically lay atop him, completely spent but obviously still enjoying the pleasure. Her moans and cries were louder now, the kind that somebody halfway down the hallway probably could have heard.

“Oh, Bell!”

“You’re so good,” he said, stroking her hair as he angled his hips, trying so hard to find that special spot of hers. “So good.”

“Uh!” she cried, inhaling shakily. Her face contorted with pleasure, and for a second, she didn’t seem to know what was hitting her. Her body reacted on its own accord, and she lifted herself off his cock, rubbing her clit desperately a few times as a unique and intense orgasm rippled through her. Fluid gushed from her body, not much of it since she’d cum twice already, but enough to classify as a squirt for sure. It rained down on his stomach and thighs mostly, and god-damn, it was one of the hottest fucking things he’d ever seen.

“Oh my god,” she whimpered. “Oh my god.” She looked down at what she’d done and asked, “Did I . . .”

He nodded, smiling at her excitedly. Getting a girl to squirt was like finding a unicorn or the Holy Grail—it was the pinnacle of sexual ecstasy, and a getting a girl to that point was like the ultimate proof that she’d gotten maximum pleasure out of the experience. He’d heard the best approach was to try for a g-spot orgasm, and it was easier to give a girl a g-spot orgasm after she’d orgasmed at least once already.

Yeah, he’d read up on this.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized.

“No, don’t apologize. That was incredible.” This had happened to Gina a few times, too, and she’d had the same reaction. Girls were sometimes embarrassed when it came to squirting, just because it didn’t happen to them all that often and they didn’t know how to react to it. “Come here,” he said, wrapping his arms around her waist, pulling her in close. “I loved that.”

Clarke lay against him, her whole body limp and sweat-soaked as she panted heavily for air. He wasn’t about to keep fucking her after that, even though he, too, was close and wanted to cum again. Her pussy had just gotten a hell of a workout and was probably way too sensitive for him to rub up against it, so he reached down, grabbed his cock, pumped the entire length of it a few times, and shot his load off into his own hand. Clarke was so out of it, she didn’t even seem to notice what he was doing. She was probably going to fall asleep right there on top of him.
He’d have to get out of that bed in a minute, grab a washcloth out of the bathroom and clean himself up. Maybe just duck in the shower really quickly, too. Typically, if one of them was decorated in bodily fluids after sex, it was her, so this was definitely a role reversal.

“Happy birthday, Bellamy,” she purred sleepily, her warm breath tickling his chest.

With his clean hand, he stroked her hair, then kissed her forehead. He wasn’t about to tell her tonight, especially since she was too tired to remember it in the morning, but this was the best birthday he’d had since Gina had been alive.

Bellamy was such a fucking nerd. But the fact that he just completely owned it was so sexy.

After getting a daytime glimpse of her haphazard parking job, Clarke didn’t insist on driving to Ford’s Theater the next day, but she did manage to navigate Bellamy there. He didn’t know where they were going, though, so when they got there, his whole face lit up with excitement. “No way,” he said, sounding amazed. “Are you serious, Clarke?”

“I’m serious.” Octavia had informed her that, even though they had taken family mini-vacations into the city and had seen more museums than she ever cared to see again, they had never been to Ford’s Theater. Apparently Bellamy had wanted to go back in high school, but it’d been closed down at the time. So for years now, he had longed to go see the theater where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

Being a historical site, the theater was really more of a museum these days, even though performances still happened there. They started out by touring through the museum, which had all the information Clarke could have ever wanted to know about the Civil War, Lincoln’s presidency, and assassination. There were audio guides available for five dollars, but Clarke didn’t need an audio guide when she had Bellamy. He explained everything she didn’t understand, and he explained it in such great detail that a visit that was approximated to take thirty minutes ended up taking fifty.

After that, they went into the actual theater itself and were able to look at the president’s box from the balcony. They sat down for a history talk from some professional who covered all the events of the assassination. It probably wasn’t supposed to be a question/answer thing, but Bellamy raised his hand like he was in class and asked questions, made comments, and just generally annoyed the speaker altogether.

He was so into this.

“That was great, Clarke,” he said as they left. “I’ve always wanted to come here.”

“Beats remodeling a bathroom today, huh?” she joked.

“Uh, yeah, I’d say so.”

“Come on,” she said, grabbing his hand as they meandered through the parking lot towards the truck. “We’re not done yet.”

“We’re not?”

“No.” The theater/museum visit was totally a Bellamy thing—she liked history well enough, but she didn’t have to know everything about everything the way he did. The next stop she had in mind was something less factual, but equally as enjoyable.
Her navigation skills were not on point as she tried to get them to Madame Tussauds wax museum. Just as she was about to cave in and whip out her phone, he just happened to drive right by it, and she yelped, “Oh, here!”

He slammed on the breaks, took a sharp left turn, and said, “The wax museum?”

“Yeah, have you ever been to one before?”

“No.”

“They’re kind of creepy,” she acknowledged, “but cool. And since this is the nation’s capital and everything, they have all the presidents.”

He gave her a sharp look. “All the presidents?”

Fifteen minutes later, once they’d paid for their tickets and made a beeline for the current president inside, Bellamy stood next to a wax figure statue of Donald Trump, flipping him off while Clarke snapped a picture. Someone did the exact same pose right after him. Apparently it was popular one. He was much more smiley when it came time to pose with the Lincoln and Reagan figures, though, and when he got to Obama, Clarke was pretty sure she even heard him say, “I wish you were still in office.” The Kennedy one was definitely his favorite, though. He made Clarke get in a lot of those pictures with him. Selfies galore. “Best president ever,” he boasted. “Navigated the Cuban Missile Crisis, made that historic visit to the Berlin Wall . . . and you know, he got with Marilyn Monroe, so . . . he had skills.”

“Oh, I think there’s a Marilyn Monroe figure around here somewhere . . .” Clarke said, looking around.

“Oh, fuck yeah,” Bellamy said, “let’s go find her.”

“Mmm, let’s,” Clarke agreed. That woman was still the ultimate sex symbol, even all these years after her death.

She and Bellamy both took turns posing with Marilyn, because they both thought she was hot as fuck, even when she was only made of wax. “This is what your body’s like,” he told her. “Pin-up figure.”

“No,” she denied modestly. She had curves, sure, but not Marilyn-esque curves.

“You are,” he insisted, putting his hands on her waist. “Your body’s just like hers.”

“It’s not,” she said again, “but thanks for saying that.”

“You got such a good body.” He bent down and gave her a kiss, and even though it started out as a peck on the lips, it soon became more than that, deepening, progressing to the point where she had to push on his chest and remind him, “We’re in public.”

He grinned. “I know.”

She blushed, tempted to slip away with him and find some place to do it here, except for the fact that she was still a little sore from last night.

There were other wax figures in the museum Clarke was interested in seeing—Beyonce and Tyra Banks were a real highlight, because they were both so fierce and beautiful—and Bellamy of course had to see Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Fallon. He said he wished he could really meet them, because
he had lots of political jokes stored away in his mind, and he thought they should use them in their monologues.

They spent the rest of the day roaming the city on foot, stopping for lunch, popping into any store or other place to visit that caught their attention. Bellamy seemed like he was having a great time, such a great time, in fact, that she wished she would have kept the hotel for Sunday, too. One more night away from Arkadia wouldn’t have hurt. But there was no way he’d let her spend any more money on him than she already had, so she didn’t even mention it.

That night, they went down to the hotel’s pool, but clothing had to stay on since there was a family of four swimming in there with them. They sat in the hot tub for a while, talking about the sex they would have had if they’d been alone in there. Eventually, the temptation became too much, and they scuttled upstairs to their room, proceeding to absolutely wreck those sheets for the poor cleaning staff.

That lasted over an hour.

By the time they were both too exhausted to move anymore, Bellamy called downstairs to see if there was room service. There technically wasn’t, but the restaurant downstairs still agreed to bring up some nachos to their room. When they knocked on the door, Bellamy opened it with nothing more than the sheet around his waist, thanked them immensely, forked over some cash, and brought the nachos back over to the bed, where Clarke lay waiting.

“Mmm, actual food,” she said, sitting up, nearly drowning in his overly large t-shirt. “Not that you didn’t feed me well, but . . .”

“No, I’m starving, too,” he said, setting the huge, heaping bowl in between them. There were so many options to dip the chips into: salsa, guacamole, cheese, just to name a few. Clarke sampled a little of each one and raved, “So good.”

“So expensive,” he said, scooping up a generous amount of white cheddar sauce. “But so worth it.”

“So worth it,” she agreed. “We worked up an appetite.”

“We did. We were exercising.”

She laughed, picturing him on top of her. It was sort of like doing a push-up, she supposed. “Even before we came back here, we were exercising,” she said. “Sight-seeing is tiring.”

“It is,” he said. “I enjoyed it, though.”

“I could tell.”

“I mean, Ford’s Theater alone . . . that’s history right there.”

She giggled, double-dipping into the guacamole. “Listen to you. ‘That’s history right there.’” She tried to lower her voice to be as gruff and gravelly as his, but it didn’t sound even remotely the same.

“I know, I’m a dork,” he said. “Rub it in.”

“It’s cute, though.”

He made a face. “Cute?”

“Yes.” Bellamy was a cute a guy, in addition to being smoldering and tantalizing as hell. He’d had
his glasses on today, and he’d honestly looked like one of the biggest, most adorable nerds on the
planet. The fact that there were two very different sides of him only added to his sex appeal, to be
honest.

“You’re pretty cute, too,” he said, using his thumb to wipe a bit of guacamole off her bottom lip.

How was it that even the littlest gestures like that made her heart beat faster? Seriously.

“So have you had a good birthday?” she asked, tucking her knees up underneath herself.

“Probably one of the best birthdays I’ve ever had,” he answered without hesitation.

“Really?” She knew he’d had fun, but that was quite the high praise.

“Really, Clarke. It’s been great.”

“Well, it’s not over yet,” she said, leaning in. “We have the room ‘til noon tomorrow.” She gave him
a quick kiss, and he made a face. “What?” she said innocently.

“The guac mixed with the salsa? It’s a little intense.”

“Sorry.” She dipped her next chip into some mild cheddar cheese instead.

“So what should we do until noon tomorrow?” he asked, leaning back against the headboard
leisurely. “Got any ideas?”

She blushed. “A few.” She doubted he’d be willing to give anal sex a go just yet, but she’d seen the
brand new dildos stashed away in his bottom bathroom drawer. He had plans for her, and somedaysoon, hopefully he would act on them. She really was eager to try it.

“So what did you wish for?” she asked him suddenly, not even sure where the question came from.
It had just bubbled up and escaped.

“What?” he asked, confused.

“For your birthday,” she clarified. As much as he’d enjoyed the weekend away, she doubted he’d
wished for it. A weekend away with no work to occupy his time was such a foreign concept to him,
so he must have wished for something else instead. “You did wish for something when you blew out
the candles, right?”

He chuckled, nodding. “Yeah, I wished for something.”

“What’d you wish for?”

He narrowed his eyes at her skeptically. “You know it’s supposed to be a secret, right? Or else it
doesn’t come true.”

“Wishes can always come true, no matter who you tell them to,” she said. “Back when I was young,
Wells was, like, my only friend, and he was the only one to come to all my birthday parties. I used to
tell him what I wished for all the time, and it always came true.”

“And what’d you wish for?” he asked.

“Back then?” She snorted at her own overt girlishness. “A Barbie dream house. Got it for
Christmas.”
“That’s ‘cause your parents had money, Clarke,” he reasoned. “What I wished for . . . it’s not that easy to get.”

She thought about what that might mean and lowered her head. “Oh.” Maybe that meant he’d wished for something Roma or Gina-related then. Or something related to the child he’d never get the chance to know. Something he could never have.

“I probably should’ve wished for Octavia to have a healthy pregnancy,” he mumbled to himself, “or for her and Lincoln’s marriage to work out. That would’ve been the selfless thing to do.”

“Bellamy, you can wish for something for yourself.”

“Yeah, but . . .” He trailed off, shaking his head. “It was stupid. I shouldn’t even think about it.”

She didn’t want to be pushy, but now that he’d sort of started talking about it, she really wanted to know exactly what it was. “Look, you don’t have to tell me, but--”

“I wished that I could go to college,” he blurted out suddenly, surprising her with his willingness to open up. “Selfish, right?”

How could he think that was selfish, to want to pursue an education he would have otherwise attained had life not thrown him a major curveball? “Not at all,” she said, wishing he wouldn’t think of it that way. There was nothing selfish about wanting that for himself, and she refused to let him believe that. Quite frankly, she was thrilled that he’d wished for something for himself and not for anyone else. And college . . . it didn’t have to be this unachievable impossibility he seemed to believe it was.

“It’s not gonna happen, though,” he said dejectedly, “and I’ve known for a long time it’s not gonna happen, so . . . I don’t know why I even let myself wish for it.”

“Because you want it,” she said, swirling a broken nacho chip around in the cheese dip, not really interested in eating anymore. “Bellamy, that doesn’t make you selfish to want things for yourself. You’re not obligated to wish for something for your sister. You can pursue your own thing, too.”

“My own thing?” he echoed. “I don’t even have a thing, Clarke. I don’t have any big, lofty educational goals. I’m not on some career path. I don’t . . .” He sighed heavily. “That time’s just passed for me.”

“Maybe not,” she said. Too often, Bellamy did this, talked himself out of college the moment the thought entered his mind. She’d listened to him do it over and over again, but this was the closest he’d come to actually admitting how badly he wanted to go, and she didn’t want to let up on it just yet. “Look, your whole life, you’ve tried to take care of your mom and your sister, and you’ve done that. But Octavia’s getting married now, and . . .” She paused, trying to phrase it delicately so that it wouldn’t sound like she was saying Octavia wouldn’t need him at all anymore. “She’ll have Lincoln. And your mom seems like she’s doing fine, and you . . . you don’t have to have it all figured out right now. You could just take one class or something, just to see how it goes, just to see if it’s something you think you’d wanna stick with or be able to stick with.”

“I don’t know,” he mumbled, and for a second, Clarke thought he was going to shake his head and reaffirm that it wasn’t going to happen, that it couldn’t. Because that was what he always did. But much to her surprise, he added on, “We’ll see,” in an oh-so-quiet voice, and that made her heart leap with excitement. Because he wasn’t shutting the door on the possibility. Not this time. By saying ‘we’ll see,’ he at least left the door hanging open.
She smiled at him adoringly. *It's a start.*
Chapter 31

Clarke wasn’t in any rush to get home. Sunday was going to end too quickly, and Monday meant trudging to class and to work again. She would have much rather spent more time with Bellamy, time lounging around their hotel room or going out and seeing more of all the sights in D.C. But alas, all good things had to come to an end, she supposed, and from the second she woke up on Sunday morning, she had an internal countdown clock running in her head. Checkout was at noon.

Bellamy was in absolutely no rush that morning. He took things at a leisurely pace, spending nearly twenty minutes inflicting the most delightful form of torture on her as he buried his tongue between her legs. Then he spooned up behind her and fucked her nice and slow, whispering all sorts of naughty things in her ear about how good she was and how tight she was and how he couldn’t get enough of her body. She wanted to tell him she couldn’t get enough of his, either, but she figured her breathless moans conveyed that.

It took them a while, but they did finally manage to get out of bed and make it to the shower. Once they were standing together beneath that steady stream of warm water, though, his hands roamed all over her, spreading soap and body wash across her back, her arms, her thighs. It was quite a paradoxical thing, letting him make her so clean when she still had such dirty things in mind.

That particular shower proved to be interesting, because she noticed his hands focusing on her backside more than they usually did. It wasn’t atypical for him to squeeze her ass or massage and knead her round flesh, but this time, he started to lightly trace his fingers up and down her crack, too. That was it, nothing more invasive than that, but she felt his hand skim over her untouched back door, and all she could think about was how incredible it would feel once his cock was in there. Sure, maybe some pain was inevitable, but after that passed, she had no doubt it would be one of the most exhilarating experiences of her entire life.

She lifted one leg and wrapped it around his waist, giving him better access to touch her. One of his fingers came into contact with her hole, tracing small circles around it just momentarily before they resumed their deliberate path up and down the crack of her ass, just barely skimming the surface of her slippery skin. She held onto his shoulders and closed her eyes as his hands ghosted all over her, reveling in the barely-there sensation that made her whole body tingle with delight.

They drove home in comfortable silence, the kind that allowed Clarke to learn her head against the window and nod off for a while. Bellamy reached over and gently shook her shoulder half an hour after she shut her eyes and said, “Clarke, wake up.”

She blinked her eyes open, taking in the familiar surroundings of Arkadia, specifically Bellamy’s neighborhood, which was she was starting to become more accustomed to than her own. Seeing trash can tipped over on the sidewalk was a lot more standard than seeing manicured lawns these days.
“Home sweet home,” he said as he got out of the truck.

“Mmm,” she purred, smiling at the closed front door of his house. Maybe it wasn’t the nicest, fanciest house of all time, but somewhere along the way, this place really had become home to her. There was no need for Bellamy to drop her off at her apartment tonight, or even swing by that place for a minute. Everything she needed was either already in that house or in their hastily-packed duffle bag.

When they got inside, she was a bit surprised to find not only Murphy and Emori sitting on the couch playing video games, but Raven, too, sitting in between them. Raven had been there a couple of times, but for things like Bellamy’s birthday party or a Saturday night hang-out. Today, it looked like she was just there for the heck of it.

“Raven,” Clarke said.

“Oh, hey.” Her friend barely glanced up from the TV screen. “Die, Murphy!” she shouted, her thumb violently mashing one of the buttons on the controller.

“Emori, help me out; she’s killin’ me here,” Murphy said, looking panicked.

“You’re on your own, babe,” Emori told him heartlessly.

Clarke barely glanced at the TV screen long enough to see what they were playing. Some zombie thing. Video games honestly all looked the same to her.

“Welcome back,” Emori said, glancing up at them long enough to smile. “Did you guys have fun?”

“Yeah, we had lots of fun,” Bellamy said, setting their bag down. “In fact, this one here . . .” He nudged Clarke’s side playfully. “She had fun multiple times.”

“Bellamy!” she hissed, feigning outrage.

He shrugged unabashedly. “Well, you did.”

“So did you.”

“I know, that’s part of what made it a fun birthday.”

“Sex addicts, I swear,” Raven said, rising from the couch. She handed her controller to Bellamy and said, “Take over for me? I’m kicking your roommate’s ass.”

“I still have one life left!” Murphy argued.

“I got this,” Bellamy declared confidently, taking Raven’s spot on the couch. He got right into the game and picked up where she had left off. “Sucker,” he said, shooting at Murphy’s character.

“Let’s go talk,” Raven said, motioning for Clarke to come upstairs. Clarke left the bag lying by the door and followed Raven up to Bellamy’s bedroom.

When Raven stepped foot inside that room, she joked, “So this is where all the magic happens,” surveyed everything, and nodded in approval. “Nice.”

It dawned on Clarke that her best friend had never actually seen Bellamy’s bedroom before and that led her to ask, “So what are you doing here? Not that I mind.”

“I was just bored, waiting for you to get home,” Raven replied, sitting down on the foot of the
mattress. “I know I don’t usually just hang out over here, but I figured . . . what the hell, right? They’re my friends now, too.”

Clarke smiled, supposing they were. Bellamy’s friends, her friends . . . they’d all sort of just blended together at this point. Like a big happy family.

“I’m really glad you and Bellamy started hooking up, by the way,” Raven said, “because I got this whole expanded crew out of it.”

Clarke laughed, sitting down beside her. “You can hang out here anytime,” she said. “They really don’t mind. There’s always somebody here.”

“Usually you?” Raven guessed.

“Me or Emori or Jackson. Sometimes all three of us.”

“Oh, I bet the neighbors love that,” Raven remarked sarcastically.

Clarke lowered head, blushing as she laughed again. Their hotel room neighbors certainly hadn’t been happy with them last night. They’d left a complaint down at the front desk with a recommendation that they be charged extra for all the ‘excessive noise’ they had made. The manager had taken pity on them, but he’d also given them this warning look, like it might not be a good idea for them to come back and stay again.

Oh, well. She’d had fun.

“So did Bellamy enjoy his birthday weekend?” Raven asked, twisting to face Clarke. “Besides the sex, I mean.”

“Oh, yeah. We went to Ford’s Theater and the wax museum. We ate some good food. It was a blast.”

“And did you guys . . . blast off,” Raven segued awkwardly, “into a brand new kind of sexual intimacy?”

Clarke scrunched up her forehead in confusion. “What?” Was she supposed to know what that meant?

Raven rolled her eyes and phrased it in layman’s terms for her. “Did you have anal sex yet, Clarke?”

“What?” Clarke shrieked, not because she was outraged by the thought, but because she was shocked Raven knew it was a thought that had crossed her mind. “How did you know we’re gonna do that?”

“I saw Bellamy in Ice Nation buying, like, this anal training kit,” Raven said innocently. “And lube. Lots of lube.”

“Oh, good,” Clarke said. She’d done a little reading up, and that was pretty much the top recommendation from everyone who’d tried it.

“So did you do it?” Raven pressed.

“No,” Clarke replied, not at all embarrassed to be talking about this with her best friend. If she couldn’t talk about this with Raven, then there was no one she could talk to. “But we’re going to. Soon. I hope. He just wants to take things slow, make sure I’m ready.”
“That’s a good idea,” Raven said. “It feels weird at first, I’m not gonna lie.”

“What’s it feel like?”

“Well, the first time you have a finger up your ass, it kind of feels like . . . like you have a finger up your ass,” Raven stated bluntly. “Just keep it clean and you’ll feel less self-conscious. That’s my advice.”

“Yeah, it’ll be fine,” Clarke said. “I mean, it might hurt a little, but . . .”

“Oh, with Bellamy’s size? It’s gonna hurt,” Raven cut in. “It’ll be like losing your virginity all over again. But it’ll be like losing it to Bellamy, so . . . you’ll probably get a rush out of that.”

Clarke smiled, excited by the thought. For the rest of her life, she was going to have to live with the fact that she’d wasted her virginity on Finn Collins. With Lexa, at least she could say that was her first time having sex with another girl. But this would be a first that she could give to Bellamy and Bellamy alone. This was something she’d been able to reserve just for him, and that was a nice thought.

“My god, Clarke,” Raven said, walking over to the closet. She sifted through some of the shirts hanging up, some of which were Bellamy’s, others of which were hers, and said, “Do you have a drawer, too?”

“Bottom drawer,” Clarke replied, using her foot to point to Bellamy’s dresser.

“And I suppose if I look in the bathroom . . .” Raven crossed the bedroom, pushed open the bathroom door, and turned on the light. “Of course,” she said laughingly. “There’s more of your stuff on the sink than his.”

“Well, I’m here a lot,” Clarke reasoned.

“Clearly.” Raven shut the light off and flopped down in the big blue chair next to the window. “Have you ever thought about just moving in here officially, give up your apartment, save yourself some money?”

Clarke wasn’t about to admit that her parents paid her rent, not even to Raven, so she just shrugged nonchalantly and said, “Not really. I’m not technically his girlfriend, so . . .”

“But it looks like you live here,” Raven pointed out. “And you guys are together all the time anyway. I’ve heard you even go grocery shopping together. That’s, like, married people shit, Clarke.”

“We’re not married,” Clarke denied. “We spend a lot of time together because we like spending time together. I spend a lot of nights here because I like it here. But no, I’m not moving in.”

“Even if he asked?” Raven questioned.

She fell quiet for a moment, not sure what she would say if Bellamy asked. She wouldn’t want to offend him and say no, and to be quite honest . . . well, she wouldn’t want to say no in the first place.

“You’d totally move in with him,” Raven said, seeing straight through her silence.

“Only if he asked,” Clarke emphasized. “And he’s not going to, so . . .”

“I could drop some hints,” Raven offered.
“Please don’t.” She and Bellamy had only been back together—so to speak—for about a month since he’d told her about Gina. She didn’t want her best friend, however well-intentioned she may have been, to say something that might derail it.

“Fine, fine,” Raven said. “Do keep me updated on the anal sexcapades, though. I’m really hoping you have a better experience with Bellamy than I had with Wick.”

“Oh, I’m sure I will,” Clarke said. It was Bellamy, after all. There was no way he’d ever give her something she didn’t enjoy. And he was definitely eagerly anticipating it himself, even though he wasn’t talking about it much. She just hoped she could do her part to make the experience an amazing one for him, too.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

“Bellamy, I’m just gonna estimate,” Clarke announced, a carton of milk poised above the pot full of macaroni noodles that still needed to be doused in cheese sauce. “I’m not gonna measure.”

“Like hell you’re not gonna measure,” he said, lunging forward to seize the milk from her. “You have to measure. I’m not lettin’ you screw dinner up.”

“She said she was gonna estimate.” she echoed, making a face. “I’ll have you know, I make amazing Kraft mac and cheese.”

“If you say so.” He pulled open one cabinet door after another, mumbling, “Where’s your measuring cup?”

“I don’t own one,” she admitted sheepishly.

“You don’t own a measuring cup?”

“Why would I? I hardly ever cook.”

“Oh my god, Clarke, just let me do it then,” he said, gently nudging her aside.

“You really think I’m that bad of a cook?”

“Yes.” He poured a small amount of milk into the pot, but it didn’t look like enough to Clarke. This was a family-sized box she’d opened up here. It required more.

“That’s it?” she asked. “You need more than that.”

“Clarke.” He gave her a look. “Leave the cooking matters to me. We’ve been through this.”

“Okay.” she grumbled in resignation. “God, I feel like whenever I try to cook you anything, you end up making it yourself.”

“I’m not making it,” he said, putting the milk back in the refrigerator. “This is all you, babe.”

“It’s gonna be good,” she promised, tearing open the top of the cheese packet. The whole reason she’d picked macaroni and cheese out of the box was because it was the simplest thing to make, and she figured there was little to no chance that she could screw it up.

“This kitchen hardly ever gets used, does it?” he remarked, running his hands across her marble countertop. “Only when I’m over here.”

“Which isn’t very much,” she pointed out.
“Yeah, we do spend a lot more time at my place,” he said.

“I practically live there,” she said quietly, just to gauge his reaction to that statement. Just for the heck of it.

“Yep,” he agreed.

She stirred in the cheese, mentally debating whether or not she should say more. Ever since Raven had brought up the whole living together thing the other day, it’d been lingering in the back of her mind. Being Bellamy’s roommate would be . . . nice. Very convenient. And really not all that different from what they were currently doing. She wondered if he’d thought about the same thing, but maybe the thought hadn’t even crossed his mind.

She figured it would be innocent enough if she brought it up solely as an idea stemming from Raven. Maybe even as a bit of an amusing joke. If she sensed that he was totally opposed to it, she’d laugh her way out of it quickly and not take any offense whatsoever. No harm, no foul. “Raven thinks I should actually live there,” she said. “Like for real.”

“At my place?” he said, chuckling lightly. “Why not? Everyone else does.”

She laughed, too, keeping her eyes downcast on the cheesy pasta. “Seriously, though,” she said. “That’s what she thinks.”

“Huh.” Bellamy leaned against the counter, watching intently as she stirred. “Well, you are there a lot,” he said. “I can get why she’d think that.”

“Yeah.” Talking about it wasn’t sending him running for the hills, so . . . that was a good sign, she supposed. Cautiously, she hinted, “I mean, it would be nice not to have to pay rent for this place. And if I lived with you, I’d be able to help out with . . . house payments and stuff. Not that you need help, but . . . I mean, I’d pay my share. Unlike Murphy.”

Bellamy narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “Are you saying you wanna move in with me?”

“No,” she said quickly. “I mean . . . I’m not opposed to it or anything, but . . .” She shrugged, trying to look nonchalant when, in reality, she was starting to grow nervous. “Whatever, it’s not a big deal.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” he said, “I like having you over there a lot. But it’s kind of nice to have this place, too. That way, on a night like tonight when Murphy and Emori want the house to themselves so they can bang, then we can come bang here.”

“Oh, who said anything about banging? I thought you were gonna help me study,” she reminded him.

“I am,” he promised. “After we bang.” He grabbed her hand, pulling her away from the stove.

“Come here.”

“But the macaroni’s done,” she protested weakly.

“You gotta let it thicken up,” he said, pulling her into the living room. “Besides, I wanna work up an appetite.”

“Ooh.” That sounded promising, and it was enough to make her forget that she’d basically just offered to move in with Bellamy and been turned down. It was totally fine. That was probably way too official and couple-y, and her feelings weren’t hurt in the slightest. If he changed his mind or gave it some more thought, at least now the lines of communication about it were open. Or semi-
open, at least.

She moaned as he curled his arms around her and kissed first her lips, then her jaw, her throat, her neck. The graze of his lips on her skin lulled her into a lusty haze, and when she felt his fingertips slipping underneath her shirt to traverse her spine, she shivered with anticipation. Spontaneous sex with Bellamy was so good, whether they were alone and secluded like this or someplace where other people could easily find them. The latter provided the thrilling rush of nearly getting caught; the former provided a sense of intimacy, because it was just the two of them.

“We should be naked all the time,” she said as he lifted her shirt over her head for her.

“You should be naked all the time,” he corrected, unclasping her bra.

“You have to be naked if I’m naked,” she said, purring contentedly as her breasts fell free from their confinement.

“If we’re both naked, we’ll never get anything done,” he warned as his nimble fingers worked deftly to unfasten her jeans. He pulled them down to the ground in a matter of seconds and didn’t seem to mind that she was just wearing regular underwear underneath. Plain white, cotton, nothing sexy. He still licked his lips, though, as she stepped out of her jeans.

“No fair,” she said, tugging at the bottom of his t-shirt. He always had her completely stripped down before she’d even gotten one stitch of clothing off of him.

He lifted his arms over his head, allowing her to pull his shirt off and drop it onto the floor next to hers. Even though she had smaller fingers than him, she just wasn’t as adept at removing someone else’s clothing, so it took her longer to get his jeans undone than it had taken him. Once they were off, though, she was able to marvel at how good he looked in nothing but his underwear. Bellamy really knew how to find the perfect boxer briefs. All his clothing, actually, fit him so well. It was tight where it needed to be, accentuated what deserved to be noticed most, and made her mouth water with anticipation.

“You like what you see?” he asked, adjusting the position of his cock through his underwear.

“Do you like what you see?” she teased, sliding her panties down. She kicked them aside and stood with her legs close together, not really hiding anything, but at the same time, pretending to be modest.

“I love what I see,” he said, taking his underwear off. Completely naked, he sat down on the couch, one hand wrapped around his cock, stroking the whole length of it, spreading its leaking pre-cum around the head of it.

She turned around, just to show him her ass and remind him that that was what they were supposed to be working towards. Not that he’d forgotten. Not that she’d ever let him forget. Tonight wasn’t the night for it, though. Bellamy had made it clear that, when they actually started their anal explorations, he was going to take it very slow with her. She didn’t want to take it slow right now. She wanted to get fucked.

“Come here,” he said, motioning her towards him.

She spun to face him again and stepped right up in front of him, leaning forward to brace her arms against the back of the couch. That brought her breasts close enough to his face that he could lean forward and tease her nipple with his tongue. His talented tongue. He did the same with the other one, then wrapped his whole mouth around it, sucking gently.
“Mmm,” she moaned, reveling in the sensation. Her breasts had always been sensitive, but Bellamy paid so much attention to them that it was like they were hyper-aware of his stimulation. He was still disappointed that he couldn’t give her one of those rare orgasms from breast play alone, but she assured him that was probably about as likely as finding a real-life leprechaun. Knowing Bellamy, though, he’d keep trying, and someday when she wasn’t expecting it, it probably would happen.

When he released her breast from his mouth with a loud pop and said, “Ride my cock, Princess,” she didn’t hesitate. She climbed on top of his lap, straddling him, took his long, thick member in one hand, and held it steady as she sank down on top of it. The initial feel of being penetrated by Bellamy never ceased to amaze her. It was more than just a feeling of fullness at this point. It made her feel complete. She never felt more alive than when he was inside her.

“That feels good, doesn’t it?” he said, tucking her hair behind her ear.

She nodded dazedly, too lost in the sensation to find words in that moment.

“It looks good,” he said, his eyes fixated on the spot where they were joined. “You wanna see?”

She nodded again, forever envious that he always had a better view of the action than she did.

“Here,” he said, clasping both her hands in his. “Lean back.”

Giggling slightly, she did just that, holding onto him to keep from falling off that couch onto her head. She still wasn’t able to see it well, but she could see his long, hard cock disappearing into her body, already coated with a thin sheen of her juices.

It did look good.

He pulled her back up abruptly, face to face with him, and crushed his lips against her, kissing her hotly and sweetly all at the same time. When she felt his hips buck up underneath her, she took that as a sign to start moving, so she began to bounce up and down on his cock.

“That’s good,” he said, smoothing his hands up and down her sides, her back, her ass. “Good job.” He squeezed her fleshy backside, fingers molding her like she was made of clay, and helped her move her hips up and down. She melted into his touch, letting his hands guide her movements, letting him show her what he wanted. He practically lifted her ass up so that only the tip of his cock was still nestled inside her, then pushed her all the way back down again.

“Uh . . .” she moaned, starting to sweat with the exertion of taking in nearly the full length of him each time. She couldn’t move very fast like this, but she could make sure she sank down onto every inch of him she could get. Exercising whatever internal control she could muster, she tried to squeeze her pussy around his cock, eliciting a guttural groan from him whenever she did so.

“Bellamy, please,” she begged.

“What?”

“Please, just . . .” She kept moving, desperately trying to quicken her pace. “Uh, just fuck me.”

“Fuck you?” he echoed, placing his hands on her hips. “You want me to fuck you, huh?” Without even waiting for a response, he began thrusting up into her, hard. The force of his thrusts jolted her body, and she dug her fingernails into his shoulders, desperately holding onto him. When she came, she’d probably feel like she was flying apart in a zillion different directions, but the feel of his sculpted, muscled body beneath her would put her back together again.
“You like that?” he asked, his skin smacking against hers as he jackhammered his hips up into her. “Oh, you feel so good.”

She wanted to tell him he felt good, too, but she never managed to be quite as coherent as he was during sex.

“You wanna cum?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” she choked out, panting for air at this point.

“Say it,” he urged, grinning.

“I...” She felt her orgasm drawing closer, so close that she squeezed her eyes shut and braced herself for it. But it didn’t hit. Not yet. “I wanna cum,” she spilled out in a rush of breath. “Bellamy...” She ground her hips down against his, meeting his thrusts with movements of her own. “Make me cum.”

He growled low in his throat, sat up straighter, wrapped one arm around her waist, and pulled her in closer as he fucked her. She wrapped her arms around his neck and fell forward slightly, unable to match his quick, forceful rhythm. She held on tight and braced herself for the onslaught of pleasure. She was close. God, she was so close. Any second now, he’d get her there. Any second...

“Knock, knock.”

There was absolutely no knocking as the door to her apartment swung open, and in strode two people who most certainly did not need to see her doing this: her mother and stepfather.

“Oh my god!” she shrieked, hopping off of Bellamy as Abby and Marcus both shielded their eyes. She grabbed her shirt in a feeble attempt to cover up her naked self and fled into the bedroom, slamming the door shut. She was mortified.

“Shit,” she heard Bellamy swear. The poor guy was helplessly exposed on that couch. She’d totally abandoned him out there, but she was too horrified to feel bad about it.

Bellamy tumbled into her bedroom a moment later, holding one couch pillow over his crotch, the other over his backside. “Holy shit, Clarke, those are your parents?” he whisper-screeched. “What the fuck are they doing here?”

“I don’t know,” she said fretfully as she yanked on a pair of sweatpants and the first t-shirt she could find. The only problem, though, was that it was one of Bellamy’s t-shirts, so she swapped that out for one of her own and said, “Just get dressed. I’m gonna go talk to them.”

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Okay,” he said, but then he grabbed her wrist as she was about to head back out. “Wait, my clothes are out there.” He grimaced. “My clothes are out there, Clarke.”

“I’ll get them for you.”

“They saw me...”

“I know.”

“And you...”

“I know.” All that semi-public sex they’d had, and not once had they been caught in the act. And now, here, within the supposed privacy of her own apartment, someone had walked in on them?
And of all the someones in the world, it was the woman who’d given birth to her and the man who’d promised to love her like a daughter? Great. Just fantastic. She should have locked that fucking front door . . .

When she slipped back out of the bedroom and joined Abby and Marcus in the kitchen, she felt her skin grow red with embarrassment. God, it wasn’t enough that they’d caught her having sex, but now Marcus had seen her *naked*? It was just so mortifying on so many levels, and there was nothing she could do about it.

She smiled sheepishly and said, “Hi, guys.”

“How,” her mother said, peering over the pot of macaroni on her stove, almost as if she didn’t want to make eye contact. She gave it an absentminded stir and said, “We should’ve called first. Clearly we interrupted something.”

*Clearly,* Clarke thought. All the arousal and excitement was completely gone, and she no longer gave a damn about the orgasm she’d been so close to achieving. But poor Bellamy didn’t have as much of an on/off switch like that. Getting caught by a girl’s parents had to be a major boner killer, though, so hopefully he was . . . in a presentable state.

“What’re you guys doing here?” she asked, hoping to talk more about them and less about her.

“We’re on our way down to Richmond to visit a friend of mine from college,” Marcus explained evenly. “Your mom thought we should . . . drop in.”

“It seemed like a good idea at the time,” Abby muttered. “We thought maybe we could take you out to dinner, but . . .” She motioned to the macaroni. “I guess you already had plans.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said, but the minute she said it, she felt rude. “You can stay, if you want,” she offered, even though that might be awkward. “That’s a family-sized box, so . . .”

“Oh, we can just leave,” her mother said quickly, “let you get back to . . .” She trailed off, cringing, and asked, “Who was that anyway?”

“Oh, he’s . . .” Clarke hesitated, struggling to find an explanation. It wasn’t like she could explain that Bellamy was a friend—a great friend—but technically her friend with benefits. “That’s, um . . .” But if she called him her boyfriend, then that wasn’t accurate either. “He’s Bellamy.”

“Bellamy,” her mother echoed. “I don’t think you’ve mentioned him before.”

“No, I haven’t,” Clarke admitted, casting a glance into the living room, where all of his clothes and her jeans and undergarments were still littering the floor. “He needs his . . . clothes,” she said, scampering to collect them. She paused at the bedroom door, arms full, turned back around to her parents, and said, “I’ll just be a minute,” before she ducked back inside. She dumped all the clothes on the floor and sighed heavily. “Bellamy.”

He lay on her bed, completely covered by her blankets. Cautiously, he pulled them down past his head and said, “Thank God,” when he saw that she’d brought his clothing in. He sprang out of bed and began getting dressed like his life depended on it. “What should I do,” he asked, “crawl out the window?”

“What?”

“Yeah, the fire escape’s not too far down. If I can just scale the ledge all the way over there . . .”
“Bellamy.” She rolled his eyes at his ridiculousness. “You’re not crawling out the—scaling a ledge? What?”

“Why not?” He seemed one-hundred percent serious about doing it.

“Because we’re not high schoolers who just got caught in the act. We’re two willing, consenting adults . . . who just got caught in the act.” She cringed, disgusted that her mom of all people had just seen that. It didn’t matter that she was twenty-one years old. To her mom, she’d always be her baby. “Look, I know this isn’t the ideal way to meet them, but . . .”

“Meet them?” he echoed fearfully. “I’m meeting them now?”

“Well, yeah, that’d be less awkward than climbing out the window, don’t you think?”

“No,” he said dramatically. “No, just let me make my escape. I’ll be like Spiderman. I can do it.”

“If you leave now, they’ll be stuck thinking of you as the guy who was fucking their daughter,” she pointed out. “Come out here. Introduce yourself. Let them get to know you. They’ll like you.”

“You think?”

“Yes.” Bellamy was one of the most likable people she’d ever met. He was smart and had a good personality, so she felt confident her mom and stepdad would like him, too. Despite the whole NC-17 display they’d had the misfortune of seeing.


“Good,” she said, reaching up to fix his hair for him. He had majorly wild sex hair going on, and she probably did, too, so she grabbed a ponytail holder and quickly put her hair up in a bun. “Okay, how are we gonna . . . explain our relationship, though?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Well . . .” She smoothed out the wrinkles in his shirt and spoke quietly, her voice low so that there was no way her parents could hear her. “As mortified as they are, they probably don’t hate the fact that I’m getting it on with a guy right now. You know what I mean?”

He shifted his weight from side to side. “Yeah.”

“But they’re both pretty traditional, so I’m not sure how they’d react to our whole . . . arrangement. I mean, they’d pretty much think it’s casual sex.”

“It’s not, though,” he said. “It’s not like we’re doin’ it with anyone else.”

“Do you really wanna explain all that to them? Or do you just wanna . . .” She trailed off, hoping he understood where she was going with this.

“You wanna tell ’em I’m your boyfriend?” he guessed.

“I just think that’d be a whole lot easier than launching into the details of our sex life.”

He contemplated it for a moment, then nodded his head in agreement. “Yeah,” he agreed. “Alright, sure. Let’s just go for it.”

“Or I won’t even say you’re my boyfriend,” she whispered as he opened up the bedroom door. “I’ll just let them assume.”
“Sounds good.” He bravely left the bedroom first, smiling nervously as he approached the two people in the kitchen. “Hey,” he said, extending his hand towards Marcus. “I’m Bellamy Blake.”

“Bellamy, nice to meet you,” Marcus said, shaking his hand. “I’m Marcus Kane, Clarke’s stepfather.”

“And I’m Abby, Clarke’s mom,” her mother added, giving Bellamy a stern look as she shook his hand.

“Hey,” Bellamy said, quickly adding, “Nice to meet both of you.”

Abby smiled at him slowly, and Clarke could tell . . . her mom was instantly impressed. It was no secret that she had all sorts of men lined up back home whom she would have loved Clarke to date. Based on a first impression alone, Bellamy seemed to make quite the good one. And why wouldn’t he? He didn’t put on airs or give off a jerk vibe. He was good-looking and genuine, and the fact that he had a penis definitely wasn’t damaging her mother’s perception of him. Clarke loved his penis, too, albeit for a much different reason.

An awkward silence descended upon the four of them after that, and Clarke broke it by asking, “So . . . who wants macaroni?”

Thank goodness Bellamy had insisted on being the one to add the milk, because he’d added the perfect amount. The macaroni and cheese was very good once they warmed it up a bit, and Clarke had fortunately had a couple chicken strips stashed away up in the freezer, too. She put those in the oven for a few minutes until they were nice and crispy—but not too crispy, because Bellamy told her exactly when to take them out to prevent burning them. Then they all sat down at Clarke’s rarely-used kitchen table and enjoyed an amicable dinner together. Marcus told her about the friend in Richmond they were visiting, her mother said a few things about a new research study she was getting to be involved in at the hospital, and Clarke told them about the exhibit at Trikru she had coming up soon. They both promised to come see it, and she figured that now that they’d met Bellamy, it was a good idea. They wouldn’t question who the man in the pictures was, because they’d already know. And as for the sexier paintings . . . well, that was no secret to them anymore, either.

Naturally, though, her parents were most interested in Bellamy himself. Her mother was the first to direct the conversation towards him. “So Bellamy,” she said, “tell us about yourself.”

“Uh, okay,” he said, wiping his palms inconspicuously on his legs. “What do you wanna know?”

“Do you live here in Arkadia?” Abby inquired.

“Yeah,” he replied. “Lived here my whole life.”

“And how do you like it?”

He shrugged. “It’s a small town, you know. There’s good things and bad things about that.”

“It’s not that small,” Clarke said. “It’s not like you know everyone else. Or I don’t anyway. Maybe you do.”

“Yeah, I know a lot of people,” he said. “I mean . . . I don’t know, I guess I like being close to D.C. We were just there last weekend.”

Clarke cringed inwardly, wishing he hadn’t said that.
“Oh, really?” her mother said. “Why is that?”

“It was Bellamy’s birthday,” Clarke explained. “We went to some museums and stuff.”

“The Holocaust museum?” her stepfather guessed. “That’s haunting.”

“Yeah, I’ve been there before,” Bellamy said. “We went to Ford’s Theater. I thought that was pretty cool.”

“And the wax museum,” Clarke added. (They’d also gone to the Bone Zone once they’d gotten back to the hotel, but no need to divulge that particular detail of their weekend getaway.)

“Well, you should’ve stopped by,” her mother said sadly, and Clarke had known it was coming. At least there didn’t appear to be a guilt-trip coming, though, so she inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

“Sorry,” she said. “We were . . . busy.”

Her mother’s eyebrows darted up on her forehead, and she nodded slowly. “I see.”

“No, I mean . . .” Clarke decided to drop it. If her mother was assuming she meant sex . . . well, she wasn’t wrong, to be honest.

“Washington D.C. is a wonderful place,” Marcus raved. “Heart of the nation. Clarke, I don’t suppose you’ve given any thought as to whether or not you’re moving back there after you graduate.”

Clarke tensed. Any thought? No, she hadn’t given it any thought at all. She cast a quick glance at Bellamy and noticed how he was deliberately not looking at her in that moment, almost as if he didn’t want to know her answer.

“I don’t . . . I don’t really know,” she responded vaguely. “But I’ve lived here for four years now. I like it here.” Truth be told, she didn’t really envision herself leaving. Raven would stay in Arkadia because of grad school, Wells was planning to start grad school somewhere in the fall, Nyilah wasn’t graduating yet, and all her other friends—most notably, of course, being Bellamy—would all still be there.

“You’ll have to start thinking about that,” her mother said. “Graduation’s only a few months away.”

“Yeah.” The future was sort of an overwhelming prospect, one she didn’t feel like contemplating right now. For now, she had her exhibit to focus on, and that was about as far into the future as she could look.

“And what do you study, Bellamy?” her stepfather asked suddenly.

Bellamy froze, and Clarke looked away. “Excuse me?” he said.

“What do you study?” Marcus repeated. “In school.”

Oh god, Clarke thought, feeling guilty. It wasn’t a hostile question by any means, and her stepdad didn’t mean anything insulting by it. But he just assumed that Clarke was with someone who was in college, and that had to make Bellamy feel like crap.

“Oh,” Bellamy said. “I, uh . . . I don’t--”

“Bellamy’s into history,” Clarke blurted out before he could reveal that he wasn’t a student at all.
“Really?” Her stepfather smiled first at Bellamy, then at Abby, as though he approved of that pursuit. “So you’re a history major then?”

Bellamy just sat there, glancing quickly at Clarke.

Even though she should have just told the truth, for whatever reason . . . Clarke lied. “Bellamy’s a grad student here at Arkadia,” she said. “History major. Dean’s list.”

He blinked in confusion, frowning so minutely that Clarke was sure her parents didn’t even notice it. “Yeah,” he said after some hesitation. “That’s me.”

_Dammit._ She mentally swore at herself for making him lie. It was just that she wasn’t sure how her parents would react if he’d told them he wasn’t in school, if he’d told them he worked as a . . . as a handyman.

“That’s great, Bellamy,” her stepfather said, brimming with enthusiasm. “Any interest in politics?”

“Um . . .” Bellamy hesitated, choosing his words wisely, which Clarke was thankful for, because she knew her stepfather’s political stance was very different from Bellamy’s own political views. “I pay attention, I get out there and vote and everything,” he said. “But history’s more of my . . .”

“Your niche,” Clarke’s mother filled in.

“Yeah.” He tried to smile, but Clarke saw a flash of hurt in his eyes, and it killed her knowing she was the one responsible for putting it there.

The conversation continued after that, moving into a topic that Bellamy didn’t have to lie about: his family. He talked about Octavia and his mom, and Clarke watched as her parents took all of that in with a smile, too. Ironically enough, even though he’d been caught in the act literally screwing their daughter, Bellamy was somehow managing to make the best first impression ever. Neither her mom nor her dad had ever been a huge Finn fan, which, in retrospect, should have probably been a big red flag. And when she and Marcus had met Lexa, they’d obviously both had to bite their tongue from voicing their objections to that particular relationship. But with Bellamy, they just kept smiling and laughing and praising him and complimenting him. He seemed a little overwhelmed by all of it, because he was a pretty modest guy. But he took it all in stride and never once let it slip that Clarke had lied to them about his status as a student. Thankfully, they didn’t ask him what he did for work, because they assumed being a student was his full time job.

Towards the end of the dinner, Abby finally asked the obvious question: “So how long have the two of you been together?”

Bellamy took a drink to avoid being the one to answer, and Clarke replied vaguely, “A couple months,” because she didn’t feel that it was necessary to admit that she’d known Bellamy since October.

“Well, it’s a shame I’m only meeting you now, Bellamy,” her mother said, before sending Clarke a sharp look. “But I’m glad I finally have. You are . . . an impressive young man.”

Bellamy smiled shyly and said, “Thank you.” And then he looked down at his lap, as if he were wondering how impressed they would be if they knew the full truth about him. He was impressive no matter what, though. Clarke desperately wanted him to know that.

When her parents left, Bellamy went straight out to her balcony, slid the door shut, and just stood there with his hands on the railing. His jaw was clenched tightly, his brow furrowed. He looked angry.
Dammit, Clarke thought, raking one hand through her hair. She’d upset him.

She tried to give him some space by taking a moment to load dirty dishes into the dishwasher, but she kept glancing out at him to see if his body language had changed. It hadn’t. He was still tense, still mad at her for lying.

Shutting the dishwasher with her hip, she took a deep breath and resolved to go out there and talk it through with him. No matter how uncomfortable it was. She started the dishwasher, and walked out onto the balcony cautiously, worried that he wouldn’t even be willing to talk to her.

“Well, that went pretty well,” she said, “especially considering how it started.”

“Yes,” Bellamy muttered in agreement, not even looking at her.

She exhaled heavily, wrapping her arms around herself because it was chilly out there. “Look, Bellamy--”

“Why did you tell them I’m in college, Clarke?” he cut in angrily. “A grad student. Dean’s list. Now they think I’m something I’m not.”

She cringed, wishing she had a good answer for that question. “I don’t know.”

“No I not good enough the way I am? Do I not measure up to their standards?”

“No, of course you’re good enough,” she insisted. “Apparently not.”

“You are. It’s just that . . .” She hesitated, trying to phrase it in a way that wouldn’t upset him even more. “My mom and my stepdad both come from a certain background.”

“The kind of background you come from?” he bit out, almost accusingly.

“Yes,” she admitted. “And they both . . . they value the same kind of thing.”

“Like an education?” he guessed. “More than a high school education.”

“Yes. It doesn’t mean they look down on people like . . .” She trailed off, stopping herself before saying, ‘People like you,’ which would probably sound totally insulting and offensive. “They just . . . they have these idealized expectations about what constitutes success, and--”

“And a self-employed handyman with only a high school diploma under his belt doesn’t quite measure up?” Bellamy filled in.

“Well, neither does a bisexual daughter,” she pointed out. “Look, they’re not bad people; they just . . .” She trailed off again, not sure whether her attempt to explain was doing more harm or good.

“You should’ve just let me tell ‘em the truth,” Bellamy growled. “I don’t have a problem pretending to be your boyfriend. I do have a problem pretending I’m in college when I’m not.”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized.

He narrowed his eyes at her, twisting his whole body to face hers, and asked, “Are you ashamed of me?”

“What?” she shrieked, frowning incredulously. “No. How could you even ask me that?”
“Well, you lied,” he reminded her, “and maybe if you weren’t ashamed, you would’ve just told the truth.”

“Bellamy.” She choked back tears, hurt that he would think for even one second that she would ever feel that way about him. She wasn’t that shallow. The views that her mother and stepfather had were not her views. “I am not ashamed of you,” she assured him vehemently. “I’ve never been ashamed of you. If anything, it’s the opposite. I’m . . . I’m proud to know you and to have you as a . . .” She paused, nearly making the mistake of calling him her boyfriend; but Abby and Marcus were gone, so the charade was gone, too. “As a friend,” she finished quietly.

“You didn’t seem very proud at dinner,” he mumbled, reaching for the door. “I’m goin’ to bed,” he said, slumping back inside.

“Bellamy . . .” She stayed out there and let him go. Because it was clear just how badly she’d hurt his feelings tonight, and she felt guilty as hell for it. Any effort to explain herself to him would just be an attempt at alleviating that guilt, and she didn’t deserve that right now. No, she knew she should feel guilty, and she should wallow in that guilt all night. Hopefully, come tomorrow, she’d have formulated the best apology in the world, and hopefully he’d accept it.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the patience with the new chapter! I had to take a couple days to recover once I returned home from the EPIC Conaggedon event. Wow, seriously . . . it was the best convention ever. And I had the Bob VIP, so . . . yeah, it was lit. 2 parties with the cast, one in which I ended up getting to dance with Bob and Zach, so many great panels (including that amazing Beliza one), a breakfast with Bob, and more photos and hugs than I can even count. The cast was amazing, but I spent the most time with Bob, and honestly, he is the nicest, most generous, down-to-earth guy you can imagine. And he's hilarious, too!

Chapter 32

All night, Bellamy was restless. He tried not to move around too much so as not to disturb Clarke. She lay beside him almost motionlessly, leading him to believe that she was trying to do the exact same thing. So that meant they were probably both awake, both not talking to each other. It wasn’t a good feeling.

He got out of bed around 6:00 and padded into the bathroom to jump in the shower. Then he got dressed quickly, figuring he could swing by home and change his clothes before he headed out for the day. His slate was relatively open today, so if he had time, he figured he could go work on Diana’s bathroom some more. He only got paid for that once he got done, and having more money on hand was always helpful.

He stopped in the bedroom doorway and stared at Clarke for a few seconds before he left. She lay curled up on her side, blonde hair sprawled out on the pillowcase. He wondered if she was really awake and was just pretending to be asleep right now, or if she really had nodded off. She looked peaceful and content, though, and he didn’t want to disrupt her. Normally he would kissed her cheek or her forehead or something, but . . . not today.

He opened and shut the door quietly and left.

His first job was at a house close to campus, some chick he’d gone to high school with and given the cold shoulder to in favor of Roma. She’d been very vague with her request when she texted him last night, just said that she had a job for him to do, and when he got there, he realized that she’d called the wrong person.

“There’s a wasp nest,” she fretted, “a huge one right out in my garage. I can’t even go get in my car without freaking out. What if they attack me, Bellamy?”

He groaned, rubbing his forehead tiredly. “I’m not an exterminator.”

“But can’t you get rid of it?” she implored. “Please.”

He didn’t know the first thing about getting rid of a wasp nest, and he wasn’t about to just go out there and whack at the thing and hope for the best. So he told her to call an exterminator and headed out.
Perhaps it was just since he was close to campus, he found himself driving past the department of history again, even going so far as to drive around the block just so he could go past the parking lot again. He pulled into a space, sat there for a couple minutes, and wondered why the hell he was back there. There was nothing to gain by sitting in on one of those classes, only time to be wasted. There was absolutely no point in ghosting that class again.

Despite how hard he tried to talk himself out of it, somehow, he ended up in the back row of that lecture hall for the second time, listening to another one of the professor’s lectures for the Twentieth Century Europe class. They were onto some Cold War/Berlin Wall stuff now, which had always fascinated him. He listened intently, wishing he could raise his hand and interject with a question. But he couldn’t do anything to draw attention to himself. He had to remain just another face in the crowd.

When the class was done, he shuffled out of lecture hall with all the people who actually had backpacks on their shoulders and were paying to be there. And he drove to Diana Sydney’s to go about the rest of his day. The normal routine.

That evening, he stayed out later than he needed to, swung by Dropship for a drink, and didn’t end up getting home until nearly 7:00. He knew Clarke was there since her car was parked out front, and when he walked inside, he found her in the kitchen, peering into the oven with a look of concentration on her face.

Since when did Clarke Griffin use an oven for anything?

“Hey,” she said. “Perfect timing. I made dinner.”

“Dinner?” he echoed skeptically, inhaling. It smelled like pasta in there, which was good, but when she opened the oven door and a gust of smoke came billowing out, that wasn’t so good.

“I just left it in a little too long,” she said, waving her hand back and forth to fan the smoke away. There was so much of it that it actually set the smoke alarm off. She cursed, nearly dropping the pan as she lifted it out of the oven with a potholder on each hand.

Bellamy crossed into the kitchen, reached up with one hand, and turned the smoke alarm off.

“Thanks,” she said, bumping her butt against the oven door to shut it. She put a large pan of what faintly resembled lasagna down on the stovetop, fanned the smoke away a bit more, and declared, “It’ll still be good.”

“Hmm.” He twisted a knob on the oven to turn it off for her, because knowing Clarke, she’d forget. The girl was many things, but a whiz in the kitchen was not one of them. Just the fact that she’d even attempted a dinner all on her own had to mean that she was up to something. An apology, perhaps? A dinner was her way of saying sorry?

“Sit down,” she said, motioning towards the counter, where she’d already set out a napkin, silverware, and drink for him.

He took off his jacket, tossing it back into the living room where it landed on the couch, and pulled out the counter stool, sitting down to watch her chisel at her creation. With what seemed to be a great deal of muscle and a great deal of effort, she cut out a large square of lasagna and set it on a plate for him. “Here you go,” she said, setting the plate down in front of him. “Bon appétit.”

“Thanks.” It was kind of still smoking and looked a little blackened on the side, so he blew on it for a few seconds to cool it down, then bravely lifted his fork and tried a bite. It was sort of like chewing
on rubber, so tough that Bellamy wasn’t even sure he’d be able to get it down. He took a drink, hoping that would help, but it didn’t do much good. So he just kept chewing, hoping it’d get easier after this first bite. “It’s good,” he said after he’d finally managed to swallow.

“No, it’s not. You’re just saying that.” She took the plate away, dumped the whole square of lasagna into the trash, and dropped the plate into the sink frustratedly. She ran her hands through her hair and then gripped the edge of the sink counter tightly, looking all worked up about something far beyond her failed attempt at tonight’s dinner.

“Clarke . . .”

“I can’t even cook lasagna without screwing it up,” she lamented. “I just screw up everything.”

He frowned, slowly rising to his feet. “What’re you talking about?”

She turned around, staring at him sadly. “Last night,” she said, her eyes brimming with tears. “I feel terrible. I’ve felt terrible all day about lying. I even called my mom and told her the truth.”

“You did?” Admittedly, that surprised him. He’d figured that, now that the lie about his level of education was out there, they’d just perpetuate it. He would have gone along with it if that was what she’d wanted, even though he wouldn’t have enjoyed it.

She nodded. “Yeah, I didn’t wanna lie to them, and I didn’t want it to be hanging over your head, either. So I just told her the truth about what you do and . . . she was fine with it. They both were.”

“Really?” So they actually approved of him regardless of his stalled out education? Go figure. Maybe their standards weren’t as impossibly high as Clarke had assumed.

“Bellamy, they both really like you,” she said. “And I mean, how could they not? You’re you.”

“Not everybody likes me,” he pointed out.

“Name one person. Besides my jackass professor.”

“Lincoln’s not my biggest fan.” He shrugged.

“Well, he probably will be once you become Uncle Bellamy and excel at that the way you excel at everything.”

He smiled at that because . . . Uncle Bellamy. It’d taken a little bit of time to get used to the idea, but now that he had, he was looking forward to it.

“Bellamy, I’m so sorry I lied,” she apologized profusely, staring at him with a pleading look in her eyes. “I know I made you feel horrible, but please believe me when I say I’m not ashamed of you. Because I promise, it’s—it’s nothing like that.”

He nodded slowly, willing to believe her. “Okay,” he said. “I still don’t know why you did it, though.”

She grimaced, shaking her head. “To be honest, it probably has more to do with me than it does with you.”

He frowned, slowly stepping around the counter. “What do you mean?”

“It’s just . . .” She turned back around, staring out the window. “It’s hard for me to be honest with my family. I mean, I was always honest with my dad, but . . .” She sniffed back tears, shaking her
head. “I’m just not as close to my mom. I mean, I love her, but it’s not like how you and Octavia are with your mom. There’s always this lingering doubt that if I tell her the wrong thing, she’ll think less of me.”

“She’s your mom,” he said simply. “She loves you.” Based on what he’d seen from Abby Griffin—or rather Abby Kane—yesterday, she was a lot different than his mother, and she had a different way of showing her affection. But that didn’t mean she loved Clarke any less.

“I just don’t wanna disappoint them,” she said, “because I know I already have. When I told them . . .” She trailed off, taking in a shuddering breath, letting it out quickly. “She wouldn’t even talk to me for, like, a month afterward. I know she feels horrible about it now, but . . .”

Clarke didn’t have to specify for Bellamy to know exactly what she was referring to. Telling her mother she was bisexual had been one of the most terrifying experiences of her life; she’d confided as much in him before. And the response she’d gotten wasn’t exactly an open-minded one. He knew they were still working through their issues, and deep down, he suspected part of the reason why Abby and Marcus liked him so much was that . . . well, he was a man. As disturbing as walking in on him and Clarke going at it had to have been for them, at least it probably reopened the possibility of her having a more ‘traditional’ relationship. They wouldn’t understand that she was bisexual no matter what, that sleeping with him didn’t make her any less of a bisexual than she’d been with Lexa. It didn’t make them bad people to think that way; it just made them . . . sort of ignorant.

“I just feel like I’m never really able to impress them,” she confessed quietly, almost as if she were embarrassed to admit it. “No matter how hard I try. I didn’t choose the right college, the right career, the right orientation. So I just thought that, if I can’t impress them, then maybe at least you could. So I lied. But it was stupid. And I didn’t even need to because . . . because you impressed them all on your own.”

Bellamy took a moment to fathom that. He’d impressed a doctor and a senator. Not bad for a poor guy from Arkadia.

“I’m sorry,” Clarke said again, peering over her shoulder. A tear spilled out the corner of her eye, and he felt compelled to reach out and wipe it away. But she did that herself before he had the chance.

Instead, he moved in close behind her and wrapped his arms around her stomach, holding her back to his chest. “I forgive you,” he whispered in her ear.

“Bellamy, you don’t have to—”

“Clarke, shut up.” Not every disagreement had to result in them not talking to each other for a week. Last night, she’d upset him with that lie. Tonight, he could better understand where she was coming from. And she’d told the truth about it. Not that that made it okay to lie in the first place, but . . . whatever. It was over. And honestly, as hurtful as it’d been . . . it’d gotten him thinking. About something important. About something that had been in the back of his mind for a while now.

“Clarke, there’s—there’s something I need to tell you,” he said quietly.

She turned around to look up at him, her forehead creasing with worry. “What is it?”

He took a deep breath, unable to believe that he was even about to say it. But he’d been thinking about it all night—hell, it was what he’d wished for on his birthday, and he was past the point of wishing now. If he didn’t do something and act on what he wanted, he’d go insane. He’d be stuck as a handyman for the rest of his life. And there had to be more out there for him. There had been, once
upon a time. Before a car crash had taken it all away.

“I wanna go to college,” he confessed, avoiding her eyes as he said the words. He looked over her shoulder and out the window, giving her a moment to take in the fact that he’d really just said that. Because judging by her sharp intake of her breath, it surprised her as much as it had surprised him that he could actually admit it out loud at all. Maybe it shouldn’t have surprised him, though. He was always admitting stuff to Clarke he’d thought he would keep secret.

When he met her eyes again, she looked . . . hopeful. Hopeful for him. But he still thought it would be hard, if not impossible, to rearrange his life enough that he would no longer have to be a ghost in a class like Twentieth Century Europe. And there were a lot of classes to take before he could actually get a degree. He didn’t feel like he could do it alone. “Will you help me?” he asked, embarrassed that he couldn’t do it on his own.

A small smile found its way to her lips, and she looped her arms around his neck, standing up on her tip toes to nuzzle his neck as she hugged him. He rubbed her back and her hair, breathing her in as he held her close, closing his eyes so he could just feel her. A hug like this was virtually the same, if not more, than a yes in response.

He wasn’t used to asking for help, and he didn’t really like having to do so. But Clarke had already helped him with a lot of things, things from his past. If anyone could help him with his future, too . . . well, it was probably her.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

In the days leading up to the month of March, Clarke spent a lot of time on campus, working on the paintings for her exhibit at Trikru. She even convinced Dante to give her a day off just to do so, and since he was excited for her to have such an opportunity, he was more than willing to give her an additional day off to get it done. When she got home, she was usually covered in paint—she had it on her clothes, under her fingernails, in her hair. She would have loved to shower with Bellamy, but he was busy with his own thing: a scholarship search.

“You find anything?” she asked as she came out of the bathroom one night, towel-drying her hair.

“A few more,” he said, eyes glued to the computer on his lap. She’d brought her laptop over, because it was a lot easier to work on scholarship essays when you could type with all your fingers instead of just your thumbs. “I don’t know, a lot of ‘em are national ones, though. I don’t know if it’s even worth it to try for those.”

Clarke knew from experience that most national-level scholarships were a waste of time. Thousands upon thousands of people applied, and only a handful were chosen. She’d wasted so much time writing essays for scholarships like those. “You’ll probably have better luck with state or local ones,” she advised, dumping the damp towel back onto the bathroom floor. She bounded towards the bed and pounced onto it excitedly. Because she was excited to help Bellamy with this part of the college application process. They’d taken the first step a few nights ago by just filling out the application for Arkadia, though he had yet to submit it. Last night, they’d looked at the costs, and while those numbers had made a vein pop out on Bellamy’s forehead, Clarke assured him it was manageable. Arkadia was a smaller school but not a private school, so it was a lot more affordable than the big-time universities.

“There aren’t really a ton of scholarships out there for people like me,” Bellamy said, typing in scholarships for non-traditional students on Google. “I mean, there’s some stuff, but most of the money out there goes towards high school seniors. Which makes sense, I guess.”
“Yeah, but we can still find some things,” Clarke said, reaching across his body to grab her phone off the end table. She went straight to Arkadia’s website and started looking for scholarships there. Indeed, most would not apply to Bellamy, but there were some good ones for upperclassmen. If he could just get his foot in the door and get some kind of freshman year under his belt, then he’d be eligible for 1,500 dollars here, 2,500 dollars there. Because there was no doubt in her mind that, once he started classes, Bellamy would be an excellent student. And that was what upperclassmen scholarships looked for, good grades and a strong GPA.

“This is gonna be a . . . long process,” Bellamy said, stretching his legs and arms. “Lots of essays to write.”

“You’re a good writer, though,” she reminded him.

“I know. I hear I do exemplary work.” He grinned.

“Just write an exemplary scholarship essay then,” she said, swiping her thumbs quickly across the screen of her phone.

“Or two. Or twenty,” he mumbled. “It’s expensive, Clarke.”

“I know.” Even as she said that, though, she realized she didn’t know. Not really. She had parents who helped her out financially. Bellamy was going to have to come up with the money all on his own.

“Oh, hey, I think I found a good one,” he announced excitedly, until his face fell as he read the fine print.

“For graduating seniors. Never mind.”

“Bummer.” She zoomed in on her phone and read about the requirements for one of Arkadia’s scholarships—it was only 1,000 dollars, but hey, every little bit helped—and said, “Hey, look.” She handed him her phone, and he read through the requirements.

“Huh,” he said. “Yeah, I should try that one.”

“I think you could get that.” It was specifically geared towards students who had been out of high school for at least four years, and the only requirement seemed to be an essay. And no criminal record.

“Wait a minute,” he said, angling the phone back towards her. “Read that.”

“What?”

“You have to write an essay about the biggest obstacles you’ve overcome in life,” he relayed as she read the words on the screen. He gave her a look. “Really?”

She sighed, knowing he wouldn’t want to write about Gina or Roma. But those were some serious obstacles, and Roma’s death was what had derailed his plans to attend college in the first place. “I know that’d be really hard for you to write about,” she said, “but . . .”

“No, but nothing,” he cut in. “I’m not writing about them. I don’t want people giving me a scholarship because they pity me. I’ll just . . . write about growing up poor or something.”

“They might pity you for that,” she pointed out.

“Then I’ll think of something else.”
“You should write about . . . what truly were the biggest obstacles,” Clarke suggested.

“And cash in on their deaths?” He shook his head, closing the computer, and got up, walking over to his desk to set it down. “I don’t think so.”

“Just don’t rule it out,” Clarke advised. It wouldn’t be cashing in on anything just to answer the question honestly.

“I think I’m done with the scholarship search for tonight,” Bellamy announced, twisting from side to side as though he had a kink in his back. “You wanna get down or something?”

“Do I wanna get down or something?” She laughed, tossing her phone aside as he crawled on top of her. Oh, yes. She definitely wanted to get down. “I just got clean, though,” she protested, though she was totally willing to get dirty.

“That’s too bad,” he said unsympathetically, bending down to capture her lips in a kiss. His mouth urged hers apart so his tongue could slip in and caress hers. Among his extensive sex repertoire, Bellamy was also an excellent French kisser. She remembered being so turned off by it with Finn, because with him, it was just sloppy and disgusting. But since Bellamy’s oral technique was basically a replica of his kissing technique, his French kissing was so arousing. Luckily, she knew hers was good, too, because she and Lexa had spent the entire night after their second date exploring each other’s mouths.

“I got an idea,” he announced suddenly, his breath a murmured whisper against her lips.

“What?”

Smirking, he teased, “You’ll see,” and sat back to take his shirt off. She arched her back off the bed and wriggled out of hers, too, tossing it onto the floor, and his hands immediately found their way to her breasts. He didn’t touch her for long, though. Instead, he smoothed them down her sides and flipped her over onto her stomach.

“Uh-oh, I’m in trouble,” she said, foreseeing some doggy style in her future. Bellamy liked to go rough in that position, which she certainly wasn’t opposed to. He fucked her so good like that, and she liked how he could just use her body and still not make her feel like a thing in the process.

“You’re not in trouble,” he assured her, pulling down the shorts—his boxer shorts—that she’d put on after her shower tonight. She shivered when she was naked, but she wasn’t cold for long. Because soon enough, his body was covering hers, and he was pressing kisses onto the back of her neck, across her shoulder blades, down her spine to the small of her back.

“Mmm,” she purred, pillowing her head against her arms. That felt good. So soft. Very intimate.

For some reason, she loved it when Bellamy kissed her backside, because it made her feel like he just absolutely adored every inch of her. So when he rained kisses down on first one cheek, then the other, she smiled dazedly. Whichever cheek he wasn’t kissing got a nice massage from his hand, and his hands were so calloused compared to his soft lips. The contrast drove her wild with desire.

Fuck me, she wanted to say—maybe a slow and romantic kind of doggy style was the idea that he had in mind—but he seemed to have other plans for her when he rested his chin on her ass and questioned, “Do you trust me?”

Her heart rate instantly sped up, because that could only mean one thing. This idea of his? It was a big fucking deal. “Yes,” she replied without hesitating. She trusted him. At this point, there was no one she trusted more.
Oh god, oh god, oh god, she thought, trying not to freak out as he pushed her legs farther out to the sides. When he splayed his hands against her ass, spreading the cheeks apart, she felt a momentary panic. But Raven had assured her that being self-conscious was natural, because letting someone go down on you in this way just wasn’t natural. At least not the first few times you did it. But she’d just taken a shower, so at least she knew hygiene wouldn’t be a concern.

At first, Bellamy just barely even brought his mouth down onto her back entrance. His lips barely grazed her flesh. It was still enough to send a tingle up her spine, though, because damn . . . that felt so weird. When he kissed her again, it was more of a soft peck this time. And after that, it was the real deal. His mouth was a hot cavern against her skin, and she had to laugh, because . . . Bellamy was literally kissing her ass.

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

She inhaled sharply. His breath tickled. “Nothing,” she said.

“Nothing?” He re-spread her ass cheeks, but this time, when his mouth closed in on her again, it was his tongue that she felt circling her tight hole. That was definitely a new sensation, too, one she couldn’t even fully comprehend. Bellamy Blake’s tongue—his uber-talented tongue, the tongue that had just been in her mouth and had worked its magic on her pussy countless times before—was licking her freaking asshole.

Unsurprisingly, he was into it. Bellamy never half-assed—so to speak—anything sexual. He went for it with gusto, though his technique definitely wasn’t the same as she was accustomed to. Each stroke of his tongue seemed deliberate and calculated. He began by making circles, then flattened it out and started licking her like she was a lollipop or something. He had to stop and start again sometimes, because he had to keep re-spreading her cheeks to have enough access. It never really did start to feel normal, but it didn’t feel bad, either.

This part of her . . . it was an unexplored part, so he was literally going where no man (or woman) had gone before. It felt as terrifying as it did exhilarating to be able to give him one of her firsts.

“Good so far?” he asked, always one to check in on her.

She tried to nod, but apparently that wasn’t enough assurance for him.

“Clarke?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you good?”

“Mmm-hmm.” She closed her eyes, trying to block everything else out and just concentrate on the unique feeling Bellamy was providing her. When the tip of his tongue touched her again, it was in yet another different way. This time, it sort of felt like a . . . like a poke. Like he was trying to push it . . . in. And it wasn’t exactly going in, just teasing.

Uh-oh, Clarke thought, suddenly worried. If even his tongue couldn’t get in there, then what were the chances that his entire cock would fit? What if she was in over her head here? What if she’d gotten his hopes up for anal sex, only to let him down in the long run?

No, you’re okay, she reminded herself, calming herself down. How many times had she tried something new with Bellamy and ended up loving it? He knew her, knew how to take care of her, and that was exactly why she trusted him so much.
“Mmm,” he said, giving her one more kiss and her ass a gentle smack as he lifted his head and sat up. “Good stuff.”

“Really?” Was he just saying that? Because that had to be a different experience for him, too.

“Yeah. That was a rimjob, by the way,” he informed her.

“Oh, so now if someone says, ‘Never have I ever been rimmed,’ I can drink up honestly?” she joked.

He chuckled. “Yeah.”

She started to roll over onto her back, but he pushed her hips back down, whispering, “No, stay,” and then smoothed his hand up her back.

Is he gonna fuck me now? she wondered, clutching the pillows tightly.

“I’ve only done that a couple times,” he admitted, reaching over to his nightstand drawer. “I hope it was alright.”

“It was good,” she said, watching intently as he pulled open the drawer. “Different, but good.” She knew her eyes must have nearly bulged out of her head when he took out the lube because all she could picture was him trying to squeeze his big cock inside her, and she didn’t feel like she was ready yet. She wanted to be, but she just wasn’t. “Bellamy--”

“Shh,” he said, squirting a generous amount of lube onto his hand. “I got you.”

She craned her neck over her shoulder to try to see what he was doing. His pants were still on, so maybe she’d been wrong to assume he wanted to go all the way here?

Just relax, she coached herself, laying her head down again. This was Bellamy. He wasn’t going to do anything to hurt her or anything she wasn’t ready for. By now, he pretty much knew her body as well as he knew his own. He’d know what she could handle. She was safe in his hands.

And his hands . . . well, that seemed to be exactly what he had in mind as he lubed both of his up. He massaged gently up and down her crack, over and around her hole, making it as slick as possible. He made no effort to take his pants off or lube up his dick. Instead, he circled his index finger around her entrance teasingly before asking, “You wanna take that?”

Just one finger? That she could handle, so she nodded.

“You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah.” Bellamy had big hands and therefore big fingers, but it was smaller than those dildos he’d bought at Ice Nation. And certainly smaller than . . . other parts of him.

“Ohay,” he said, carefully probing her asshole with his finger. “Don’t tense up.” He slowly slid it inside, and she tried to stay as loose and relaxed as possible. It did feel weird, though, since she wasn’t accustomed to using that as an entrance.

“Just relax,” he said, echoing what she’d told herself. He pushed his finger in farther, and she couldn’t be sure, but she felt like . . . like most of it was in there. It felt equally as tight and as full as three of his fingers in her pussy did. One finger alone was enough to stretch her, or at least enough to start. Again, she couldn’t even fathom how he’d get his cock in there someday, but then again, that was why he was doing this first, getting her accustomed to it a little bit at a time.
“You’re so tight,” he said admiringly as he began to slowly move his finger in and out. “Are you relaxing?”

“Trying to.” She had a finger up her ass, though. There was only so much relaxation she could manage.

“So fucking tight,” he commented again. “Damn, Clarke.”

She could tell by the sound of his voice that he was getting majorly turned on by this. And that led to a trickle of wetness between her legs.

He must have noticed, because he swiped his thumb against her pussy to collect the evidence of her arousal and spread it around her asshole. His finger stayed securely lodged inside her, pausing its motions only long enough for his thumb to tease. When he resumed his rhythmic in and out motion, she moaned, starting to get used to the feeling. It would never rival the feel of his fingers on her clit, but it was . . . it was interesting, for sure, and not in a bad way.

She lost track of time as he touched her there, though she did notice that, at various point, he seemed to be trying to insert another finger. He always thought better of it and decided not to, though. Apparently this was enough for now. Anal sex was definitely a marathon for him, not a sprint, and she appreciated that.

“Such a good girl,” he praised as he slowly withdrew his finger. “Fuck.”

“I kinda liked that,” she admitted, wriggling her ass for him playfully.

“Yeah? Good.”

They’d certainly be doing more of it soon, so she was really glad the feelings hadn’t freaked her out too badly or made her second-guess her decision. No, she was going to have anal sex with Bellamy, no matter how intimidatingly huge his dick was.

“Shit, Clarke.”

“What?” She rolled over onto her side, immediately panicked. ‘Shit’ was really not the right word to say when you were exploring the backdoor area. But luckily, he’d just been muttering it as a curse, and it only took one look at him to understand why: He had a massive hard-on protruding from his sweatpants.

“Want me to do something about that?” she offered, already reaching out her hand.

“I’ll do something about it,” he said, taking his pants off. “I’ll do you.”

Oh, thank god, she thought. She desperately wanted to get fucked after all that teasing. Even anal teasing, something she was totally unused to, got her worked up. Bellamy had turned her into such a nymphomaniac. It was like she couldn’t get enough.

“Come here,” he said, turning her onto her back. He grabbed her waist and pulled her down slightly so that her groin was directly in front of his. Then he grabbed one of the pillows from the top of the bed, and she instinctively lifted her hips so he could place it underneath her. With the slight change in elevation, she was at the perfect angle for him to just plunge into her, and that was exactly what he did.

It definitely wasn’t some gentle lovemaking he was giving her. He started thrusting hard right from the start, staying upright, sitting back on his knees. He held both her legs out to the side with his
hands, spreading her open wide, and his eyes immediately fixated on the place where they were
joined. He watched himself drill her with a dark look of intensity in his eyes, and damn, he just
looked so masculine, so manly.

It wasn’t that she preferred men to women now or anything ridiculous like that. But she preferred this
man. To anyone else she’d ever been with. If she never had sex with anyone else for the rest of her
life, then she was perfectly content, because he was all she needed. He made her feel satisfied in a
way she could barely even comprehend.

“Fuck, Clarke,” he swore, grabbing onto her hips. He pulled her against him right as he pressed into
her, creating one hell of a deep penetration. He was probably close to bottoming out, which, quite
frankly, she welcomed the feel of at this point, even though it’d been a bit uncomfortable the first
time. She liked knowing that his whole cock was in her. It made her feel like there was no end to him
and no beginning to her. There was just them. And this.

And this was good.

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When Clarke’s exhibit debuted at Trikru, she was excited. And nervous. Like nervously excited,
whatever the word was for that. Part of her was worried that no one would like it, let alone show up
to see it, but another part of her was so stoked to actually have some paintings on display in a real art
gallery. It made her feel like she was a real artist.

The night of the debut, she put on a nice, not-too-short-but-still-sexy black dress, making sure she
looked both young and professional before she left her apartment. When she got there, not many
people had shown up yet, which made the dread kick in full-force; but as night fell, more and more
people arrived. Her exhibit wasn’t the only new one. There were two exhibits, also done by young,
emerging artists in the community. One was called Disintegration and seemed to be this very dark,
very tragic take on the end of the world. The other was much lighter, Popped Off, and seemed to be
inspired by Andy Warhol’s pop art. Clarke couldn’t help but notice that her Handsome Friend
exhibit seemed to be getting a decent amount of traffic, perhaps more than the other two combined.
Maybe that was just because hers involved nudity and sex in half the paintings, or maybe Bellamy’s
face attracted everyone else just as much as it attracted her.

When he showed up and gave her a kiss, he garnered a lot of looks, because he obviously had a very
distinct appearance, and everyone recognized him from the exhibit. A couple of people even
approached him and asked if he was the guy from the paintings, and he sort of smiled proudly and
said, “Yeah.” He never let the attention linger on himself for too long, though. He made sure they
knew that, even though the paintings were of him, Clarke was the one who had created them. And
that led her to have several very nice conversations with people she didn’t even know. She explained
the exhibit’s title, talked to them about why she’d chosen the ten paintings she had, and listened to
their interpretations about some of the more ambiguous ones. Bellamy usually drifted away when
they started talking about the one of him with tears in his eyes. He and Clarke knew the full story
behind that one. No one else had to. And no one else’s interpretation was even close to the truth. The
vibe of it came across in spades, though. They all could tell that, deep down inside, he still carried
some pain around with him, some sadness, and that that had been the moment when it had all come
tumbling out.

It was cool, because even though she’d known Bellamy and Raven and Niylah and Wells would be
there to support her, all of her friends ended up coming. Each one of them dressed up for the
occasion, except for Murphy, who probably didn’t even own a suit. Amazingly enough, Jasper had
on his nicest pair of jeans and a button-down, which was basically his version of a tuxedo. He
proudly proclaimed, “I’m not even stoned,” as he strolled in. “I’m gonna remember this.”

Harper seemed to get a little turned on as she looked at Clarke’s paintings, mumbling, “Now I remember why I used to have such a crush on him.” But when Monty gave her a sharp look, she emphasized, “Used to. I’m all about you now.”

Miller and Jackson jokingly dismissed a lot of it as “straight people sex,” but they assured Clarke the paintings were great, and Miller even said he’d buy one if he didn’t already live with the guy.

Emori seemed to be the one who had the most appreciation for art, being somewhat of an artist herself. “I could tattoo Bellamy’s face on your body,” she offered. “If you want.”

“Uh, that sounds like a really bad idea,” Clarke said. “But thanks.”

Emori shrugged. “The offer’s open.”

Murphy would probably never admit it, but he was sort of into art, too. Clarke had caught him doodling on napkins and Post-It notes sometimes, and he wasn’t half bad. Not good enough to make a career out of it, necessarily, but then again, maybe she wasn’t, either. He studied each painting of Bellamy closely and decided to be obnoxiously nitpicky by saying things like, “Nah, I think that hair’s out of place,” and “You missed a freckle there.” Clarke took all his teasing in stride, though, because that was just Murphy. The more he ribbed you about stuff, the more he actually liked you.

“Is this the Bellamy Blake method?” Jasper asked, standing next to one of the more suggestive paintings of Bellamy’s face between her thighs. It was more R-rated than XXX, because she hadn’t actually painted the part of her body that he was . . . exploring. But it was beyond heavily implied.

“ Damn right it is,” Bellamy boasted. “You should study that, Jasper, learn a few things.”

“Oh, I will,” Jasper said in all seriousness, looking at the painting some more.

“That’s hot, Clarke,” Raven remarked, sidling up to the exhibit with a glass of champagne in hand. “Makes me wish I could paint. Roan’s got a good method, too.”

“Mmm, so does Luna,” Niylah purred. “I wish there was a way to compare.”

Clarke laughed at the thought, even though she felt confident that Bellamy’s oral method would always come out on top.

Octavia was there, of course, and she spent a lot of her night on Lincoln’s arm. Fiancée of the owner and all that. She was wearing a black dress, too, and she looked absolutely stunning in hers. Her baby bump was on full display, no longer hidden beneath oversized t-shirts and baggy sweatshirts. She was one of those girls who seemed to be able to gain weight in her midsection but nowhere else, which was incredibly unfair, especially given how naturally tiny she was anyway. When Bellamy wasn’t with Clarke, he was with her, and at one point, Clarke glanced over his way and noticed that Octavia had left him alone with Lincoln. And they were actually talking. Civilly. Peacefully. Almost as if they were—or at least someday could be—amicable. Maybe even friends.

“Hey, Clarke,” Octavia said as she swayed towards her, sipping what had to have been club soda or something. “Don’t mind me. I got a sneak peek of your exhibit earlier. That’s why I haven’t been hanging around here much.”

“Oh, no offense taken,” Clarke assured her.

“Besides, half of these paintings make my brother look like an adult film star, so . . .”
“I get it,” Clarke said. “I tried not to make them like porn, though. Do you think I went too far?”

“Oh, no, they’re all really good,” Octavia said. “They’re more . . . intimate than pornographic, I guess you could say. But still, I’m his little sister. I don’t like to picture him being intimate with someone any more than he likes to picture me being that way.”

“Fair enough,” Clarke said. “I’m curious, though, which one’s your favorite?”

Octavia didn’t even hesitate. She moved around to the other side of Clarke and motioned to a very simple painting of Bellamy smiling, mid-laugh. “This one,” she said. “I like seeing him look that way.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed, “me, too.” She’d also painted what he looked like when he was sleeping, that innocent boyishness that emanated from him when his hair was in his eyes and his mouth was gently parted while he dreamed. She’d done one of his facial features drawn tight in concentration as he worked, too, fixing something for somebody, because he fixed everything for everybody. And there was one of him grinning at her flirtatiously, too, since he seemed to do that a lot. She had that look of his perfectly memorized.

“Hey, so while I’m thinking of it . . .” Octavia turned to face her and blurted out a question Clarke hadn’t been anticipating: “Wanna be one of my bridesmaids?”

“What?” The question caught her so by surprise, she couldn’t even answer. “Seriously?”

“Yeah. Lincoln’s gonna ask Nyko, Miller, some cousin of his I don’t even know, and maybe even Bellamy.”

Clarke’s eyes bulged.

“I know, right? But that’s what he wants to do. As a sign of good will or something,” She shrugged. “I don’t know. I think Bellamy will do it, though. This baby’s making him lighten up about things.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said. *A baby would.* “Well, are you sure you want me to do it, though?”

“Yes. You’re my friend Clarke,” Octavia said. “And not just because you’re fucking my brother. I really do like you.”

That was high praise coming from a girl like Octavia, especially considering Bellamy’s ex-girlfriend used to be one of her best friends. “Thank you,” Clarke said awkwardly. “I mean, I’d love to, yes.”

“Great,” Octavia said. “Harper’s gonna be my maid of honor, and then I’ll have Emori, Maya, and you. It’s perfect.”

“And when is this happening?” Clarke asked.

Octavia glanced back at her brother and her future husband, then lowered her voice to reply. “Soon,” she said. “Not like next week or anything, but we decided we wanna get married before the baby’s born. If we can get everything planned fast enough . . . maybe in the next few months?”

“Wow,” Clarke wasn’t sure how Bellamy would react to that, but . . . there wasn’t much he could do about it. He’d accepted it, offered his blessing, and he really did seem to be handling it better than she’d initially thought he would. Clarke knew he was looking forward to being an uncle, and maybe if he and Lincoln continued to set aside the animosity, accepting him as a brother-in-law could be pretty seamless, too.
“Yeah, it’s exciting,” Octavia said. “I know me getting pregnant kind of speeds things along, but it would’ve happened eventually no matter what. All things that are meant to happen do happen eventually.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. “Well, I’ll be there, in whatever non-hideous bridesmaid’s attire you pick out for me.”

Octavia laughed, and then she actually wrapped one arm around Clarke and hugged her. “Thanks,” she said, uncharacteristically affectionate in that moment. Maybe her hormones were out of whack.

Clarke felt a tap on her arm after that, and she turned around to find a woman she didn’t recognize surveying her paintings. The woman asked her if the paintings were inspired by anyone in real life, and Clarke vaguely said, “Uh, yeah. He’s around here somewhere.” The woman’s eyes lit up with glee, and she scampered off to go find him. Clarke chuckled and mumbled under her breath, “I bet she’s one of those soccer moms who reads *50 Shades of Grey*.”

“Yeah,” Octavia agreed, but she sounded distracted. Her eyes were glued to the picture in front of her, the one where Clarke could almost hear Bellamy laughing, because—not that she was trying to brag or anything—it really did look a lot like him. Octavia narrowed her eyes, staring intently, a thoughtful expression on her face.

“What is it?” Clarke asked. Was there something about the painting that was off, something Octavia didn’t like about it?

“Nothing,” she said. “I just haven’t seen him smile like that since . . .” She trailed off, shaking her head quickly, and said, “See you later, Clarke,” as she slipped back off into the crowd.

Clarke frowned, trying not to assume she knew what Octavia had been about to say there. But still . . . the unspoken words rang loudly in her head.

She hadn’t seen him smile like that since Gina?

No, she thought, pushing the idea out of her mind. Surely that was giving herself too much credit. Bellamy had been in *love* with Gina. He’d been expecting a child with her. There was no way she could ever compare to that.
Thanks for sharing my excitement about the con with me! To say that it was the greatest time of my life would be an understatement.

Chapter 33

In the days following her exhibit, Clarke was on cloud nine. Lincoln told her he’d heard many positive things about it, and a critic from the local newspaper wrote a glowing review. Apparently, some well-known professor from the university even wanted to purchase a couple paintings, which was fine by Clarke. That was money in her pocket and money for Trikru. She could always repaint them for the capstone project, or try to make them even better. The thought of somebody having a picture of Bellamy hanging in their living room was a little weird, though, but not as weird as the thought of somebody having a sexy picture of Bellamy. The professor had purchased one of those, but she didn’t question it.

It took a few days to come back down to earth. And when she did, it was something in the mail that caused it. Not her overdue cable/internet bill, which she’d neglected to pay simply because she wasn’t home very often to get her mail anymore. Nope, that was something she could write out a check for and be done with. But when she saw an envelope with her address scrawled in familiar handwriting, her stomach knotted up. She recognized Lexa’s handwriting immediately, because she used to tease her that she wrote sloppier than most guys did.

Indeed, the name in the upper left-hand corner was Lexa’s, and the address was some town in Missouri she couldn’t pronounce. It was Costia’s hometown. According to Twitter and Instagram updates, Lexa had moved there about eight months ago to live with her new girlfriend. Fiancée. Whatever.

Clarke sat down on her couch and opened the envelope, sensing she already knew what was inside. What reason did Lexa have to mail anything to her other than a cordial, polite wedding invitation? And of course, that was exactly what it was. It wasn’t anything fancy, just a simple, almost plain invitation printed on cardstock. It had all the information about the wedding—the time, the place, and a request to RSVP by the first of this month, a date that had already passed. That had Clarke scratching her head. That combined with the fact that the wedding was taking place in only a few weeks led her to believe that Lexa had perhaps agonized about whether or not to send her an invitation at all. It was kind of weird, asking your ex-girlfriend to come watch you wed your current girlfriend. But maybe there shouldn’t have been any weirdness about it. The decision to end their relationship had been a mutual one, after all, and she and Lexa had always been amicable with each other. They just…they weren’t friends. They’d never just been friends. So they hadn’t exactly stayed in touch other than social media updates.

Fuck my life, Clarke thought dramatically, putting the invitation back inside the envelope. If she didn’t go to the wedding, then she’d seem like a bitch. But if she did go, then it was gonna be awkward as fuck. Neither option sounded appealing.

The impending decision of whether or not to attend that wedding weighed heavily on her mind all day. She thought about it at work, even going so far as to make a list of the pros and cons. Whatever
decision she made, she had to make it fairly soon, because it wasn’t like she could just get in the car and be in Herculaneum, Missouri in the next five minutes. According to Google Maps, it was at least thirteen hours away no matter what route she took. If she decided to fly, of course she could be there in only a few hours, but she had to purchase her plane ticket like now, because flights booked up fast.

That evening, when she and Bellamy went to the library to study—or work on scholarship essays, in his case—it was still on her mind. Bellamy had to flirt his way into the library again, of course, which pissed Clarke off, because he had just as much of a right to be there as anyone else. All in all, she was in a pretty bad mood, and Bellamy noticed it almost right away.

“You alright?” he asked.

“I’m fine,” she answered a bit too quickly, barely glancing up from her crappy notes. “I just have this test next week, and I’m not ready for it.”

“Want me to help you study?” he offered, poised to close the laptop—her laptop.

“No, you have your own stuff to work on,” she said.

He grunted. “Like I’m gonna get any of these scholarships anyway.”

“You might,” she said, wishing he’d be more optimistic about it. “You did before.”

“I was an eighteen year-old salutatorian before,” he reminded her.

“Well, that’s why they have scholarships for other people, Bellamy,” she snapped. “If you don’t wanna try for ’em, then don’t try. But really, what do you have to lose?”

“Okay,” he said. “Damn. You are not in a good mood tonight, are you?”

“I’m just . . .” She dug her hand through her hair, wondering if she should just tell him about that wedding invitation. She didn’t want to come off as the jealous ex, though, because she really was happy for Lexa and Costia. It was just . . . it was just a weird thing to contemplate going and actually being a part of their big day.

“Did something happen today?” he asked.

“No.” She could have told him, definitely. There were only a few other people there right now, and both of them seemed completely absorbed in what they were doing and probably wouldn’t even overhear their conversation. But she felt bad that she was distracting him from what he should have been working on, so she said, “I need to go find a book,” and got up from the table. It wasn’t even a lie, really; she did need to go find a book, one she’d never purchased for her class. She knew exactly where it would be and exactly what chapters she should skim to take away just enough knowledge to hopefully be able to pass her test.

She wove her way through the stacks, mentally cursing at herself when she started to get turned around. Wasn’t this supposed to be the art section? Why the hell was she seeing science and technology books? How hard was it to find one stinking book about Da Vinci? Or Van Gogh? Or whoever the hell it was she was supposed to have been learning about? God, she was getting frustrated.

“Are you lost?”

She spun around, a bit startled even though she’d recognized Bellamy’s voice. “No,” she claimed.
“You’re not in the art section.”

“How do you know I’m looking for an art book?”

He gave her a confused and knowing look. “You’re in art classes, Clarke. You’re an artist.”

“Well, maybe I’m looking for something else.”

He grinned and said, “Oh, I know what you’re looking for.”

“Do you now?”

“Mmm-hmm.” He closed in on her, pressing her back against the shelves, his hands on her waist. Bending down, he pressed his groin against, rubbing insistently until she could literally feel him starting to get hard in his jeans.

“You think that’s what I’m looking for?” she asked, tilting her head to the side.

“Oh, I know it’s what you’re looking for.” He licked his lips, adding, “And I know what I’m looking for.”

“What’s that?”

“Hmm.” His fingertips dipped underneath the waist band of her black leggings, and he tickled her skin lightly before pulling them down over her hips. He dropped down to his knees as he lowered them to the floor, and she gasped when he took off her panties, too.

“Bellamy,” she whispered. “We’re in a library.”

“I know.” He wasn’t deterred at all. And why would he be? This was, after all, one of the places where they’d admitted to wanting to have sex with each other. “Books and Clarke,” he said, tracing his index finger along her slit. “Two of my favorite things.”

She took in a shuddering breath as he lifted her right ankle, completely removing her leggings and panties from it. He then hoisted that leg over his shoulder and scooted forward on his knees as his tongue slid between his teeth eagerly.

“Are you gonna put me in a good mood?” she asked.

“A very good mood,” he promised. His breath tickled her core when he whispered, “I wanna make you feel good.”

“Mmm,” she purred, reaching down to run her fingers through his messy hair. He always made her feel that way.

When his mouth clamped down on her pussy, she felt that familiar rush of bliss. God, she loved the feel of his tongue on her, and she loved that he did this so often. It was never a disappointment.

She glanced to her right, determined to keep careful watch of their surroundings even as she lost herself in this act. Getting caught by her mother and Marcus had been one thing, horrible in and of itself. But getting caught by a total stranger could be really bad. All it took was one person to report them, and then the next thing either of them knew, they’d be getting fined for public indecency. Or arrested. Maybe both.

Sitting halfway on his shoulder, she leaned back against the stacks, rolling her hips against his face as he thoroughly tongue-fucked her. It was so hard to stay quiet, because all she wanted to do was let
out a loud moan and tell him how much she was enjoying this. She figured he knew, though. He already had her feeling slick with arousal, and for the first time since she’d gotten her mail, that wedding invitation was nowhere close to being on her mind. All she could think about was the man whose mouth was doing insanely pleasurable things to her. It was the same mouth that had kissed her cheek before he left for work this morning, the same mouth that kissed the back of her neck in the middle of the night. And the same mouth that had lavished undivided attention on her ass a couple nights ago.

“Oh . . .” she couldn’t help but moan. The things Bellamy Blake did with his mouth should have been illegal. But at the same time, they should have been celebrated and mimicked throughout the entire world. If every guy and every girl was as good at giving head as he was, no one would ever be sexually frustrated or unfulfilled.

It was like she was his whole world when he did this. He poured all his attention and focus into giving her pleasure by just completely devouring her. He licked and lapped, nibbled and nuzzled, sucked and kissed. He didn’t even have to zero in on her clit to get her feeling like she could cum. Just seeing the way his neck arched as he licked up into her, his tongue zig-zagging up and down her folds . . . god, it made her feel so hot, and as her orgasm approached, she started to forget about being vigilant and watchful.

Suddenly, he stood up, though, and shielded his body with hers. She understood why when a girl with an armful of books walked by. She paid them no attention, probably didn’t even know they were back there, but she sat down at a table close by, only one row of books away. Shit, Clarke thought. Even though she and Bellamy were being quiet, him being down there still made . . . sounds. Sounds that that poor girl could probably hear.

“I got this,” Bellamy assured her quietly, scooping her up in his arms. He carried her a few aisles down, hopefully out of earshot. She felt so ridiculous with her leggings and underwear dangling from her left ankle, but when he pushed her back against another row of books, she felt turned on again. Now that they were a little farther away, they were a little more hidden. But still, if anyone walked by, and glanced in that direction, they’d see them. No doubt about that. That was part of the thrill.

He kissed her for the first time since they’d started, and she could taste herself on his lips. “What do you want?” he asked her.

She wanted him to get back down there. Either that, or . . .

She glanced down at his jeans, noting the prominent bulge that had formed there. “I want that,” she said, nudging it with her knee.

“Where do you want it?”

Wasn’t it obvious? Her thighs felt slippery as an eel as she rubbed them together wantonly. “In me.”

“So what do you want then?”

She rolled her eyes, pretending to be annoyed by the way he was drawing out the inevitable. “I want you to put it in me.”

He growled low in his throat, then hastily unbuttoned his jeans, pulled down his zipper, and pushed his pants and underwear down far enough to get his cock out. With one hand, he hiked her leg up around his waist, holding it in place underneath her knee, and with the other, he stroked his dick, spreading the pre-cum gathered at the tip around his entire length. Seconds later, he was putting it
exactly where she wanted it. And then he was fucking her.

“Oh, god,” she gasped, and he immediately put his hand over her lips to remind her to be silent. It was so hard, though, because his prior ministrations already had her feeling close. Though she wasn’t much of a screamer, she did want to be loud. But libraries weren’t loud places.

“Shh,” he said, careful to angle his thrusts in such a way that his skin wasn’t slapping against hers. He bent his knees and concentrated on thrusting up into her, nothing super deep, but still enough to make her feel full and content. It wasn’t the type of angle where his cock was able to rub naturally against her clit, so he used his hands, circling his thumb over the tiny bundle of nerves to get her off. She squeezed her eyes shut and bit her lip as she came, struggling not to say anything. He knew her body well enough to know that she’d cum, though, to feel it in his own, because he sped up his thrusts after that and pounded into her for about a minute more before he came, too.

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that she could feel Bellamy cum when he was inside her. She’d never felt that with Finn, but then again, they’d always used condoms, and she and Bellamy had pretty much given up on those a long time ago. Bellamy was so large, too, that she was sure his size intensified what she felt when he had his orgasm. She could usually feel him get harder, feel his penis start to pulsate and throb, and then, especially if it was a big load, she felt the warmth of his seed spreading inside her. It was an incredible turn-on, knowing that he enjoyed her pussy so much that he couldn’t contain himself; and sometimes, she swore she’d be able to get off again if she could just keep grinding down on him, even if he was going soft. But Bellamy usually came pretty hard, and his orgasms tended to leave him feeling sensitive, so she typically opted to just ride out the wave with him and bask in that feeling of connectedness. Because in that moment, both literally and figuratively, they were connected.

“Shit, that was good,” he said, pulling out of her slowly. “You make me feel so fucking good, Clarke.” He winced slightly as he pulled up his pants, then helped get her dressed, too. She was very wet and very sticky between her legs, and what she probably needed to do was go home and get cleaned up. But she also wouldn’t mind going home and fooling around a little more first. The night was young. Screw studying.

“I’m in a better mood now,” she told him, smiling. “You made me feel better.”

“See?” he said boastfully. “I told you I would.”

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Clarke did something the next day that she hadn’t done in a year: She texted Lexa. Very brief, very to the point. *I’ll try to be there,* she typed out quickly, pressing send before she had a chance to second-guess it. There, that was good, right? Nice and supportive without being entirely committed, so if she decided not to show, then that wasn’t shocking or disappointing. Because all she’d said was that she’d try.

Lexa never let a text go unanswered for more than a minute, so Clarke wasn’t surprised when she got a response a few seconds later. *Thanks, it read. Just you or would you bring someone?*

Clarke sighed, not sure what to tell her. She could ask either Raven or Bellamy to go with her. Raven would make more sense since she actually knew Lexa, but the wedding was during spring break, and Raven probably wanted to spend her spring break with Roan. Bellamy might be willing to go with her, but it was possibly going to be one of those pretend-to-be-my-boyfriend scenarios. Just for the sake of simplicity. And she couldn’t commit him to that without asking first.

*I’ll let you know soon,* she texted back. And that was the end of that conversation.
That afternoon, Bellamy came and picked her up from work since he’d been the one to drop her off that morning. Instead of going straight home, he drove to Walmart. He said he needed groceries, and she was more than willing to help him pick stuff out since she ate most of her meals at his place anyway. He didn’t object when she tossed some Hot Pockets and other microwavable meals into the cart, but he did shake his head in disapproval a few times. When he put in boxed pasta that had to be boiled, she opted for canned spaghetti and ravioli. Chef Boyardee was even making canned macaroni and cheese now, which just simplified things so much.

“Please don’t tell me you want gummy bears,” he said right as she dumped two boxes of Scooby Doo snacks into their cart.

“They’re not bears,” she informed him.

“They’re still basically plastic, though.”

“No, they’re not using artificial flavors anymore,” she said sadly. “So they’re less plastic-y. They tasted better before.”

He laughed in amazement. “How you manage to keep the figure you have eating the way you eat . . . it’s a mystery.”

“Well, I work out,” she claimed.

He made a face. “Since when?”

“Well, I work out with you,” she clarified.

“Oh, you mean . . .” He trailed off, nodding. “That is good cardio.”

“It’s exhausting,” she dramatically, rounding the corner with him into the next aisle.

“Well, we can do it less, if you want,” he offered teasingly.

“I didn’t say I want that.”

“Okay, good.”

“Good.” Yes, she was addicted. If she didn’t get to have sex with Bellamy nearly every single night, she started to go crazy.

She wondered if Gina and Roma had been as into it as she was, as thirsty. Was Bellamy’s sex life with them as good as it was with her? Or better because of all the . . . the feelings involved? He’d said before that sex with her was the best he’d ever had it before, but . . . what if he was just saying that?

Before she could contemplate that much longer, he announced, “Hey, I’m payin’ for all this, by the way.”

“What? Bellamy . . .” Her shoulders slumped in defeat already, because she knew there was no use arguing with him. “Let me at least put some stuff back then.”

“No,” he said defiantly. “My princess wants two boxes of gummy snacks? She gets two boxes of gummy snacks. No matter how disgusting they are.”

As much as she wanted to just pay for herself and take some of the grocery shopping expense off of his shoulders, she couldn’t help but smile when he said that. Because she really did love being his
princess.

On the drive home, she made the mistake of pulling out her phone and checking Instagram. She’d gotten better about not doing that so much, because Bellamy’s non-social media ways were rubbing off on her. But with Lexa’s wedding on the horizon, she felt snoopy. It wasn’t anything on Lexa’s Instagram that caught her eye, though. Instead, it was Finn’s. Which was also a mistake to check.

“Oh, great,” she mumbled. “Fantastic.”

“What?” Bellamy asked, turning the radio down.

“Oh, nothing. It’s just apparently now Finn’s engaged, too.”

“The ex-boyfriend?”

“Yeah.” There was a picture of him with his girlfriend and daughter—who looked exactly like him. They were all smiling, and his girlfriend was holding up her left hand, showing off a small diamond ring. “First Lexa, now Finn.”

“Does that bother you?” he asked, sounding surprised.

“Well, no, I mean, I’m happy for them, of course.”

“You don’t sound very happy.”

She sighed, realizing she sounded jealous. And she did not get jealous over Finn. He was her first love only in the puppy love sense. He was the high school boyfriend who had cheated on her and whom she was probably much better off without. He was a dad now, so of course it was good that he was marrying the baby’s mother.

“Do you still kind of have a thing for him or somethin’?” Bellamy questioned.

“Ew, no,” she answered quickly. “Finn was a phase. A phase I lost my virginity to, but still just a phase.”

Bellamy chuckled. “Okay.”

“It’s just . . .” She wasn’t even sure how to describe what she was feeling lately. Envious was maybe a better word? Because jealousy implied that she still had feelings for Finn and Lexa, which was not the case at all. But she did envy them, in a way, because they both seemed to have this whole future lined up for them. And Clarke didn’t feel like she had that.

“What?” Bellamy prompted. “You can tell me.”

She supposed she could, especially after everything he’d told her. Bellamy wasn’t just there for her in a sexual capacity; he was there for her as a friend, too. “It’s just that everyone’s getting married,” she said. “Lincoln and Octavia, Lexa and Costia, now Finn and his girlfriend. Finn has a baby. Octavia’s gonna have a baby. Lexa’s probably gonna adopt a baby. I just . . .” She sighed frustratedly. “I feel like everyone around me is just settling down and doing what people my age are supposed to start doing.”

“People your age?” he echoed. “Clarke, you’re twenty-one.”

“I’m gonna be twenty-two soon.”

“So? I got two years on you, and I’m nowhere near that stuff.”
“Well, and according to you, you never will be,” she reminded him.

He turned the radio off completely and said, “Nope. Not anymore.”

She frowned, twisting in her seat to better face him. “You really don’t think you’ll ever get married someday?”

He shook his head. “No. Closest I ever came was Roma.”

“So you would’ve married her if she hadn’t . . .” She trailed off before saying that word. Died. Roma had died.

“Yeah, I would’ve married her,” he said quietly.

“That’s crazy,” she said, thinking about how different his life would have been. “I mean, not crazy that you would’ve married her, but just . . . crazy to think about.” He would have gone to college at a big university, so he probably wouldn’t live in Arkadia. Which meant he never would have met Gina, and he never would have . . .

He never would have met her, either. And if Roma had been alive, he would have been completely okay with that.

“I don’t think you have to worry, Clarke,” he said. “It’s not weird that you’re not getting married and popping out kids.”

“I know,” she said. Despite her frustration, she knew she was still young and had her whole life ahead of her. It was just confusing sometimes, because she didn’t have as much of a roadmap for her future as these other people seemed to have. Finn—Finn of all people—the guy who couldn’t even find his way from class to class in high school, had more of a plan for his life than she did. He’d probably gone out there and gotten a good job to be able to provide for his family. She didn’t even have that. Yeah, she’d had an exhibit at Trikru, but when the month was over, that exhibit came down, and she was back to being a girl about to graduate with an art degree she had no idea what to do with.

“It just would be nice to know that the universe has a plan for me,” she said, staring out the window longingly. She didn’t need to be getting married and starting a family right now. She didn’t even really need to have her whole career planned out. But eventually, things were going to get to that point. Someday.

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Bellamy tried not to let it bother him; he really did. He tried to forget that wistful look he’d seen on Clarke’s face on the way home, tried to forget the sound of disappointment in her voice when she lamented that she didn’t have what so many other people her age did. He tried to convince himself that it was no big deal that she would vocalize those things to him, but inside, he was panicked. All he could think was that . . . that she wanted something more. Maybe more than what he could give her.

That fear nagged at him while they put away the groceries. He was quiet during that, and when they went outside to lay on the trampoline, he was quiet there, too. She snuggled against his side, and he held her close, determined to keep her warm, because even though spring was on the horizon, it was still cool outside.

She babbled about something—he really wasn’t even sure what. He felt bad for not listening, because he wasn’t the type of guy who just tuned girls out. He did listen, and he especially listened
to Clarke, because she was one of his favorite people to listen to. Dammit, his mind was so elsewhere, though, still freaking out, still fearing the worst.

*What if she’s ready to be done with me?* he wondered. Maybe she was close to deciding that she wanted a real boyfriend, somebody who actually might be able to give her a legitimate future someday. Bellamy had always known this day would come, but he didn’t think it’d happen so soon.

It wasn’t that he couldn’t uphold his stance on friends with benefits. He could. That was still the kind of relationship he wanted, the kind he needed.

He just . . . he kind of wanted and needed Clarke right now, too.

“Bellamy?” she said softly, breaking him out of his racing thoughts. “Are you even listening?”

His response alone indicated he wasn’t. “What?”

She frowned. “What’s up with you? You’ve been quiet ever since we got home.”

“Oh, sorry.” He rubbed her back and her arms, trying to warm her up. “You wanna go inside?”

“In a little bit.” She propped herself up on her forearm, looking down at him confusedly. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” he lied. He was a bad liar. Either that or she just knew him well enough to see through it.

“No, something’s wrong,” she said. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” he said again. “I’m fine.”

“Bellamy.” She gave him a look, the kind that made him think she’d just keep pestering him about it until he buckled and told her what was on his mind. That was kind of her specialty. She’d gotten him to do it before about much more serious things.

He let out a heavy sigh, figuring they were going to have to talk about it. He wouldn’t even be able to fuck her properly if he had this lingering worry in the back of his mind. Even now, he couldn’t even lie there with her and enjoy it, because he was so afraid it was going to be over in an instant. If it was, he wanted to know, and if it wasn’t . . . well, then he wanted to know there was nothing to worry about.

“Listen, I’m fine,” he began by assuring her. “Really. It’s just that . . .” He shivered, not because he was cold, but because he was nervous. “I just got a little freaked out on the way home when you got so upset about Finn.”

“Upset?” she echoed. “I was upset?”

“You seemed upset.”

“I wasn’t,” she said. “Frustrated, sure, but . . .”

“Then why were you frustrated?”

“Because I . . .” She trailed off, sitting up, pulling the sleeves of her long-sleeved shirt down over her wrists. “Where’s this coming from?”

“I’m not mad or anything,” he said. “I just . . . I don’t know, it scared me, I guess.”
“Scared you?” she echoed. “Bellamy, I don’t—I don’t understand.”

He sat up beside her, rubbing his hand up and down her back. “I’m not mad,” he reiterated. If she decided she needed a change, then he’d support her. Because that was what friends did, and above all else, he was her friend.

“Good,” she said. “It’s good that you’re not mad. Although I don’t know what you’d be mad about.”

“Listen, Clarke . . .” He hung his head, feeling downtrodden. “I get it. You want what they have.”

“What they have? You mean Finn and Lexa?” She scrunched her face up as if she were completely perplexed.

“You know you do,” he said. “That’s why you brought it up. That’s why you got . . . frustrated about it.”

“That was a momentary frustration,” she claimed. “It passed.”

“Did it?” He wanted to believe that, but maybe she was the one lying to him now.

“Yes,” she said. “And now I’m here with you. And there’s no place I’d rather be.”

“No place?” Oh god, he wanted to believe that. But they were in his crappy neighborhood in his backyard on a trampoline. There were plenty of other places she could have been, and plenty of other people she could have been with.

“Bellamy, cut the crap,” she snapped suddenly. “What’re you getting at here?”

He sighed again, hating that he’d put a worried look on her face now, too. Maybe Finn’s news hadn’t upset her, but this would. “The way you were talking,” he said, “I just kinda thought . . .” He shrugged sadly, trying not to sound too sad when he said, “Maybe you were over me.”

“Over you?” She huffed as though that idea were outrageous. “Have I done anything to make you think I’m over you?”

“No.” Just this morning, in fact, they’d laid in bed for a few extra minutes after his alarm went off, and he’d curled up behind her and made love to her. And she’d said it was the best way she’d ever woken up.

“Have I ever said anything?” she pressed on.

“Just that stuff in the car.”

“Why on earth does that make you think I’m over you?”

“Because there’s just some stuff . . .” He gulped, trying to speak evenly and calmly. “There’s just some stuff that isn’t in the cards for me. Things I can’t give you. We both know that.”

She lowered her head, too, looking down at her lap. “Bellamy . . .”

“I mean, I always knew someday you’d meet someone else and move on, or decide you wanted something more. And I said I’d be okay with it. And I really will be,” he insisted. “If that’s what you want . . .”

“Are you sure?” If there was even one piece of her that doubted she could do this any longer, then it was better she tell him now.

“I want you,” she told him decisively. “Bellamy, what we have . . . it’s not like it has an expiration date.”

He knew that. But he also knew it wouldn’t last forever. It couldn’t, not when she was bound to find someone without six years of emotional baggage holding him back. Not when she deserved better than that.

“I haven’t forgotten what we agreed to when we started this whole thing,” she said. “But I also haven’t . . . I haven’t gotten restless, if that’s what you’re thinking. I don’t wanna go out there and find another Finn, or even another Lexa.” She wiped tears from the corners of her eyes, shaking her head stubbornly. “I don’t care what the future holds,” she said. “I just wanna be with you.”

With me, he thought. Clarke Griffin was smart and beautiful and could have had any man or woman she wanted. And yet, for now at least, she wanted to be with him? Of all people?

It was the reassurance he needed, though, enough to quell his concerns, or at least put them on the back burner. He couldn’t give her everything she wanted, or everything she would want someday. But for now, he could give her enough. For now.

Maybe now was all that mattered.

He kissed her softly, brushing his thumb across her cheek as he did so, nuzzling his cold nose against hers. He wanted to be with her, too. For however long it lasted. And when the time came to let her go, to give it all up, he would. He could. And at least she wouldn’t be gone like Gina and Roma were.

When Clarke got another text from Lexa, it was one asking if she’d be bringing a guest to the wedding. Clarke still wasn’t even one hundred percent sure she would be attending the wedding, let alone whether or not she was bringing Bellamy with her. Raven was heading down to Florida with Roan for the week of spring break, so going with her was out of the question. But Clarke decided to ask her best friend for advice about the situation anyway. Because Raven did give pretty good advice most of the time.

“So what should I do?” she asked as she walked with Raven to class. “Go alone, or . . .”

“No, of course not. Bring Bellagio,” her friend suggested. “You can’t show up to your ex-girlfriend’s wedding without someone new on your arm. That’s like an unwritten law.”

“But what if he doesn’t wanna go?” Clarke fretted. “You know how he is about work and stuff. He hates taking time off.”

“He took time off to go to D.C.,” Raven pointed out, readjusting her backpack on her shoulders. “Just ask him, Clarke. What’s the big deal?”

She sighed, unable to fully articulate why it made her nervous to ask him. It was just that . . . the other night, he’d been so worried about . . . everything. If she invited him to a wedding, what if he assumed that was some not so subtle hint? She was most definitely not trying to get him thinking about marriage, and she respected if he didn’t believe that lay in his future. She wasn’t wanting to get married more than she was wanting to be with him. She didn’t want him worrying about anything like that, and even though she’d put his nerves at ease the other night, what if going to Lexa’s
wedding just drugged all those concerns up again?

“What, do you still have some leftover feelings for Lexa or something?” Raven questioned, sliding over towards Clarke to make room as a biker zoomed down the sidewalk. “Is that why you don’t wanna bring him?”

“No, nothing like that,” Clarke said.

“Then what’s the hold-up? Go home, ask your man to be your date for the wedding. I’m sure he’ll say yes, and you guys will have fun. Who knows? You might even catch the bouquet.”

“No,” Clarke said sternly.

“You might.”

“I’m not even gonna try for it.” That was the last thing she needed to do.

“Just ask him,” Raven reiterated, heading left at a break in the sidewalk as Clarke headed right. “Let me know what he says.”

“Okay.” Clarke sighed, hoping it would all be that simple. Raven was right, though. Showing up at Lexa’s wedding without a date would be lame. And she and Bellamy would have a good time. There was no one she enjoyed spending time with more than him.

She meant to talk to him about it right when he got home from work, but when he walked in the door, he was covered in some kind of filthy sludge she didn’t even recognize, and he looked miserable. He said one word, “Gutters,” before lumbering straight upstairs and getting in the shower. She took that to mean he’d cleaned out somebody’s gutters today, which probably hadn’t been a very fun job. So she grabbed him a cold beer and lay in bed, waiting for him to emerge from the shower.

When he came out of the bathroom, he had wet hair, droplets of water all over his tan, sculpted chest, and a towel around his waist. “You should take your clothes off,” he suggested. “I’m feeling like . . .”

She didn’t hesitate to lift her shirt over her head. “Like you wanna ravage me?” she guessed eagerly.

“Yes.” He untied his towel and let it drop to the floor, but he wasn’t hard yet. That could be fixed.

One sixty-nine blowjob later, she found herself flat on her stomach, trying very hard to stay loose and relaxed while he toyed around with her backdoor again. Toy being the key word there, since he’d finally decided to break out the dildos he’d picked up at Ice Nation. The first one was pitifully small, no bigger than his finger, so he only used that on her for a few minutes right at the start. With the help of plenty of lube, of course, he then put the medium-sized one into her and experimentally moved it around. He lay down beside her, almost lazily pumping it in and out of her asshole. There was so something so sexy about how calm and casual he was about the whole thing, like it was no big deal to be fucking her ass with a plastic toy in preparation for fucking it with his cock.

“You good?” he asked periodically.

“Mmm-hmm.” The toy wasn’t as warm as his finger or his tongue was, but it was necessary, she knew, if they wanted to get to the point where they could really try anal. All the way. “Am I making progress?” she asked.

“You’re making a lot of progress,” he confirmed, taking the toy all the way out momentarily. The
loss of it made her feel very empty very suddenly, even though it still felt kind of weird to have anything in there at all. “That’s good,” he said, peeking downward before re-inserting it again. “You’re doin’ really good.”

“You’re doing good,” she said. “You’re the one taking care of me.”

“Well, I don’t wanna hurt you when it comes time to actually . . .” He trailed off, scooting in closer so he could press a kiss to her shoulder. “I don’t wanna hurt you.”

“You won’t,” she assured him. “Is that gonna be next time? Or are you gonna make me try the other dildo first?”

“I don’t know, we’ll see,” he murmured against her skin. He pressed the toy in about as far as it would go, and she hissed sharply, tensing up as she clutched the pillows tightly.

“You alright?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s just . . .” She took a deep breath to calm herself and focused on being relaxed again. She was definitely getting stretched out here, and she’d have to stretch even further to accommodate Bellamy. “I’m okay,” she said, laying her head back down again. She looked at him and smiled, always appreciative of his concern. “Just keep doing it.”

He pressed another soft kiss to her shoulder and kept up his ministrations.

Clarke knew it was a bit of an unconventional time to have a conversation about anything even remotely serious, but she kind of figured . . . why not? It was just the two of them alone here, there was really no pressure to get off on the feeling of being fucked in the ass with a dildo, and maybe he’d be more inclined to agree with whatever she asked of him since she’d just let him cum in her mouth fifteen minutes ago.

“Bellamy?” she squeaked out.

“Yeah?”

“Do you wanna . . .” She trailed off, hesitating, then worked up the courage to just do it. “Would you be willing to go to a wedding with me?”

For a moment, he stopped pumping her ass full of plastic, and blinked at her confusedly. “A wedding?” he echoed. “Like Octavia’s?”

“No, Lexa’s,” she clarified. “I got invited, and I kinda feel like I should go.”

“Oh.” He remained still, so she pressed her hips backwards slightly to indicate that she wanted him to keep going. Getting the hint, he resumed. “Well, when’s that?”

“In about two weeks,” she replied. “Spring break. It’s in Missouri, which I’m pretty sure is one of the states in the middle.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, it is.”

“So . . . do you wanna go?” She made a face. “I mean, not want to go, because it’s a wedding, and nobody really wants to go to weddings. But would you be willing to go? With me?”

It took a moment, but slowly, a grin spread across his face. “Are you really asking me this while I’ve got a fake cock shoved up your ass?”
“I really am.” She laughed at her own ridiculousness, careful not to move around too much as she did so.

“Wow. That’s . . . that’s new, Clarke.”

“Well, do you wanna go or not?” she asked impatiently, needing an answer. If he said no, then maybe she just wouldn’t go at all. She’d text Lexa back and say plans had changed and she couldn’t make it. No big deal.

“Uh . . . sure, I can go,” he answered at last.

“Really?” And he wasn’t freaked out about it? Major relief.

“Yeah,” he said. “It’ll be fun. We’ll make a road trip out of it.”

“A road trip?” she echoed excitedly. Despite being a senior in college, she’d never had a road trip before. Some people acted like it was a rite of passage.

“Yeah, I can’t fly,” he said vehemently. “I’ve never been on an airplane before in my life.”

“But you could join the mile high club,” she pointed out.

“Hmm, tempting, but no.”

She laughed again. “Okay, road trip it is.” That eliminated the cost of airline tickets anyway. They’d probably end up taking his truck, though, and he’d insist on paying for gas . . . but maybe she could pay for the hotels? If he let her.

“Yeah, let’s do it,” Bellamy declared, sounding almost excited about it. “I’m in.”

“Okay. Good.” Now that he’d agreed to it, she wasn’t even sure why she’d been so nervous about asking him. Whatever anxiety Bellamy had been dealing with the other night had passed, and now everything was back to normal again. There was nothing to worry about.

“Is she gonna think I’m your boyfriend?” Bellamy asked as he slowly withdrew the dildo from her ass.

“Probably,” she replied sheepishly. “We can tell her--”

“Nah, it doesn’t really matter,” he said. “Your parents still think that, too, I assume?”

She halfway cringed. “Kind of . . .”

He chuckled, shaking his head. “Whatever. It’s easier than explaining it to them.”

“Much easier,” she agreed. Besides, showing up at her ex’s wedding with a brand new boyfriend on her arm? It wouldn’t suck.
Chapter 34

Saturday night at the Blake-Miller-Murphy household was lit, as Saturday nights there usually were. But this one was quite literally lit, as Miller bought a backyard fire pit at the thrift store for twenty bucks. Monty and Jasper brought over some lawn chairs, and Bellamy grabbed a couple folding chairs from the junk closet. With the girls sitting in the guys’ laps, there was room for everyone to sit around the fire and roast marshmallows. Bellamy felt like a seventh grader at summer camp, and it was kind of awesome.

The main topic of conversation seemed to be his and Clarke’s impending road trip. Jasper desperately wanted to tag along, but Clarke apologetically told him that she could only bring one guest. He whimpered and protested, “Why can’t that guest be me?”

Emori answered before Clarke could get a word out. “Because you don’t give her orgasms, and Bellamy does.” She smirked at Clarke. “Right?”

Clarke shrugged without much shame. “Pretty much.”

“Sick,” Octavia muttered, her face pressed into the side of Lincoln’s neck. She looked tired. According to Harper, she’d been up all night last night feeling nauseous, but no one was supposed to mention it, because she’d snap at them. Octavia was a moody girl under normal circumstances, but pregnancy hormones had her at a whole different level, and right now it was all about just keeping her calm and unoffended.

“Where is this place you’re going anyway?” Murphy asked, blowing on his marshmallow before he removed it from the stick. “Mississippi?”


He made a face as he chewed the gooey snack. “Midwest of what?”

“I don’t know,” Clarke said. “Appalachian Mountains or something.”

“It’s by Kansas and Nebraska and Iowa,” Bellamy informed him.

Murphy just stared at him like he’d never even heard of those three states before. “I failed geography, dude.”

“Not surprising.”

“I’ve been to Missouri before,” Jackson said, “for a medical conference. That was in St. Louis, though. Sounds like you guys are going somewhere smaller.”

“Way smaller,” Clarke said, wriggling around a bit on Bellamy’s lap. She probably was just trying to get more comfortable, but the move brought her ass back against his groin, and he had to try really hard not to show any reaction to it. “Lexa moved there not long after she met Costia,” Clarke went on to explain. “I guess Costia has family there. I don’t know. She left one small town for another. But she seems really happy there.”

“Is Lexa hot?” Murphy asked.
“Well, I think so,” Clarke replied.

Behind her, Bellamy nodded emphatically. He’d seen photos.

“Hot chicks getting married in the Midwest,” Murphy recapped. “It’s like a gay hootenanny.”

“And you guys are driving all the way there?” Maya asked as she put together a s’more for Jasper. “Why not just fly?”

“Because Bellamy’s scared of planes,” Clarke blurted.

“I’m not scared,” he argued. “I just don’t see the point in paying for airline tickets when we can just get in the truck and go.”

“Oh, I’m all for it,” Clarke assured him. “I’m not the biggest fan of flying, either. We should really figure out our route, though, and figure out where we’re gonna stop, maybe book our hotels in advance.”

Bellamy gave her an incredulous look. “Clarke,” he said. “You don’t plan out a road trip like that. You gotta have some spontaneity in it, okay? Trust me.”

“So we’re just gonna drive and stop whenever we feel like it?” she asked, making a face. “That doesn’t sound very—”

“It sounds awesome,” he interrupted, threading his hands through her hair. “Right?”

She smiled sheepishly, her face aglow with the firelight. “Right,” she said, but he knew it was hard for her to not plan out and have control over every detail of what was essentially a minor vacation.

The conversation shifted after that to the more broad topic of who, besides Lincoln and Octavia, would be the first to get married out of their group. The consensus seemed to be that Miller and Jackson were well on their way to the altar, and neither one of them denied it. Murphy claimed he would never get married, but Emori just rolled her eyes at that, which led Bellamy to believe that they’d talked about it.

“I think Raven and Roan might get engaged at some point this year,” Clarke chimed in. “He’s, what, like, twenty-eight? Twenty-nine? He’s gotta be at that point where he’s ready.”

“You think they’ll get married before you two?” Jasper asked.

“Who two?” Clarke questioned. She looked at Bellamy and then motioned in between the them. “Us two?”

Bellamy averted his eyes, hoping to avoid answering the question.

“Oh, wait, it’s ‘different’ between you guys,” Jasper said, using sarcastic air quotes to accentuate his words. “I forgot.”

“So anyway,” Bellamy transitioned quickly and awkwardly, “about that North Korean nuclear missile shit . . .”

His friends all made faces and started throwing marshmallows at him. Not only did they have no vested interested in talking about North Korea or anything else on the news, they also lambasted his attempt at diverting the conversation away from himself and Clarke. “Worst segue ever,” Murphy said, and Miller agreed, “That was lame, man.”
“I’ve got something less lame,” Octavia announced suddenly, sitting up straight in Lincoln’s lap. One of Lincoln’s hands rested protectively on her stomach, and she linked her fingers with his. “Our wedding date,” she said, smiling sleepily. “It’s gonna be May 15th.”

Bellamy’s eyebrows shot upward. “May?”

“Yes.” She looked to Lincoln and he nodded in agreement before explaining, “We wanna get married before the baby’s born. We’re gonna be cutting it close if it decides to come a month early, but we couldn’t get the chapel booked for April.”

Fine by me, Bellamy thought. This at least gave him a little over two months to get used to the idea, which was still hardly any time at all, but it was better than nothing. “That’s soon,” he said simply, hoping he didn’t sound . . . angry.

“We’re excited, though,” Octavia said, giving her boyfriend—fiancé—a quick peck on the lips. She looked cautiously at Bellamy afterward, and he just nodded calmly to let her know he was okay with it. Because at this point . . . he kind of just had to be.

It was all wedding talk after that. The girls wanted the inside scoop on what their bridesmaids’ dresses looked like, and Murphy for some reason volunteered to be an usher. The dumbass actually thought they were going to pay him for it, and when he found out they weren’t, he said, “Maybe Jasper should be an usher then.” Jasper didn’t hear, because he’d gone off to the tree line to smoke up—couldn’t very well do that around a pregnant chick. Jackson offered to be the minister, because apparently he’d gotten ordained online, and Miller hinted that he’d be willing to be the DJ at the reception.

The whole thing kind of still made Bellamy’s head spin, and though he didn’t want to seem like a grouch, he had to get out of there while they babbled about it. He lifted Clarke off his lap and said, “I’m gonna go get some more beer.”

“Want me to come with you?” she asked.

“No, it’s fine.” She was just as curious about the bridesmaids’ dresses as the other girls were, so he left her out there with the rest of them to try to get some vague hints out of Octavia.

Alone in the kitchen, he chugged an entire beer, just because he could, and he figured a slight buzz might numb his mind to the fact that his sister was no longer going to be a Blake in two short fucking months.

He wasn’t alone for long, though. The back door opened, and since he didn’t bother to look over his shoulder and see who it was, he at first muttered, “I’m fine, Clarke,” assuming she’d followed him inside.

“Not Clarke,” Lincoln said gruffly.

Yeah, those footsteps were definitely too heavy to belong to her. He should’ve known. “You want another beer?” he offered, opening the refrigerator. “Got a few left.”

“I’m good,” Lincoln said. “I just wanted to talk to you about something.”

Bellamy shut the door slowly, bracing himself. But then again, this guy had already asked for his permission to marry Octavia, had already knocked her up even before that. Realistically, there were no bigger bombshells he could drop than the ones he already had.

Turning around slowly, Bellamy said, “Go ahead.”
“Well, it’s about the wedding,” Lincoln said quietly. “I know you’re not my biggest fan, so feel free to decline, but I was wondering if you might be willing to be one of my groomsmen.”

Bellamy froze, on purpose, because if he didn’t freeze and say nothing, he’d burst into laughter. That had to be a joke, right? Lincoln got along with these other guys way better than he got along with him. Lincoln didn’t really tell a whole lot of jokes, though; he was a pretty serious guy. So Bellamy didn’t even have to question whether or not the offer was serious. “You’re asking the guy who runs the gallery with you, right?” he said, buying himself a little time before he had to answer.

“No. Nyko. Yeah, he’s my best man,” Lincoln confirmed. “He and Miller and one of my cousins are gonna do it. But Octavia’s got four bridesmaids, so it’d look better if I had a fourth, too.”

_Monty. Jasper. Hell, even Murphy_, Bellamy thought desperately. But if Lincoln had wanted one of them to do it, he’d be out there asking one of them right now, not in here.

It was a good thing, he supposed, an olive branch, a truce. Lincoln was going to be his brother-in-law, and he was trying to include him in the big day. Bellamy had been an ass to the guy over the years, sure, but he wasn’t going to be so much of an ass to turn that down. Especially not when he’d promised Octavia that he would play nice. “Sure,” he answered finally. “I’ll do it.”

Lincoln smiled, looking as surprised as he was relieved. “Thank you,” he said. “That really means a lot to me. And I know it’ll mean a lot to Octavia.”

_That’s why I’m doing it_, Bellamy thought, nodding silently. Lincoln wasn’t an idiot; he probably already knew that.

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The prospect of spending a Sunday afternoon with her parents seemed less excruciating to Clarke when Bellamy agreed to accompany her. She was a little bit nervous about him seeing their house, just because it was very big and very nice and probably kind of intimidating to someone who had never seen a house that big and nice before. But she figured that he’d handled seeing her apartment just fine, and it was the fanciest complex in all of Arkadia. If Bellamy was intimidated, he’d hide it well.

“So did you tell your mom I’m coming along?” Bellamy asked as he drove at least ten miles over the speed limit. He spotted a cop up ahead and pressed the brake a little too obviously.

“No, but she asked earlier if you were,” Clarke replied. “I hadn’t asked you yet. I wasn’t even sure if I was gonna come. I was kind of waiting to figure out if we were gonna have copious amounts of sex today.”

“Keep going straight?” Bellamy asked, slowing down as he approached an intersection.

“Yeah, you turn at the next block.”

He pressed the gas again, gliding past the cop car at an even and legal pace. “Well, we can have sex when we get home,” he said. “Or on the way. Just fuckin’ pull off into some back alley and do it here in the truck.”

Well, she loved truck sex, especially since they’d had their first time in there. But she was partial to the warmth and comfort of their bedroom—_his_ bedroom. Whatever. “Oh, that sounds romantic,” she remarked sarcastically. “And safe, what with the back alley and all.”

“I’ll keep you safe,” he promised, smiling at her sweetly. He turned onto her parents’ street, and his
eyes got wide with amazement when all the houses came into view. “Damn,” he said. “You didn’t tell me they live in a mansion.”

It wasn’t a mansion, not technically. Just a really big house in a neighborhood full of really nice houses. But she understood that, to Bellamy, it probably looked like something straight out of Beverly Hills.

“It’s the beige one up here,” she informed him.

“Oh, you mean, the one with the three-car garage?”

“That’s the one.”

He grunted. “Do they really have three cars?”

She didn’t say anything, didn’t need to.

“Damn,” he said again, shaking his head in astonishment.

Technically, they had four, because they were the ones who had purchased hers. But she wasn’t about to say that.

Her mother came bounding out to greet them like an excited puppy dog when they pulled into the driveway. Clarke had barely stepped down from the truck when her mom threw her arms around her and hugged her. “Oh, I’m so glad you could make it today,” she said. “And you brought Bellamy.” She smiled at him as he walked around the truck. “It’s so good to see you again,” she squealed cheerfully.

“Yeah, you, too, Abby,” he said, looking a little caught off-guard when she hugged him, too. It surprised even Clarke. Her mom wasn’t really much of a hugger.

Her stepfather joined them outside a moment later, dressed more casually than Clarke had seen him in a long time. Whenever he went anywhere in public, whether it was a campaign appearance or even just out to eat, he dressed like a politician. But right now, he had on jeans and black t-shirt, and he actually looked like a normal guy. He greeted Clarke with a hug and Bellamy with a handshake, then invited Bellamy out back to grill burgers with him.

“You grill?” Clarke asked, unable to disguise her surprised tone.

“Well, I haven’t for a while,” Marcus acknowledged, “but it’s not like you forget how.” He clapped Bellamy on the shoulder and said, “Let’s go.”

Weird, Clarke thought, trying to figure out why they seemed more wholesome and less stuffy than usual. All she could figure was that they’d suspected Bellamy might be tagging along, and maybe they were trying to act less white collar around him or something.

It was a nice enough day outside that Clarke was able to sit down with her mother out on the back patio, watching as Bellamy grilled. He was better at it than her stepfather, unsurprisingly, and he looked so hot doing it. Those broad shoulders, muscular biceps, that tan skin . . . mmm, he turned her on so much without even trying. She could barely even look away.

Her mother seemed to be paying a lot of attention to him, too. She asked questions about his mother, his sister, and about whether or not his father was still in the picture. Clarke kept all her replies as basic and vague as possible, because she wasn’t sure what Bellamy wanted her to divulge. If her mom wanted to know about his past relationships, there was no way she was telling her anything
about either Roma or Gina.

Her mother seemed to like the thought that he was big on family, that his mother and sister were so important to him, and that he was a good man despite the absence of any sort of father figure. “He just seems really respectable,” she said enthusiastically. “I like that.”

“I’ve noticed,” Clarke said. Her mother had never been like this with Lexa, and she’d been pretty skeptical of Finn, too. “Mom, can I ask you something?” she inquired. “And I just want you to be honest.”

Her mother sipped from a glass of pink lemonade and said, “Sure.”

Clarke sighed, wondering if it was even necessary, or if she already knew the answer. “Are you all aboard the Bellamy train just because he’s a guy?”

“No,” her mother answered quickly.

“But you like that he’s a guy.”

“I . . .” Her mother trailed off, pressing her lips together tightly for a moment. “It doesn’t upset me, no,” she admitted. “But I am trying to be more open-minded. So no, that’s not the main reason why I like him.”

“Then what’s the main reason?” Clarke asked. “I mean, you know what he does for a living.”

“And I respect that, too,” her mother said. “Clarke, you seem to have this idea that I’m just the wicked witch of the west or something.”

“No.” She hadn’t meant to insinuate that. “No, not at all. I’m just not used to you being so gung-ho about someone I’m . . .” She hesitated before saying, “Someone I’m dating.” Because as far as her mom and Marcus were concerned, Bellamy was her boyfriend, and it wasn’t really a lie so much as it was an exaggeration. Friends with benefits was just not a description she wanted to give them. At all.

“Well, I don’t think you’ve ever dated someone like Bellamy before,” her mother said, smiling. “He’s a good man, Clarke. A good person. And it’s obvious how much he cares about you.”

Clarke smiled, too, unable to help herself. “Really?” she said. It was obvious?

“Oh, yes,” her mother said emphatically. “I think he loves you.”

Clarke’s smile fell, and she tensed up a bit. Love? Did Bellamy love her? Probably, in the way you loved your closest confidante or your lifelong friend. But the kind of love her mother was hinting at . . . that was the type of feeling their relationship was meant to avoid.

She wouldn’t understand that, Clarke thought, putting a smile back on her face. That’s okay.

Once the burgers were done, they moved back inside to eat at the dining room table. There were potato chips and French fries to complement the burgers, which once again took Clarke by surprise. She hadn’t seen her mother eat burgers and fries in years, but hell, she wasn’t complaining. Some of the so-called fancy meals they’d eaten over the years still left a bad taste in her mouth. Just like that art department dinner had left a bad taste in Bellamy’s.

“Saved the best one for you,” Bellamy said, placing what looked like the biggest, juiciest burger on Clarke’s plate.
“Thanks,” she said, sitting down next to him. He’d even melted two slices of cheese on it, cheddar and Swiss. He knew what she liked.

The conversation was . . . actually really nice, and it flowed incredibly well. They didn’t talk about politics at all, which was probably a good thing, and neither her mother nor her stepfather seemed particularly interested in getting Clarke to hammer out a post-graduation plan. They were just interested in Bellamy. They asked where he had gone to high school and seemed thrilled to find out he’d been the salutatorian. They didn’t ask him why he hadn’t gone to college, but they had to be wondering. Clarke was proud of them for withholding the question, though. Instead, they wanted to know about his job, how he’d gotten his start, what kinds of things he did for people, et cetera, et cetera.

“I just kinda started fixing things for people around the neighborhood,” he explained. “And then word got around, and before I knew it, people were callin’ me for all sorts of stuff. I mean, you name it, I’ve probably fixed it or installed it or . . . I don’t know, cleaned it.” He glanced at Clarke and muttered, “Those gutters the other day . . .”

She put her hand on his shoulder and rubbed it gently. “He pretty much taught himself everything he knows,” she boasted, seeing nothing wrong with bragging him up a bit.

“Well, I learned some stuff online,” he admitted.


“Well . . . thank you,” Bellamy said unsurely, almost like he wasn’t used to being complimented for his job.

“And you must do really good work to keep getting people’s business,” Abby added in.

Bellamy shrugged modestly. “I try.”

“You do,” Clarke said, wanting to brag about him some more. “That elderly couple? They adore you. And that girl you went to high school with who can’t always afford to pay? You help her out of the goodness of your heart and you know it.”

“Really?” Her mother smiled, nodding. “That’s very generous.”

If Bellamy had had a fairer skin tone, Clarke was pretty sure he’d be blushing. He was humble and modest about everything, of course, but clearly he had two big fans in Clarke’s parents, and that had to be a good feeling.

Towards the end of the meal, Clarke was feeling too full to finish the few remaining bites of her burger, so she put it on Bellamy’s plate, and he finished it for her. Her stomach was rumbling as it tried to settle itself, so she spaced off and wasn’t sure who was the first person to start talking about college. By the time she’d rejoined the conversation, her mother was saying, “A friend of mine who works with me at the hospital used to be a college admissions counselor. I could give you her number or her email. It wouldn’t hurt.”

“Yeah, that’d be great,” Bellamy said. “Thank you.”

“You’re gonna get accepted,” Clarke declared confidently. “I feel it.”

“I hope so,” Bellamy said. “You feel like I’m gonna get any scholarships? ‘cause that’s what I really need.”
“Mmm.” Her stepfather took a sip of his ice water, swallowing quickly. “I might be able to help with that,” he said. “Education was one of my biggest platforms during the last election. I’ve got some guys I can talk to who might be able to set you up with something.”

“Oh, no, you don’t have to,” Bellamy said. “I can’t ask you to do that.”

“It’s not guaranteed money, just grants and some affordable loans,” Marcus said. “But it could help.”

Clarke reached underneath the table and squeezed his hand. He didn’t have to worry or feel like they were taking pity on him. They weren’t looking at him like he was a charity case. He was a person whose company they were enjoying, and therefore, they wanted to help him. Her stepfather was often very focused on his own success, and her mother was often quite focused on her stepfather; so seeing them actually make someone else a priority . . . it was a nice change of pace.


After dinner, he got to put his handyman skills to use, because the garbage disposal wasn’t working. He crawled underneath the sink, banged around a bit, and somehow, that fixed the entire problem. Abby looked at him like he’d just cured cancer and said, “That is amazing! How do you know how to do that?”

“It’s not really that amazing,” Bellamy denied. “I’ve just fixed a lot of ‘em.”

“I wouldn’t even know where to begin with it,” Marcus said, carrying the rest of the dirty dishes into the kitchen. “Good job, Bellamy.”

He laughed lightly, still seeming a little self-conscious under the bright light of all this praise. He rolled with it, though, probably secretly enjoyed it.

Clarke smiled at him proudly, glad that he could make such a good impression. *Yeah, Bellamy,* she thought, *good job.*

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

When it first started to rain, Bellamy thought nothing of it. Just a light downpour, nothing he couldn’t handle. But then the rain picked up into a full on storm, and before he knew it, Marcus flipped on the news to reveal that there was some flash flooding going on in the area. The highway that he and Clarke were supposed to take home didn’t look good, and there was apparently some ‘old highway’ that could get them there, too, but there were a lot of accidents on that highway even in good weather. Abby said she didn’t like the thought of them driving home in the bad weather and fretted about it for half an hour.

Bellamy was pretty sure both he and his truck could handle it, but he didn’t want to worry either one of Clarke’s parents. So when they suggested that he and Clarke stay the night and go home tomorrow morning instead, he didn’t really resist the idea.

“I can just sleep down here on the couch,” he volunteered.

“Oh, no, we’ve got plenty of room upstairs,” Abby assured him. “What do you think, Marcus? The blue guest bedroom or the red one?”

They had more than one guest bedroom? Bellamy didn’t know why he was surprised by that. The house was gigantic.

He ended up in the blue guest bedroom, which was probably only given that name because the
bedspread was a dark blue. Sleeping in there felt like sleeping in some fancy hotel, and it made Bellamy wonder, if this was only a guest bedroom, just how nice was Marcus and Abby’s master?

The rain had lulled him to sleep, and he’d been out for a while when a particularly loud boom of thunder rang out, startling him awake. He sat straight up, immediately gasping for air, only because . . . that clap of thunder sounded a lot like the gunshot in Ocean City had.

_Dammit_, he thought, trying to push the memory out of his mind. It was just thunder, which meant that it was as normal and harmless as his neighbor’s fireworks had been. He took a few deep breaths to steady himself and listened as the rain pattered against the window. Maybe he could fall back asleep.

He glanced over at the other side of the bed, feeling like it was just some huge, empty space. Even though it was the same size as his one at home, he was used to sleeping next to Clarke. Neither one of them had really protested the separate rooms arrangement tonight—they were in her parents’ house, after all, and even though the fact that they were sexually active together was _obviously_ no secret to them, it just seemed like the most respectable thing to forgo sharing a bed. But Bellamy missed his girl next to him, missed the way she curled up against his side, the way her small hand rested on his chest at night and her leg draped across his. He missed the way her hair tickled his arms and shoulders, and he even missed the way she kicked the covers off.

Lying back down, he resolved to try to fall back asleep without her when his phone buzzed. He reached over onto the nightstand to pick it up, smirking when he saw a text from her. _Come play with me_, it said. So apparently she was lying awake, thinking about him, too.

He swung the covers aside and got out of bed, quietly slipping out of the room and tiptoeing down the hall. As he reached for the doorknob on the door he thought was hers, though, he second-guessed himself, not sure if that was her room or Abby and Marcus’s. There were so many rooms, and this was such a long hallway.

_Here goes nothing_, he thought, twisting the knob slowly. Worst case scenario, he stumbled in on her parents and claimed he’d been looking for the bathroom.

“Hey,” she said before he could even see her.

“Hey.” So he’d guessed right. Her room was completely dark, but his eyes quickly began to adjust. The moonlight peeking in through the blinds was enough to get a glimpse of her.

“I couldn’t sleep,” she said.

“Me, neither.” He shut the door softly and crept towards her bed. “So this was your room, huh?” he said, looking around. Even with no lights on, he could tell it was even bigger than that guest room was.

“Only for the last couple of years,” she said. “It’s not like a grew up here or anything.”

“Yeah.” He thought about lying down with her, but while he was up, he wanted to see what it looked like outside. So he went around to the other side of the bed, looked out the window, and said, “Damnit. It’s pretty bad out there.” Lightning was decorating the sky, and the rain was still coming down pretty hard.

“Good thing we’re in here then,” Clarke said, sticking her leg out so she could poke his calf with her toes. “You should get under the covers with me,” she suggested.

He looked over his shoulder, getting a kick out of the way she was covered up all the way to her...
neck, like she was freezing or something. “I don’t know how your parents would feel about that.”

“They never have to know,” she said, slowly lifting the blankets up to reveal . . . a whole lot of her underneath.

He blinked a few times, surprised to see that she was . . . completely naked. Apparently when she’d texted him to come play with her . . . she’d meant it.

“What’re you waiting for?” she teased playfully.

Well, shit, he thought, so much for respecting her parents. He didn’t care if it was wrong to sneak into her room and get a little frisky under their roof. When Clarke was already undressed and obviously horny, it wasn’t like he could resist.

He stripped down to his boxers and gave her a questioning look. When she nodded eagerly, he took those off, too, casting them aside as he crawled into bed with her. “Get on top of me,” she told him, holding the blankets up so he could get under them.

He did as she requested, settling in above her, trying to keep himself propped up as much as possible so that he wouldn’t crush her. She draped the blankets over him and lifted her legs up to graze against his sides as he nestled comfortably in between them. The second his limp cock brushed against her already wet pussy, he felt himself starting to get hard. Because he suspected he knew what she’d been up to before he got in here, and the picture he had in his mind was hot. “Were you touching yourself?” he asked.

“Maybe,” she replied.

“Did it work?”

“No.” She pouted. “That’s why I told you to come in here.”

“Oh, well, I’m happy to be of service.” As much as he enjoyed the thought of Clarke touching herself, he enjoyed more the fact that she found it unsatisfying compared to him.

She snaked one hand down in between them to grasp onto his cock, handling him swiftly and effectively. All it took were a few strokes, and he was feeling ready to go, if she didn’t mind skipping the foreplay, that was.

“You want me to fuck you?” he asked, even though the answer was obvious.

“Yeah,” she said. “Nice and slow.”

“Nice and slow, huh?” He could do that. Moving her hand aside, he gripped the base of his length and guided himself towards her entrance, relying more on the feel of her since he couldn’t see between them in such a dark room. He eased into her familiar warmth, sitting back a bit just to get himself positioned in there just right. When it felt perfectly snug and comfortable, he bent forward again, pressing his bare chest against hers, bracing himself on his forearms on either side of her head.

“Mmm,” she purred contentedly, coiling her legs around his waist. “You feel so good inside me.”

“Yeah,” he agreed breathily. It felt damn good to him, too. Sex with Clarke, whether it was rapid-fire fucking or slow and sensual like this . . . it was so lit. Honestly, he’d never had it so good with anyone.

He rolled his hips slowly against her, into her, touching her cheek and her hair reverently before
lowering his mouth to hers. He kissed her lazily, too distracted by the feel of her pebbled nipples against his chest to kiss her properly. “What if your parents walked in on us right now?” he murmured against her lips.

“Oh, well,” she said, rubbing her hands all over his back and shoulders. “Nothing they haven’t seen before.”

“Yeah, who knows?” he said, kissing her again. “Maybe they’re doin’ the same thing.”

“Ew, Bellamy.” She made a face of disgust. “Don’t kill the mood.”

“Sorry. I’ll salvage it.” He kept up his short, slow thrusts into her as he lowered his head further to suck on the smooth, satiny skin of her neck. He could feel her pulse point throbbing beneath his lips, and for some reason, that made him push into her a little deeper.

“Oh . . .” she moaned quietly, tangling one hand in his hair, rolling her head to the side to give him better access. Her breathing was already coming slowly but heavily. All the noises she made were so damn sexy, and they just spurred him on to suck her neck even harder.

“Wait a minute,” she said, gently tugging on his hair to get him to lift his head. “Don’t give me a hickey. They’ll see that tomorrow.”

He stilled his hips completely and gave her a look. “Is that really any more embarrassing than them seeing you ride me?”

She pretended to think about it for a moment, then said, “Hmm, good point,” and pushed his head back down again. Pressing her head back into the pillow, she gave him full access to the slender column of her neck and throat, and he got right back to work, kissing the spot he’d been working on before. He loved the thought of Clarke walking around with a hickey tomorrow, one she could easily conceal just by wearing her hair down. But he’d know it was there, and that was what mattered. It’d be like a secret way of making it known that she was his.

Once he was satisfied he’d left his mark, he kissed his way back up her cheek to her mouth, kissing her languidly, teasing the tip of her tongue with his own, brushing it against her lips. He was so caught up in just making out with her that he didn’t even realize he’d stopped thrusting until she dug her heels into his ass impatiently, wordlessly communicating with him to keep going.

“You wanna cum?” he asked, pressing his hips forward rhythmically.

“Yeah,” she gasped. “Please, Bellamy.”

Oh, it’d be so easy to get her off, he knew. All he had to do was push in a little farther, maybe reach down there to play with her clit. But she’d asked for nice and slow, and nice and slow was what she was going to get. “I’m gonna make you wait for it,” he taunted.


“Shh,” he whispered, pressing his index finger against her lips. “Don’t worry, I’ll get you there.” The truth was, he felt like he had some major stamina in him tonight. If he’d wanted to, he could have made this a marathon, drawn it out for half an hour or something. But he wouldn’t make her wait that long. Since she’d gotten an early start with her own hand, she’d go crazy if he drew it out for more than fifteen minutes.

The longer he fucked her, the more he started to work up a sweat. Her body was covered in a thin sheen of it, too. He could feel it on her stomach, mixing with his, in between her breasts as his chest
slid against hers. It got to the point where she couldn’t even grab onto his arms and shoulders without her hands slipping because of the sweat, and he felt beads of it dripping down the side of his face. The blankets and bedspread felt like heavy weights on him, so he tossed them aside, leaving their naked bodies covered only by the thin sheet; but he continued to stay close to her as they writhed together, each of them breathing harder and more raggedly as this wore on.

“Oh god, Bellamy,” she groaned when he changed his angle just slightly. At first, he wasn’t sure what had elicited that until she started pressing her hips down against him, trying to grind on his shaft. He realized he was positioned at just the right angle to rub against her clit with every thrust.

“Relax,” he told her, putting one hand on her hips to still her movements. “Just lie back . . . and let me make you cum.”


Oh god, that was so fucking hot to hear her say that. Clarke was all sexy and needy beneath him, and he was the one who could satisfy those needs. “I know, baby,” he said, lifting her left arm up above her head, where her right one was already positioned. He clasped both her wrists with one hand, keeping his other hand on her hip so he could effectively hold her in place while he continued to screw her slowly. Truth be told, he was getting closer to the edge himself, his initial stamina fading fast.

“Please,” she said, staring up at him pleadingly.

He smiled and kissed her mouth sloppily, just once, but he kept his face near hers, their breath mingling as he nearly pulled all the way out of her.

“Uh!” she whimpered in protest.

He kept the head of his cock in her, though, smirking, teasing her a bit, making her think he was going to pull out right before he shoved in all the way again.

“Oh!” she cried. Loudly. Way too loudly. If her mom and stepdad were still even the slightest bit awake, they had to hear what was going on.

Oh, well. Too late to stop now.

He repeated the maneuver several more times, pulling out all the way to the tip before slamming back inside. Each time he did it, he gauged her reaction, wondering how much more she could take. She had strands of her hair soaked to the side of her face now, and her thighs were so wet against his sides, wet with more than just sweat.

Dragging it out like this was making him mad with desire. Part of him wanted to just rage into her, get her to fall apart, and fuck her all the way through his own orgasm, too. But with the thunder roaring and lightning crashing outside, the rain pelting against the window, he liked the idea of being tender with her, keeping things soft and sweet since it wasn’t so sweet out there.

“I think you’ve waited long enough,” he said, finding that perfect angle to give her clit some friction again. He kept most of his cock buried within her and just grinded against hers, giving her what she needed, letting go of her wrists so she could grab at the pillows and she sheets as the breath tore through her lungs.

“Yeah, just like that,” she encouraged breathlessly, her whole body starting to shake beneath his. “You’re gonna make me cum.”
That was the idea.

“Oh god,” she gasped. “Bellamy!” With his name on her lips, she came hard, squeezing her eyes shut, gasping for air. Her mouth opened to form a perfect O, and he traced his thumb over her bottom lip, stalling his movements so that he could just watch her. Fuck, watching Clarke have an orgasm was one of the most beautiful things in the world. These past few months, she’d taken so much ownership over her own sexuality that when she came, she just let it overtake her. There was never one time that it happened that it hadn’t blown his mind.

Speaking of blowing . . . his cock felt like it was about to blow his brains out, so he fucked into her a few more times while she came down from her high, quickly finding his own release. It was never difficult to cum right after she came. Never. He shot his load into her eagerly and gratefully, his cock spasming on its own accord inside of her. “Fuck,” he swore as he rode it out. Going nice and slow had been agonizing, but it had also been pretty damn good.

Even though he knew he should pull out of her now that he was done, he wanted to stay inside her for a few minutes while he went soft again, so he lay down, resting his head against her sweat-soaked breasts, using them as his favorite pillow while both their breathing patterns returned to normal.

She pushed his damp hair off his forehead and ran her fingers through his hair adoringly. “Nobody has ever fucked me like you do,” she told him quietly, clamping her legs down tighter around his waist, almost as though she wanted to fall asleep with him inside her.

“Good,” he said proudly. Nobody ever would.
Chapter 35

Chapter 35

Attending Lexa’s wedding meant that Clarke had to buy a dress for Lexa’s wedding. She had some stashed in the back of her closet, but she felt the need for something new. Of course, finding one was easier said than done, because there were so many variables to consider. For instance, the color. Black was probably the safest bet, but in the wrong style or fabric, it’d look like she was going to a funeral. If she went with some kind of color, though, it could be too much. Red was out of the question, because it was too attention-seeking, and white obviously wouldn’t work since that was what the brides would be wearing. She’d never been much of a pink girl, and yellow and orange looked horrible with her skin tone. She ended up reverting back to blue, which was sort of her go-to color when she didn’t know what else to wear.

The style was problematic, however, because she had the type of figure where, if she wore something too form-fitting, it’d look like she was trying to steal the show away from the people who were actually getting married. Strapless was out of the question, but so many of the halter dresses looked like prom gowns.

Luckily, Niylah was available as reinforcement during the dress shopping. Clarke dragged her around to about five different stores and tried on dozens of dresses, some of which Niylah liked, but none of which Clarke liked well enough to purchase.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized as she zipped up the back of another blue dress. “I know I’m being indecisive.”

“No, it’s fine,” Niylah said. “Luna’s at work, so I don’t have anything better to do.”

“Studying?” Clarke suggested.

Niylah snorted. “Like I’d ever do that.”

Clarke laughed, shaking her head, and took a good look at herself in the ever-unflattering dressing room mirror. This dress definitely wasn’t flashy, but then again, it didn’t need to be. It was a navy shade of blue, cinched around the waist, and the short sleeves were lacy. It was a V-neck, but it didn’t go down far enough to show too much cleavage. Maybe this was the one?

“Okay,” she said, slowly stepping out the dressing room. “What do you think?”

Niylah tilted her head first to one side, then the other. “I like it,” she declared after a beat. “Simple. Chic. Still cute, though, which is what you wanna be at your ex-girlfriend’s wedding.”

“She probably won’t even notice me,” Clarke said.

“Oh, she’ll notice you,” Niylah assured her. “Especially if you wear the right bra. Which Bellamy will also notice.”

Clarke smiled. Truthfully, Bellamy was the one she most wanted to look pretty for anyway.

“Get this one,” Niylah told her. “Don’t second-guess it. Just do it.”

“Alright,” Clarke said, ready to be done with shopping anyway. “Decision made.” She went back into the dressing room and gave herself an affirmative nod in the mirror. Yeah, it was a decent look,
and totally appropriate for a wedding.

“So are you gonna try to catch the bouquet?” Niylah asked on the other side of the door.

“No,” Clarke answered swiftly as she got out of her the dress.

“Huh. I guess it doesn’t matter,” her friend went on. “It’s gonna happen anyway.”

Clarke made a face. “What do you mean by that?”

“You and Bellamy,” Niylah said, as though that clarified anything.

“What about me and Bellamy?”


“Obviously?” Clarke echoed. “Obviously not. We’re not even--”

“Oh, I know, I know,” Niylah cut in. “But you guys are perfect for each other and you know it.”

Clarke dropped her dress to the floor, stepping out of it carefully. Perfect for each other? she thought curiously. Was there such a thing? Could two people ever really be perfect for each other, especially when they weren’t . . .

“We’re not dating,” she said vehemently, interrupting her own thoughts. She and Bellamy were so close that it didn’t hurt to remind herself of that fact from time to time, especially when her friends seemed to so easily forget.

“He’s your date to the wedding,” Niylah pointed out. “And your constant companion.”

“Not constant,” Clarke muttered, although . . . yeah, it was pretty constant. Oh, well, whatever. They enjoyed each other’s company. And bodies.

“Raven said you’re moving in with him,” Niylah blurted suddenly.

“What?” Clarke rolled her eyes, impatiently yanking her clothes back on. “No, she suggested I move in with him.”

“You should,” Niylah agreed. “You practically live over there anyway. And then when you guys do get married . . .”

“Niylah,” Clarke cut in sharply. “Please stop.”

Niylah fell silent for a few seconds before quietly mumbling an apology. “Sorry.”

Clarke looked at herself in the mirror again, not liking the glint of sadness she saw in her own eyes. What was there to be sad about? She had a great guy in her life who also happened to be a great friend, and he wasn’t going anywhere. Right now, the future just wasn’t something they had to think about.

Bellamy didn’t really do much to prepare for his and Clarke’s road trip to Missouri. What was there to do? You got on the Interstate and drove. GPS wasn’t even necessary. He packed up a bag the night before they were set to leave, but other than that, the only thing he did was make sure he had enough cash on hand to buy snacks at every pit stop.
Clarke was trying to be spontaneous, but it was so clearly killing her not to have things planned out in detail. She kept asking about how much of the drive they were going to get out of the way on day one, and his response was always to shrug and say, “I don’t know. We’ll see.” She’d then try a different variation of the question, like asking which state they’d probably end up in that first night. He just kept shrugging and telling her they’d find out.

She wanted to look up interesting and cheap things to do in Missouri, as well as all the other states they were passing through. But every time she got her phone out and started to search, he snatched it away from her and said, “Whatever catches our eye, that’s what we’ll go see.”

“But Bellamy,” she whined in protest, “we have literally no plan here. What if we end up trying to see something that takes too much time, and then we don’t get to the wedding on time, and then all of this was for nothing—”

He had to silence her with a kiss before reminding her, “It’s not all for nothing. It’s about the journey, Clarke, not the destination.”

She rolled her eyes, pretending to be annoyed. “You sound like a cheesy motivational poster.”

“I’m serious, though.” The open road was all about an open mind, and Clarke’s mind wouldn’t be open if she had some kind of itinerary for them.

Even though they’d said they would go to bed early Thursday night in order to get an early start on the drive tomorrow, he had to take Clarke’s mind off their lack of a plan, and the easiest way to do that was to take her out to TonDC. The whole crew was there—Thirsty Thursday, after all. Raven and Niylah seemed to have abandoned Mount Weather now that they knew what a better club TonDC was, and even Wells had shown up, though he looked like he was ready to bolt and go home and study.

He got Clarke out on the dance floor and swayed around with her for a while, pressed in close behind her, hands on his hips while she flung her head back against his shoulder. Clarke still wasn’t a particularly good dancer, never would be, but she’d gotten a little bit better and even could hold her own on the Wop now. It helped when she had a few drinks in her, just enough to get her buzzed but not plastered.

After they were tired of the dance floor, they sat down on one of the couches and tried to socialize, but any attempt at that soon was lost as they started making out with each other. It was hard for Bellamy to keep his hands from venturing down the back of her pants or crawling up under her shirt, but he managed to do it somehow. She ended up sitting in his lap, not straddling him, though, because they’d have to go out to the truck for a quickie if she straddled him.

“Fuckin’ seriously?” Miller said as he and Jackson came back from the bar with shots for everyone. “Do you guys ever come up for air?”

Bellamy tore his mouth away from Clarke’s and joked, “We try not to,” grinning as she nibbled playfully on his ear.

“I can’t believe you two met at Walmart,” Jackson said, shaking his head. “And here I thought Nate and I had the weirdest first meeting.”

“How’d you meet?” Raven asked.

Miller smirked. “I was at the hospital giving blood like the good Samaritan I am. This guy here . . .” He jerked his thumb towards his boyfriend. “He couldn’t find my vein, hit a muscle instead.”
“You made me nervous,” Jackson said in his own defense.

“I actually asked for another doctor,” Miller recalled.

“And then I asked for his phone number,” Jackson added. “The rest is history.” He leaned over and kissed Miller, and Raven “aww”-ed exaggeratedly.

“That’s like a romantic comedy,” she said before looking to Roan. “What about us? We met in your sex shop.”

Roan smiled proudly. “That we did.”

Clarke seemed to want to keep making out with him—the plan to get her buzzed had definitely worked, and then some—but Bellamy sat her down beside him and put his arm around her instead. “We gotta interact with people,” he reasoned.

She pouted. “But you’re the only person I wanna interact with.”

“We’re gonna ‘interact’ in every state we drive through,” he promised. “Trust me.”

“Mmm.” She smiled excitedly, not so worried about having everything planned out right now, and snuggled into his side.

For some reason, the conversation ended up revolving around the number of sex partners they had all had, which Bellamy couldn’t exactly recall—he hadn’t tried to keep count, and even if he had, he would’ve lost count a while ago. There were some hazy nights in the years between Roma and Gina, and even more hazy ones in between Gina and Clarke. Lots of one night stands that hadn’t been particularly memorable, so . . . well, he hadn’t bothered to remember them.

A few people seemed surprised when Clarke revealed she’d only slept with three people before, and Emori even said, “Really? I thought it’d be way more than that.”

Clarke gave her a look. “What does that mean? Do I give off slut vibes or something?”

“Hey, wait a minute,” Niylah cut in. “I’m well into the double digits, and I’m not a slut.”

“Sorry,” Clarke said apologetically. “No, just three for me, though. Why is that so hard to believe?”

“Well, your art exhibit for starters,” Emori mumbled.

“He was the only one in those pictures,” Clarke said, gesturing wildly to Bellamy.

He smirked. *Hell, yeah.*

“Don’t remind me,” Octavia muttered, groaning as Lincoln rubbed her lower back for her. “Okay, I got you beat on the lower end of the spectrum. One. One and only.”

“Thank God,” Bellamy whispered. It was at least a mild comfort to know that, even though his sister was knocked up, at least Lincoln was the only guy she’d ever been with.

Niylah ended up having the highest number of partners for the girls, in large part due to some crazy twelve-girl orgy she confessed to taking part in as a college freshman. Bellamy thought he might have the highest number for the guys until Roan blurted out some insane triple-digit number that put his estimation to shame.

The conversation easily would have stayed lighthearted (and probably sex-focused) like that if
Octavia wouldn’t have gasped suddenly and sat up straighter. “Oh my god!” she exclaimed, immediately grabbing Lincoln’s hand and putting it on her stomach. “He’s kicking!”

Lincoln’s eyes immediately grew wide with amazement. “Oh my god.”

“Oh, can we feel?” Harper asked eagerly.

“Yeah,” Octavia said, “just a minute.” She and Lincoln sat together in silence—everyone else had fallen silent at that point, too—feeling their child move for the first time, and then she broke out into laughter. “Wow, that’s so weird,” she said.

“What’s it feel like?” Maya asked.

“Like popcorn popping.” She motioned the girls over, and they all took their turn. Each one seemed to agree that it felt strange but cool.

Clarke stayed with Bellamy, though, nuzzling her face against his shoulder. “Do you wanna go feel?” she asked. “That’s your nephew.”

That’s him, Bellamy thought. Seeing Octavia’s round belly was something he was still getting used to, just like seeing her sonogram pictures. Actually feeling that baby kick . . . it’d be strange, but it’d probably be kind of neat.

Before he could answer Clarke, Octavia looked over at him and said, “Come here.”

The girls moved aside, making way for him, and he got up, pulling Clarke to her feet along with him.

“He must be kickboxing or something,” Octavia said, shaking her head in astonishment.

“Probably gets that from you,” Clarke said. “Can I?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Clarke bent down and lay one palm flat against Octavia’s stomach, her eyebrows immediately shooting upward. “Oh, wow,” she said. “That is weird.”

“First time I’ve felt him kick,” Octavia revealed. “I was starting to think I never would.”

“Now he’ll probably do it all night,” Lincoln said.

She shot him a warning look.

“Go ahead, Bellamy,” Clarke said, stepping aside. She looked excited for him, and he had to admit . . . he kind of felt excited, too. His nephew . . . his nephew was in there. Maybe this was his way of saying hi.

“Is it kinda annoying to have everyone come up and touch your stomach?” he asked his sister as he squatted down and did the same.

“A little,” she admitted.

He moved his hand around a bit, trying to feel whatever he was supposed to feel. But he didn’t feel anything. No movement, no kicking. Definitely nothing that seemed like popcorn popping.

He frowned, slowly withdrawing his hand. “I don’t feel anything,” he said.
She smiled at him sadly. “Maybe next time.”

Bellamy nodded wordlessly, trying to swallow his disappointment. *Yeah, maybe then.*

He and Clarke were the second ones to leave that night, after only Lincoln and Octavia, who weren’t doing many late nights out anymore. Bellamy hadn’t really felt like doing much drinking or dancing as the night wore on, and he and Clarke *did* have that early morning tomorrow.

“You okay?” she asked when they walked in the front door of his house.

“Yeah.”

“Because you seemed kinda . . . bummed,” she noted.

He shrugged, mumbling, “I’m just bad luck with babies, I guess.”

She stared up at him sympathetically, cupping his cheek with her soft hand. “Bellamy . . .”

“It’s okay.” He brushed past her and flopped down on the couch, determined not to feel too sorry for himself. His nephew would kick again, and he’d get to feel it. So what if he’d never gotten to feel that with his own child? That was life. That was *his* life. Nothing he could do about it now.

Clarke sat down beside him, curling her legs up underneath herself. “It’s gotta be hard for you,” she empathized, “seeing them start a family when . . .” She trailed off, letting out a shuddering breath. “That doesn’t mean you’re bad luck, though.”

“Hopefully not,” he said, grabbing the remote off the arm of the couch so he could flip on the TV. “I wanna be a good uncle, especially since I didn’t get to be . . .” He, too, let his sentence fade. The word *father* was hard to say.

“You will be a good uncle,” she said, running her hands through his hair. “Probably the best.”

“I’ll sure as hell try,” he said, channel surfing quickly until he found a good documentary. Korean War. Riveting stuff. He tossed the remote aside, wrapped his arm around Clarke, and pulled her into his side. It felt good to hold her, even in silence. Feeling her in his arms made it easier not to dwell on the fact that he hadn’t felt his nephew kick tonight.

 Clarke didn’t even remember falling asleep, which meant she must have dozed off on the couch. She woke up in her usual spot, though, in Bellamy’s bed, which must have meant that he’d carried her upstairs last night. He practically had to carry her out the door that morning, too, because it was so early in the a.m. it was still kind of dark outside. Mornings were a real struggle for her, especially early mornings, but he always seemed to handle them fine.

Once they got on the road, though, and she saw the ‘*Thanks for visiting Arkadia! Please come again!*’ sign on the way out of town, she started to wake up. This road trip was a real thing now, no longer just an idea. And it would be fun. Because she’d be with Bellamy.

Just the two of them.

For days.

Perfect.

“You got any music?” he asked, switching off the radio.
“Yep, I made a playlist,” she proudly declared, taking her iPod out of her purse.

“What do you have on there?”

“Just fun songs.”

“Define fun.”

“Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Beyonce . . .”

“What the fuck kind of playlist is that?” he shrieked.

“Don’t worry, I put some of Miller’s rap stuff on it, too,” she said. “And some of that weird music you sent me, the kind nobody’s ever heard of.”

“That’s the best kind,” he insisted.

She hooked up her iPod and blasted a classic rock song that she knew he liked, “Thunderstruck,” by AC/DC.

“Oh, alright,” he said approvingly.

“Now everyone’s heard this one.”

AC/DC, The Beatles, and Queen carried most of the tunes for the start of their drive—hearing Bellamy belt out “We Are the Champions” at the top of his lungs was a real highlight. By the time they were halfway through Pennsylvania, she’d switched to some more mellow songs, and he seemed to be a lot more chilled out and relaxed. He had this content look on his face as he drove. The sun made his eyes shine and illuminated his whole smile. He looked . . . amazing.

So amazing that she couldn’t resist.

It began with a hand on his lap, just resting there innocently enough. But sooner than later, she started rubbing his cock through his jeans, and he just sat there and let her. Finally, he urged, “If you wanna go for it, just go for it.” So she unfastened his jeans and reached inside, managing to pull his semi-hard erection free of his underwear. It sprang into her eagerly-awaiting hand, and she pumped it gently, with no real hurry in mind. For five more miles, he continued to drive in comfortable silence while she handled him and some underground soft rock song filled the vehicle. One she started stroking him faster, though, his breathing began to quicken, and his grip on the steering wheel tightened. He came not long afterward, squirting all over her hand.

She realized she hadn’t really thought this through. Because now there was all this sticky cum that she had to clean up, and she had nothing to clean it with. Maybe he could stop at a gas station and get her some napkins. Or maybe . . . well, he might drive off the road if she sat there and licked every single finger clean.

“Did you like that?” she asked.

“Uh, yeah,” he said, zipping his pants back up. “You’re good at that.”

She’d gotten a lot better since they’d gotten together. “I’m an artist, you know,” she boasted. “That’s called ‘finger-painting.’”

He tossed his head back against the seat and laughed.

In Ohio, they had to make their first stop for gas, and while Bellamy was filling the tank, Clarke went inside the station and picked up a brochure for things to do in the area. Bellamy rolled his eyes
when she brought it out to him, reminding her about the spontaneity thing, but she told him she
thought she was being spontaneous enough already, and one little brochure wouldn’t hurt anything.
It turned out to be the perfect resource of ideas, too, because his eyes lit up when he saw a picture of
some aquarium only a mile or so off the interstate. “You wanna go there?” he asked her.

The idea of watching a bunch of fish swim around didn’t sound particularly riveting to her, but she
could tell he wanted to go, so she said, “Sure,” and stuffed the brochure in her purse.

Even though Bellamy fancied himself some world class navigator who had a great sense of direction,
he took a wrong turn on the way to the aquarium, and it ended up taking them twice as long as it
should have to get there. He had to buckle down and rely on Siri to tell him where to go, but once
they got there, he took all the credit. “See?” he said. “Told you I wouldn’t get lost.”

“Oh, whatever!” she yelped, whacking his shoulder playfully.

Once inside the aquarium, Clarke had to admit, it was much cooler than she’d thought it would be. It
wasn’t just typical fish. There were jellyfish and sting rays and even some small sharks. Plus, the
Octopus latched onto the glass wall was kind of awesome, because he just so clearly didn’t give a
fuck about any of the visitors.

Clarke was mainly content to just point out the prettiest fish, the ones with the most unique coloring
and stuff like that. But Bellamy, of course, was the only person there who, rather than just watching
all the animals swim around, took the time to read the information placards about all the different
species. Science wasn’t even his favorite thing, and yet here was, still being the biggest nerd on the
planet. When she’d first met him, she never would have pictured that he was such a dork, what with
him having the body of a jock and face of a male model, after all. In truth, though, his intelligence
and passion for knowledge just made him ten times sexier, so she wasn’t complaining.

Their second stop in Ohio came about an hour later, when they’d stopped at McDonald’s for the
worst French fries and soggiest chicken nuggets Clarke had ever eaten in her entire life. Bellamy
happened to look across the street and see a billboard advertising a book store. “Oh, we gotta go
there,” he said.

“The Ron Chee book store?” Clarke read. Leave it to Bellamy to want to buy literature on a road
trip.

“It’s an adult book store,” he said.

“What?” How did he know that? It didn’t say anything on the billboard.

“Ron . . . Chee,” he said emphatically. “The Ron Chee book store.” He gave her a look, like he
expected her to get it. “Raunchy, Clarke.”

“Oh!” That made more sense. Suddenly, that bookstore sounded like a better idea.

They spent a little longer at Ron Chee’s than they probably should have—there was just something
so enjoyable about making fun of sexy things that were so bad they were good. It was like making
fun of stuff at Ice Nation, or getting a kick out of Murphy’s vintage VHS porn collection, which he
had stashed under his bed and assumed nobody knew about. Somehow, they walked out of that store
with five books, most of which Bellamy had picked out himself. “I’m gonna get tired when I drive,”
he reasoned. “You can read that stuff to me to keep me awake.”

“Oh,” she said, seeing right through his flimsy logic. He just wanted the smut.

Clarke ended up napping through most of Indiana. The further west they went, the more sparsely
populated things became. Sure, there were a few big cities here and there, but for the most part, it
was a lot of open highway and not much else. It was pretty much a straight shot, though, so the ride
was smooth and easy, and Bellamy was a very good driver.

She only woke up when she felt his hand on her shoulder, gently shaking her awake. “Clarke,” he
said. “You want anything? I’m gonna go get somethin’ to drink.”

“What?” She blinked her tired eyes open, taking in her surroundings. They were at another gas
station, but she had no idea if they were still in Indiana or if they’d made it to . . . what was the next
one over? Illinois? Iowa? Did they even need to go through Iowa? “Where are we?” she asked,
yawning.

“I don’t know,” he replied flippantly. “Somewhere in Indiana. I gotta go stretch my legs.”

“I’ll go with you,” she said, rubbing her eyes. It’d be good for her to get up and move around a little,
too. According to her phone, it was 5:00 in the afternoon. They’d been driving for hours.

She started to perk up as she roamed around the convenience store. That nap had been really good
for her. She felt bad for Bellamy, though, because he had to keep himself alert while he was at the
wheel, and she hadn’t been much help in that endeavor. He kept tilting his head from side to side, as
though he had a crick in his neck, and bypassed the sodas in favor of an energy drink. He took one
look at the ingredients, however, shook his head, and declared, “I can’t drink this shit.”

“You can rest; I can drive,” she offered.

“No, I’m good,” he said quickly. He didn’t have to say that he was protective over his truck for
Clarke to know that he was. Just letting her drive it to D.C. last month had to have been agonizing
for him.

She had to admit, though . . . there was something about being the chick in the passenger seat while
her man sat behind the wheel . . . it was oddly sexy. Bellamy looked so good when he drove. Hell,
Bellamy looked good all the time.

He looked sexy as hell walking around this gas station right now, too, his plaid flannel shirt hanging
loosely on his shoulders, five o’clock shadow creeping onto his face and chin. Clarke forgot all about
being tired and allowed herself to complete fixate on him, to the point where he eventually stopped
looking at the snacks and instead look at her. “What?” he asked.

“You just look . . . really sexy,” she told him, trying to contain her hormones.

His eyes swept up and down her body appreciatively. “So do you.”

Oh, yeah, she felt real sexy, with her hair falling out of its ponytail and her makeup probably long
worn-off. But really, even when she had bed-head hair and mascara smudged all around her eyes,
Bellamy didn’t seem to mind. He wasn’t picky. He pretty much wanted her all the time, just like she
wanted him all the time.

All the time.

Even right now.

She glanced around the store, wishing those other customers would just leave. And the clerk could
go right along with them. If she and Bellamy were alone right now . . .

“What’re you thinking about?” he asked suspiciously.
God, was she that obvious? “Nothing,” she said nonchalantly. “Just that . . .” She lowered her voice, moving in close to him. “If these people weren’t here, I would be on my knees with your cock in my mouth.”

His eyebrows surged upward. “Really?”

“Yeah.” She liked giving him blowjobs, but she didn’t do it nearly as much as he went down on her. He always made her pleasure the utmost priority, but his pleasure mattered just as much to her.

Bellamy looked around, and she could tell . . . he was entertaining the same idea she was. What if they just did that right here, right now? The only other customers in the store were heading up to the checkout counter. It wasn’t like they’d mosey towards the back of the store for anything. And as long as they didn’t make it too obvious, the clerk would probably have no idea what was going on, either.

He gave her an almost challenging look and shrugged, as if to say that he was game for it.

Oh my god, Clarke thought, glancing down at his crotch. Am I really doing this?

When he unbuttoned his jeans, the answer became obvious: Yes.

Everything had to be quick, so he just barely popped his cock out of his pants, and she made sure no one was looking before she dropped to her knees. She held him at the base and took him straight into her mouth, sucking hurriedly and greedily, hoping to get him off in record time. Because as much as she loved the thrill of this, it wasn’t even just semi-public sex this time; it was public. Nothing semi about it when only a row of potato chips and crackers were concealing you from someone else’s view.

“Shit, baby,” Bellamy swore, tangling one hand in her hair. He glanced over his shoulder, carefully monitoring the situation up at the counter. He was probably trying to act natural, but he looked more conspicuous than he should have.

She couldn’t help but laugh a little—though that wasn’t easy with his cock filling up her mouth—and that must have felt good to him somehow, because his eyes nearly rolled back into his head. “Clarke,” he choked out.

Putting on her best innocent expression, she looked up at him, making eye contact as she bobbed her head up and down his length. This was so bad. It was just so bad to be doing this. And wrong. Wrong on so many levels. This probably rivaled the sex on the Mount Weather dance floor as one of the riskiest things they’d ever done.

Oh god, she loved it, though. She loved it so much.

“Get up, get up,” Bellamy said suddenly, pulling her to her feet. She understood why when she noticed that someone else was roaming around the gas station now, a young guy who seemed to have his sights set on something in their direction. She wiped off her mouth with the back of her hand as he quickly pulled his pants back up, but he didn’t even have time to zip them before that guy came around to their side of the shelves and grabbed a bag of Doritos. He lingered, paying them no attention, and seemed to be debating what he wanted for his second bag.

What a cock-block.

Bellamy angled his back towards their fellow customer and pretended to be all interested in buying snacks of his own. Clarke acted like she was busy debating whether or not to get a red or blue Gatorade, when in reality the only thing she was interested in drinking down was Bellamy. She kept
grabbing one or the other, then putting them back, feigning indecisiveness. She was just waiting for that guy to go away so she could suck Bellamy’s cock some more.

When that guy finally settled on a second bag of Doritos and left them alone back there, they got straight down to it again. Bellamy pulled his cock back out, and Clarke sank down on her knees again, quickly taking him back into her mouth. He was painfully hard, but that it made it so easy to move her mouth back and forth on him. He was wet and sticky with a mixture of pre-cum and her saliva, and she couldn’t wait to get him off. The thirst was quite literal in this moment; she wanted to taste his cum.

It didn’t take long. A gas station blow-job was certainly not meant to promote stamina. He came hard in her mouth, and she was careful not to let any of it spill out the sides onto her chin. They still had to walk out of this gas station, hopefully with some semblance of dignity intact, and that wouldn’t be possible if she was wiping her boyfriend’s cum off her face.

“That was so hot,” Bellamy told her, quickly pulling his pants back up. “But we have to get outta here. I think the clerk’s onto us.”

Clarke swallowed down everything he’d given her and licked her lips, then tried to be as subtle as possible as she stood up. It wasn’t subtle, though, and all she could do was keep her head downcast, eyes averted as she scampered back out to the truck with Bellamy.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe I did that,” she squealed, giggling as she spilled back into her seat.

“I can,” Bellamy said, twisting the key in the ignition. “Don’t get me wrong, you’re still a princess, but . . .” He grinned at her lasciviously. “You’re a dirty little princess sometimes.”

She blushed, supposing that was true. And perhaps it had been ever since that first night with him at Dropship, right here in this pickup truck. Even though that had felt less public than this, it’d really only been some steamed up windows concealing them from everyone else back then. Truth was, she’d always been willing to be wild with him. Always. Even back when she’d barely known him.

Bellamy seemed to have it in his head that he owed her one for everything she’d done for him today. The hand-job and the blow-job had caught him by surprise, he admitted, and he couldn’t let that go un-rewarded. She could tell he was absolutely exhausted, though, because he wasn’t actively complaining about the songs on her playlist as much, and even the cheesiest, most ridiculous lines in the erotic novels weren’t getting much of a reaction out of him anymore. Finally, he admitted, “We gotta find a hotel. I can barely keep my eyes open.”

Unfortunately for them, they’d crossed into Illinois now, and Illinois had a whole lot of nothing going on. This wasn’t Chicago or any huge urban area like that. This was miles and miles of open interstate, and it seemed like it could take a while to get from one town to the next.

“There’s a Motel 6 up here,” Clarke said, pointing to a road sign.

“No,” Bellamy said, shaking his head, “I can’t make you stay in a Motel 6. That’s too crappy.” He drove right past that exit, and it was at least another twenty minutes—and twenty tired yawns from him—until they came upon another town. This one looked slightly bigger than the last; there were a few traffic lights, and they had a Super 8 as opposed to a Motel 6. Clarke assured him that was fine. She’d never actually stayed in a Super 8 before, but she acted like she had. They got their room, which he still refused to let her pay for, even in his weary state. In contrast to how their morning had started, he was now the one who was almost too tired to put one foot in front of the other, and she was the one having to drag him around.
“What time is it?” he groaned as they staggered into their room.

“Late,” she lied, even though it was only 9:30. She flipped on the light and surveyed the room. Not bad at all. It was pretty standard, but at least it looked clean.

“I feel like I’ve been driving for eighty-four years,” he exaggerated, dropping his bag on the floor. He flopped down on the bed, arms and legs all sprawled out, and Clarke doubted he would move much from that position at all.

“You need to wear your glasses tomorrow,” she told him, cuddling up beside him. He probably had eye strain.

“I will,” he said. “Don’t worry, I’m gonna . . .” He yawned as he toed off his shoes and let them fall next to his bag. “I’m gonna return the favor at some point. For everything you did today.”

“Oh, are you?”

“Yeah.” He sounded determined, but it probably wouldn’t happen.

“You don’t have to,” she said, more than happy to just lie next to him and fall asleep tonight. Sure, the road trip was a good time so far, but she was tired, too. Besides, if he didn’t do anything to her tonight, he’d probably surprise her when she woke up tomorrow morning. Waking up to the feel of his hand between her legs would definitely start the day off right.

“You’re so good to me, Princess,” he said, his words blending together as the sleep took hold. “I . . .” He trailed off, completely lost to his own exhaustion. She lay her head on his arm, her hand on his steadily rising and falling chest, and tilted her face back to appreciate how cute and boyish he looked when he slept. God, he was so adorable sometimes, mostly when he wasn’t even trying to be.

She leaned in and pressed a goodnight kiss to his stubbly cheek, then snuggled against him again. The light was still on, and they were both still dressed in their clothes, but she didn’t have any desire to move. Especially not when he tightened his arm around her and pulled her closer, probably without even realizing it.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

I gotta say, I think this chapter includes one of the dirtiest sex scenes in the entire fic. So . . . enjoy. ;)

Chapter 36

The second day of the road trip didn’t require Clarke to wake up quite as early as the first one had, but Bellamy could tell it was still earlier than she would have liked. He woke up without an alarm, got out of bed, went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth, and she just continued to lie there on her stomach, face buried in the pillow, unwilling to move. He tried to entice her to get in the shower with him, but even that didn’t work. By 8:00, when he was all ready to go, he manhandled her out of bed despite her groans of protest, undressed her, and shoved her into the shower by herself before heading downstairs to see if there were any kind of breakfast foods available. He wasn’t expecting much from a Super 8 motel, but . . . maybe an apple. A bagel. Something.

It took her until 9:00 to finally get ready to go, and it was still too early for her. “We should just be waking up right now,” she mumbled, yawning tiredly, even though they’d gotten plenty of sleep last night.

Once they got back out on the road, though, she perked up. She put her eclectic playlist on shuffle mode and sang and danced in the passenger’s seat to “Teenage Dream,” by Katy Perry. And she was so cute about it, he couldn’t even find it in himself to be annoyed by the stupidity of the song.

“Sorry I fell asleep so early last night,” he apologized, turning down the volume on the music once the song was over.

“Why are you sorry?” she asked. “You drove all day.”

“Yeah, but . . . we’re supposed to be hookin’ up in every state.”

“We are,” she said.

“We skipped Ohio.”

“Well, we can do it there on the way back,” she said. “Pennsylvania was . . . you know.” She wriggled her fingers suggestively. “And then Indiana . . .” She trailed off, blushing.

“Indiana,” he echoed, licking his lips as he thought about it. Damn, that had been one hot blowjob. “You’re makin’ it all about me. I haven’t even done anything to you.”

“Well, you could,” she pointed out, slipping one hand in between her legs to touch herself.

“Hmm.” That was definitely tempting, to reach over there and use his fingers to get her off, just like she’d done to him yesterday. But Clarke had to sit in that seat the rest of the way to Missouri, and they still had a few hours to drive. If she made a mess, she’d regret it. “I got a better idea,” he said, switching into the right lane so he could take the upcoming exit off the interstate.
“Where are we going?” she asked.

“Nowhere.” Literally, they were in the middle of nowhere. There was a gas station not far off the exit and a few houses about a mile down the road, but other than that . . . nothing.

“I wanna fuck you,” he declared bluntly, pulling over onto the side of the road.

“Here?” she asked, looking around. “In the truck?”

Well, that was one option, but . . . that gas station looked pretty deserted, and there were no cars coming in either direction for as far as the eye could see. “Not in the truck,” he said, undoing his seatbelt. He climbed out and heard her gasp.

On his way around to her side, he lowered the tailgate, suddenly very sexually inspired, and then opened the door for her. “Come on,” he said, grabbing her arms to help her down onto the ground.

“Bellamy, we’re in the middle of nowhere,” she fretted.

“Exactly.” It’d be public as hell, but what were the chances anyone would actually see them?

“There’s, like, nothing to conceal us.”

“Nope.” He brought her around to the back of the truck and pounded his fist against the lowered tailgate, predicting, “This should be good.”

“You want me to get up there?” she asked.

Already, his hands were fumbling with his jeans. “No, just bend over.”

As worried and embarrassed as might have been trying to act, he saw the flash of excitement in her eyes, the kind that reassured him she was totally okay with this, even if she did try to protest.

“You wanna get fucked?” he asked, lowering his pants and underwear just enough to pull his cock out.

“Yeah.”

“Then let me fuck you.” He gave himself a few long strokes, almost instantly hard, because the thought of doing her right out in the open like this was a major fantasy of his.

“Oh my god,” she said, rolling her eyes, huffing in mock outrage as she turned around and pulled her leggings down over her hips.

“This, too,” he said, snapping the waist band of her pretty little thong against her skin.

She lowered that per his request and then bent over on the tailgate, her bare backside completely exposed and waiting for him.

“You have such a perfect ass,” he complimented, smoothing his hands over her round cheeks.

“Are you gonna fuck it?” she asked almost teasingly.

“On the side of the road?” He snorted. “Yeah, right.” When he finally did have anal sex with her, he was gonna do his best to make it romantic. “I’m gonna fuck your pussy, though,” he said, never one to grow tired of being sheathed inside her there. That was another perfect part of her, and it deserved some attention after everything she’d done for him yesterday.
“Hurry up, before somebody drives by,” she said, wriggling her butt playfully.

He put his hands on her hips to still her, not about to admit that he was secretly hoping someone would drive by. It was perverted as hell of him to want someone to see him fucking her, but . . . whatever. It was what it was.

A hiss of air escaped her lungs as he slammed into her roughly, filling her up in just one thrust. He started moving right away, holding onto her sides so he could pull her back against him while he pushed forward. It made for a nice, deep penetration, and god, she felt so tight and wet around him. And she looked so good bent over like this.

“Fuck,” she swore. “Oh, Bellamy . . . oh god, yes.”

Hearing her moan and groan and say all sorts of things during sex was one of his biggest turn-ons. He knew she wasn’t just making sounds for the sake of stroking his ego, wasn’t just pretending to love every second of this. She did love it, and whatever words came out of her mouth were words of pure pleasure. Nothing exaggerated, nothing fake.

He got this reaction out of her. Only him.

Bellamy glanced over his shoulder as he fucked her, and he noticed a car a long way down the road. Either he could try to finish up before it got closer, or he could slow down, prolong it so that they’d have something interesting to see when they drove past.

He opted for the second one, even though part of him feared there would be kids in the car. It wasn’t like he was trying to scar anyone for life or anything like that. He just . . . he really wanted to keep fucking her, draw it out, make it last.

“Come here,” he said, slipping one hand underneath her stomach. He lifted her up, holding her straight against him, and kept his cock buried inside her. The angle wasn’t an easy one, so he had to tell her, “Spread your legs,” to make it work better.

She obediently moved each foot further apart, and then gasped sharply as he started pounding up into her again. “Oh god!”

He cupped and squeezed her breasts through her shirt with one hand, sliding the other down her stomach and lower abdomen to fondle the juncture between her legs. “Can you take that?” he whispered in her ear.

“Yeah,” she choked out as her pussy clamped down around his cock with no rhyme or reason. “Oh, I love it.”

“What do you love?” he asked, hoping to hear her say she loved his cock or his hands or the way he fucked her.

“I love . . .” Her whole body shuddered when he pinched her clit between his thumb and index finger. When she was finally able to answer, it was even hotter than he’d been hoping for: “I love the way you fill me up.”

Well, fuck, if that didn’t make him nearly shoot his load right then and there. He could hear the car behind them getting closer, and she still seemed oblivious to it, so he pressed down on her shoulders again to bend her over, grabbed hold of her hips, and started surging into her again, his skin slapping against hers as he sought out her orgasm more than his own.

“Fuck,” he grunted, squeezing his eyes shut for a second, fighting hard to keep from cumming. If she
didn’t get off before he did, then he was going to lift her up into the bed of that truck, pull her hips nice and close to the edge, and eat her out right there. Because there was no way he could get back on the road having had three orgasms to her zero. That just wasn’t even fair to her.

When the car finally did drive past, the driver honked the horn as if in approval, and Clarke immediately freaked out. “Oh my god!” she yelped. “Bellamy!”

He just chuckled, reaching around to touch her clit again.

“Did you know—did you know they were coming?” she asked.

He didn’t really care about who was coming or going on that road. All he cared about was her cumming.

“Bellamy?”

“There’s someone else up ahead,” he said, pointing out a van that was slowing down on the exit ramp. “You think you can get off before they make it over here?”

She groaned low in her throat, pressing her ass back against him wantonly. “You have to make me.”

“I’ll make you,” he promised, rubbing her clit faster, harder. At the end of the exit ramp, the van did turn in their direction, but it was still up there a ways. They’d be cutting it close. “Come on, Clarke,” he said, not sure how much longer he could hold out, either. He fucked her and touched her deliberately, determinedly, and when he felt her pussy clench around him again, he knew he had her.

“Oh, fuck!” she whimpered, her hands gripping the edge of the tailgate tightly as she came. “Shit!”

There was no time to slow down as that vehicle slowly approached. A van like that could have been driven by a soccer mom, and that meant there could be kids in there on their way to soccer practice. Bellamy finished off as quickly as he could, pulling out of her the second he was done splattering cum all over her insides, and hastily pulled his pants back up. He did the same for her and tugged on the back of her shirt to get her to stand up straight. Seconds later, the van drove past them. Bellamy saw a woman at the wheel, but that was it. She barely even noticed them.

“That was close,” Clarke said. “Maybe we should just go before somebody calls the cops on us.”

“Good idea.” He shut the tailgate and scampered back to the driver’s seat. She climbed in the truck, too, giggling and saying, “I can’t believe we just did that,” as he twisted the key in the ignition and whipped back out onto the road.

He could believe it, though. Clarke was always willing to walk on the wild side with him.

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Herculaneum, Missouri was smaller than Arkadia. Like way smaller. So small, in fact, that there wasn’t even a suitable hotel to stay in. They had to stay in a nearby town about five miles away, where the Holiday Inn seemed to be their best bet.

Honestly, Clarke would have been okay with the Motel 6, which was one of the other options. (Of course Bellamy was paying, even though this whole road trip was really all for her.) It didn’t matter to her where they stayed. All that mattered was spending time with him.

According to what was online, there wasn’t much to do in the area, other than to visit the historic sight of some dead governor. Even Bellamy wasn’t interested in that one, so they laid low in the
hotel for a while, enjoying all the cable channels Bellamy didn’t get at his house. Game Show Network was his favorite as long as they were showing some kind of trivia game. He knew all the answers to everything. He was like a walking encyclopedia, and Clarke could only sit there and marvel at all his intelligence.

“And to think,” she said, snuggling up beside him, “you’re gonna get even smarter when you go to college.”

“If I get accepted,” he mumbled, flipping the channel when Family Feud came on.

“You’ll get accepted,” she said confidently, drumming her fingers against his chest. “I know it.”

There wasn’t a doubt in her mind that Bellamy was going to college. Even if it was just one or two classes to start with, he didn’t seem to have that same mindset that he couldn’t go anymore. He was determined.

That night, they drove around Herculaneum just to see what it was like, and Clarke was pretty sure they drove by the church where the wedding was happening tomorrow. There were four churches in that small town, what with this being part of the Bible Belt and all. It was kind of an odd place to picture a lesbian wedding taking place, but Clarke didn’t want to stereotype. There were open-minded people everywhere, just like there were close-minded people everywhere. Small towns or big cities, every place was going to have a variety.

“Let’s go get a drink,” Bellamy suggested when they drove up to a bar.

It seemed like as good of a place as any to stop for a while. They were on what looked to be the town’s main street, and there weren’t any other bars to stop at.

When they walked inside, Clarke immediately noticed something weird about the clientele. “Uh, Bellamy?” she said. “Is there something a little off about this crowd?”

Everyone in there looked very, very old.

“Maybe the nursing home’s having a night out,” he said, finding them a table. He pulled her chair out for her, and she sat down, feeling like they stuck out like two sore thumbs in the midst of all these grandpas and grandmas. Surely there were some young people in this town.

When the waitress approached their table, she noted, “You must be passing through.”

“How can you tell?” Clarke asked.

“Never seen you before,” the waitress replied with a shrug. “Plus, everyone in town knows it’s senior citizen night. Anyone over sixty-five eats and drinks for free.”

“Can people under sixty-five drink or free?” Bellamy asked optimistically.

The waitress smiled at him. “Sorry, Hot Stuff. Gonna have to charge you.”

Clarke made a face. Hot Stuff? Bellamy was her Hot Stuff, not this chick’s.

“I’ll just have a beer then,” Bellamy told her.

“I’ll also have a beer,” Clarke added, “and . . .” She flipped through the menu on the table, in the mood for something gooey and greasy. “Mozzarella sticks?”

“Coming right up,” the waitress said, heading back behind the counter.
Clarke grunted, giving Bellamy a look. “I think she likes you.”

“Jealous?” he teased.

“Why would I be jealous?” she countered. “She gets to serve you beer; I get to ride your cock.”

“Shh, Clarke,” he said, looking around. “We’re in the presence of a more conservative generation here.”

“Since when do you care about being conservative? You fucked me on the side of the road earlier,” she reminded him. “Besides, half of them probably can’t hear anything anyway.”

“Oh, I can hear,” a man at the nearest table said, turning around. “I can hear quite well, actually.”

Clarke blushed and smiled sheepishly. “Hi.”

“Well, hello, dolly,” he said, patting Bellamy on the back. “You’re a lucky man,” he said before turning back to the group at his table.

Bellamy tried to stifle his laughter. “Can’t hear anything, huh?”

She rolled her eyes.

They got their drinks and split a plate of cheese sticks while some old Elvis song played over the jukebox. They didn’t really try to talk to anyone, but as the only young people in that bar, they were definitely noticeable, and people started talking to them. The little old ladies absolutely loved Bellamy. They pinched his cheeks and tried to give him kisses, and he was a pretty good sport about it and let them. They asked if he was an actor or a model, and when they found out he was a handyman, they started rattling off all sorts of things around their homes and assisted living apartments that needed fixing. Of course they wanted him to be the one to come fix it, but he had to break their hearts and tell them he wouldn’t be in town long enough for that.

Clarke got the attention of more of the old men, of course. They took turns complimenting her hair and her smile and her figure—from anyone below the age of sixty-five, it may have come off as creepy, but with them, it was all pretty harmless. A particularly friendly man named Herb even asked her to dance when “I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You,” came on, and even though she told him she had two left feet, he wasn’t dissuaded. So she got up and slow-danced with him for the hell of it, and Bellamy gave Herb’s wife Margaret a dance that seemed to make her whole night.

“Thank you so much,” she said, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

Herb had the decency not to kiss Clarke, but he did give her a hug.

Some of the oldest people started to clear out early, Herb and Margaret among them, but Clarke was surprised how many of them stuck around past 10:00. “Shouldn’t it be their bedtime by now?” she leaned over and asked Bellamy quietly.

“Not necessarily,” he said. “They can still live it up.” He waved goodbye as one woman used her walker to head out the door. “Bye, Nancy!” he called. “I hope you get your sink unclogged.”

She beamed at him and blew him a big, exaggerated kiss.

“Always so popular,” Clarke mumbled.

“I like elderly people, as long as I’m not stuck behind them on the highway,” he said. “Besides, this
is gonna be us someday, Clarke.”

“Us?” she echoed, not sure why her mind lingered on that word.

“Yeah.” He downed the rest of his beer and held up his empty glass as a way of telling the waitress to bring him another one.

Clarke glanced over her shoulder to the jukebox, where a man and his wife were slow-dancing to some old country song she didn’t even recognize. They were barely moving, mostly just holding each other, swaying ever so slightly, both of them smiling as though, even after all these years, they were completely content in each other’s arms. It was actually really sweet.

“Maybe I should’ve gotten Nancy’s number,” Bellamy pondered aloud.

“What?” She knew Bellamy had some kinks, but seriously . . .

“So I could fix her sink,” he said. “And where’d Lucinda go? She said her furnace was acting up.”

“You’re on a road trip,” she reminded him. “No working.”

“But I could drum up some business while I’m here.”

“Bellamy.” She wanted him to relax and enjoy himself. Knowing him, he’d work twice as hard when they got back home just to make up for the days off.

“Alright, alright,” he said, grabbing the menu. He opened it up and said, “I’m still hungry. You wanna split some fries or something?”

Had the door never opened and a familiar figure not strode inside, Clarke would have answered him immediately. But her eyes bulged in disbelief, because . . . not only had somebody young actually shown up here tonight, but . . . Lexa had shown up. She was right there, only feet away. Clarke hadn’t seen her in months.

“Oh my god,” she whispered, seizing the menu out of Bellamy’s hands. She lowered her head and pretended to be all absorbed in looking at it.

“What?” he said, looking around. His eyes settled on Lexa, too, and Clarke watched out of the corner of her eye as she went up to the bar and started talking to the waitress. Is that Costia? Clarke wondered. She’d seen some pictures of the girl online, but the waitress didn’t look exactly like her. Same hair color, sure, but plenty of girls had brown hair.

“Is that her?” Bellamy asked a bit too loudly.

“Shh!” she shushed him. Right now, she just wanted to be invisible . . . which was going to be difficult since the only other people who were still there were three times her age.

“She’s really hot,” Bellamy remarked.

Clarke eavesdropped as Lexa told the waitress, “Yeah, the reception’s gonna be at the community center, but don’t feel bad if you can’t make it.”

“I’ll try,” the waitress said. “But hey, if I’m not there . . . congrats to you and Costia.”

“Thanks,” Lexa said, and for a millisecond, Clarke thought she was going to leave. She thought her quietness had done the trick and she’d made herself unnoticeable. But when she chanced a glance at her ex-girlfriend, she found Lexa staring at her, narrowing her eyes as if she weren’t sure she was
actually seeing her. “Clarke?”

“Here we go,” Bellamy said, sounding almost excited about this whole thing.

Clarke closed the menu and put on a big smile. “Hey!”

“Hey, stranger.” Lexa came over to the table, and Clarke stood up to give her a hug. “I didn’t know you were in town already.”

“Yep. Well, staying in the Holiday Inn, technically.”

“Yeah, we don’t really have any good hotels around here,” Lexa said. “It’s good to see you, though.”

“Yeah, you, too.” Lexa was just as beautiful as she’d always been. Even when she’d barely run a brush through her long, brown hair, it still looked like something straight out of a shampoo commercial. She didn’t have to wear any makeup to look like a model, and she had the kind of figure where she could eat three burgers in one sitting and still not gain a pound.

Lexa glanced down at the table and noticed Bellamy for the first time. “Hi,” she said.

“Hey,” he greeted in return.

“Are you Clarke’s date?”

“Yep.” He stood up and extended his hand. “I’m Bellamy.”

“Nice to meet you,” Lexa said.

“You, too. Congratulations, by the way.”

Lexa smiled excitedly. “Thank you.”

“You wanna join us?” Bellamy asked politely, pulling out a chair for her.

“Uh . . .” She glanced at the clock on the wall, then shrugged. “Sure. My girl won’t mind me being a little bit late.”

Clarke sat back down, awkwardly thinking of something to ask to continue the conversation. “So you and Costia live here, right?” Duh. What a dumb question. She already knew they lived here.

“Yeah. In an apartment. But next month we’re moving into our own house.”

“Bellamy has a house,” Clarke blurted, not sure why.

“I have a house,” he confirmed.

“Do you like it?” Lexa asked. “Owning a home, I mean. I know it’s a lot of work, but we’re really looking forward to having something to call our own.”

“Yeah, that’s the main reason I like it,” Bellamy said, leaning aside when the waitress brought his next beer over to the table. “You want one, too?” he asked Lexa.

“Sure,” she replied.

“Okay, one for her, too,” he told the waitress.
Clarke sat back while Bellamy and Lexa did most of the talking—it was weird how well they got along. Not that she’d expected them to not get along. Bellamy was friendly, and Lexa was . . . well, Lexa wasn’t really friendly in the same way Bellamy was, but when she was in love, she was kind of a softie. And clearly she was madly in love with Costia. Every other word out of her mouth was Costia this or Costia that. And Clarke couldn’t blame her. If she was engaged, she’d want to talk about her fiancé—or fiancée—a lot, too.

Twenty minutes into the conversation, Lexa admitted, “I never would have moved out here if it weren’t for Costia. But she wanted to be close to her family, and I don’t really have any family to be close to.”

“You don’t?” Bellamy asked.

“No. Foster kid.”

“Oh.” Bellamy frowned. “That’s rough. I never knew my dad, but at least I had my mom.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t great,” Lexa agreed, “but I turned out alright.”

“Cheers to that,” Bellamy said, raising his glass. They toasted, and then, as if they’d forgotten she was even there, they both knocked their glasses against Clarke’s, too. Clarke took a big drink.

“So how’d you two meet?” Lexa inquired, motioning between the two of them.

“Oh, um, we . . . it was kinda this, uh . . .” Clarke stuttered. “It was chance meeting, really. Very romantic.”


“Oh.” Lexa laughed, shrugging. “Hey, whatever works.”

“Yep,” Bellamy agreed, smiling at Clarke as he gave her knee a nudge beneath the table.

“Well, it’s really nice of you guys to come all the way out here,” Lexa said. “Did you fly or drive?”


Lexa made a face. “I don’t like ‘em, either.”

“We just decided to make a road trip out of it,” Bellamy said, taking another swig of his beer. “Any suggestions for what we can do around here?”

“Not much, unfortunately,” Lexa said. “I see you crashed senior citizen night, though. That’s always a party.”

Bellamy chuckled. “Yeah, I got molested by a couple old ladies, but you know.”

“Margaret?” Lexa guessed. “Or Nancy? Lucinda?”

“All of them, actually.”

“Wow, this is a really small town,” Clarke said. “You just knew automatically who he was talking about.”

“Well, of course,” Lexa said. “Everybody knows everybody here. Half the town’s gonna be at the wedding tomorrow.”
“So people here are, like . . . accepting of everything?” Clarke asked, not wanting to be too invasive with her questions.

“Well, there’s always gonna be people who object to it,” Lexa said, “but for the most part . . . yeah, everyone’s been pretty good about it. It helps that everyone here has known Costia her whole life. And her family. Her dad’s the head of the volunteer fire department. Her mom runs a boutique. Everyone knows them.”

“Man, and here I thought Arkadia was small,” Bellamy said. “But I guess we are big enough to have that Walmart, so . . .”

“Good thing, too, otherwise, you guys may never have met,” Lexa pointed out, grinning pointedly. 

True, Clarke thought, trying to even imagine that. Bellamy had become such a huge part of her life these past few months. She spent more time with him than with anyone else. She practically did live over at his place, even though she still had her own apartment. And now here he was in Missouri with her, chatting with her ex-girlfriend as though he’d known her for years.

For almost a hour, they sat at that bar and talked to Lexa while the senior citizens gradually cleared out. When they were the last ones there, they finally got up, and Bellamy dropped enough cash on the table to cover everyone’s food and drinks. When Lexa revealed that she had to walk home, Bellamy offered her a ride, but she declined. “Thanks,” she said, “but it’s a beautiful night. I might as well enjoy the fresh air.”

“I enjoyed the fresh air in Illinois,” Clarke said, thinking about her and Bellamy’s little fuck-fest on the open highway. It was possible that she was a little buzzed right now.

“Well, I’ll see you guys tomorrow,” Lexa said, her shampoo commercial hair whirling around her as she swayed down the sidewalk. “Bye!”

“Bye,” Bellamy called, waving.

“Bye,” Clarke added, waiting until she was out of earshot before she whacked Bellamy’s arm and huffed, “Seriously?”

“What?”

“You just kept talking to her. On and on and on.”

“Yeah, I liked her,” he said nonchalantly. “Plus, she’s smokin’ hot, so . . .”

“Do you have any idea how awkward that was for me to be sitting in a bar with my ex-girlfriend?”

He snorted. “And do you have any idea how much I’d love to sit anywhere with my ex-girlfriends?”

Well, when he put it like that . . . oh, god. Now she just felt insensitive. “Sorry,” she apologized quietly.

“No, it’s okay.” He put his arm around her, leading her down the sidewalk to where his truck was parked on the corner. “You wanna go back to the hotel and have sex?”

“Mmm-hmm.” She’d enjoyed senior citizen night at the bar, and as awkward as it had been, she’d actually kind of enjoyed getting to chat with Lexa again. But she’d enjoy sex with Bellamy so much more than either of those things.
Later that night, as she lay on her stomach feeling satiated and utterly satisfied, Clarke imagined what she would have said to Gina and Roma if either one of them had been sitting at that table tonight. And she couldn’t do it. It wasn’t just the fact that she wasn’t as naturally sociable as Bellamy was. It was that . . . she knew things between Bellamy and herself would be completely different if either one of them were still in the picture. She wouldn’t even know him. Maybe they still would have met at Walmart that day, but he never would have agreed to hang out with her at Dropship that night. And then everything would have been different.

“You okay?” he asked as he traced his hand up and down her back, brushing ever so slightly over the crack of her ass.

“Yeah,” she said, feeling like she could fall asleep sooner rather than later. Bellamy had woken her up way too early this morning, and she was really hoping they’d be able to sleep in tomorrow.

“You look like you’re kinda . . . lost in thought,” he noticed. “Are you?”

“A little,” she admitted, not quite used to her mind working so rampantly after sex.

He touched her head, circling his thumb over her temple. “What’re you thinking about?”

She sighed. “Oh, nothing. Just . . .” She trailed off, not sure if she even wanted to bring up what was on her mind.

“Just what?” he prompted.

She gazed at him for a moment, losing herself in his dark brown eyes, getting distracted by all the freckles on his face. “I was just thinking that . . . I was never as close to Lexa as you were to Roma and Gina,” she confessed.

He frowned. “You don’t think so?”

“No.” It wasn’t even that she was sad about it, because as he’d basically pointed out earlier, at least Lexa was still alive. “I mean, I loved her, yeah, and she loved me. And even Finn . . . that was like a first love/puppy love thing with him.”

“Yeah, I never had that,” he said. “With Roma . . . it was the real deal right away.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” she said, recalling all the things he had stashed away in that box in his nightstand. She wondered if he ever looked at the things in there without her knowing. Maybe some of those early mornings when he was awake and she was still sleeping . . . maybe he looked back at all his memories of her, and she wasn’t even aware of it.

“Well, every relationship’s different,” he said. “I think it’s good you and Lexa can still be friends. Sort of.”

“Yeah.” It was a good thing, and she knew it, even if they never talked again after this wedding. “I don’t know, I guess I just realized . . .” Again, she let her sentence fade, and this time, she really didn’t want to finish it.

“What?” he asked.

She shook her head against the pillow, refusing to answer this time. “Never mind,” she said, turning onto her side. She scooted back against him, and he curled up behind her, arms wrapping around her waist, face pressing against the back of her neck. He didn’t make her keep talking this time, which was good, because she was afraid to.
In her mind, though, the realization she’d had tonight rang out loud and clear: She was closer to Bellamy than she’d ever been to Lexa, and certainly closer to him than she’d ever been to Finn. He knew her better than either of them did, and she wasn’t even sure how that had happened. But over the past six months . . . it had.

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Much to her satisfaction, Clarke slept in the next morning. She awoke at 9:30 to find that Bellamy wasn’t there, but he’d left a note next to her phone saying he’d gone down to the pool to swim. The fact that he could do any kind of physical activity this early in the morning absolutely flabbergasted her, because the only strenuous thing she could do in the morning was have sex. And even then, she kind of just laid there and let him do most of the work.

Once she got her teeth brushed and put some clothes on, she headed down to the pool and found him playing Marco Polo with a couple of kids, one boy and one girl who couldn’t have even been in junior high yet. She kind of had to just stand back and watch him with them for a moment, because it was so sweet, and he genuinely looked to be having a good time.

“Oh, hi, Clarke,” he said, waving when he noticed her. “I made friends.”

“I see that.” God, he really would be a great father someday. He just had that vibe.

When the kids left, he attempted to pull her into the water with him, but she fled before he had the chance. He came back upstairs shortly afterward and got in the shower with her, but the water got very cold very fast, so they limited themselves to kissing only.

Since the wedding wasn’t until the afternoon, they had all morning to take it easy. They went out for breakfast and then stumbled upon a nature reserve on their way back to the hotel. Bellamy insisted that they stop and walk around, impersonating the late great Crocodile Hunter when he said (in his best Australian accent), “You never know what strange and wild beasts we’ll find out here.”

“In Missouri?” She doubted it, but she walked around the nature reserve with him anyway. There really wasn’t much of anything to see, other than a lake and some birds here and there. But then again, Clarke didn’t really care about seeing any animals. She was content to just walk around with Bellamy, hand-in-hand, enjoying his company and laughing at all his nerdy jokes, of which there were many.

Bellamy wanted lunch, but she didn’t want to eat before the wedding. She had a dress to squeeze into, after all, and she wanted to look good in it. So he grabbed something to go from the local burger joint and sat on the bed stuffing his face while she began to curl her hair.

“Crap,” she swore, setting her curling iron down on the sink counter. She’d been aiming for some Khloe Kardashian beach waves, but what she was ending up with looked more like Shirley Temple.

“What?” Bellamy asked, his mouth full of French fries.

“Nothing,” she muttered, envious that, as a guy, he could just run a comb through his hair, put on his suit, and be ready to go. “I just can’t get this to look right.”

“You look fine to me,” he told her.

“You have to say that,” she said, meeting his eyes through the mirror. “Because I won’t sleep with you if you say I look bad.”

Grinning, he said, “Nah, you’ll sleep with me no matter what I say.”
She blushed, because that was very true. She totally would.

Once she’d finally combed out her hair to make the curls loose and wavy the way she wanted, she got to work on her makeup, trying to keep it simple and classic. The last step was to try to put on her new blue dress, but somehow, she managed to get stuck in it with her arms above her head, and she couldn’t move them. She whimpered for help, and Bellamy had to pull it down over her head, twist it around in the right direction, and zip her up in the back. “You look really cute,” he told her, smiling affectionately when she was all ready to go.

“Thanks.” He didn’t look too bad himself. A casual t-shirt and jeans would always be her favorite look on Bellamy, but when he dressed up, he looked so dapper and dashing. Like a prince.

They got to the church half an hour before the wedding was set to begin, and it really did look like half the town had turned out. Clarke didn’t really know anyone, so she wanted to find a seat right away. But Bellamy of course started to talking to people. He recognized a few of the older guests from the bar last night. Plenty of the younger women in attendance wanted to talk to him, too, and Clarke couldn’t say she blamed them. Seeing a new, attractive guy in a small town like this was probably a big fucking deal, because most of these girls probably went to high school with the same guys they’d once been in preschool with. There was some minor flirting on their end, but Bellamy never really seemed to reciprocate. So Clarke wasn’t jealous. Besides, some of the girls who talked to him had brought other girls as their dates, so . . . unless they were bisexual, they probably weren’t even really flirting.

During the actual wedding, they sat near the back. It went quick enough, and it was a nice ceremony. Lexa’s dress was very loose and flowy, and Costia’s was form-fitting and sleek. They both looked beautiful and totally in love as they vowed to cherish each other in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, as long as they both shall live. The vows were ironically traditional for such a non-traditional wedding, but the way they both said them was really heartwarming. They were obviously meant to be together; they’d found their special person. The rings and the kiss at the end to seal the deal . . . that was all just symbolic of what they already had together.

She didn’t even realize she was crying until Bellamy nudged her shoulder and asked, “You okay?”

“Yeah,” she answered quickly, dabbing at the corners of her eyes. “I’m just doing the stupid girl thing.” She smiled at Lexa as she and her new wife walked down the aisle, cheers and applause from all their guests accompanying them. They both looked so happy.

“Are you gonna cry at Octavia’s wedding, too?” Bellamy asked teasingly.

“Maybe,” she admitted. “Are you?”

“Oh, yeah,” he answered without hesitation. “I’ll bawl like a baby.”

She laughed lightly, giving his arm a squeeze. Knowing how close he and Octavia were, it wasn’t hard to picture that.

The wedding reception took place about a block away from the church at some community center building. The decorations inside were simple, and the food looked like something fit more for a backyard barbeque than a fancy event. It was a lot better than that crap they’d served at the art department dinner, though, and Bellamy ate to his heart’s content, declaring, “I’m so glad this isn’t rabbit.”

Lexa and Costia had their first dance as a married couple, of course, and that was very romantic, but after that, the atmosphere was pretty lighthearted and jovial. Bellamy and Clarke were at a table with
some of the other out-of-towners, but there was a lot of mingling happening, so nobody really stayed seated for long. She was able to meet some of Lexa’s new friends, all of whom seemed nice, and she was even able to meet Costia at one point. Lexa introduced them while Bellamy was off at the food table, the center of attention for a particularly inquisitive group of lesbian friends who, much like Niylah, all wanted to know about his oral sex technique.

“Clarke, it’s so nice to meet you,” Costia said, giving her a hug. “Lexa’s told me so much about you. I know it really means a lot that you could be here today.”

“It does,” Lexa agreed. “Thank you, Clarke.”

“Yeah, of course.” It wasn’t like there was any bad blood between them or anything, so it wasn’t hard to show up.

“I know it was a long drive,” Lexa went on, “and I really do appreciate it. And I’m glad I got the chance to meet Bellamy, too. Where is he, anyway?” She looked around curiously.

“He’s, uh, over there,” Clarke said, pointing him out.


“He is cute,” Lexa confirmed. “Not that I’m the best judge, either.”

“Hmm, maybe I should go introduce myself and rescue him, though,” Costia contemplated. “I love our friends, but they can be kind of . . .”

“Crazy,” Lexa filled in.

“Exactly.”

“Oh, I’ll go rescue him then,” Clarke said. “You guys just . . . bask in your newly-weddedness.”

Lexa and Costia smiled sweetly at each other and gave each other a quick peck on the lips.

Clarke had only taken a step when Lexa called her name. “Clarke!”

She spun back around.

Her ex smiled at her warmly. “Seems like your boyfriend’s a keeper. You did good.”

My boyfriend? Clarke thought. She and Bellamy hadn’t discussed in depth whether or not they were going to let people assume that’s what he was to her, but she figured . . . that was just easier. Much in the same way she didn’t feel like explaining the unusual nature of their friendship to her parents, she didn’t feel like explaining it to Lexa. So she didn’t bother to correct her, didn’t bother to admit the truth, that Bellamy wasn’t her boyfriend. She decided to let him have that title for the day, because . . . why not?

She interrupted Bellamy’s conversation with his new companions—they seemed to be discussing whether a woman’s breasts or butt was the most attractive body part—and cooed, “Come sit with me.” She didn’t do as well in these large-scale social situations as he did. She couldn’t go up to somebody and strike up a conversation like she’d known them her whole life.

“You doin’ alright?” he asked, wrapping an arm around her waist.

“Yeah,” she replied, leaning into him.
“Yeah?” He waved goodbye to his new friends and meandered with her towards their table, which was right next to Herb and Margaret’s table, the older couple they’d danced with at the bar last night. When they sat down, Margaret turned around and asked Clarke, “Are you going to try to catch the bouquet?”

Clarke smiled at her and shook her head. “No, I don’t think so.”

“You should,” Margaret insisted.

No, Clarke thought adamantly, inhaling a shaky breath, I shouldn’t. It didn’t matter much anyway. Even though she didn’t get up and join the other girls trying to catch either Lexa’s or Costia’s bouquet, it ended up in Clarke’s lap anyway. Lexa had played softball in high school, so she could throw hard and far, and her aim was pretty damn accurate. She tossed it right to Clarke, smirking deliberately, and Clarke just smiled meekly and held it up to cover her face while everyone clapped for her.

“Jesus Christ,” Bellamy swore. “I guess she wanted you to have that.”

“I guess,” Clarke mumbled in agreement, handing the bouquet to Margaret instead. Margaret was reluctant to take it of course, but Clarke insisted she didn’t want it. And she really didn’t. So she was happy to give it up.

It was shortly after catching the bouquet—unwillingly—that Clarke started to knock back a few more drinks. It was all pretty much champagne and wine, so nothing hit her particularly hard, and she wasn’t trying to get wasted or anything. She just felt like she’d enjoy herself a little more here if she was slightly tipsy. Bellamy was driving, so he wasn’t drinking much. He could keep her from doing or saying anything too embarrassing.

Of course, the trade-off for a buzz was that it was easier to convince her to get out there onto that dance floor than it would have been if she was sober. She warned Bellamy that she’d probably step on his feet, but he just said, “What else is new?” and wrapped both arms around her waist, pulling her in close. She looped her arms around his neck, smiling up at him, and purred, “Mmm. You’re a keeper, you know that?”

He nodded. “I’ve often thought so.”

“You’re not the only one.”

“I’m not?”

“No.” She shook her head, cover her mouth with her fist as she let out a little burp. “Sorry.”

“Are you wasted?” he asked her.

“No. Just tipsy.” There was a difference.

“Tipsy, huh?” he echoed. “Am I gonna have to carry you out of here?”

“Nope.”

“You sure?”

“Positive.” She looked over to her right, and there were Herb and Margaret, dancing together much in the same way she and Bellamy were. They were so cute and completely absorbed in each other.
Clarke wondered how many years ago they’d had their wedding dance.

“Hey.” Bellamy placed his hand under her chin, tilting her head up. “Do you wanna go?” he asked. “Or stay and do something fun?”

“Something fun?” she echoed. “Like what?”

“Well . . .” He grinned mischievously, and jerked his head toward the side, like he was suggesting they go someplace where they could be alone.

“I can’t have sex at my ex-girlfriend’s wedding,” she said. “That would be . . . sacrilegious.” She was pretty sure she mispronounced the word in her semi-drunken state.

“It wouldn’t be,” Bellamy said, “but that’s fine. We don’t have to, if you don’t want to. Just thought I’d offer.”

“It’d be wrong,” Clarke said, even though she was pretty sure there was always at least one couple who snuck off during the wedding reception to get it on. And sure, it would probably feel really good to get fucked by Bellamy right now, and an orgasm might be enough to make her forget that Lexa had called Bellamy her boyfriend, that she hadn’t corrected her, and that the bouquet had ended up in her lap. But . . .

Actually, that all sounded pretty convincing.

Not even ten minutes later, Clarke found herself pinned up against the bathroom door, her legs wrapped around Bellamy’s waist as he held her up and fucked her roughly. She wasn’t even trying to be quiet, because all that thumping against the door had to be a dead giveaway. All she could hope was that nobody had wanted to use this bathroom, because if they walked by, they’d hear her moaning and gasping his name.

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” She clung desperately to his shoulders, her fingers clutching and clawing at his shirt since he’d thrown his suit jacket on the floor. “You get me to do the craziest things.”

He growled low in his throat and fucked her harder, and of course she loved every second of it.

Clarke was drunk and Clarke was tired, but Bellamy managed to get her to leave the reception before she got too sloppy. He wasn’t really sure what had prompted her to drink so much, but . . . whatever, drunk Clarke was fun, and she didn’t come out to play too often.

Luckily, she was able to put one foot in front of the other until they got to the stairs. Both the hotel’s elevators were broken, so they had no choice but to climb up three flights to get to their room.

“Come on, Clarke,” he said, trying to pull her along behind him.

“No,” she said, pouting and shaking her head stubbornly. “I won’t do those.”

“You’re not doing the stairs?”

“No.” She plopped right down on the bottom step, yawning exaggeratedly. “I’ll sleep right here,” she declared, almost proudly.

“You’re really not gonna come upstairs?”

“Nope.”
He sighed, seeing no other way than to manhandle her. “Alright, you leave me no choice then.” He bent down and scooped her up with little effort swinging her over his shoulder, his arms wrapped securely around her legs to hold her in place.

“Bellamy!” she yelped. “Oh, don’t drop me.”

“I won’t drop you,” he promised, taking the stairs carefully. “Not on your head anyway.” Clarke wasn’t heavy by any means, but three flights of stairs carrying another person took its toll on him, especially because he was feeling a little tired himself. “Almost there,” he said more to himself than to her as he kicked open the door that led out into the hallway. Hopefully no one walked out of their room and saw them right now. Not only was her ass hanging out the back of her dress, but he also probably looked majorly suspicious carrying some drunk girl back to his hotel room.

“Bellamy, my head hurts,” she complained.

“That’s ‘cause you’re upside down, babe.”

“Just like I am when we do that one thing.”

“What one thing?” he asked.

“You know.”

“Oh, you mean, the standing sixty-nine?” He grunted. Overrated. They’d only done that once or twice. The lying down version was so much easier on his arms.

When he finally got her back to the room and back on the bed, she curled up on her side and murmured, “Mmm, let’s sleep now.”

He sat down beside her, brushing her hair out of her face, and said, “I think I might go take a shower.” The sex in the bathroom had been a nice added touch to the day, but he’d worked up a sweat doing it.

“No,” she whined, grabbing at his arms and shoulders. She pulled him down next to her, curled up against him, and wrapped one leg around him tightly, almost as if to keep him in place. “Bellamy, don’t—don’t leave me,” she sputtered quietly, sounding as if she could fall asleep at any minute.

He laughed a little, getting a kick out of how adorable she was when she was drunk. “Where would I go?” he asked.

She didn’t have an answer, but she did have the same request. “Just don’t leave me.”

He frowned, not sure why she sounded so afraid of that happening. He was right there. Wasn’t going anywhere. Not anytime soon.

Deciding to chalk it all up to her being smashed and not really even knowing what she was saying, he waited until she was fast asleep to slip out of bed and take that shower he needed. And even then, he made it a quick one so he could get back in bed with her before she even noticed he was gone.
Heading home from a road trip wasn’t nearly as exciting as leaving on one. It was just a bummer for Clarke knowing that, in a couple days, she’d be back at work and back in her classes, back in the same routine. There were upsides, too, though. She missed her bed—Bellamy’s bed, whatever—and her friends. Plus, it would take two days to get back to Arkadia, just as it’d taken two days to drive out to Missouri in the first place. That was two days of uninterrupted time with the sexiest man she’d ever seen, so there was no reason to complain about that.

The drive home was so relaxing. They passed the time with jokes and playful teasing, plenty of flirting and some graphic suggestions about what they should do once they found a good hotel in Ohio. But they were also able to sit in comfortable silence, just roll down the windows and let the wind blow in while music drifted out from the speakers.

Clarke felt free out here on the open road. Like she could go anywhere, do anything. Back in Arkadia, there was all sorts of mounting pressure, questions about her future, about her plans post-college. She tried not to think about it, though, and instead focused on how nice it was to have this time alone with Bellamy. Just the two of them. It was literally blissful.

He made love to her on that first night of the drive back, in a small hotel room in a small town in Ohio; and it was so good, she could barely walk straight the next day.

It was late afternoon the next day by the time they finally got back to Arkadia. Clarke had fallen asleep for about an hour, but she woke up when she felt the truck slow down. Bellamy was taking their exit. “We’re home already?” she asked, slightly disappointed that it was really over.

“Almost,” he said, stopping at the highway. He looked both directions, then turned left instead of right.

“Where are you going?” she asked. Surely he wasn’t going to drop her off at her place, was he?

“There’s something I gotta do,” he said quietly. And that was all he said about it.

Clarke didn’t ask questions, even though she had plenty of them. He drove some streets she wasn’t even all that familiar with, and eventually they came upon . . . a cemetery? Why the hell would he want to stop at a cemetery? Wouldn’t that—

Oh, she realized, nothing his body language as he turned off the car and then just sat there, staring out the windshield at the graves in front of him. This isn’t just any cemetery.

Wordlessly, he climbed out of the truck and slowly walked forward, hands in his pockets. Clarke wasn’t sure whether he wanted her to come with him or wait for him. But soon enough, he turned back around and asked, “You comin’?”

In a way, she was surprised—not all that long ago, he’d been so closed off about all the tragedy he’d endured—but she was also pleasantly surprised because, if he was inviting her to join him, then he’d made tremendous strides from where he’d been back at New Year’s.

She got out of the truck, pulled the sleeves of her shirt down past her wrists, and lingered behind him a bit as he led the way to a medium-sized grey headstone. She wasn’t sure whether to expect Gina’s or Roma’s, but she recognized the picture of Roma on the stone before she even read the name.
Beloved daughter, devoted friend, it read beneath the smiling image of her. Her birthday and the day of her death were engraved on there, of course—not even twenty years—and her birthday . . .

It was today. Today was her birthday.

Oh my god, Clarke thought, wishing she’d known. Bellamy had been a bit quieter today than normal, but he hadn’t seemed . . . depressed. So maybe that was a good thing.

He knelt down in front of the headstone and brushed his hand over her photo tenderly, managing a small smile. “Hey, you,” he said quietly, almost too quiet for Clarke to hear. That was all he said out loud, but Clarke figured he was saying a lot more in his head. I miss you. I love you. Things like that.

She stood behind him, almost feeling as if she were intruding on a private moment. She wasn’t sure what to say, so she was grateful when he said something again.

“She would’ve been twenty-five today.” His voice shook just slightly, and he looked to be blinking back tears. “Her birthday.”

Clarke had to dab at her eyes to keep from crying, too. She hadn’t even known the girl, but knowing that Bellamy had loved her . . . that was enough to make her feel at least a piece of the sadness he was feeling.

“Do you come out here every year?” she asked him softly.

“Yes.” He brushed some cobwebs off her gravestone and rearranged some of the flowers in the holders on the sides. Some of them were dead flowers at this point. “I should get out here more often, though.”

It’s probably not easy, Clarke wanted to say. But knowing Bellamy, he wouldn’t want to hear it. He’d just say it was no excuse and he needed to start visiting once a week or something.

“I don’t really get to go to Gina’s grave, because she’s not . . .” He trailed off, rephrasing. “It’s not anywhere close-by. She’s buried in her hometown. So.” He shrugged sadly.

Clarke doubted he’d be able to go visit Gina’s grave anyway. Roma seemed to be that love-of-his-life girl, but Gina . . . she was the mother of the child he’d never get to know.

Sitting down next to him, Clarke murmured, “I visit my dad’s grave sometimes. And I talk to him.”

Bellamy snorted, looking up to the sky. “You think any of ‘em can hear us?”

Clarke smiled, confident in at least that much. “Yeah.”

Bellamy let out a heavy sigh, and even though he wasn’t quite as confident as she was, eventually, a subtle smile crept onto his face.

They stayed there for about a half an hour, and Bellamy talked to her about Roma without her even having to probe for stories. He told her about Roma’s seventeenth birthday, which had apparently been one of the greatest nights of his life, because they’d gone to a concert, and he’d never seen her look so happy as she did when they stood in the fifth row and listened to her favorite band play her favorite songs. He told her about how Roma had hated birthday cake, so one year, he’d made her a pie instead, and it was the best damn pie either of them had ever eaten. He said that, most of the time, her parents and family hadn’t really done anything much to celebrate, so she’d usually spent the entire day with him. They’d always skipped school on this day to spend time with each other, and each year had been even more fun than the last one.
Clarke listened with interest, glad that he could talk about this now without looking so tortured by the memories. He just seemed so much lighter than he had that night he’d come to her apartment and opened up about this girl for the very first time.

They probably would have stayed longer had the sky not darkened and had it not begun raining. But as it started to pour, they scurried back to the truck, and Clarke asked, “Are you sure you’re ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Bellamy replied. “I’m ready.” He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss and twisted the key in the ignition.

The rain had let up by the time they got home, just a light drizzle then instead of a downpour. It was a warm rain, so Clarke really wouldn’t have minded lying out on the trampoline with Bellamy. But she was also tired after so many days of traveling, and part of her just wanted to go up to their bedroom and crash for the night.

“Home sweet home,” Bellamy mumbled as they walked in the door.

“Yes,” Clarke agreed, dropping her bag at her feet.

“You’re back,” Miller chimed from the kitchen. He and Jackson were cutting up some vegetables and potatoes and dumping them in the crockpot.

“Back and better than ever,” Bellamy said, making a face as soon as those words left his mouth. “What am I even saying? I don’t know.”

“It was a long drive,” Clarke said, sitting down on the arm of the couch. She flopped down onto the cushions, feeling spent. “We’re tired.”

“Yeah, I could go to bed right now,” Bellamy agreed, dropping his bag down next to Clarke’s.

“Hold that thought,” Murphy said suddenly as he came out of the bedroom. Clarke tilted her head back and saw that Emori was with him, and she had a nervous look on her face.

“What’s wrong?” Bellamy asked, as if he immediately sensed something troublesome.

Emori exchanged a look with her boyfriend, then met Bellamy’s eyes. “It’s Octavia.”

Clarke immediately sat up, worried about what that could mean. Bellamy’s entire body went rigid and tense. “What about her?” he gasped. “Is she okay?”

“She’s fine,” Emori assured him quickly. “She kinda . . . passed out when we were at the gym today.”

“What?” Bellamy shrieked. He looked like he was about to bolt right out the front door upon hearing that. “Why?”

“She was dehydrated,” Emori explained. “I took her to the doctor, and Lincoln dropped everything and came there, too. He took her home, and she’s fine now.”

Bellamy threw his hands up in the air, looking almost . . . outraged. “Why the hell didn’t anyone tell me, call me at least?”

“We didn’t wanna worry you while you were on the road,” Murphy answered. “She’s fine, man. There’s nothin’ to worry about.”
Thank God, Clarke thought, breathing a sigh of relief. She’d been dehydrated before, years ago at a kids’ medical camp she’d gone to one summer. It sucked. She glanced up at Bellamy, though, and he still looked on edge about the whole thing. These reassurances from his friends clearly weren’t going to be enough for him, so she wasn’t surprised when he shot out the door.

“I’ll go with him,” she volunteered, running to catch up.

Bellamy barely said anything as he drove. His hands gripped the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles turned white. Clarke tried to be comforting and remind him that dehydration was common, that there was no reason to be concerned, that Octavia was fine now, but he still looked tense as a coiled spring. He had to see for himself that it was okay, otherwise he wouldn’t believe it.

Bellamy knocked on the door to Lincoln and Octavia’s apartment frantically, and Lincoln was the one who opened it.

“Is she alright?” Bellamy asked, pushing past him.

“I’m fine,” Octavia answered. She was curled up on the couch under a green afghan, a carton of ice cream on her lap. There was a glass of water on the end table and two on the coffee table, all of which were halfway full. “All this liquid’s not exactly agreeing with my tiny pregnancy bladder, but . . .” She shrugged nonchalantly. “What can you do?”

“You can’t freak me out like that,” Bellamy said, crashing down next to her on the couch. He gave her a big hug, practically crushing the ice cream carton between them.

“Who told you?” Lincoln asked Clarke quietly.

“Emori,” she replied.

Lincoln nodded, shutting the door. “I’m making dinner,” he told Clarke. “You guys can stay if you want.”

“Oh . . . thanks.” She wasn’t sure Bellamy would want to make this into a social visit, but then again, he might want to stick around a little while to keep an eye on Octavia, too. She was good with whatever he decided.

Lincoln wandered back into the kitchen to stir something in the pot on top of the stove, and Clarke sat down on the coffee table as Octavia repeatedly tried to explain to her brother that she was fine.

“It was just dehydration, Bell,” she said.

“Just?” he echoed in horror. “People die from that, O.”

“I went a little too hard at the gym; that’s all,” she said. “Emori was right there with me the whole time.”

“Did everything get kind of muffled and fuzzy?” Clarke asked. That was how it’d happened for her.

“Yeah. I don’t even really remember it,” Octavia replied. “One minute, I was stretching, and the next, I was lying down on the yoga mats, and there were all these people around me. Emori had a cold washcloth on the back of my neck, and people were trying to get me to drink something.”

“Oh my god,” Bellamy said, rubbing his face and forehead. “That sounds serious.”

“I felt fine afterward,” his sister assured him. “But Emori took me to the doctor and called Lincoln,
and he rushed straight there. They said I was dehydrated and that I was doing better, so I just needed to relax the rest of the day and drink plenty of fluids. So that’s what I’ve been doing.” She motioned to the glasses around her. “As you can see.”

Clarke smiled at her, putting a hand on her knee. “We’re really glad you’re okay,” she said.

“Yeah, me, too,” Octavia said. She gave her brother an almost-stern look and said, “See? Nothing to worry about.”

He sighed heavily, and Clarke could tell he was still struggling not to worry. “Are you sure you’re okay?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered emphatically.

“Because I can take you to the emergency room--”

“Oh my god,” Octavia groaned, rolling her eyes. “Clarke, please take him home and have your way with him. Just get his mind off of me. Please.”

Clarke laughed lightly, not used to Octavia encouraging her and Bellamy to have sex. “I’ll do my best,” she said, happy to see that the girl was in good spirits. She seemed completely fine, completely normal, and even Bellamy had to see that.

Even though Octavia’s incident had clearly been nothing major, Clarke still had to practically drag Bellamy out the door. He didn’t want to stay for dinner; he just wanted to stay and ask her if she was okay. Over and over again. Since that would have driven Octavia nuts, Clarke made it her mission to get him out to the truck. For every three steps he took forward, he seemed to hesitate or backtrack, but eventually, they got to the truck, and he started to pace back and forth in the parking lot.

“Dammit,” he swore. “I can’t deal with anything happening to her.”

“Bellamy, she’s fine,” Clarke reminded him. “You heard her; you saw her. She’s good.”

“SHe’s pregnant. And she passed out. And now I’m supposed to just--”

“Yes,” Clarke cut in. “You’re supposed to just calm down and not freak out and not assume something bad is happening. Because she’s fine. And the doctors even said she’s fine.”

Bellamy bit his bottom lip, shaking his head worriedly. “I can’t handle it if something bad happens to her,” he fretted. “I can’t lose her, too.”

“You won’t.” She frowned, reaching for his hand, but he turned around and ran both his hands through his hair. That relaxed guy from the road trip was gone. The guy who had sat at Roma’s grave today and been able to smile as he recalled some of their happier memories . . . nowhere in sight. And now he was just this panic-stricken, overprotective big brother who once again felt the fear of losing someone he loved.

“Bellamy.” She had to calm him down, otherwise he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep tonight. So she walked up behind him, wrapped her arms around his waist, and hugged him from behind, able to feel how his abdomen shuddered with every intake of breath. She held him tightly, hoping that, somehow, her touch would be enough to calm him down. It took a while, but gradually . . . it was. His body finally lost its tension, and his breathing evened out.

“I’m alright,” he said, slowly turning to look at her. “Thanks.”
“You’re alright and Octavia’s alright,” she said, keeping her arms coiled around his midsection. “Okay?”

“Okay,” he said, nodding as if he understood. “Yeah.”

“Come here.” She pulled him close and melted into him as his arms wound around her. She pressed her cheek to his chest, feeling the steady drum of his heartbeat. He definitely wasn’t as worked up as he had been when they’d come over here. Now that he’d seen that his little sister was okay, he was okay, too.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

The first few days back from their road trip were an adjustment, for both Clarke and Bellamy. He sensed that he was getting back into the swing of things quicker than she was, though, because he didn’t have as much going on. For him, it was pretty much just work as usual. But she was busy with projects and essays for her classes and seemed frustrated that the last semester of her last year of college wasn’t easier. She practically pulled an all-nighter on Wednesday, and then on Thursday, she was so tired after a long day of classes and work that she fell asleep at 7:30 on the couch. He carried her upstairs and stayed there with her, just in case she woke up and felt inspired to fool around. But she never did, so he decided to be productive and work on a few scholarship applications instead. The ones that required essays were probably the ones he stood the best chance of getting—if he got any at all—but those were a pain in the ass to do.

Maybe it was all just a fucking waste of time anyway. He hadn’t been accepted yet, and that didn’t feel like a very good sign. Tomorrow was the start of April. Most colleges had probably sent out the majority of their acceptance letters by now. He’d gotten his application in pretty late, and it wasn’t like they’d be clamoring to make room for some twenty-four year old handyman who still only had a high school diploma.

If Clarke had been awake, she would have told him not to worry about it, would have assured him that he was going to get in. Even though he had way more doubts about that than she did, he kept working on those scholarships. Just in case it somehow all worked out.

Friday, his afternoon was pretty open, so he came home early with money in his pocket and a smile on his face. For the most part, he had a free weekend, save for one little showerhead issue he was going to get around to fixing at Monty and Jasper’s house. He was in a pretty good mood about things and even had enough time to lie down and take a nap.

When Clarke got home and came into the bedroom, she clearly wasn’t in half as good of a mood as he was.

“Rough day?” he asked, rubbing his eyes as he sat up. He could tell just by looking at her.

“It sucked,” she grumbled, shutting the door before she started ranting. “First of all, I got this essay back in my Capstone class, and I totally bombed it. Why? Because that jackass professor hates me. And then in my next class, we were working in groups, and these girls in my group started talking about their plans for the future.” She threw her hands up in the air exasperedly. “Of which I have none, so I had nothing to contribute to the conversation. And they were like, ‘Oh, well, you’d better figure that out. We already have jobs lined up.’” She rolled her eyes in annoyance. “I wanted to tell them to fuck off, but I’m way too nice for that, and that just pissed me off for the rest of the day.”

Bellamy couldn’t help but smile as Clarke continued to rant and ramble. She was so cute right now, but he had a feeling she’d get pissed at him, too, if he told her that.
“And then work was long and endless and boring, and I just wanted to get out of there. And I think I’m about to get my period, and that really sucks, because then I won’t even be able to have sex with you to make myself feel better, and . . . everything’s just frustrating me right now, Bellamy!”

Well, luckily, he knew he could help with that. “You’re gonna get your period but you don’t have it right now?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

Opening his arms to the sides, he proclaimed, “Then let the doing it commence.”

That brought a reluctant smile to her lips, and it even got her to laugh. She kicked off her shoes and climbed onto the bed, settling in on his lap. “Mmm,” she moaned into his mouth as they kissed. “You always know how to make me feel better.”

“I try my best,” he whispered against her lips before trailing kisses down her cheek to the side of her neck.

“I seriously just—I’m stressed out right now,” she confided as he sucked on the skin near her pulse point.

“Don’t be stressed,” he murmured.

“But they’re right. I really do need to figure my future out,” she fretted, threading her fingers through her hair. “I have no plan.”

“So?”

“So . . . it’s stressful,” she summarized.

“So I need to de-stress you,” he concluded, snaking his hands up underneath the back of her shirt.

“Yes.”

“I need to . . .” He lifted his head to kiss her lips. “. . . get your mind on something else. Completely.”

“Completely,” she agreed emphatically.

“Hmm.” If she wanted to, he could go all night, but in the back of his mind, he had this idea that there was one thing in particularly that could really clear her mind. While one hand rubbed up and down her spine, he allowed the other to venture down the gap in the back of her jeans, fingers slipping beneath her panties to caress her backside suggestively. “I could fuck your ass,” he proposed.

At first she laughed, like he thought he was joking or something, but he wasn’t. And when she realized that, she froze, and this real stunned look came over her face. “Seriously?”

“Yeah.” There were no more dildos left to use for practice, and he’d been getting her used to some gradual anal stimulation for a month now. That was plenty of time. Tonight was as good as any other, he figured, and if anything could make her forget about all the stress of the day, it was having a cock in her ass for the first time in her life.

She balled his shirt up in both hands, holding onto it tightly, and likewise, her whole body suddenly tensed up.
“You still want to, right?” he questioned.

“Yeah,” she said, but she didn’t sound as convincing as he would have liked.

“We don’t have to,” he added quickly, pulling his hand out of her pants. He didn’t want to pressure her at all, even though this had been the one act at the top of his Clarke Griffin sexual bucket list for the entire time he’d known her.

“No, I want to,” she insisted, and she did sound more sure this time. “I’m just . . .” She lowered her eyes, voice softening as she admitted, “I’m nervous.”

Stroking her cheek tenderly with his thumb, he made an unlikely confession. “Me, too.”

She seemed surprised. “Really?”

“Yeah.” He wasn’t exactly experienced with this kind of sex, on account of only having done it a few times. It hadn’t been Roma’s cup of tea, but Gina had enjoyed it, with the exception of some mild discomfort the first time. Hopefully he’d gotten Clarke sufficiently ready and it wouldn’t hurt too much for her.

“You’ll be good at it,” she said confidently, rubbing his chest through his shirt. “You’re good at everything.”

“Hope so,” he said, kissing her cheek. He smiled at her excitedly, wriggling his eyebrows, and asked, “So you wanna?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“And you trust me?”

Instead of sounding exasperated—because it was about the billionth time he’d asked her that since they’d begun their anal explorations—she touched his cheek and looked him right in the eye, confirming, “I trust you.”

Good, he thought. That was kind of the key thing here.

He made out with her some more, using the opportunity to rid her or her shirt. She quickly did the same to him, but then her bra still stood in the way. He reached around with one hand and popped open the clasp, sort of feeling like a stud that he could get it undone so fast. When her breasts were free, she leaned forward, pressing her bare chest against his, and he bent his head down to rain kisses on her shoulder.

“Oh, Bellamy,” she moaned, rolling her head back as he bent down even further to suck on her tits. “I want it.”

Even though it was tempting to keep teasing her nipple with his tongue, he lifted his head, gazing at her lustfully. “You want what?”

She circled her hips wantonly in his lap. “I wanna feel you.”

He groaned low in his throat, fairly certain she could already feel him since the mere prospect of doing this was enough to make him hard as a rock. He was gonna have to fight like hell to draw this
out and make it worth her while, because the minute he stuck his dick up her ass, it’d be hard not to cum.

“Then feel me,” he urged, grinning playfully.

For some reason he blushed, and she smiled sweetly as she reached down in between them to pull the waist band of his boxers down. His cock sprang free into her palm, and she began to handle him expertly. She knew exactly what kind of strokes to give him to get him worked up—the long, slow kind. And she even took a minute to fondle his balls, which made his whole body jerk with excitement.

“Damn, Clarke,” he said, taking a few deep breaths to get control over himself. The anticipation of this had been building up for a while. The last thing he wanted was for it to be over before it started.

“Wait a minute,” she said suddenly, quickly withdrawing her hand. “I need to shower.” She shot off the bed and darted into the bathroom, shutting the door firmly.

“Right now?” he asked helplessly.

“Yes!” Seconds later, water started to run.

He sighed disappointedly, looking down at his straining erection. Great, now he had to wait. Although he understood where she was coming from with the whole shower thing. From what he knew, anal sex was an extremely self-conscious thing for some girls, and really, being sanitary about the whole thing was good. He would’ve done it whether she’d showered or not, but whatever made her feel more at ease.

He decided he may as well be productive while he waited for her, so he stripped off his boxers and roamed around his room naked, getting everything set up the best he could. He put a pillow down right about where her hips would be, and he got all the lube out and ready to go. He was gonna go with KY, just because that was what he was most used to, and that was Clarke’s personal request.

When the water stopped running inside the bathroom, he asked, “You comin’ out, babe?”

“In a minute,” she replied.

A minute, he thought. That probably gave him enough time to run downstairs, grab some romantic candles, and light ’em up, try to make it a real romantic ambiance for her. “Give me three minutes,” he told her.

“Why?”

“Just give me three minutes.” He yanked on his boxers again and zoomed downstairs to grab some candles out of the junk closet. They had one lighter around there somewhere, but hell if remembered where it was at, so he had to get some matches before heading back upstairs. He arranged the candles around the room, on the nightstand, on his desk, on top of his dresser, and lit them quickly, then shut off his beside lamp. Perfect, he thought. It was a good ambiance. Warm, inviting, that sort of thing. It wasn’t so dark that he wouldn’t be able to see her, but it was definitely a softer glow than the lamp provided.

“Can I come out now?” she asked right as he’d finished up.

“Yeah,” he replied, shoving his boxers back down to the floor. He stepped out of them and waited eagerly for her to walk out and see what he’d set up for her. Hopefully she liked it.
Slowly, the door opened, and out she came completely naked, her hair only slightly wetted down. She gasped in amazement when she saw all the candles and said, “Bellamy . . .” holding her hand to her chest as if she were touched.

“Romantic?” he asked.

“Very romantic.” She closed the distance between them and looped her arms around his neck, standing up on her tiptoes to kiss him better. Her skin felt so smooth beneath his fingertips, and he felt bad that his hands weren’t smoother. Despite the callouses that years of manual labor had given him, he touched her greedily, running his hands all over her sides, her hips, her waist. Her curves were insane in the best way possible, and there wasn’t a day that went by that he didn’t appreciate them. As far as he was concerned, Clarke Griffin’s body was the standard of beauty that magazines needed to promote on their covers. Screw the stick-thin girls with no figure whatsoever; she was the ideal.

“Bellamy, make love to me,” she sputtered pleadingly as he kissed a path down her neck again. “Please?”

“Yeah,” he breathed out against her skin, scooping her up into his arms. She clung to him tightly as he carried her over to the bed and gently laid her down, carefully setting in on top of her. He kept up the foreplay, kissing her as he massaged her breasts and rubbed his cock against her folds teasingly. It took all his willpower not to just drive into her wet pussy, because that time she’d spent in the shower hadn’t decreased the strain of his erection at all.

“You ready?” he asked her.

She nodded frenziedly.

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

He smiled at her, hoping she knew how goddamn lucky he felt right now, how absolutely floored he was that he was going to get to do this with her. It was a privilege, in his mind. Then again, everything about being with Clarke was a privilege.

“Turn over,” he instructed, sitting back on his knees.

She did as told, her hips comfortably positioned on the pillow beneath her, which elevated her ass in the air and gave him the best angle to have access to her. “Perfect,” he said, smoothing his hand over the round globes of her backside.

“No, not really,” she denied.

“Looks perfect to me.” He reached over onto the nightstand and grabbed the lube, squirting a generous amount into the palm of his hand before coating the entire length of this cock. Not that he expected to get the entire length in there, or anywhere close, really. He was just going to go as far as he could without her feeling any major discomfort, certainly without feeling any major pain.

“Spread your legs, Princess,” he told her.

She giggled slightly upon hearing her nickname and did as instructed. “Lots of lube,” she told him.

“Lots,” he agreed, spreading an ample amount around her hole. He made sure to coat her ass cheeks, too, and her inner thighs. He wanted everything to be as smooth and easy for her as possible.
“You’re gonna go slow, right?” she asked.

“Of course.” This was her first time doing this. Ever. With anyone. She was giving this to him. He wouldn’t dream of going any other way.

When he was sure the lube was sufficient, he tossed it aside on the mattress and lay down on top of her, enveloping her small frame with his much larger one, holding as much of his weight up as possible while he pressed soft kisses to her shoulder blades and back.

“Mmm,” she purred, closing her eyes. “That feels nice.”

How’s this feel? he thought, nestling his cock in the crack of her ass. He rubbed it up and down suggestively, and he could tell she liked that, too, because she smiled dazedly.

“I’m gonna make you feel good,” he promised, whispering the words into her ear.

“You already are,” she whispered back, turning her head enough so he could kiss her properly on the lips again. He let his tongue twist around hers for a moment, still rubbing his cock shamelessly against her ass. Good god, he could probably get off just from doing that. He had to stop, otherwise this would be over way too fast.

Sitting back, he first put his hands to work, probing her with just one finger at first. She’d gotten used to that, even used to a second one, so he pushed his middle finger a minute later, pumping them in and out, trying to move them like scissors to see how far he could get her to stretch. The biggest dildo she’d taken was still smaller than his cock. The fact of the matter was, he was just well-endowed, and as much as the ladies liked that about him, it also presented problems sometimes. He didn’t want anything about this to be problematic.

“I like the candles,” she remarked suddenly.

He had to laugh, because it was so cute seeing her look around the room and comment on his decorative choice while he had his fingers up her ass. “That’s good.”

“I look tan with the candles,” she said. “You look really tan.”

Again, he just chuckled. So cute. So fucking cute.

She shifted gears suddenly, though, when she told him softly, “Bellamy, I... I think I’m ready.”

“Yes, I think so, too.” He withdrew his fingers, holding her cheeks apart to admire the small gape. The finger-fucking and the dildos and all that... it had loosened her up these past few weeks, but she was still tight as hell, and it would definitely be a snug fit.

“Are you gonna fuck me or what?” she teased, wriggling her rump playfully.

“Wait, I thought I was supposed to make love to you.”

“Well... that, too.”

“That, too?” That kind of sex was a tough balance to achieve for some couples, but with Clarke... honestly, that was how they did it naturally. “No pressure, though, right?”

“No pressure.”

He grabbed the lube and squirted a dab more onto his cock, smearing it around the head. “Seriously, though, Clarke, no pressure. At all. If you want me to stop...”
“I won’t want you to stop,” she predicted.

“But if you do . . . just say something and I will,” he promised. Hell, even if it was the best sex of his life, he’d end it in a heartbeat if he thought for one second that she couldn’t handle it anymore. He wasn’t going to get so wrapped up in what they were doing that he ever stopped focusing on her or paying attention to how she (and her body) was reacting to this. She was his priority. Everything else was secondary.

“Just do it, Bellamy,” she urged him, reaching back to spread her ass cheeks open.

_Fucking hot_, he thought, scooting forward on his knees with the base of his shaft in his hand. He lined it up so that his cock was positioned right at her hole, poking and teasing the entrance, and he couldn’t help but get a kick out of her impatient moaning.

“Bellamy . . .” Her whines turned into a sharp gasp as he made the first push inside. He took it slow and didn’t go in very far. With only the head of his cock in her, already it felt like heaven.

“Oh my god,” she breathed out.

Watching in amazement as she stretched to accommodate him, he pushed in a little farther, eyes practically rolling back into his head. If he’d been standing, his legs would have buckled, because it felt so fucking tight and so fucking good, and it was a hell of a sight to see.

“Uh!” she whimpered, and when he checked her face to gauge her reaction, he got worried. Because she looked like, despite his best efforts to prepare her, she still felt some pain.

“You okay?” he asked, concerned.

“Uh-huh,” she said shakily, but that didn’t disguise the tear that slipped out of the corner of her eye. She grabbed at the pillows beneath her head desperately and winced.

“I’ll stop,” Bellamy offered.

“No,” she said pleadingly.

“Clarke--”

“I’m fine,” she insisted, wiping the tear away. “It just feels . . . really full.”

He chuckled, shaking his head in astonishment. It _looked_ full, too. “Damn.” He could feel her clenching and unclenching around him as she tried to stay as loose and relaxed as possible. So he just sat there and waited, rubbing her back and her shoulders, trying to soothe her discomfort. It was actually a good thing that she needed a minute to adjust, because it gave him a chance to calm down and keep from cumming right away.

“I’m good,” she said, lifting her head up, peeking back towards him. “You can keep going.”

_Keep going?_ he thought, not sure if he should just stick with a shallow penetration or try to get in just a little bit farther. The look of pain was gone from her face, though, so he chanced it. He moved forward just about another inch, but it was enough to make her put her head back down and close her eyes. “Oh, god . . .”

That sure _sounded_ like pleasure to him, so he took that as a sign that he could start thrusting. He moved his hips forward and back slowly, watching in awe as her body accepted his. The lube prevented any unwanted, unnecessary friction, so even though it was tight, he could move easily.
And it felt incredible.

“Fuck, Clarke,” he swore, feeling himself go deeper and deeper with each thrust. She was really opening up for him.

“Does that feel good?” she asked him.

“It feels . . . amazing.” He still his hips as he leaned forward, covering her body like a blanket. He kissed her shoulder, her cheek, her lips, his breath mingling with hers as he started thrusting again. He kept it slow and steady, enjoying the feel of her around his cock. Plus, her lubed up butt cheeks were all shiny and gave him the perfect cushion for the pushin’.

“You’re fucking my ass,” she whispered.

“I’m fucking your ass.” It was unreal to think about, and in the back of his mind, he remembered that he was the only one who had ever done this to her, that no one else knew what it felt like to be with Clarke Griffin in this way. And that just turned him on even more.

He started thrusting faster, unable to help himself. His body moved on its own accord, and she certainly noticed that he’d picked up the pace, because she groaned gutturally and clutched the pillows tighter. “Oh . . .” she moaned loudly.

“You still alright?” he asked.


_Holy shit_, he thought, stopping for a moment just because . . . he had to. When she said his name like that, he almost erupted on the spot. And he wasn’t ready for this to be over quite yet.

He sat back, taking a second to admire how much of his length was sheathed inside her, how much she’d managed to fit, and then grabbed his cock in his hand, pulling the whole thing out. She whimpered in protest. “Uh, don’t stop.”

“I’m not.” He pushed back in again, filling her up with one long movement.

“Oh!” she cried out shakily. “Yes . . .”

She liked that, huh? He pulled out again, mesmerized by just how far her ass had stretched for him, and shoved back in, a little harder this time, just to test it out.

“Uh . . .” she said shakily, her ass clamping around him as though she intended to make him stay there. “Oh, fuck . . .”

He did it one more time, perhaps a little too hard this time, because her whole body moved forward on the bed. “Sorry,” he apologized.

“It’s okay,” she whispered. “Bellamy, just . . .”

Before she could even finish, he was thrusting again, holding onto her hips so he could pull her ass backward when he moved forward, creating a penetration deeper than he’d thought would be possible this first time. It helped that she had totally relaxed into this by now, and even though he didn’t hold any unrealistic expectations of getting her off, he was glad that she at least seemed to be enjoying herself.

He hadn’t even realized he was grunting and growling until she craned her neck to look back at him
and laughingly asked, “Are you okay?”

He smiled, shaking his head. “No.” This just felt too good to draw it out for much longer. His head was spinning and he felt like he was high on something. He’d never actually been high before, but he doubted it could feel any better than this. “Clarke, I’m gonna cum,” he warned her.

“So cum,” she said invitingly.

“Yeah, but . . .” He slowed his movements, trying to think if there was any position he could get in that would draw this out longer. But there really wasn’t. No matter how they set it up, he was inside her ass. Fucking her like this was one of the hottest things he’d ever done in his entire life, and how he’d managed to prolong his orgasm even this long was a mystery.

“Here,” he said, pulling out of her suddenly. She seemed confused until he rolled her over on her side and spooned up behind her. He grimaced as his erection brushed against her ass, because he was so hard, it was actually painful. “Lift your leg up,” he told her, and when she did, he hooked one hand underneath it to hold it in place while his cock nudged against her hole again. He had to use his hand to help guide it into her, but it slid in so easily this time. If it felt uncomfortable anymore, she wasn’t giving him any indication.

“Can you take it?” he asked, rolling his hips against her.

“Yeah,” she said breathily. “I can take it.”

*I hope so,* he thought, coiling one arm underneath her to wrap around her waist, while the other held her leg under her knee. He went for it, thrusting up into her hard and fast, really pounding her now, giving her as much as he had left. The sweat on their skin mingled as his chest rubbed against her back, and he heard that familiar sound of his skin slapping against hers. His balls knocked against her ass cheeks, and he swore, “Fuck, Princess,” not sure he’d ever felt anything better than this.

“Oh my god,” she gasped, “oh my god . . . oh! Bellamy?”

“I’m right here,” he rasped against her ear. “I got you.”

“Oh god,” she choked out again. “Oh . . .”

*Say my name again,* he thought, his whole groin area tightening up. If she said his name again, he’d-

“Bell . . .”

“Oh, fuck,” he moaned, pressing as far into her as he could as his brains shot out through his cock. He held her close as he came hard, filling her up with his seed. It was such a powerful orgasm and his cock was so sensitive that he had to take it out of her mere seconds after he was done, even though he would have loved to have just . . . stayed in there.

She just lay there in his arms, breathing heavily, slowly lowering her leg. He lay behind her, completely spent, not even sure if he was alive anymore or if he was just . . .

He couldn’t even think.

When he regained enough function to press lazy kisses to the back of her neck, he found himself intoxicated by the smell of her in that moment. She smelled like . . . well, there really was no way to describe it other than to say she smelt like *them.*
“Wow,” she said at last.

“Yeah,” he agreed, barely able to form thoughts, let alone words. Next time, he’d play with her pussy, try to get her off, too. She deserved that for being so . . . so fucking amazing.

“Wait a minute,” he said, sitting up suddenly. He flipped her over onto her stomach once again and spread her ass cheeks one more time, smiling proudly as he watched some of his cum drip out of her. In porno terms, that was called a creampie, and it was hot as hell. He wished the candles illuminated the room more so he could see it better, but . . . he saw it, and it was sexy, just like seeing it drip out of her pussy was.

“What’re you doing?” she asked.

“Just taking one last look,” he said, giving her ass a little spank as he lay back down beside her. “You did so good, babe,” he told her, stroking her hair lovingly.

“So did you,” she said.

“Was it okay?” It’d sure as hell felt okay to him, but then again, he was a guy. In all honesty, he was open to some constructive criticism if there was something he’d done wrong or something he could have done better. He could probably count on one hand the number of times he’d asked a girl if the sex was okay, but this was a special circumstance, and he needed to know.

“It was good,” she reassured him, turning over onto her side, still facing him.

“Really?” She wasn’t just saying that?

“Yeah.” She snuggled up into him and added, “Different, but good.”

He smirked. Different but good. That was the whole point. “So you feel better?” he asked her.

She wrinkled her forehead in confusion. “I was feeling bad?”

He laughed lightly. “Yeah, when you came home.”

“Oh.” She shrugged as best she could in her current position. “I don’t even remember.”

“Good.” Clearing her mind, de-stressing her . . . that had been the idea.

He kissed her forehead and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her in close so he could hold her for a while. They liked cuddling after sex, though their semi-public escapades didn’t exactly permit it. When it was just the two of them, though, here in their bedroom, in their bed like this . . . it was such an intimate feeling, one he hadn’t felt in a long time. Her skin was aglow with candlelight, her hair damp with a mixture of sweat and water, and he swore . . . she was way too good for a guy like him.
David’s Bridal had more than just bridal gowns. It had bridesmaids’ dresses, too, which made it the perfect spot to shop. Octavia arranged a time for all the girls to visit and informed them that she hadn’t made any decisions yet, so any color or style was still a possibility. The most important thing, of course, was finding her a dress, but Clarke didn’t see the harm in prioritizing the bridesmaids’ dresses, too. She’d never actually been a bridesmaid before, but she’d heard horror stories about frilly pink dresses and bright blue gowns with matching blue feathered hats. Surely (hopefully) Octavia had better taste than that. She wore a lot of dark colors, so Clarke was hoping to talk her and the other girls into a dark blue or dark purple. Both of those colors would surely be flattering enough on all four of them.

From the moment they started browsing, they let their concerns be known.

“I look horrible in halters,” Emori stated.

“Spaghetti straps do nothing for me,” Harper added.

“I can’t wear anything not cinched at the waste,” Maya said.

“If I wear a strapless dress, my boobs will fall out,” Clarke blurted, shrugging. It wasn’t an exaggeration, either. There was one particularly horrifying memory from her National Honor Society induction ceremony her junior year of high school that still brought tears to her eyes.

“Okay, congrats, you’ve reduced yourselves to wearing a burlap sack at my wedding,” Octavia informed them.

“Sorry to be picky,” Emori apologized on their behalf. “But none of our guys have even thought about popping the question. We wanna look good so they, you know, realize they can’t live without us.”

“Actually, I just don’t want my boobs to fall out,” Clarke mumbled. Talk about taking attention away from the bride . . .

“We’ll find something for you guys,” Octavia said, looking around the huge store where an endless array of dresses were on display. “And then we’ll find something for me.” She patted her rounded stomach and dramatically bemoaned, “Somehow.”

“We’ll find you something,” Clarke said confidently. Octavia wasn’t even that big, at least not big all over. She had the whole perfect round little basketball of a belly going on, which was so unfair. Probably the only other place she’d gained weight was her boobs, and she didn’t seem too disappointed about that.

They tried on countless gowns, each gravitating towards their own distinct taste. Clarke liked anything blue, particularly styles with a lot of support up top. Harper didn’t mind the color, as long as the dress had some sort of slit up the side to show off some leg. Maya was the most conservative of them all and seemed to favor girly colors like red and pink, and Emori was the one who wanted to push the envelope and wear midriff dresses or something with lace or sheer or cutouts on the sides.

It took a while, but eventually Octavia found a dress that she thought would look good on all of them. It was plum-colored, long and flowy with a slit like Harper wanted and a high-waisted cinch
like Maya wanted. The bodice was lacy, which Emori liked, and had sleeves that went to the shoulders, so Clarke wouldn’t worry about popping out of it. It was flattering on all of them, comfortable, and something that wouldn’t steal the attention away from whatever Octavia was wearing. Plus, it was affordable, which the girls were relieved about.

Finding a dress for Octavia proved to be a much harder challenge, however. There were some maternity dresses to choose from, sure, but not exactly a wide variety. Everything was either too obnoxiously tight or too loose and flowy for her taste. “I look like a hippie!” she complained as she twirled around in front of the mirror. “This so isn’t me.” The next dress she tried on proved to be all wrong, too, and not one of them could even pretend to like it. It was long-sleeved and looked like an Elizabethan nightgown. Octavia described it as, “Freakin’ pioneer woman!” before stomping back into her changing room and growling, “I hate this!”

They each tried their best to locate a suitable dress for her, and Clarke finally decided to branch out of the maternity section and just look at the plus-size dresses instead. Octavia was a small girl, even with the baby bump. So she found a simple white halter dress that she thought might fit, checked the price to make sure it wasn’t too expensive for Octavia to afford, and brought it to her friend to try on. The poor girl was sitting in her changing room in a pool of dresses that simply “would not work,” as she proclaimed. She looked close to tears.

“Here,” Clarke said, handing her the halter gown.

“Thanks,” Octavia said forlornly. “What do you bet this one looks like crap, too?”

“Just try it on,” Clarke suggested, giving her an encouraging smile as she walked out of the room.

She’d only taken a few steps when Octavia called her name questioningly. “Clarke?”

She turned back around.

Octavia made a face, inquiring, “Why are you walking funny?”

*Because I just had anal sex last night,* Clarke thought, well aware that she’d sort of been . . . waddling all day. There was a definitely soreness going on, not that she was complaining. She’d loved being with Bellamy in a new way.

“I’m not walking funny,” she said as innocently as she could manage.

“Yes, you are,” Octavia insisted. “What, did you and my brother . . .” She trailed off as Clarke cringed. “Oh, ew, gross,” she said, shuddering and sticking her tongue out in disgust. “Blagh.” She swung the door shut, and Clarke sighed, relieved that she wouldn’t have to give any details.

“You are walking funny,” Emori noted, shuffling past with two white dresses slung over her arm. “Did you take it up the butt or something?”

Before Clarke could deny it—hey, that was her and Bellamy’s business, and nobody else needed to know—Octavia yelled, “I can hear you!” from inside her dressing room.

Clarke shrugged exaggeratedly.

“You totally did,” Emori mumbled, heading towards a room of her own.

“Where are you going?” Clarke asked her.

“Duh, I’m trying on wedding dresses,” Emori replied. “I used to never think I’d get married, but . . .”
She blushed, shrugging. “Well, you know.”

“Oh, I know exactly what you mean,” Harper said, coming their way with a dress of her own. It definitely looked to be for her and not for Octavia. “I’m gonna try some on, too.”

Maya was the next to follow, and she had three dresses. “Yeah, it’ll be fun,” she said, handing one to Clarke. “Here, this one’s for you.”

“Oh, no,” Clarke said, shaking her head, reluctant to indulge in the same girly fantasies they were. “I—I don’t . . .”

“Just try it,” Emori said, slipping into the room adjacent to Octavia’s. “It’ll look good.”

“This is so fun!” Harper squealed, squeezing in with Emori. “You’re gonna have to zip me up,” she warned.

Clarke glanced around helplessly, standing there with a wedding dress in her hand that she never would have picked out for herself. She had her purple bridesmaid dress on order. All they had to do was make a few alterations to the bust-line of the sample size, and she was good to go. There was no need to try anything else on. At all.

“Maya, I can’t,” she said, trying to hand the dress back.

“Come on, Clarke,” Maya urged. “It’s just for fun.” She skipped off to the empty dressing room across from the other two and smiled as she shut the door.

Clarke sighed frustratedly, looking down at the white dress Maya had picked out for her. On top, it had a similar look to the bridesmaid dress, except instead of lace, the bodice was covered with some kind of sheer material. And the bottom was big and poofy. Like obnoxiously so.

Even though she felt like she shouldn’t have, Clarke stepped into a dressing room of her own and reluctantly put the dress on. There was so much fabric that she practically got lost in it, but she finally found her way out the top. It fit . . . well. Really well, actually. It was the kind of dress that wouldn’t even need altering. She could move in it, she could breathe, but it still matched the curves of her figure. It wasn’t so long that she would step on it, and the train wasn’t so drawn out that someone else would, either.

The other girls came out of their rooms, beginning to chatter, mostly about Octavia’s dress, which she unenthusiastically declared as, “the one that’s gonna have to do.” But it was only a matter of time until they started babbling about each other’s dresses, too. Clarke heard Harper say that Murphy would drool if he saw Emori in that dress, and Emori said that Monty would cry if he saw Harper in hers. Octavia said Maya looked adorable and that Jasper would think so, too, if he wasn’t stoned and could actually see straight.

Then they started to whine for her to come out. “Clarke! Come on, come show us.”

She smoothed her hands up and down her sides, then fluffed out the bottom a bit. Staring at her reflection in the mirror, she kind of felt like . . .

. . . well, like a princess.

This was a bad idea, she thought, hesitatingly stepping out of the dressing room. The minute she did, all the girls gasped, their mouths dropping open. “Oh my god!” Harper exclaimed.

“What?” Clarke asked. Did she look . . . bad?
“You look so pretty!” Maya squealed.

“Damn,” Emori said. “That dress is, like, tailor-made for you.”

“No,” she denied, shaking her head. She cast a quick glance at Octavia, who was just smiling. “Maybe you should try this one,” she suggested. “It’s so big on the bottom, it’d disguise . . . everything.”

“Nah, I think I’ve tried on enough wedding dresses for one lifetime,” Octavia said. “Besides, that’s . . .” She trailed off, eyes glazing over for a moment as though she were thinking about something.

“You should seriously get that,” Emori suggested. “Snatch it up before someone else does.”

“Oh, right,” Clarke said sarcastically. “Can you imagine Bellamy’s horror if I dragged home a wedding dress? I don’t even want him to see me in this.”

“Too late,” Octavia said, and Clarke heard a camera click.

“O!” she yelped, shielding her face when she glanced over and saw her friend poised with a camera. When she remembered that Bellamy was the only one who could get away with calling her that, she amended, “Octavia!” but kept the same exasperation in her voice. “Don’t sent that to him.”

Octavia shrugged unapologetically. “I just did.”

“What?” she shrieked. Oh, this was just great. How the hell was she going to explain this to him?

“Relax,” Octavia said. “Just tell him it was an April Fool’s joke or something.”

Clarke’s stomach clenched; she had to get out of that dress. “I’m gonna change,” she announced, waddling back into the dressing room as fast as her poofy gown and sore legs would allow her to.

That night, she sat with Bellamy on the couch, trying to be cool and play it off as an April Fool’s joke like Octavia had suggested. Bellamy seemed content to believe that, so it was fine. No big deal. But he did tease her about it mercilessly.

“Seriously, Clarke, I know you caught the bouquet at Lexa’s wedding, but this is a little much.”

“I know, it’s just . . . everyone was trying dresses on, and they made me try one on, too, and--”

“Oh, they made you, huh?” he cut in.

“Yes!” she insisted, then rolled her eyes. “Okay, no, not really, but . . . coerced. That’s the word I’m looking for. They coerced me.”

He took a look at the picture on his phone and squinted as though he were trying to see something straight. “Is that one dress or two?”

“One. It’s very big,” she explained.

“Well, I know you like big things.” He grinned at her, then set his phone down on the arm of the couch and gently pushed her onto her back, lying down on top of her.

“Bellamy!” she squealed, giggling as his fingers tickled her sides lightly. He silenced all those giggles with a kiss, though, and she felt her heart flutter in her chest. As it often did with him.

She definitely would have kept kissing him had Murphy not strolled out of his bedroom and
grumbled, “God, breaking beds wasn’t enough; you have to break the couch, too?”

Clarke tore her mouth away from Bellamy’s and told him, “We’re not breaking anything.”

“Yet,” Bellamy mumbled, his mouth fixating its delightfully sinister attention on her neck now.

“Well, take it easy. I like that couch,” Murphy said, pulling open the refrigerator. He looked around inside of it for an obscenely long amount of time, and Clarke kind of thought Bellamy might stop being so frisky, or at least tone it down. But his hands were sliding up under her shirt, and she couldn’t help but loop hers around his neck to tangle in his hair. They wouldn’t really have sex down here, not with Murphy being home, so they were probably going to have to take it upstairs soon before they got too obnoxious.

She had her eyes closed and was totally enjoying the feeling of Bellamy’s hot, wet mouth on her skin when she heard the refrigerator door shut. Murphy came into the living room with a beer in hand, and even Bellamy had to stop as his friend pulled up his beanbag chair right next to the couch and sat down. “Carry on,” he said, popping open the tab.

“What the hell do you want?” Bellamy grumbled, lifting his head to glare at him. “We’re busy.”

“Oh, you’re gettin’ busy,” Murphy said, taking a swig of his beer. “Please, don’t stop on my account.”

Bellamy groaned, sitting up, and Clarke pushed herself up, too. “Murphy,” she said sternly. “You are not watching us have sex.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time—forget I said that,” Murphy said quickly. “I was just gonna ask you guys somethin’.”

Bellamy both looked and sounded impatient when he spat, “What?”

Murphy took another drink, then looked to Clarke and asked, “Are you movin’ in here?”

She froze for a second, taken aback by the question. But she managed an answer quickly enough. “No,” she said, having flashbacks to when Raven had asked her about this. Why did these people just assume it was inevitable? She and Bellamy weren’t even . . . they weren’t . . .

“Why do you even care?” Bellamy asked back.

“Well, because Miller and Jackson are probably gonna get their own place this summer,” Murphy explained, “so I was thinkin’ we’d need another roommate. Someone who’d actually pay rent, ‘cause, you know, I don’t do that.”

Bellamy grunted. “I noticed.”

“So I was thinking of asking Emori to move in with us, but if Clarke’s already gonna be here, that might be a little too much feminine energy.”

Clarke chuckled. “Your girlfriend’s not exactly a girly-girl.”

“Oh, yeah, then what’s this I hear about wedding dresses today?” Murphy challenged.

Clarke bit her lip and looked away.

“You can ask Emori to move in if you want,” Bellamy told him. “You’re right, we will need someone else paying rent if Miller moves out.”
“But if Clarke moves in—” Murphy started again.

“I’m not,” she cut him off abruptly. That was . . . pretty clear.

“Are you sure?” Murphy pressed.

She shot Bellamy a glance, because . . . well, she needed his help on this. If it was just up to her, then no, she wasn’t sure. If it was just up to her, she’d pack up everything in her apartment and bring it on over as soon as she could, because she liked it so much better over here anyway.

“She’s not moving in,” Bellamy told him calmly, evenly.

“Oh. Okay.” Murphy thought about that for a moment, then made a face and asked, “Why the hell not?”

“Because I—I have my own apartment,” Clarke stuttered in response.

“We hang out over there sometimes,” Bellamy added.

“Sometimes,” she agreed. Like once or twice a month, but whatever.

“Yeah, but . . .” Murphy gave Bellamy a look. “She practically lives here. And if you don’t believe me . . .” He set his beer down and got up, heading back into the kitchen. “Exhibit A,” he said, pulling open the freezer and taking out a box of frozen food delight Clarke was very familiar with. “Hot Pockets. Pretty sure we never had Hot Pockets here until the girl who couldn’t cook started stayin’ over all the time.”

“Hey!” Clarke yelped, only halfway taking offense at that.

“Exhibit B . . .” Murphy came back into the living room, reaching into his back pocket. He pulled out a tiny black thong Clarke recognized as one of his own and twirled it around his index finger. “I found this on the back of my t-shirt this morning. Must’ve gotten stuck there in the laundry.”

“Give me that,” Bellamy said, seizing it back from him. Rather than giving it to Clarke, though, he tried to pocket it himself.

“Bellamy, that’s mine,” she said, trying to get it back from him, but he held his arm out, keeping it out of her reach. “What’re you gonna do with it, huh?”

“Start a collection,” he proposed.

Murphy smirked. “Nice.”

“Give it!” She finally managed to take it away from him and stuffed it in the back pocket of her jeans.

“Anyway, Exhibit C,” Murphy continued on. “I’m pretty sure you already have a key.”

“Of course she has a key,” Bellamy muttered. “Look, Murphy, Clarke’s not moving in. So if you wanna ask Emori to move in with us, then that’s fine. Go for it.” He got up and strode into the kitchen, probably to cook something for dinner. Not Hot Pockets.

It all sounded so . . . definitive. Like the decision was made and would not change. Clarke wondered if he’d even thought about it, even considered it just once the way she had.
“Don’t worry,” Murphy said, sounding almost . . . sympathetic. “He’ll change his mind.”

Clarke first looked up at him, then glanced into the kitchen and watched as Bellamy meandered around. For Murphy of all people to say that, she must have looked really sad. Or at the very least, disappointed.

She hadn’t meant to look that way.

Since plenty of her coworkers had volunteered to fill in for her when she’d gone on her road trip, Clarke felt obligated to return the favor and fill in for one of the girls who got sick that week. It meant she’d basically be working a double shift at the museum, a full morning and a full afternoon, but on a day with no class, she figured she’d might as well. Her friends would be busy with class and work today, and Bellamy had a full slate of jobs around the neighborhood that he’d said would probably take him until 7:00 at night to get done. So Clarke figured she’d might as well stay busy, too. Maybe tonight, she could get Bellamy to take her out to eat or something.

She trudged inside the museum, still tired, yawning, and dropped her purse behind the front desk. Just as she was about to sit down and get comfortable, Dante poked his head out from his office and called, “Clarke?”

She whipped her head around.

“Do you have a minute?” He motioned for her to come join him in there.

“Oh, no,” she thought, slowly standing up. This wasn’t good. Her boss never called her into his office to talk. Maybe she wasn’t the star employee, but she was a decent one. For two years now, she’d worked there without any major incidents or complaints. Hopefully he wasn’t about to fire her, but her mind automatically went to that fear.

She closed the door once she set foot in his office, just in case that was the direction this conversation was going to go. Nervously, she took a seat in the chair across from his desk, feeling like a kid in the principal’s office. Not that she’d ever been in the principal’s office. Just that one time for tardies in junior high, but that had kind of just been a slap on the wrist.

“Is everything okay?” she asked hesitantly.

“Oh, yes, I just wanted to talk,” Dante began. “Graduation’s coming up soon. I’m sure you’re excited about that.”

“Oh, um . . . yeah, I guess,” she replied, though she hadn’t really given it much thought. Until it happened, she’d still feel like she had another year of college ahead of her. Once she donned that cap and gown and got the diploma she’d worked towards for four years, that was when it would seem real.

“It’s a very big achievement, graduating college,” Dante went on.

“Well . . . thank you.” She wasn’t really sure what else to say.

“You’re welcome,” he said. “I remember my college graduation, years and years ago. Everything was so different back then . . .”

Clarke sat there with a smile on her face and tried to listen while her boss droned on and on about his own graduation. He was a nice enough old man, but he was . . . well, old. Sometimes he started in
on his stories and forgot to stop.

It wasn’t until he asked, “Do you have any plans for the future?” that she stopped spacing out and truly became attentive again.

“Plans?” she echoed, stalling for time as she struggled to come up with something that might sound the slightest bit impressive. “Well, nothing’s really set in stone yet.”

“I saw your exhibit at the Trikru gallery,” Dante noted. “Very impressive.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you hope to continue with your own artwork?”

“Well, I—I mean, I hope to,” she said, but the logical part of her knew that it would be very hard to make a living as an artist. “But I always kind of thought I’d open up a studio of my own. Sell some of my work, and other people’s, too.”

Dante nodded thoughtfully. “I might have a job opportunity for you then.”

“Really? Here?” She’d been under the impression that he didn’t make it a habit of hiring graduates. It was an on campus museum after all, so the college pushed him to hire students.

“Not here, exactly,” Dante clarified. “My granddaughter recently graduated last year with a double major in art and business management. She’d like to open a gallery, but she wants a business partner. The person she had in mind bowed out of the deal, so she asked me if I might know of anyone who would be interested.” He smiled at her encouragingly. “Would you be interested, Clarke?”

Her eyebrows shot upward on her face. “Uh . . . yeah,” she replied, even though the business side of running a business wasn’t something she wasn’t as experienced with. “I mean, I don’t know if she’d wanna take a chance on someone straight out of college, but . . .”

“You have to start somewhere,” Dante said. “My wife and I were straight out of college when we opened up our first gallery. We could barely scrape two pennies together, but we made it work.”

Clarke laughed lightly. “Well, you made the most of it.” From what she understood, Dante and his family were pretty well-off. Not unlike her and her family, but he was more of a self-made man rather than someone who had inherited his wealth.

“Now I can’t guarantee anything,” he said, “but if you’d like, I can put you in touch with my granddaughter. The two of you could talk, meet up, decide if this is something you’d want to pursue together.”

“Yes,” Clarke said, excitement bubbling up inside her as the very beginning of a plan for her future took shape. “Yes, thank you, that’d be . . . that’d be great.” Getting into business with a partner was probably the perfect route for her to go. She could learn from the person who had majored in business management. And since they were both young, it wouldn’t feel like she was working for someone; she’d be working with someone. She could still create her artwork, and she could provide a place for other artists to break into the business, too, just like Lincoln had provided for her. If she and this girl got along, then maybe it would be the ideal fit.

“Great, great,” Dante said, scribbling down some information on a small piece of notepad paper for her. “She’ll be happy to hear from you. She has a great location picked out, and she’s ready to get going.”
“So am I,” Clarke said. Even though she’d enjoyed working here and had enjoyed college (for the most part), it was time for something new. Time to be an adult. Like for real.

“So am I,” Dante said, handing her his granddaughter’s contact information.

Clarke took one look at it, and what jumped out at her was . . . the address. It definitely wasn’t local. In fact, it was . . .

“Philadelphia?”

Dante nodded. “If you’re looking to start a business, a big city is the ideal place.”

She tried to smile, but inside . . . she was nervous. Philadelphia, she thought solemnly, not even sure how far away that was from here. The fact that she’d only been there once in her life probably meant it wasn’t exactly close, and she was too young to remember it. All she knew about the place was that they had the cracked Liberty Bell and that there might or might not be a real statue of Rocky Balboa there.

Philadelphia. The excitement she’d felt mere seconds earlier vanished, replaced now with . . . well, something that felt very much like dread.

It was on her mind all day, weighing down heavily on the rest of her thoughts. Work was busy, luckily, with not only one but two elementary school tour groups, so the hours passed quickly. But once work was over and it was time to go home, Clarke felt . . . she wasn’t sure how she felt, but whatever it was wasn’t a particularly good feeling. She stuck Cecilia Wallace’s contact information in her purse, determined to put it out of her mind and enjoy the evening.

She changed out of her uncomfortable work clothes in the car and then drove straight to Bellamy’s, hoping he’d been able to finish up his work for the day and get home earlier than expected. His truck was parked out front, so that was a good sign.

When she walked in the front door, a loud “SURPRISE!” greeted her, nearly knocking her off her feet. All her friends were there, hiding behind the counter or the couch. But they jumped up when she came in, smiles on their faces, arms in the air. Murphy had on a stupid party hat and had a noisemaker, and someone—probably Bellamy—had taken the time to hang a happy birthday banner up in the kitchen. There was a cake on the counter with her name on it and twenty-two candles.

“Oh my god!” she exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear. “You guys . . .” She was touched that they’d remembered. Nobody had said anything all day, not even Bellamy, and even though she hadn’t for one second suspected he’d forgotten, she’d never imagined that he would get everyone together for a party. Raven and Roan were there, Nylah and Luna, and even Wells and his girlfriend, Sasha, along with the usual Saturday night crew, of course. The house was packed.

“Did we really surprise you?” Harper asked, skipping forward to place a tiara on Clarke’s head.

“Yes.” Clarke adjusted the tiara, wondering at first what it was for until she realized, “Oh, right, the princess.”

“Damn right,” Bellamy said, smiling at her as he came forward to give her a kiss on the cheek. “Happy birthday, babe.”

“Thanks.” She wrapped an arm around his waist, snuggling into his side. “Did you do all this?”

“Everybody helped,” he said modestly.
Murphy blew his noisemaker obnoxiously and bragged, “I made the cake.”

“We all brought presents,” Emori added, showing off quite the display of gifts next to her boyfriend’s leg lamp on the kitchen table.

“And we all brought food,” Monty added.

“But the whole party was Bellamy’s idea,” Octavia said, smiling at her big brother with approval.

All of her friends started to come forward to hug her as Miller started up the music, and Raven and Niyalah made sure to tease, “Did you seriously think we wouldn’t even text you on your birthday?”

“Well . . .” Clarke shrugged. She hadn’t been intending to make a big deal out of it. Honestly, she’d figured she would ask Bellamy to take her out to eat or take her to go see a movie or something. Or to just . . . take her. Repeatedly. In various positions upstairs. And she was still going to ask for that last one. Just later.

The party wasn’t really that much different than a regular Saturday night at the Blake-Murphy-Miller household, but it didn’t need to be. Every Saturday night was awesome. They went outside and jumped around on the trampoline for a while, but Clarke jumped so hard, her tiara flew right off her head. Like a sexy superhero, Bellamy dove off the trampoline and retrieved it for her, promptly placing it back on top of her head before giving her a big kiss.

They ate and they drank, and while Miller and Lincoln had a very mismatched arm-wrestling contest, Clarke got to talk to Wells and Sasha, whom she’d only met a few times before. Sasha was the daughter of the governor of Delaware, and Wells and she planned to move to Dover after graduation.

Well. At least they had their plan for the future in place.

Clarke was having so much fun, though, that she was able to push the Philadelphia anxiety out of her mind for the most part that night. She had enough drinks that the girls were able to convince her to dance, and at one point, someone started a game of truth or dare that resulted in Jasper taking all his clothes off and streaking down the street. Clarke mainly stuck to truths, and her eyes got really wide when Emori asked, “So did you finally find out what a rim job is?” But when Octavia shrieked, “No, don’t answer! I don’t wanna know this!” Clarke just shrugged and said, “Look, I can’t answer when the pregnant woman tells me not to.” And she just left it at that.

By far the most interesting dare, to her, was the one that Bellamy took. (Of course Bellamy took a dare. He said it was basically just a game of dares for him.) Jackson dared him to do a striptease for Clarke, right there in front of everyone, and for a split second, he looked like he might not do it. He cast a curious glance at Clarke, and she just shrugged, not exactly opposed to the idea. As long as her clothes stayed on, she was fine if his came off.

“He’s not gonna do it,” Miller said tauntingly. “He’s gonna wimp out.”

Bellamy Blake was never one to back down from a challenge, though, and when Clarke saw that look of determination in his eyes, she knew he was going to go through with it. “Octavia, leave the room,” he told his sister.

She rolled her eyes, already dragging her feet towards the bathroom. “It’s fine, I have to go throw up anyway,” she grumbled. Lincoln followed her, probably to hold her hair back for her.

The girls pulled out a chair for Clarke in the middle of the living room and told her to sit down, and Bellamy requested that Miller find a good song. Seconds later, the iconic beats of “Pony” came over the speakers, and all the girls laughed and hollered with delight.
“What the fuck is this, *Magic Mike*?” Bellamy spat.

“Woo!” Clarke exclaimed, clapping her hands together excitedly. Yeah, she was *definitely* into this. This was going to be a present all in its own right.

Bellamy shook his head, seemingly embarrassed, at least just a little bit, before he said, “Fuck it,” and just went for it, moving from side to side in front of her with way more rhythm than she’d ever have. He snaked his torso from side to side and did these little pelvic thrusts that drove her wild, and apparently she wasn’t the only one. Harper was already fanning herself, and Jackson was practically drooling. Raven yelled, “Go get it, Bellagio!” which just made him laugh and shake his head.

Clearly, even though he’d been the one to ask for a dare, he couldn’t believe he was doing this.

When he swung both legs over her lap and straddled her, that’s when everyone roared with applause, and Clarke nearly collapsed into a fit of laughter. But as funny as it was for Bellamy to be giving her a legit lap dance right now, it was also hot as hell. The way he rolled his hips on top of her lap was totally mimicking the way he looked when he fucked her real good, and it was quite the turn-on to feel like she was trapped beneath him, couldn’t get away even if she wanted to.

*She didn’t* want to.

“Take it off!” one of the girls—probably Raven—hollered.

Bellamy shook his head again but didn’t stop moving his hips suggestively for one second. He reached down with crossed arms, took the bottom of his t-shirt in both hands, and pulled it over his head in one swift motion. Of course, there was a thunder of cheers for that, and Clarke was pretty sure she heard Niylah say, “This is the best thing I’ve ever seen, and I’m not even straight.”

“The things I do for you, Princess,” Bellamy muttered, grinning at her as he whirled his shirt around in the air like a lasso. He ended up throwing it, and Clarke didn’t see who caught it, because she was pretty distracted by his abs at this point.

When it came time for him to take his pants off, he reached down to unbutton his jeans, and Clarke’s eyes widened, because . . . was he really going to go that far in front of his friends? He ended up shaking his index finger in a semi-scolding way instead, got off her lap, and said to everyone, “Hope you enjoyed the show.”

They all clapped and cheered for him, and Octavia came out of the bathroom a few seconds later, barely peeking through the fingers that covered her eyes. “Is it over?” she asked fearfully.

“Yeah, it’s over,” Bellamy said. “Give me my shirt, Miller.” When Miller wouldn’t give it back, that of course escalated into a wrestling match, and the girls loved that, too. “Hell yes!” Raven shouted.

“Somebody get some oil,” Emori suggested.

Unfortunately, the wrestling match was over before Clarke could full appreciate the sight of shirtless Bellamy rolling around with another man. Bellamy got his shirt back and put it on, which naturally elicited a groan of disappointment from everyone except the straight guys.

There was no specific set time for opening presents. Clarke opened a few at a time before the need to eat and drink—mostly drink—became everyone’s priority again. Most of the gifts were art-related—she got so many colored pencil sets, she couldn’t even keep them straight—but she appreciated that everyone was nice enough to get her something when they were all on a much stricter budget than she was. Niylah’s gift was one of the highlights, as she knew Clarke well and knew that she would enjoy the blue and white floral sundress she’d picked out for her. It was super cute and flowy, and
Clarke had to duck upstairs to put it on. When she came back down, Niylah exclaimed, “See? I knew you’d look so good in that.”

Bellamy leaned over to Murphy and mumbled, “She’d look good out of it, too.”

She did a little twirl, very aware of how short the dress was, unembarrassed that she might have just given everyone a little too much of a peek at what was underneath. Whatever. Most of them had walked in on her and Bellamy at least halfway naked by now, so there wasn’t much to hide.

Raven’s gift was also a nice one, so perhaps it wasn’t surprising that she’d gotten two of her best gifts from the girls who had been her friends the longest. Raven gave her a scrapbook of all of their college memories. Lots of pictures, plus some other fun stuff, like their unused concert tickets for Justin Timberlake. They’d both come down with the flu that weekend and hadn’t been able to go, but they’d watched the whole thing online later and told everyone they were there. Plus, there was a pact they’d written together and signed shortly after the Finn fiasco, where they both vowed to never date anyone again in college. That hadn’t lasted long since Raven had found Wick pretty early on and Clarke had found Lexa about a year later.

“Raven, I had no idea you were so good at arts and crafts,” Clarke said complimentarily as she skimmed through the book.

“Oh, I’m not,” Raven said, “but this one here . . .” She motioned to her boyfriend.

Roan shrugged. “It’s a gift.”

“Oh.” It was weird to picture Roan sitting down and helping Raven with a scrapbook, but . . . well, Roan was a weird guy, so it made sense that he had weird talents.

“Open mine next,” he said, handing Clarke a medium-sized red sack.

“I swear, if this is that dick-sculpting kit . . .” Clarke pushed the tissue paper around inside and saw that, indeed, that was what it was. She showed it to Bellamy, and he just said, “Thanks, Roan. We would’ve never gotten that for ourselves.”

Clarke was already making plans to give that to Murphy and Emori. It seemed like something they’d be into.

Bellamy’s gift was exactly what she’d asked him for: a new coffee maker. For a non-morning person like herself, coffee was vital if there was to be any possibility of her functioning like an actual human being. The coffee maker in her apartment was decent enough, but the one they had over here was kind of crappy, and she was the only one who used it, so getting a new one hadn’t been a priority. She thanked him profusely and made a mental note to get it set up that night so that she’d have some much-needed caffeine to look forward to in the morning.

As the party wore on well into the evening, Octavia and Lincoln had to leave. She just got too tired to stay up late anymore. Wells and Sasha left, too, claiming they both had exams in the morning, but Clarke saw that twinkle in their eyes. They looked like they wanted to go have sex. But they would never be as blunt about that as most of the other people at the party would be.

Clarke wanted to have sex with Bellamy, too, but he was busy talking to the guys. Judging by the emphatic hand gestures they were all making, they were probably talking about sex, so she took the opportunity to pull Raven and Niylah aside and do the same. She told them that she and Bellamy had tried . . . she couldn’t even say it at first, but Raven and Niylah knew. Raven hugged her, and Niylah actually congratulated her.
“Why?” Clarke asked. Was anal sex really a congratulatory thing?

“Well, you stepped outside your comfort zone, tried something new with someone you really care about,” Niylah exclaimed. “I don’t care how taboo people make it seem. I think that’s beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Raven agreed. “Good for you, Clarke. Was it . . .” She lowered her voice and asked, “I mean, did he make it . . . good?”

Clarke gave her a look. It was *Bellamy*. Of course he’d made it good.

“Figured as much,” Raven said after interpreting the nonverbal reply as a yes.

Once the sex talk started, it was hard for Clarke to get her mind out of the gutter. Between the conversations she and her friends were having, Bellamy’s strip tease earlier, and the steaming hot looks he kept sending her from the kitchen, she couldn’t quench the desire building up inside. No matter how inconspicuously she tried to rub her legs together, the friction was never enough to provide any sort of relief, and no matter how many glasses of water she drank, she never could get her skin to stop feeling so hot. She needed him. She wanted him. Alone.

Even though it was already 1:00 a.m., no one else seemed ready to leave. Bellamy must have been feeling the same lustful tug that she was, though, because he set his drink down on the counter and motioned upstairs with his head, smirking suggestively. She grinned back, giving her friends a polite, “Excuse me,” before she headed up. It must have been completely obvious when he snuck up after her a few seconds later, but they were both past the point of caring.

They crashed together into the bedroom, kissing and groping wildly as they shoved the door shut. He slammed her against it, pinning his body against hers, grinding his groin against hers to let her feel his semi-hard cock through his jeans. It felt good, and she wanted it, so she pressed her hips forward into his, and before she knew it, they were going back and forth, grinding against each other wantonly as their hands clamored to rid each other of their clothes.

Her dress was off before she even knew what was happening, and her bra came next. She lifted his shirt over his head, revealing that amazing bare chest that had entertained her so during the strip tease. She grazed her fingernails against his skin, scratching lightly as she reached down to fiddle with his jeans.

“You wanna get fucked on your birthday, huh?” he said teasingly, letting her reach down into his pants and handle him.

“Of course.” She wanted this way more than she’d wanted that coffee maker, and that was really saying something.

“I got you,” he said, placing his hands on her waist so he could spin her around. She plastered her chest against the door and instinctively stuck her butt out as he hooked his fingers into the sides of her panties and pulled them down. He stopped and placed a kiss on each cheek and on the backs of her thighs as he lowered her panties to the ground almost tortuously slowly. She stepped out of them and spread her legs, fully prepared to get nailed right there. She heard him shuck off his jeans, but rather than standing up and plunging into her, he got down on his knees, angled his head in between her legs, and started to lick and lap at her cunt, which was already wet for him.

“Oh . . .” she groaned, accidentally knocking her head against the door. That felt so damn good, so she spread her legs open some more, hoping to give him the easiest access possible.

His nose nuzzled her folds as his tongue flicked and teased her clit, and his breath was so hot against
her sensitive flesh that it felt like a furnace. She loved that he was obviously loving the taste of her, and she experimented a bit with circling her pussy against his face, the way she sometimes did when they were doing a sixty-nine. He held his tongue out and let her roll and rub against it, finding that friction she’d so desperately been craving downstairs. God, his mouth was heavenly, and the things he did with it were unreal.

He gave her pussy lips one big, sucking kiss before standing up, much to her disappointment. “I’m just workin’ you up,” he told her as he plunged two fingers into her depths. She gasped sharply and had to press her hands hard against the door to stay upright as he finger-fucked her almost urgently. She wasn’t used to him going so fast like this, not unless they were somewhere like a dressing room or the side of a highway; but right now, fast was exactly what she needed.

“Oh my god, Bellamy,” she whimpered, getting off on this so much. When he pushed a third finger inside of her, she jolted forward, and he had to grab hold of her hips with his free hand to keep her still.

Any minute, she kept expecting him to push his underwear down and get inside her. When she glanced back over her shoulder, she saw that his cock was now straining hard, and it had to be painful to be confined by any clothes. She tried to reach back and touch him, offer him some sort of pleasure just like he was giving her, but she was so worked up that she lost her balance without both hands braced against the door.

“Cum on my fingers,” he leaned forward to whisper dirtily in her ear. That was all it took. She squeezed her eyes shut and, seconds later, did just that. She felt like she was dangerously close to squirting, which was something she knew Bellamy was dying to get her to do again, but she didn’t think she had any control over when it happened. For now, he seemed content with her just drenching his fingers, and when he withdrew them, plenty of her juices seeped out, further coating her pussy and her inner thighs.

“That was fucking hot,” he said, and she finally heard the waistband of his briefs snap as he lowered them past his cock. She looked around and found him touching himself with the same hand that had just gotten her off. Tantalizingly, he smeared a mixture of her cum and his pre-cum around his cock, getting it all ready for her, and her knees nearly buckled as she watched him.

“Come here,” he said, picking her up like she weighed nothing. He set her down on the bed and stood back to take his underwear all the way off. “Me on top or you?” he asked as he stepped out of them.

There was no way she had enough control over her body right now to ride him, and she loved it when his whole body encompassed hers anyway. So she said, “You,” and scooted back on the bed.

He crawled on top of her, lips seeking out hers for some messy, sloppy kisses she couldn’t get enough of, an instinctively, she spread her legs so he could settle in between. The head of his cock nudged against her still sensitive pussy, but he didn’t push it in. Instead, he dropped his head and sucked at her breasts for a moment, using that to get her worked up again. Bellamy most certainly knew how to give her multiple orgasms, and he knew it worked best when he gave her just a minute or two in between to let sensitivity die down.

“You ready?” he asked, lifting his head.

She nodded dazedly, trying to raise her hips up off the mattress to swallow his cock. But he sat back instead, manhandled her onto her side, and lifted her right leg up to rest against his shoulder. Then he moved forward on his knees, holding his cock in one hand, and guided it inside her smoothly.
“Uh . . .” she murmured, loving how this felt even fuller than three of his fingers had. Having Bellamy inside her had become as necessary to her as oxygen. She couldn’t live without it.

Holding onto her leg, he rocked into her with smooth, long strokes, very similar to the movements he’d been making during the striptease earlier. His eyes darkened with desire, and he kept his face trained on hers, only looking away every once in a while to watch himself sliding in and out of her.

She wasn’t used to this position, but she liked it. It stretched her wide open for him, and since she couldn’t move very well, she felt like she was completely under his control. Even when she was on top, Bellamy usually managed to be the more dominant one in bed, but on nights like this, he took things to a whole different level. He was completely ravaging her with pleasure and attention, and she was loving every second of it.

He must have sensed she was going to cum again, because even though he kept the pace of his thrusts the same, he reached down with one hand to rub her clit with hard circles. It really didn’t take much stimulation to get her to fall over the edge again. Right now, her whole body felt wired, like one big erogenous zone just for him, and he had it memorized.

Instead of picking up the pace of his thrusts and pounding into her to find his own release, his hips stilled while she rode hers out, and he stayed inside her after it was done. He massaged her thigh and her calf with his hands, pressing a tender kiss to her ankle, and then rolled his hips forward again.

“Oh,” she moaned breathily, not sure if she could even handle another one. But clearly that was what he had in mind.

“Can you give me one more?” he asked hopefully.

Honestly, she wasn’t sure. She’d rarely had three orgasms in a row before, but she knew it was possible. Bellamy had gotten her to have three before. Her legs and arms already felt shaky and weak, but the prospect of adding to the immense pleasure she was already feeling was too much to turn down. She nodded her response, thinking that all these orgasms might be the end of her. What a way to die, though.

He set her leg back down and remained inside her as he carefully lay down, supporting his weight with an arm on either side of her head. He stroked her hair and kissed her softly, and little moves like that reminded her just how much he adored her. Literally. Whenever she was with him, the way he touched her and kissed her made her feel adored.

She wasn’t sure how long they stayed like that, but she was sure it wouldn’t take long to get her off for the third time that night when he started thrusting into her again. It was more of an insistent grind this time, since his body was already pressed so tightly to hers. She loved it, loved the feel of him on top of her, of the beads of sweat on his chest and stomach mixing with her own. After everything they’d done together and everything they’d tried, her favorite position with Bellamy was still just this: him on top of her, making her feel adored, fucking into her like nothing else in the whole world even mattered, because nothing else did.

“I’m gonna fuckin’ cum inside you,” he murmured hotly against her lips, and something about the way he said that, or maybe even just the thought of it, made her whole body quiver. She clenched around him, hoping she’d be able to feel it when he did. She had a smaller orgasm this time, but an orgasm nonetheless, and she felt dizzy with delight as he spent himself inside her a few seconds later. She felt a pulsating warmth spread through her body, and the knowledge that it was him made her head spin. In a good way.

The downside to so many orgasms, unfortunately, was that she was so sensitive, she had to push
against his chest and shoulders to tell him to pull out of her not long after he’d cum. He got the message and did just that, lying down beside her, immediately scooping her up in his arms. “Come here, Princess,” he said, bringing her close. She curled against him, still shaking and shuddering with that euphoric feeling he’d just given her. She couldn’t explain it, but cumming so many times like that made her feel sort of vulnerable, so it was nice to be able to just snuggle up with him and feel his arms around her, feel his hands in her hair and on her back. This time, he wasn’t touching her to arouse her; he was touching her to comfort her, to calm her down.

It took a while for her abdominal muscles to stop fluttering and for her breathing to return to normal, but once they did, she felt utterly sated. If their friends were expecting them to come back downstairs at all tonight, then they were going to be sorely disappointed, because she wasn’t moving out of this bed. She couldn’t, even if she’d tried.

She wasn’t about to try.

“You okay?” Bellamy asked her after a few minutes of silent cuddle time.

“Yeah,” she replied, smiling woozily. “That was incredible.”

“You’re incredible.” He kissed her forehead softly, then put his hand under her chin to lift her face towards his, too. He kissed her lips, nuzzled his nose against hers affectionately, and revealed, “I got one more present for you.”

“What?” Hadn’t he already given her enough? Between the party itself, the spontaneous strip tease, her beloved coffee maker, and this little escapade, she wasn’t expecting anything more.

“Just one more thing.” he said, reaching over to his nightstand drawer. He took out a small jewelry box, bigger than something like a ring but smaller than a necklace, and handed it to her. “Happy birthday,” he said, smiling.

“Bellamy . . .” If this was indeed jewelry, then it was probably way too expensive. He spent way too much money on her.

“Open it,” he urged, lying on his side so he could watch her eagerly.

Even though she felt like she was getting spoiled, she couldn’t deny that she loved it. Bellamy Blake knew how to treat a woman right, in more ways than one, and even though she didn’t need another gift, she was eager to see what he’d gotten her.

When she opened the box, she really wasn’t prepared for what she saw. It was a gold bracelet with the words Love always, Dad on it. And the crazy thing was . . . that was her father’s handwriting.

“Oh my god,” she whispered in astonishment, clasping one hand over her eyes, then her mouth, as she struggled not to cry. It didn’t work, though. The tears started to fall almost immediately. It had been six years since her dad had died, and in those six years, she’d learned to dwell on it less. She could think back to all her memories with him and smile and feel happy that she’d at least gotten sixteen years with him. But seeing something like this . . . she hadn’t expected it.

“Sorry,” Bellamy apologized. “I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“No, good tears,” she assured him, sniffing, smiling sadly as she took the bracelet out of the box. It was beautiful, and she couldn’t get over how it was . . . it was an exact replica of his handwriting. Every letter on that bracelet was exactly the way he would have written it. “How did you get this?” she asked.
“Well, when you got me that bear that has Gina’s voice, it inspired me,” he explained. “So I got online and found this company that does personalized bracelets like this. Your mom sent me a copy of some letter he wrote for you when you were younger, and I sent in the signature part so they could put it on a bracelet.”

She blinked back tears, nodding as she remembered what letter he was talking about. She had it framed in her bedroom, and she’d never get rid of it. “Um, he wrote me that when I was starting seventh grade,” she informed him. “I was so nervous to be in junior high, so he put a letter in my trapper keeper—’cause, you know, trapper keepers were, like, all the rage back then.”

Bellamy chuckled.

“And when I opened it up for my first class, there it was, and it just made me feel so much better.” She wiped at her eyes, pushing the good tears away, and took a moment to appreciate just how compassionate of a gift this was. This wasn’t just some pretty bracelet he’d picked up in the store. This was something with so much meaning and sentimental value attached that she could barely even fathom it. And her mom had helped him out, which made it even nicer. In a way, this was a gift from both of them. And a gift from her dad.

No one had ever gotten her something this nice before.

“I love it,” she told him, blinking back fresh tears. “Thank you.”

He smiled at her sweetly, then suggested, “Put it on. Here.” He carefully took it from her, and she held out her wrist. Getting it unhooked and then hooked again wasn’t easy for his big fingers, but he managed it, and the bracelet fit perfectly.

Love always, Dad, she read, smiling happily. Now, whenever she wore this, she could think of him. Of both of them.

It was perfect.

She leaned over and kissed Bellamy gratefully. He hadn’t had the privilege of knowing or even meeting her dad, and sadly, he never would. But there wasn’t a doubt in her mind that her father really would have liked him.
Chapter 39

Clarke usually heard Bellamy’s alarm go off in the morning, but it was never really enough to wake her up. Either he hadn’t set it last night, or he’d slept through it, because she woke up on her own around 8:00. To her surprise, he was still in bed, sleeping soundly on his side. She hoped that meant he didn’t have much work lined up today and could take it easy, maybe even take a whole day off. He deserved it.

She looked down at herself, and the first thing she noticed was the bracelet on her left wrist. That made her smile. Then she saw that she was wearing one of his t-shirts. She couldn’t even remember putting it on before going to bed, but damn, it was comfy. The whole bed was comfy, and had she not had class in an hour and a half, she would have just lounged around all day. In fact, she was seriously considering skipping, because really, she wasn’t going to be able to focus on any of the content. Not when she still had plenty of other stuff on her mind.

It kind of sucked that, after such a great night, it didn’t take long for the reality to come crashing back in that morning.

Clarke reached over Bellamy and grabbed her iPad off the nightstand, unplugging it from the power cord. She lay back and did what she’d resisted doing all day yesterday: She Google-Mapped the distance from Arkadia to Philadelphia.

Two hours and forty minutes. That was the fastest route. Other routes took three hours, maybe even more.

She felt a sinking feeling settle into the pit of her stomach as she tried to readjust the route to find something faster. Every swipe she made on the screen just made the journey even longer, so it just got more and more depressing.

She’d be there by herself. No more girls nights with Raven and Niylah, no chance to babysit Lincoln and Octavia’s son. Jasper wouldn’t invite her to any of his pot rallies anymore, because she wouldn’t be around to attend, and she wouldn’t be able to try to learn anymore dance moves from Harper during their nights at TonDC. Whenever Miller and Jackson got engaged, she wouldn’t be around to celebrate it. Same with Murphy and Emori.

She’d miss all her friends. Every single one of them. She’d miss their nights out at TonDC, and she’d miss their Saturday shenanigans here. But there was no one she’d miss more than the man lying next to her.

He began to stir, almost as if he knew subconsciously that she was thinking about him.

How was she supposed to just pack up and move to a place where she knew no one, where she’d have to live by herself instead of living with him? Okay, fine, maybe she didn’t technically live there, but for all intents and purposes . . . she shared a bed with Bellamy every night. He gave her a kiss before he left for work every morning. How was she supposed to . . .

Dammit.

Two hours and forty minutes. No. That wouldn’t work. She couldn’t drive that distance back and forth every day. It was too far. It was way too far.
She swung the covers aside and got out of bed, setting her iPad down on the desk before treading into the bathroom. Hopefully a shower would help her clear her head.

Fifteen minutes later, with a head still jumbled with thoughts, she came back out into the bedroom to find the bed empty. She could hear noise coming from downstairs in the kitchen, so she assumed it was Bellamy. Tugging on a comfy pair of shorts and a fresh t-shirt of his, she headed downstairs to see if anyone had decided to just crash there for the night. It’d been pretty late when she and Bellamy went upstairs, and the party hadn’t seemed to be dying down.

“Morning,” Bellamy greeted her as she stepped down off the bottom step.

“Morning,” she returned, hopping over Murphy, who was curled up comfortably on his beanbag with an empty red solo cup in his hand. Other than him, no one was asleep on the floor, but she doubted Emori had gone home, so she was probably asleep in her boyfriend’s room. Miller and Jackson may have already left for work for the day.

“You know what I realized?” Bellamy said, reaching into the refrigerator. He took out her birthday cake, which still had twenty-two unlit candles on it and hadn’t been touched at all last night. “You never made a wish.”

She smiled, swaying towards the counter, and asked, “Are we really gonna have cake for breakfast?”

“Sure,” he said, digging around the kitchen drawers until he found the candle lighter. “This is a lot of candles,” he said, lighting them one by one. “Are you sure you can blow ’em all out?”

She sat down on one of the stools and replied suggestively, “Oh, you’d be surprised what I can blow.”

He smirked, lighting the rest of the candles quickly, and then pushed the cake towards her. “Here you go,” he said. “A day late, but it still counts. Make a wish.”

She leaned forward, staring first at all the candles, then at him. Honestly, she didn’t know what she was wishing for. But at the same time, it felt like she was wishing for something.

Taking a deep breath, she blew it all out, getting about half the twenty-two candles to go out before she had to stop and breathe again. “What the hell, are these trick candles or something?” she whined.

“No, you’re just getting old, so there’s a lot of ’em,” he teased.

“Oh, shut up. You have two more than I do,” she snapped back.

“Want some help?” he offered.

“No, I got it.” She took another deep breath and let it out over the candles that remained, and it was enough. Except for one little stubborn one in the corner, but with one more little puff of air, that one went out, too. “Does this mean my wish won’t come true then?” she asked, pouting.

“No, it’ll come true,” Bellamy assured her, already removing the candles.

I hope so, she thought, swiping her finger against the bottom of the cake to collect some of the frosting and taste it. Mmm, it definitely tasted like it was going to be a good. She’d have to give Murphy his props when he woke up.
After indulging in a massive birthday cake breakfast, Clarke did actually attempt to haul her ass to class. She sat through one boring hour-long lecture about . . . something, just as unfocused and disinterested as she’d expected herself to be. By the time she was supposed to head to her second class, she was in full on screw-class mode and decided to do something a little different with her day. Very different, actually.

She got in the car and drove home to see her mom. No obligatory holiday dinner or campaign rally lured her to make an appearance this time. She could tell her mother was surprised—and maybe even a little startled—when she came out of surgery to find her daughter in the waiting room. “What’s wrong, honey?” she asked immediately. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Clarke assured her, feeling guilty that their mother/daughter time had become such a rare thing these past two years. When her mother’s gut reaction was to assume something was wrong when all she’d done was stop by, that probably meant she needed to be a more attentive daughter. “I just wanted to talk to you about something,” she told her quietly, hoping she wasn’t interrupting some life or death operation.

“Oh.” Abby still looked worried, and her eyes automatically flittered downward to glance at Clarke’s stomach.

She thinks I’m pregnant, Clarke realized. And hell, with the ominous way she’d phrased that, who could blame her? “Nothing like that,” she quickly added.

“Oh, okay.” Her mother breathed a tiny sigh of relief but still looked curious, slightly nervous.

“It’s nothing bad,” Clarke promised her. “Will you have a break soon?”

“In about half an hour,” her mother replied.

“I’ll wait.” Clarke sat back down in one of those uncomfortable chairs and grabbed an outdated issue of People magazine off the table in front of her. Looked like Justin Bieber was in trouble again. Fascinating.

Thirty-seven minutes later, her mother re-emerged and led Clarke up to the third floor cafeteria, which, she boasted, served the best turkey sandwiches she’d ever eaten in her life. Clarke got one for herself but only took a few bites. She was still full from the birthday cake.

She told her mom about the surprise party her friends had thrown for her last night—left out the more inappropriate Bellamy parts, of course—and showed off the beautiful gold bracelet on her wrist. Her mother became a bit tearful and held Clarke’s hand steady to get a closer look. “That’s a very heartfelt gift,” she remarked.

“Very,” Clarke agreed. Leave it to Bellamy to get the absolute perfect and most touching thing.

Somehow, she segued into an update on Wells and his girlfriend, how they were moving after graduation and he already had a political internship with her father lined up for the summer. She then used that to transition into talk of her own future, and her mom seemed to realize quickly that this was the real reason she’d came. She listened intently as Clarke told her about the potential job—hell, potential career—in Philadelphia, and as she fretted about how far away Philadelphia was. Clarke confessed that the whole thing had her feeling confused and utterly miserable.

“There’s nothing to be miserable about,” Abby said. “This is an exciting opportunity.”

“Yeah, but it’s also stressful,” Clarke lamented. “And I feel pressured to make a decision sooner than later.”
Her mother tilted her head to the side and inquired, “Are you leaning one way or the other?”

She sighed heavily, recalling a much different conversation a few years ago when her mom had asked that same exact question in regards to her sexual preferences. “I mean, it would be nice to have some sort of career plans laid out for me,” she admitted. “But I wasn’t exactly looking to relocate.”

“You moved to Arkadia by yourself,” her mom pointed out.

“For college. And that’s, like, twenty minutes away from here. Philadelphia’s a lot further. And big. And I wouldn’t . . .” She stopped herself before saying she wouldn’t have Bellamy there and just mumbled, “I wouldn’t know anyone.”

Her mom studied her for a moment, and Clarke knew she didn’t have to say anything else for her to get it, for her to understand why such a seemingly great opportunity was still so conflicting.

“That’s what scares you, isn’t it?” her mother said. “Not having your friends, not having . . .” She trailed off empathetically.

Clarke swallowed hard, looking down at her bracelet again. It was the best gift she’d ever received, given to her by one of the best people she’d ever known.

“Maybe you could ask him to go with you,” her mother suggested.

With me? Clarke thought, unsure. This wouldn’t be the same as asking him to hop in the truck and drive to Missouri for the weekend; they were talking about packing up and moving to an entirely different state here. But Bellamy had a home in Arkadia, a job, a family. His mother and sister were there, and soon, his nephew would be, too.

How could she ask him to leave all of that just for her?

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When Clarke got home, Bellamy was already there, sitting on the couch in grey sweatpants and a black t-shirt. His hair was messy, and he was wearing his glasses, which usually meant he’d been lounging around for a while. He hardly ever wore his glasses out in public.

“Hey,” she said.

“Hey.”

She set her backpack down, groaning because it was weighed down by all the crap she was supposed to read this weekend. If she didn’t do it, she’d probably be kicking herself come time for final exams, but . . . sometimes it was just really hard to find the motivation.

“You’re home early,” she remarked.

“Yeah, I didn’t have much to do today,” he said. “What about you? How was your day?”

She shrugged, plopping down beside him. “It was fine. I went and had lunch with my mom.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. Had to show her my bracelet.” She held it up for him to see that she still hadn’t taken it off.

“Looks nice,” he said. But that was all he said. Where was the trademark flirtatiousness and his default sexual innuendo? If he really hadn’t done much today, she’d expected him to be . . . frisky.
Maybe even bored and looking for a little lovin’.

“You alright?” she asked. He just seemed sort of . . . out of it.

“Yeah,” he answered. But he sounded out of it, too.

No. Uh-uh. She didn’t buy it, not for a second. Something was up. She gave him a stern look and just said, “Bellamy,” knowing that would probably be enough to get him to start talking.

It took him a few seconds, but finally, he reached underneath his leg and handed her . . . an envelope. Something he’d been hiding? She was so confused.

“What’s this?” she asked, flipping it over to check the return address on the front. Only she didn’t even have to look, because that big calligraphy A in the top left-hand corner was very familiar to her.

Arkadia. Bellamy had gotten a letter from the college.

“You heard from them?” she exclaimed, fingers cautiously feeling to see if he’d already opened it. He had.

Bellamy nodded mutely, averting his eyes.

Oh, no, she thought, preparing herself for the worst. This didn’t sound good.

She was already formulating a dozen comforting things to say, as well as piecing together some truly epic rants about how they were going to be kicking themselves once they realized what a great student they were missing out on, but suddenly, Bellamy blurted, “I got in.”

“What?” The envelope fluttered in her hands, and she wasn’t sure she’d heard him right. She pulled out the letter inside, unfolded it eagerly, and there it was in black and white: We are pleased to accept your application for enrollment . . .

“Oh my god!” she bubbled excitedly. “Bellamy!” She threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly, beyond thrilled for him. “Oh my god, I’m so happy for you. Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” he said, slowly pulling back.

“Are you . . . are you happy?” she asked, frowning. He didn’t seem happy.

“Yeah,” he insisted. “Just kinda . . . I don’t know, it’s surreal, I guess.”

“Oh, I’m sure.” So he wasn’t upset; he was just stunned. That made sense. He hadn’t been a student for six years, and he’d spent those years convinced that college was an opportunity that had passed him by. She supposed she could understand how something like this made his head spin. “Well, this is good news,” she reminded him.

“Yeah, it is,” he agreed. “I didn’t think I’d get in.”

“I knew you would.”

“I didn’t wanna get my hopes up.”

“Well, I got ‘em up for you.” She smiled at him excitedly, looping her arms around him again. “I’m so proud of you, Bellamy,” she said. “You deserve this.”

“Thanks,” he said again. “I was so scared when I opened that up. I almost waited until you got
home. But I didn’t wanna . . . you know, if it was bad, I didn’t want you to have to make me feel better.”

“Well, it’s not bad,” she said, reading the very first line again. “This is great, Bellamy. This is perfect for you.”

“Yeah, and look here.” He pointed to a part of the letter she hadn’t even gotten to read yet. “They said I can still enroll in summer classes since I’m a ‘non-traditional student.’ So I could take my first class in, hell, five weeks?”

“Five weeks,” she echoed, as amazed by the thought as he was. “Oh my god, that’s crazy.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “In a good way.”

“A very good way.” She handed his letter back to him, hoping it’d be one of these good memories he held onto and put in that box in his nightstand drawer. “Wow.”

“Yeah, my mom’s gonna freak out,” he predicted, a slow smile spreading across his face. “Octavia’s gonna be happy.”

“Everyone’s gonna be happy,” she said. They all knew how much Bellamy longed for this, how much he loved learning. But not one of them even knew he had applied. “When are you gonna tell all of them?” she asked, hoping to be there when he did.

“I don’t know. I wanted to tell you first.” He put his arm around her, pulling her into his side. “This is nuts,” he said. “College.” He grunted, chuckling lightly, and said, “I guess I know what I’ll be doing for the next four years.”

“Hmm.” She scrunched his t-shirt up in her fingers, snuggling closer, trying to keep her smile firmly in place. Because there was no reason not to smile right now. This moment right here with Bellamy was easily the best part of her day. She was so happy for him, so proud, and there wasn’t a doubt in her mind that he would take all sorts of classes and excel in every single one. This opened up doors for him. He wasn’t going to have to be a handyman for the rest of his life. The things that he’d wanted for himself and worked for before Roma’s death . . . those were still things he could achieve. He’d be a history major or a history education major or something. He was actually going to get the chance to pursue what he loved.

And he was going to do it here. In Arkadia.

Maybe that should have muddled up Clarke’s own personal dilemma a little bit more, but it didn’t. In a way, it made everything seem very clear.

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Besides Clarke, Octavia and his mother were the two people Bellamy was most looking forward to sharing the college news with. He withheld it from them for a day, then convinced his sister that they needed to have a family dinner Friday night, because once she had the baby, she’d be too tired and busy to do anything with them anymore.

“But I’m already tired and busy,” she protested. All it took was a little more pleading on his part, and a reminder that he planned on being the best uncle in the entire world, and he managed to persuade her to accompany him to their mom’s house. It was weird not to think of it as home anymore, but then again, they’d bounced around a lot as kids, never lived in one house or apartment—or trailer—very long. The house he’d lived in now was the longest he’d ever lived anywhere.
“Where’s Clarke?” Octavia asked when she climbed up into his truck.

“She’s got a research paper to write tonight,” Bellamy explained, though she had still offered to come with him. “We don’t do everything together, you know,” he pointed out. “We’re not attached at the hip.”

“You kind of are,” Octavia argued. “Metaphorically and literally.”

“Says the girl who’s knocked up.” He shook his head in mock disapproval and waited for her to get her seatbelt on. She wasn’t huge by any means, but it still seemed to take a great deal of effort to pull her seatbelt from one side of her lap to the other. Honestly, it was kind of hilarious, but Bellamy knew better than to laugh at any of her pregnant misfortunes unless he wanted to get his ass kicked.

“You need some help?” he offered, already reaching over.

She swatted his hand away and proclaimed, “Got it,” as he belt clicked into place.

“Only took you eighty-four years,” he mumbled, shifting gears into drive.

“What?” she snapped.

“What? I didn’t say anything,” he lied, pulling away from the curb.

She stared at him skeptically but didn’t say anything more.

Phew, he thought. Close call.

When they got to their mom’s house, she was still fixing dinner, which was perfect, because it gave Bellamy a chance to check her home security system and make sure everything was still working properly.

Once they sat down to eat, Octavia dominated most of the conversation, telling their mother all about her doctor’s appointments, the crib Lincoln was assembling—damn, Bellamy had wanted to build them a crib, but scratch that—and of course she had to show off some pictures of the wedding dress she’d decided on. “It’s not the nicest,” she admitted, “but it’ll do.”

“I think it’s beautiful,” their mother said. And then . . . “Oh my.” She angled the phone towards Bellamy, showing him the picture of Clarke in that big poofy dress, the same picture Octavia had already forward to him the day she’d taken it. “What’s this all about?” she asked.

“Oh, it was a joke,” Octavia said, grabbing her phone back. “Kind of.”

“Kind of?” Their mother looked confused.

“Yeah, kind of?” Bellamy echoed. What the hell was that supposed to mean?

“Anyway . . .” Octavia went on. “That’s my dress. And the church is booked, and invitations are going out soon, so we’re making progress.”

“Sounds like,” Aurora agreed, nodding. She looked over at Bellamy and asked, “So what about you? What have you been up to?”

Octavia snorted and answered for him. “Doing Clarke.”

“O!” he yelled, embarrassed even though he wasn’t surprised. “Why—every single time we’re over here, you . . . I mean, this is the woman who gave birth to me. Did you ever think for one second that
maybe I don’t want—”

“I’m sorry,” Octavia cut in. But then she mumbled seconds later, “It’s true, though.”

“I’ll have you know, I’ve been busy with a lot of things,” he said. “Work and . . .” He trailed off, not entirely sure how to go about making his big announcement.

“Work keeps you busy,” his mother said sympathetically.

Bellamy sighed, figuring he might as well just go ahead and say it. So he did, just blurted it out: “I got into college.”

Both his mother and his sister stilled, forkfuls of food in their hands. His mother’s fingers began to tremble as she managed a shaky, “W-what?”

“Yeah, I applied at Arkadia a while back,” he replied, “and I got in, so . . .”

Octavia dropped her whole fork and squealed—literally squealed—and sprang to her feet faster than he’d seen her move in months. She ran around to his side of the table and hugged him excitedly, exclaiming, “Oh my god, oh my god!” on repeat.

“Bellamy . . .” His mother was calmer but no less thrilled by the news. With tears in her eyes, she leaned over and hugged him, too. “I’m so proud of you.”

“You’re going to college?” Octavia yelped incredulously. “You’re actually gonna go?”

“Yeah.” Even if he didn’t get any scholarships, the opportunity was too good to pass up. Again. He could take out loans if he had to, and even if he was paying them off until he was senile, he could make it work. Hopefully he’d get a little something, though. He’d filled out more scholarships applications than he could count. A couple hundred dollars here, a couple hundred there . . . it would add up.

“Oh my god, this is so great!” Octavia babbled. “You’re gonna be . . . I don’t know, like a historian or something!”

He chuckled. “We’ll see.” He had ideas, of course, but nothing was set in stone yet.

“You’re gonna go to college, Bell, just like you always wanted. You’re gonna . . .” Octavia trailed off, and all of a sudden, her bubbling enthusiasm turned into crying. It was like someone had flipped some switch inside her, and she flung her arms around him, hugging him tightly again. “I’m just so happy for you,” she cried.

Whether she was having one of her mood swings or really was just this overjoyed about it, he wasn’t sure, but it didn’t matter. “Thanks, O,” he said, grateful for the support. Glancing at his mom, he noticed her dabbing tears from the corners of her eyes. She was clearly trying not to get as emotional as her daughter had become, but it wasn’t working. He squeezed her hand, and she watched them both with an adoring smile on her face.

Bellamy’s acceptance into college was a fucking big deal, just like Clarke had anticipated it would be. He tried to downplay it, of course, act like he wasn’t half as excited about it as he really was, and he ended up just telling everyone right before a game of beer pong on Saturday night. Half their friends didn’t even hear his big announcement until Octavia blared, “Hey, everybody shut up! Bellamy has something to say!”
So he told them again, and this time, there was an eruption of raucous cheers and congratulations. They all knew how important it was to him, and they all knew why he hadn’t gone. So even though he said, “We don’t have to make a big deal out it,” everybody wanted to make it a big deal. They ditched the usual Saturday night plans to hang out at home and went out to eat instead. A celebratory dinner, Miller called it, and for once, Bellamy wasn’t allowed to pay for himself or anybody else. But apparently Clarke wasn’t, either, because Miller pulled her aside and said, “I’m paying for you.”

With such a big group, their options for restaurants were limited, and of course the Valentino’s buffet was the best bet. They shoved three tables together, loaded up their plates with mountains of food, and Roan ordered a round of beer for everyone at the table. Everyone except Octavia, of course.

“This is too much,” Bellamy kept whispering to Clarke as they ate and chattered. “Look at this, I’m fuckin’ sittin’ at the head of the table like Jesus or something.”

Clarke laughed. “Everyone’s just happy for you.”

On the other side of him, Jasper nodded vigorously and said, “Fuck yeah, man. If I was half as smart as you, I’d go to college.”

“You’re smart, Jasper,” Clarke assured him. The world wasn’t all about being book-smart. There were different realms of intelligence.

“No, let’s be honest, I’ve ruined quite a few brain cells,” Jasper admitted. “But I’ve got a few I’m holdin’ onto.”

“Oh.” Clarke made a face. “A few? ‘Well . . . good.’

At the other end of the table, Miller tapped his fork against his half-empty beer glass, drawing everyone’s attention. It wasn’t even just everyone at their table. They were the biggest, loudest, rowdiest group there, so all the other customers were watching them to some extent.

“Alright, I think it’s time for a toast,” Miller said, standing up. “To my best friend, Bellamy Blake, who also happens to be the smartest person I know.”

Bellamy just smiled and shook his head modestly.

“You’re a great guy,” Miller told him, “and you deserve this.” Raising his glass, he said, “Cheers!” and everyone raised their glasses and did the same.

After they’d all taken a drink—and Octavia had groaned enviously—Murphy stood up, too, and cleared his throat exaggeratedly. He sounded like he was hacking up a hairball.

“Oh god, here we go,” Bellamy muttered.

“My turn,” Murphy started in. “I’m the other best friend, in case you’ve forgotten. And I happen to know that Bellamy has wanted to go to college since he was, like . . . really young. Which we all know he’s not anymore. But education doesn’t age, my friends, and neither does this guy.”

“What the hell are you even talking about?” Raven spat.

“Yeah, honey, you’re not making any sense,” Emori told him.

“I got an early start on things tonight, so I’m kind of a little drunk already,” Murphy informed them. “But whatever. You get the point. Congrats, man.” He raised his nearly empty glass and downed the rest of it, and once again, everyone else took a drink, too. Octavia buried her face in Lincoln’s...
shoulder as though she couldn’t bear to watch this time.

“What about you, Clarke?” Harper asked. “You got anything to say?”

“Oh, not really,” Clarke replied. “I’ve been congratulating him a lot already.” She realized how easily that could be misinterpreted the moment the words left her mouth and everyone at the table started to say, “Ooh!” and “Bow chicka wow wow!”

“Not like that,” she clarified.

“Well, no, you did congratulate me like that,” Bellamy reminded her.

She lightly kicked his shin beneath the table.

“Well . . .” He shrugged unabashedly. “You did.”

“Just embrace it, Clarke,” Niylah suggested, putting an arm around her. “You’re horny. It’s healthy.”

“Fine,” she said, halfway covering her face because she had a feeling she was getting really red with embarrassment.

“Sex jokes aside . . .” Octavia cut in, breaking up the laughter and obligatory bed-breaking jokes. “You knew before all of us, right? I mean, we didn’t even know he’d applied.”

“Yeah, I knew,” Clarke said. “All of a sudden one night, he just decided he wanted to go.”

“Because I sat in on those classes,” he added.

“Wait a minute,” Niylah said, “you went and sat in a college class for fun?” She snorted in disbelief. “I wish I had your love of learning.”

“Well, I love the subject matter, so . . .” He trailed off and shrugged again.

“Okay, spontaneous poll time,” Octavia said. “Who thinks he’s gonna end up being a history teacher?”

Almost everyone at the table raised their hands, with only Roan muttering, “I don’t fuckin’ know.”

“A teacher, huh?” Bellamy said.

“I could see it,” Miller said. “You’d be good with kids.”

Clarke caught it—that flash of reminiscence in his eyes. She saw it even though no one else did, and she knew that, for just a split second, he was thinking about Gina, thinking about what he’d lost with her. She squeezed his leg beneath the table, and he nudged her knee in return, a silent way of saying thank you.

“What about this one?” Emori asked the group, motioning towards her boyfriend. “What’s he gonna be someday?”

Everyone started blurting out ideas, the answers ranging from “slacker” to “janitor” to “prison bitch.” Clarke took the opportunity to stand up and excuse herself.

“Where you goin’?” Bellamy asked her.

“Bathroom.”
“You wanna get me some more breadsticks on the way back?” he asked.

“I suppose.”

He beamed a smile at her. “You’re the best, Princess.”

God, it never mattered how many times he called her that, she never got tired of it.

As fun as tonight was, Clarke knew there was something she had to do. So when she got in the bathroom, she took the small, folded piece of paper Dante had given her out of her purse and sighed heavily as she stared down at the number. She’d put this off long enough, but right now was as good a time as any. If she didn’t call Cecilia Wallace, Cecilia Wallace might just end up calling her. One way or another, there was a job out there that didn’t have her name on it, and she needed to make that perfectly clear so that this girl could branch out in search of other business partners.

The door swung open suddenly, and Clarke crumpled up the paper, stuffing it back in her purse.

“Hey,” Octavia said as she strode in. “Can we talk for a minute?”

“Uh . . . sure,” Clarke said, frowning. “About what?”

Octavia laughed. “Don’t look so serious. I’m not mad at you or anything. I’m in a good mood. But I know my hormones make it hard to tell.”

“Right,” Clarke said, but truthfully . . . it wasn’t hormones. It was just Octavia’s natural personality that was so intense.

“I just wanted to thank you,” Octavia said. “I know you’re a big part of the reason why my brother decided to do this.”

“No, it was his decision, really,” Clarke said, not willing to sit here and take credit for something she didn’t really deserve. “I just sat there with him while he filled out the application and helped him look up some scholarships. No big deal.”

“It is a big deal, though,” Octavia insisted. “He convinced himself he wasn’t ever gonna go. He just thought it wasn’t in the cards for him after everything that happened to . . .” She lowered her voice. “To Roma.”

Clarke nodded sadly.

“And then after Gina . . .” Octavia exhaled a shaky sigh. “Even I gave up hope after Gina. I didn’t think he was ever gonna . . .” She shuddered, shaking her head as if to rid that sadness from her mind. “But then you came along, and . . . I don’t know, it just seems like his past was this huge hindrance to him, and ever since he met you, it’s like he’s not letting that hold him back anymore.”

Clarke just stared at her, kind of . . . stunned. Up until now, she hadn’t really considered her own role in this whole thing. In her mind, it was all Bellamy. He was the one who was working through his own issues, and he was the one who’d decided to pursue this. She was just . . . along for the ride.

“Clarke, I can never thank you enough,” Octavia went on. “I couldn’t convince him. My mom couldn’t convince him. No one out there could, either. But you . . .” She blinked back tears, smiling. “You convinced him.”

I did? Clarke wondered. Was there any truth in that? Maybe it didn’t matter whether there was or not, because Octavia certainly thought it was true. And if Octavia was thinking it, then maybe
everyone else was thinking it, too. She was still reluctant to take so much of the credit, but . . . maybe
she had played a bigger part in this than she’d imagined. It was still Bellamy’s decision, but perhaps
she had influenced it.

Just like he was about to influence a decision of hers.

After Octavia hugged her and left the bathroom, Clarke took out her phone again and the crumpled
piece of paper. She quickly dialed the number and waited for someone to pick up. The girl’s
voicemail kicked on, which was a relief, because Clarke felt way more comfortable turning down the
opportunity over a quick message. Short and sweet.

“Hi, Cecilia, this is Clarke Griffin,” she started in after the beep. “I work for your grandfather. I think
he told you about me. Um . . .” She bit her bottom lip, pausing for a moment, collecting her thoughts
on how she wanted to say this without coming off as an ungrateful bitch. “He told me you’re looking
to open up a gallery and you’re looking for a business partner, and I just wanted to let you know . . .”
She cringed. “As much as I would look forward to that, I just can’t relocate to Philadelphia right
now. So I don’t think I’d be the right person . . . for the job.” She sighed disappointedly, wishing it
had been closer to home. She could have made D.C. work, or even Baltimore. But not Philadelphia.
It was just too far away. “I’m sorry,” she apologized, “but best of luck. With everything.” She ended
the call, hoping that would be the end of it, tore up Cecilia’s contact information, and dumped it in
the trash.

Slowly, a few seconds later, the bathroom door creaked open, and in came Octavia again, much
more hesitantly this time. “Hey,” she said. “Sorry, bladder the size of a pea right now. I was coming
back to . . .” She gestured towards the empty stalls, then whirled her hands around in front of herself
for a moment before confessing, “I couldn’t help but overhear.”

“Oh.” Clarke looked down at her feet.

“I heard you . . .” Octavia sighed heavily. “I heard you talking, and I didn’t wanna interrupt, so . . .”
She cringed. “I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop, but I was just kind of standing there and--”

“It’s okay,” Clarke assured her quickly. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I wasn’t trying to be sneaky or anything,” Octavia insisted.

“I know.”

“It’s just . . .” Octavia frowned. “You turned down a job?”

“Potential job,” Clarke corrected. “I don’t even know if I was the right fit for it.” What did she know
about owning a business? Nothing. She had to take a few more classes before she launched into that.

“And it was in Philadelphia?” Octavia asked.

Clarke nodded. “Yep.”

Octavia tilted her head to the side curiously. “Why’d you turn it down?”

Clarke shrugged. “It just wasn’t for me. I’ve done the big city thing before; it’s not all it’s cracked up
to be. I like it here. I like being close to my mom, and I have all of you guys. I don’t wanna move
away and be somewhere all by myself.”

“Yeah, we’d miss you,” Octavia said. “Bellamy would really . . .” She trailed off, and Clarke knew
the expression on her face must have changed, because the expression on Octavia’s did, too.
Don’t go there, Clarke thought worriedly. Please.

But it was Octavia. Of course she went there. “That’s why you turned it down, isn’t it?” she concluded. “I mean, that’s the main reason. Because of him.”

Clarke shifted uncomfortably, reluctant to admit it.

“You don’t wanna be away from him,” Octavia stated matter-of-factly, not even the slightest sound of a question in her voice.

Even if she didn’t admit it, it was obvious. So Clarke shook her head and said, “No, I don’t.”

Octavia stared at her intensely, nodding slowly, silently. As if something about that . . . just made sense. And again, Clarke had to look away.
Chapter 40

So beautiful, Bellamy thought as he lay behind Clarke, watching her sleep. His alarm had gone off ten minutes ago, so he really should have been out of bed by now. But he didn’t want to move.

Clarke’s lips were gently parted when she slept. Sometimes she snored, but never that loudly. Sometimes she kicked off all the covers, and sometimes she hogged them all. Right now, she only had a sheet draped over her naked frame, and the smooth skin of her back was mesmerizing him. His fingers ghosted over her shoulders and spine, and he moved her hair aside so he could lean forward and press a gentle kiss to the back of her neck. Then he smoothed his hand over her shoulder and let his lips follow, mapping out a trail down her arm. God, her skin was so soft.

She started to stir slightly, but Clarke was a heavy sleeper, so she didn’t wake up. Not even when he slipped one of his legs in between hers and wrapped his arm around waist to pull himself closer to her, melding into her from behind.

Oh god, every inch of her skin felt like silk against his. He wanted to feel every inch of her. Despite the fact that it was now twelve minutes past the time he should have gotten out of bed, Bellamy reached down beneath the sheet and lifted her leg up enough to hike over his hip, giving him the perfect angle to rub his already semi-rigid cock against her entrance. That definitely got her to start waking up, and it made him ready to go in a matter of seconds. Before she was even fully coherent, he pushed into her, filling her up, and that elicited a hoarse moan and got her to open her eyes.

“Morning,” he said, grinding his hips forward steadily. Not too fast, not too hard. She’d just woken up.

“Uh . . .” was all she could manage as she tried to look at him over her shoulder. Apparently that took too much effort, though, because she ended up lying her head down again, using his arm as a pillow.

“You didn’t wanna keep sleeping, did you?” he teased.

She smiled dazedly and shook her head. “No.”

“No?” She probably had, but one of the few things Clarke liked better than sleep was sex, so there wasn’t a doubt in his mind that she was okay with this. Sometimes he liked to surprise her and have sleepy early morning sex with her. Usually, however, when he woke up and found her hand around his cock, it was something she’d done by accident.

“What a way to wake a girl up,” she said quietly.

He grinned proudly, getting lost in the addictive feel of sliding in and out of her. No matter how many times they did it, he never got tired of it. Any position, any time of day . . . it always felt so damn good. He liked forgetting where she ended and where he began.

He fucking into her for a few more minutes, trying to get her off by massaging her sides and stomach and squeezing her ample breasts. Ultimately, he got there before she did, but it wasn’t that big of a deal. Even when he pulled out of her, she looked satisfied. When he offered to go down on her and finish the job, she told him, “Later.” And when he asked “Why not now?” she told him it was
because it would make her legs feel all quivery and sticky. “Besides,” she said, clamping her legs shut. “Now this way I can keep you inside me all day.”

_Holy shit_, he thought, almost popping another boner right there. Damn, the thought of her walking around all day trying to keep his cum in her pussy . . .

_Damn._

An early morning orgasm was a surefire way to put himself in a good mood, so he didn’t even get pissed when he had to go un-clog a couple toilets or deal with what turned out to be a fake termite problem at Diana Sydney’s house. Nope, he was in a fucking good mood, and nothing was going to change that. It helped that he had time after lunch to head to campus. He wandered around for about ten minutes, just getting a better feel for the place, watching the other students on their way to classes. It felt different now, knowing that he was one of them. Or at least that he would be. He’d already paid his enrollment deposit.

The next step was getting the classes started, and he definitely wanted to take advantage of the chance to do a late enrollment for one of the summer sessions. He stumbled upon the administration building and walked inside. He must have looked confused, because somebody there asked him if he knew where he was going. When he explained his situation, they directed him to the academic advising offices, and there, he was able to sit down with someone who was basically an advanced version of his high school guidance counselor. He got all sorts of information on what majors were offered and what classes he could take that would count as ‘gen-eds’ and apply to pretty much any major he ended up choosing. He saw that the Twentieth Century Europe class he’d already sat in on a few times was also offered in the first summer session, and he said, “I wanna take that.”

“Are you sure?” his advisor asked him. “It’s not an intro level course.”

“I wanna take it,” he said affirmatively. It looked like there was a Twentieth Century Americas class offered during the second summer session. He wanted to take that, too.

That afternoon, he walked out of the administration building with detailed instructions on how to get online and register. Once his enrollment deposit went through, he’d be able to set up a student account, and from there, it seemed pretty self-explanatory. He could always ask Clarke to help him out, too, if he got confused with anything. She’d spent four years signing up for classes, so she had to know what to do.

He knew he must have looked like the biggest dork in the world, must have had the biggest smile on his face, but . . . dammit, he was excited Fucking stoked, actually. No more slinking towards the back of the class and just sitting there trying to be invisible. No, he was going to _belong_ in that class this summer. He’d have a backpack like all the other students. He’d raise his hands and ask questions, answer them, maybe even challenge the professor on some of the things he didn’t agree with. _Hopefully_ if there were any essay assignments, he’d be able to do some _exemplary_ work again, just like he’d done on Clarke’s paper.

He knew a lot of the students who would be on campus that summer were probably dreading the summer sessions. But he was looking forward to it so damn much.

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Being un-athletic, Clarke had never actually been to the basketball courts down at the park, even though the park was only a few blocks away from Bellamy’s house. With the weather nicer these days, Bellamy and Miller were definitely wanting to get outside more, and since Roan was a basketball fan, they invited him to come. Jackson tagged along, too, even though he admittedly
wasn’t very good, and Clarke was thankful to have Raven as a fellow spectator. Raven actually was athletic, so she probably could have gotten out there with them and given them all a run for their money; but she opted to sit on the sidelines with Clarke and cheer the boys on instead.

“Go, Roan!” she yelled for her boyfriend. “I love you!”

“Love you, too, girl,” Roan panted as he ran down to the other end of the court. His eyes never left the ball, and he jumped up to block Miller’s attempted layup at the rim. (Was that what it was called, a layup? Clarke wasn’t even sure.)

“Where’s my cheerleader?” Bellamy asked expectantly, bending over to grab his knees as he caught his breath.

Clarke shrugged exaggeratedly. “Go, fight, win?”

He chuckled, “Thanks,” then charged forward and managed to steal the ball from Jackson. He dribbled it back to the net and sunk a shot.

“Fuck!” Miller swore, always ultra-competitive.

“Nice,” Roan said to Bellamy, giving his teammate a high-five.

They continued to play—such boys in that they didn’t even care that they were dripping with sweat—and it got really nice when they all decided to take their shirts off. Jackson’s arms were a thing of beauty, and Miller’s chest hair made him look pretty rough and rugged. Raven made sure to point out Roan’s amazing abs, but Clarke still thought Bellamy looked the best. He wasn’t as good of a player as Roan, but he was naturally athletic enough to at least hold his own out there. His sweat-soaked hair kept falling in his face as he bounded around the court like an excited puppy, and that meant he kept having to do hair flips to flick it out of his eyes.

“He looks so happy,” Raven remarked.

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. It warmed her heart to see him looking so carefree, so jovial.

“I’m happy for him,” Raven said. “College is gonna open up a lot of doors.”

“Yeah, I think he’s gonna love it,” Clarke predicted. Last night, he’d already talked her ear off about this Twentieth Century Europe class he’d signed up for. He wanted to find out who the professor was in advance so he could email him or her and ask what books they’d be using. He said he wanted to get a head start on the reading.

What a dork.

Raven let out a loud, “Woo!” when Roan made another basket, a three-pointer this time, then turned to Clarke and asked, “How’d you get him to do it, though?”

“What?”

“Apply for college.”

Clarke shook her head. “I didn’t. People are giving me way too much credit.”

“Oh, come on, it had to be partly your influence,” Raven said.

She looked out at Bellamy, finding it funny how he was trying—and failing—to spin the ball on one finger now. Miller grabbed it from him and took it down to the other end of the court. Roan wasn’t
fast enough to get down there and block his shot this time, so he and Jackson celebrated with a chest-bump.

“Sorry,” Bellamy said to Roan, “got cocky.”

Clarke smiled, joking, “I like it when you get cocky.”

“Hey now, don’t distract me,” he warned, and right as he said that, Roan lobbed the ball at him. He failed to catch it.

Clarke giggled amusedly as all four of them ran after it when it rolled towards the bushes. “I don’t know, maybe I influenced him a little bit,” she acknowledged. “But it was his decision.”

“Well, however it came about, it’s a really good thing,” Raven said. As the boys returned to the court, she leaned over and said, “Okay, seriously, I gotta admit, Bellagio is fine as fuck, Clarke. How the hell did you meet this guy at Walmart?”

Clarke shrugged, smiling proudly. “Just lucky, I guess.”

“Seriously.”

She snorted. “Look who’s talking. You met your boyfriend in a sex shop.”

“True,” Raven admitted. “That’s a story for the grandkids right there.”

Clarke laughed. Oh, yeah, by the time Raven and Roan had grandkids, they’d have tons of stories, some far more inappropriate than others.

By the time the sun was going down, Miller and Jackson were hungry, so they headed home. Roan and Raven left, too, but Bellamy wanted to stay and shoot around some more. He even offered to teach Clarke a few things, but she was a hopeless learner. She couldn’t shoot a free throw to save her life, and even dribbling down the court proved to be too much of a challenge. Bellamy finally just told her to pass it to him, and then he sunk the shot himself. “Alright, there you go,” he said. “That’s an assist. Good job.”

She put her hands on her hips and huffed, pretending to be offended. “Are you not impressed by my ball-handling skills?”

“Your ball-handling skills are fine,” he assured her. “Your basketball skills, on the other hand . . .” He trailed off, cringing.

“Well, maybe I don’t wanna work up a sweat,” she claimed.

“Oh, is that so?”

“Well . . .” She kicked at the concrete court and blushed. “I don’t wanna work up a sweat playing basketball.”

He smirked mischievously, closing the space between them, and panted a big, sloppy kiss on her lips. He wasn’t quite as sweaty anymore as he had been while he was playing, but he still had his shirt off, and he kept it off when they got in the truck and drove off. So that was good.

Instead of heading home, he drove her up to the top of some hill at the north end of the park, a place he said used to be the closest thing this town had ever had to some kind of “make-out point.” People had forgotten about it over time, he said, so there were no other vehicles parked up there. They were
alone.

He pulled down the tailgate of his truck, and they lay in the bed of it on top of an old blanket he’d had stashed away in the backseat. With his chest as her pillow, it was actually kind of comfortable. Just them, the annoying sound of crickets, and the stars in the sky.

It was perfect.

“So did you ever take Roma here back in high school?” she questioned.

“Oh, yeah,” he replied without hesitation. “We went to second base here.”

“That’s all?” That seemed so tame for Bellamy Blake.

“Well, yeah, I wasn’t gonna screw her right here in the truck.”

“Hey!” Clarke yelped, playfully whacking his chest.

“Not that there’s anything wrong with that,” he quickly amended. “But I’d only had sex once. I felt more confident in the bedroom.”

“Oh, well, that makes sense.”

“But I did . . .” He shook his head, groaning dramatically. “I found Octavia out here once when she was a sophomore. With her first real boyfriend.”

“Oh god.”

“Yeah. And I know what they were gonna do, but I shot that idea down real quick.”

“I’m sure you did.” She could picture it in her mind so easily: Protective big brother Bellamy, pounding on the soon-to-be steamed up windows of some high school kid’s car, putting the fear of God in whoever had dared to mack on his sister.

“Yeah, she never came up here again,” Bellamy boasted proudly. “Sometimes I would, though, by myself, just to remember Roma. But it’s been a while.”

She snuggled closer, asking, “Did you guys ever just lay here like this?”

“Sometimes,” he said. “If we weren’t making out, she’d ask me to tell her about the constellations. I don’t know why. I think she just liked hearing me talk.”

“Mmm,” Clarke purred, drumming her fingers atop his chest. “Tell me.”

“About the stars?”

“Yeah.” She liked hearing him talk, too.

“Well, I’m kinda rusty,” he cautioned, clearing his throat. “But there, you see that?” He outlined a shape for her and said, “That’s the Big Dipper.”

“Mmm-hmm.” She didn’t have an eye for constellations at all, so it kind of just looked like dots in the sky to her.

“And there . . . see that guy up there who kind of looks like a male model? See him?” Again, he outlined a shape for her.
“What?”

“Yeah, his name is . . . Bellagio.”

She laughed.

“And over there is the Princess. See, that’s her crown and her rack.” His finger zig-zagged around, not even really trying to connect any stars now.

“That’s a big rack,” Clarke noted.

“It is big; it’s nice,” he agreed. “So legend has it, Bellagio meets the Princess, she asks him to hang out, they meet up at a bar, and they end up goin’ to Pound Town in his truck. And the rest is history.”

“Oh, that’s a very romantic story,” she commented sarcastically.

“I know, right?” He smiled down at her and gave her a quick peck on the lips. “I’m so glad I’m here with you right now,” he told her, suddenly serious again.

“Me, too,” she said. In fact, she couldn’t think of anywhere else she’d rather be. There wasn’t any other place in the world that felt as warm and as safe as being in his arms did.

She wasn’t sure how it happened, but he was everywhere after that, hands and lips all over, undressing her, urging her to undress him, too. His body felt so hot against hers, so slippery, so good. When they were completely naked and he hoisted her up onto his lap, she wriggled and squirmed desperately, needing to feel him inside.

“Please,” she begged, trying to sink down on him as the head of his cock nudged her entrance.

He snaked one hand down in between them and guided his length up and in. That initial feel of having him inside her was always such a rush—Every. Single. Time.—and she craned her neck back, moaning. Good god, this sexual compatibility between them was like nothing she’d ever experienced before. Just one touch from him could make her tingle and burn; one thrust could make her—

“Ah!” she screamed as he rocked up into her. “Oh god.” She loved this position, the closeness of it, the intimacy.

“Fuck,” he swore, his arms enveloping her. His breathing was already coming in hard, heavy pants, and his hips lacked their usual rhythm and flow as they jerked up into her. It totally turned her on, though, this feeling that he had just as much longing for her as she had for him. He didn’t have to be completely suave and completely smooth to be sexy. This frenetic, uneven pace was both uncoordinated and endearing.

“Clarke,” he choked out, his eyes dark with desire. “I want you.”

Oh, god, she wanted him, too. All of him. Clinging to his shoulders, she tried to bounce up and down in his lap, tried to ride him with the same clumsy fervor he was fucking her. Their hips clashed and collided, and it felt so good, she never wanted to stop. She wanted to keep him sheathed within her forever, buried to the hilt, because honestly, it didn’t even feel like they were two separate people anymore; it felt like they were one.

“Hold it right there, you two!”
They both froze when a booming voice blared out and a bright flashlight spotlighted them. Clarke squinted and shielded her eyes against the bright glare, confused as to what was happening. But Bellamy seemed to know right away.

“Oh, crap,” he muttered, trying to cover her up.

It wasn’t until the flashlight was lowered and Clarke saw a cop car and a man in uniform that she knew they were in big trouble.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

It wasn’t Bellamy’s first time being hauled down to the police station in a cop car—his bar fight in defense of Gina’s honor still held that distinction—but it was a first for Clarke, and she was shaky and panicked the whole time. At least the arresting officer didn’t handcuff them. That really would have freaked her out.

They sat together in the police station, both mortified, but in different ways. Clarke was humiliated, but Bellamy was worried this was going to screw shit up for him. He’d just gotten into college, just signed up for a summer class, and he didn’t want an arrest on his record derailing any of that. Mostly, though, he was worried about Clarke. She didn’t even have a record, but this would be the start of one unless he managed to get her off the hook.

“We’re gonna be fine,” he assured her.

“Are you kidding me?” she spat. “We just got arrested, Bellamy, for having sex in a public park.”

“Yeah, I know.” The worst part was, they hadn’t even gotten to finish. Cops were a pretty big boner killer, though, so at least he wasn’t in any physical pain.

“Has this ever happened to you before?” she asked.

“No.” Hell, semi-public sex had always been one of his kinks, but with Clarke, he definitely pushed the envelope, tested the bounds, and was a lot more brazen about where and when they went at it.

“So how do you know we’re gonna be okay?” she prodded.

‘cause I’m gonna make it okay, he thought determinedly, not about to let his girl get caught up in some stupid legal mess just because he couldn’t keep his hands off her. He fixed things; that was his job. So he could fix this.

“I got this,” he promised her, standing up. He slowly approached the officer who had arrested him, a guy he recognized as the father of one of the girls he’d gone to high school with. He was pretty sure he and that girl had hooked up one night a couple years ago, but . . . no need to tell him that.

“Hi,” he greeted lamely.

“Sit down, Bellamy,” the officer told him.

“Oh, you know me.”

“It’s Arkadia. Of course I know you.” The officer motioned for him to take a seat again.

“I just wanted to talk to you and explain some things about what you saw tonight,” Bellamy started in. “First of all, totally consensual, she’s of age, and neither of us was intoxicated. You had us do that breathalyzer.”
“That really doesn’t matter,” the officer said unsympathetically. “It’s indecent exposure. There’s really no other way to slice it.”

“But--”

“Sit down.”

“But if you could just--”

“Bellamy.”

“Just let her go and I’ll take the fall for it.”

“Sit down or I will put you in a cell,” the officer warned.

He sighed heavily, disappointed in himself. So much for being able to fix this. He and Clarke were going to walk out of there with a hefty fine to pay, most likely, and an embarrassing little blurb in the arrests section of the newspaper, too. It was just a misdemeanor, but still . . .

_Dammit_, he thought, trudging back to his chair. He plopped down beside her, feeling guilty as hell. Why didn’t they just arrest him? Why’d they have to bring her in, too?

“I’ll try,” she offered, getting to her feet. She approached the officer slowly as he chatted with another man on duty, and she looked nervous as she wrung her fingers together and bit her bottom lip.

Bellamy watched, hoping for a miracle as she started in. The guy was at least a little more receptive to letting her talk, probably because she was sweeter and nicer and, well, a girl. He heard her try to explain to them that they hadn’t meant any harm, and that no one else had been around, and then he kind of had to stifle a laugh when she lied and said they’d never done anything like this before and never would again. Because this was their _thing_, and it would continue to be their thing; they’d just be a hell of a lot more covert in the future.

Poor Clarke. She tried so hard to get them out of the mess they were in, but that deflated look on her face must have meant she wasn’t having any better luck than he’d had. Bellamy knew neither one of them was going to be able to talk their way out of this one, so he caught the attention of an officer strutting past and asked, “Can I make a phone call?” He only had one, so he knew he had to make it count.

Normally—not that getting arrested was a normal thing for him—but normally, he would have called Miller. Miller wasn’t gonna be able to help him, though, not the way he needed. Raven wouldn’t be able to help Clarke, and there was no way he was bothering his mom with this. So he sucked it up and called the people he knew could _really_ help him, the people who actually had enough power, influence, and money to make the problem go away.

Clarke was nearly in tears thirty minutes later, even though it didn’t seem like they were going to have to stay there overnight. The cops weren’t really doing much of anything with them. In fact, they seemed content to just let them sit there until they decided what course of action was best. Bellamy kept telling her it was all going to be okay, and when he saw her mom and stepdad stride in the big double doors of the station, he knew it would be.

“Oh my god,” Clarke gasped, trying to hide her face. “What’re they doing here?”

Bellamy swallowed his pride and admitted, “I called them.”
“You what?” she shrieked.

“Yeah, just . . .” He had to look away when Abby came towards them, because good god, this was ten times more embarrassing than having them barge into Clarke’s apartment while she was on the couch riding his dick; and he hadn’t even thought that was possible.

“Clarke,” her mother said sternly, disapprovingly. She gave Bellamy a sharp look, too, then just shook her head.

“I’m sorry,” Clarke apologized. “What’s Marcus doing?”

“He’s gonna talk to them,” Abby explained.

Bellamy nodded slowly, a bit disgusted that he was going to use his one connection to wealth and prestige to weasel his way out of this. It wasn’t a particularly good feeling, so he quickly mentioned, “He doesn’t have to get me off the hook. Just her.”

“No, both of us,” Clarke insisted. “I mean, if he can say something or do something, then why not take advantage of it?”

Because it’s wrong, Bellamy thought, unsettled. He’d broken the law. He should have just owned up and accepted the consequences for it.

“He’ll take care of this,” Abby assured them both.

Bellamy peeked around her slender frame and watched as Marcus Kane laid on the patented political charm. He smiled and schmoozed, and he even took out his wallet at one point, discreetly offering to make a ‘charitable donation’ to the station in order to make all of this go away.

This is low, Bellamy thought. He felt like a jackass for resorting to something so underhanded.

It worked, though. Whatever Marcus said worked like a charm, because five minutes was all it took for the exact same officer who had arrested them to come over and tell them both, “You’re both free to go. But don’t let this happen again.”

Clarke breathed an audible sigh of relief and said, “Thank you,” quickly shooting to her feet. She ran to her stepfather and hugged him, and that left Bellamy with her mother.

“We’re gonna talk,” Abby warned him as he stood up.

His stomach clenched nervously, but he just nodded. The least he could do was be a man about one thing tonight and give her the respect of a conversation, no matter how awkward it would be.

“Thank you so much,” Clarke babbled, still hugging her stepdad as the four of them walked out of the station together. “I don’t know what we would’ve done if you hadn’t shown up.”

“That’s what fathers are for,” Marcus said proudly. “I mean . . . step-fathers.” He seemed so oddly happy to be able to do this for Clarke. It was weird, but Bellamy could see for the first time how much he really did love and care for his step-daughter. He wasn’t her dad, but they were still family.

“That’s what fathers are for?” Abby echoed incredulously, huffing. Clearly, she was more mortified by the whole incident than her husband was. “For bailing their daughters out of jail after they get arrested for public sex? That’s what fathers are for?”

“You know, I can just walk home,” Bellamy quickly volunteered, sensing that he might not be the
most welcomed guest in their vehicle right now.

“Nonsense,” Marcus said. “We’ll give you a ride back to your truck. You two can go home and forget this ever happened. Because legally, it never did.” He smirked, and Bellamy felt a bit sick to his stomach again.

“I’m so sorry,” Clarke apologized. “We were just . . . we weren’t thinking and--”

“Well, clearly,” Abby said.

Marcus just kept grinning, and Bellamy couldn’t help but wonder . . . had he once done things exactly like this? Hell, maybe he’d had to talk himself out of a few situations over the years. He didn’t seem that upset at all. In fact, if anything, he almost seemed amused.

Abby was definitely less amused, however, when she motioned Bellamy to come with her, to take a stroll through the parking lot so they could have their little talk. He shoved his hands in his pockets, lowered his head in shame, and went with her, hoping she wasn’t too mad at him. He actually really did like the woman, and he sort of prided himself on being the type of guy parents approved of.

“Imagine my surprise,” she began, “when my husband hangs up the phone and tells me Clarke’s been arrested.”

“I’m sorry,” Bellamy apologized sincerely. “Sure, it had taken two to do what they were doing back at that park, but he couldn’t help but feel like it was mostly his fault.

“I know you’re sorry,” she said, “and I know neither of you meant any harm. You’re young and crazy about each other, and sometimes it’s easy to get caught up.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow, now wondering if maybe she, too, could . . . relate. He wasn’t about to ask, though.

“I know you’re a good man, and I know you treat Clarke well,” she acknowledged. “But Bellamy . . .” She stepped in front of him, eyes pleading, shimmering with tears. “She’s my little girl. The only one I’ll ever have. I need to know . . .” She trailed off, gulping. “I need to know that you’ll take care of her.”

“I will,” Bellamy promised. “I do. But . . . to be honest, most of the time, it feels like she’s the one takin’ care of me.”

“And that’s good,” Abby said. “You should take care of each other.”

“I won’t ever hurt her,” Bellamy promised. “And I won’t . . . I won’t ever let her take the fall for some stupid thing I’ve done.”

“Well . . .” Abby cast a glance at her daughter and knowingly remarked, “I’m sure this was just as much her doing as it was yours.” She surprised him then, by taking both his hands in hers. “Just—just promise me that I can trust you with her. I really want to trust you.”

“You can,” Bellamy reassured her. “She’s . . .” He tried to think of a way to describe Clarke, to describe what she’d come to mean to him, and he settled for, “She’s my best friend.” Because at the end of the day, that was really their foundation, and it was still the most important thing.

Abby actually smiled at him, much to his dismay, and let go of his hands as she said, “I think you’re her best friend, too. And that’s special. So I guess it makes sense that she . . .” She hesitated momentarily. “Well, you know, that she turned down Philadelphia.”
“Philadelphia?” he echoed, completely confused.

“Yeah.”

He wrinkled his forehead, feeling like he was majorly out of the loop on something. What the hell was going on in Philadelphia? Clarke had never mentioned it.

“Her job opportunity,” Abby explained. “She decided not to go.”

What? Bellamy thought, trying to remember if she’d said anything or done anything to hint at any of this. But his mind was coming up blank.

“Oh.” Abby seemed to realize the mistake she’d just made, because she recoiled a bit. “I’m sorry, I thought you knew.”

“No,” he said, wishing he had. Glancing back over his shoulder, he took a good look at Clarke, who was smiling and laughing with her stepfather in a way he hadn’t seen before. He also hadn’t ever seen her hug him so much, but she was in gratitude mode right now, so it made sense.

Clarke . . . he thought heavily, wondering just what kind of job she’d turned down. And why she’d turned it down. But he suspected he already knew the answer to that second question, and it made him feel even guiltier than getting her arrested tonight had.

Bellamy sat quietly in the back of Kane and Abby’s very fancy car as Clarke directed them back to the park. She sat back there with him, reaching over to squeeze his hand and give him a small smile, but he couldn’t manage much of one back. He felt like crap.

He thanked Marcus profusely, learned a little too much about the man when they bro-hugged and Marcus mumbled, “Public parks. I understand the appeal,” and then he and Clarke got in the truck and headed home. She did most of the talking, assuring him that neither one of her parents hated him now, and even joked that they’d taken the news of her arrest far better than the news of her bisexuality. He kind of just nodded and stayed quiet.

When they finally walked in the front door, they found Murphy in the kitchen, wearing an apron with bears on it and doing the Carlton dance to “It’s Not Unusual.” He appeared to be entertaining himself as he watched something bake in the oven, but he stopped abruptly when he looked over and saw that he was no longer alone. He turned off the music and demanded, “Where the hell have you two been? I was worried sick. You know the rules: If you’re gonna be out late, call.”

“Okay, Mama Murphy,” Clarke teased. “We were . . .” She looked up at Bellamy, cringed, and then confessed, “Well, actually, we were getting arrested.”

Murphy made a face. “What?”

Clarke nodded slowly. “Yep.”

Murphy’s eyes then widened. “What?”

Bellamy kicked off his shoes, moseying towards the stairs.

“What the hell did you get arrested for--” Before he’d even finished the last word of his question, it dawned on Murphy, and he started laughing.

“Yeah, get it all out now,” Clarke said. “I know this puts the bed-breaking incident to shame.”
“Oh, it really does,” Murphy agreed emphatically. He raced to the backdoor, swung his head out, and yelled, “Hey, Miller, get in here, man! Bellamy and Clarke just got arrested!”

“It’s really not that funny,” Bellamy grumbled.

Miller and Jackson must have been jumping on the trampoline, because they both seemed sort of out of breath when they clamored inside. “Holy shit,” Miller swore. “You guys got arrested? What for?”

“Sex somewhere,” Murphy replied, giving Clarke a questioning look.

“In the park,” she revealed.

Miller snorted. “What, like in the bushes? With all the squirrels watching?”

“No, we were in my truck,” Bellamy cut in. “You know what? It wasn’t even really much of an arrest. They didn’t lock us up or anything.”

“Yeah, they didn’t even handcuff us,” Clarke added.

“Well, they probably figured you two were already kinky enough,” Murphy reasoned. “No need to throw handcuffs into the mix.”

Jackson chuckled at that and said, “Well, it’s just a fine or something, right? Nothing major?”

“No,” Bellamy said, “nothing . . .” He rolled his eyes, muttering, “We talked our way out of it.”

Clarke looked up at him curiously, and thankfully, she seemed to understand that he didn’t want to own up to calling in her stepdad to save the day. “Right,” she said. “It’s all good.”

Is it? Bellamy thought. Getting arrested should have been the biggest event of the evening, but somehow, there was this even bigger bombshell, the one Abby had dropped on him. And he didn’t know how to broach the subject with her.

“Well, you guys lucked out,” Miller said. He motioned between himself and his boyfriend and said, “We wouldn’t have.”

“Oh, no,” Jackson agreed. “They would’ve thrown the book at us.”

Everyone was being so lighthearted, cracking jokes left and right, and Bellamy just couldn’t take part in that right now. He announced, “I’m gonna get some sleep,” and trudged upstairs.

“Bellamy?” Clarke said. It took a moment for her to follow him, but soon enough, he heard her footsteps echoing behind his.

“Hey, are you okay?” she asked, sliding into the bedroom with him.

“Yeah,” he said, undoing his pants. He shucked them off, mumbling, “Just kind of a weird night.”

“Oh, yeah,” she agreed. “It all worked out, though.”

“I guess.” He thought about switching to a pair of sweatpants, but he kind of just felt like sitting down and processing some shit; so he kept his boxers and t-shirt on and flopped down on the bed, landing on his back, staring up at the ceiling.

Clarke crawled up onto the bed and tried to get on top of him, but he grabbed her arms and held her back, sitting up. “No, not right now,” he said.
She frowned, curling her legs up underneath herself. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“What’s wrong?” he echoed. “Clarke, I got you arrested tonight.”

“You didn’t do anything,” she adamantly corrected. “We did. Don’t make it seem like this was all your fault.”

“And then I had to call your parents just to . . .” He trailed off, shaking his head angrily. “Don’t tell anyone I did that, okay? I don’t want them to know that’s what I had to resort to.”

She narrowed her eyes curiously, titling her head to the side, and gazed at him contemplatively for a moment. “Bellamy,” she said, putting a hand on his knee. “You don’t have to feel bad about--”

“Exploiting my resources?” he cut in. Because that was what he’d done, plain and simple.

“You don’t have to feel bad,” she reiterated. “You’re not a bad guy. Anyone else in that position would have done the exact same thing.”

“I don’t know,” he muttered skeptically.

“Bellamy.” She put her hand on his face, forcing him to look at her. “Stop. You are a good guy.”

“I don’t feel very good right now,” he confessed.

“Why, because we--”

“No, because you . . .” He stopped abruptly, not sure if it was worth it to have this conversation right now. He wasn’t upset with her, but he was upset with himself, and he didn’t want any of that to be misconstrued.

“Because I what?” she prompted. And clearly it was too late to backtrack now.

He shook his head sadly, sort of wishing now that Abby hadn’t said anything. Ignorance could’ve been bliss. Or something like that. “I know about Philadelphia,” he revealed. “Your mom told me.”

“My mom?” she echoed.

“It was an accident.” He didn’t want to start any discord there.

Clarke huffed, shaking her head angrily. “She shouldn’t have . . .” She bit her bottom lip worriedly, looking down at her lap. “What all did she tell you?” she asked him quietly.

“Just that you had a job there and you turned it down.”

“A potential job,” she corrected, scooting closer.

“Doing what?”

She exhaled heavily, lowering her face again. “Owning a gallery.”

“Owning?” Oh, shit, now he felt even worse. That sounded like a hell of an opportunity, and she hadn’t taken it. For him.

“Bellamy, I don’t even know if . . .” She rolled her eyes frustratedly. “I mean, I don’t know if I’m ready to own a gallery, and I’ve never even met the person looking for a business partner. And I didn’t wanna move, so I probably would’ve been miserable there.”
“Did you stay for me?” he asked bluntly.

“I didn’t stay because I was never going anywhere,” Clarke insisted. “I didn’t wanna go.”

“Because of me?”

“Because of . . .” She raked one hand through her hair. “Okay, yeah, partially because of you. And everyone else. And even Arkadia. Bellamy, this is place is . . . this is my home now. I like it here. And I don’t care if it takes me a while to figure out my plans for the future, because I will eventually, and I don’t feel the need to be that in control anymore, okay?” Her voice cracked on the last word.

He swallowed hard, trying not to choke on his guilt, trying to get past it since she obviously didn’t want him to feel guilty. But it was hard not to feel like he’d kept her from something, and it was especially hard since this was the girl who had been the ultimate encourager when it came to getting him into college.

“I just don’t wanna hold you back,” he told her, fearing that was exactly what he’d done.

“Bellamy . . .” His name was a sad whisper on her lips, not the kind of sadness she felt for herself, but the kind she felt for him. “Don’t ever feel like you’re holding me back,” she said tearfully. “These past six and a half months with you have been the most exhilarating time of my life.”

Exhilarating, he thought. Yeah, that was a good word for it.

“I don’t regret anything,” she assured him, smiling softly. “Not even getting arrested tonight.”

He raised an eyebrow doubtfully. “Really?”

She thought about it a moment, then amended, “Well, I’m not saying we should make a weekly thing out of it.”

He managed to laugh, just a little, but it made him feel better. Sometimes he got in these moods where everything seemed so dramatic and dire, and he had to remind himself to lighten the hell up. So he and Clarke had gotten arrested tonight for being horny as hell for each other. Whatever, there were worse things they could have gotten arrested for. And yeah, he’d had to rely on her senator stepdad to fix the problem for him, but that didn’t mean he was a total loser; it just meant he was lucky. And Philadelphia . . .

Yeah. Clarke had turned down Philadelphia. But it didn’t seem like her heart had been very invested in the idea in the first place. So maybe he had influenced her decision, unknowingly, but that didn’t mean it was the wrong decision for her.

“Are you okay then?” she asked, tugging on his t-shirt gently, pulling him forward.

“Yeah,” he said, nodding before their lips met in a relatively chaste kiss. He was fine. She was fine. Everything was fine.
April was shaping up to be a good month. A little over halfway in, and Clarke was already having the time of her life. The stress of classes seemed to be fading away as the end of the semester approached. Sure, she had final exams to study for, but she didn’t have to study for those yet. All her major projects and papers were done, so her homework load was light. Dante was training a new employee at the museum, so her hours spent at work decreased, too. Of course, there was still the stress of figuring out what she was going to do for a job once she graduated, but really, she was okay with just letting things play out and seeing if something fell into place. Maybe she could do another collection for Trikru, start to get her name out there some more, get some more exposure. Or she could look into selling some stuff online. Monty was good with technology, so he could probably help her set up a website.

More time on her hands meant more time to have fun, and she made the most of it. Bellamy was having quite the good month, too—he’d already figured out what books would be needed for his class and was diligently reading ahead—so he was more than willing to have some date nights with her. They did all sorts of fun (and possibly lame) stuff, like mini-golfing with Jackson and Miller. Jackson was so good that there was a hole at the course named after him, and Miller wasn’t bad, either. But Bellamy was inexplicably bad, and it frustrated the hell out of him. He tried to contain it, but when even Clarke surpassed him on the fifteenth hole, he grumbled, “This is ridiculous,” and then declared, “It’s go time,” once they got to the sixteenth hole. When Clarke got a hole in one and he took four shots to sink his ball, he looked like he wanted to throw his club down and just give up. It probably didn’t help that Miller took his blue golf ball out of the hole and teased, “Blue ball, huh?”

“Shut up, I’m concentrating,” Bellamy growled, snatching the ball back from him. He lined it up on the seventeenth hole, shook out his shoulders, closed his eyes as if to visualize the shot, and then took a deep breath. It wasn’t an easy one. Too far to either the right or left, and it would roll off a little bridge and go down into the water. And when he swung at it . . . that was exactly what it did. Plopped right into the water and flowed away down a mini-river.

“Dammit!” he roared, attracting a curious look from the kids playing the hole in front of them.

“Wow, this is really something,” Jackson remarked.

Miller sauntered forward and rubbed salt in the wound. “I don’t think I’ve ever actually seen you be bad at anything before.”

“I don’t know what’s going on. I suck,” Bellamy lamented.

“Yes,” Miller agreed emphatically. “Clarke, is this normal for Bellamy to be having such a hard time putting balls into holes?”

Bellamy gave her a sharp look, sort of a babe-have-my-back-on-this type of look, and she stuck up for him. “Well, these balls are a little smaller than what he’s used to,” she reasoned.

Bellamy chuckled and grinned proudly, swinging his club over his shoulder as he stepped aside for her to take her shot. “Damn straight.”

Because mini-golfing was such a disaster for Bellamy, he insisted on doing Bingo Night at Dropship later that week. Clarke had never even known that the bar did Bingo Night, because apparently it
only happened a few times a year. Murphy and Emori were eager to tag along, so they made a
double date out of it. Bellamy did much better with Bingo, and it seemed to make him forget about
the golfing. Every other round, it seemed he was throwing his hands in the air yelling, “Fuck yeah, I
got a Bingo!” He won so much, in fact, that the other players started purchasing multiple cards just to
try to stop him.

“How are you doing this?” Murphy leaned over and asked him.

“I just get lucky,” he proclaimed. “In more ways than one.” He cast a perverted glance at Clarke, and
she just smiled at him. Because he looked so cute and dorky right now, playing Bingo and actually
wearing his thick-rimmed glasses out in public, that he was going to get even luckier than this once
they got home.

Some of the date nights didn’t even really involve going anywhere. Clarke really wanted to start
walking during the summer. Even though she was getting plenty of cardio with Bellamy—god, that
was some good cardio—she figured it wouldn’t hurt to have another form of exercise in place to
keep her in shape. Running was out of the question; she didn’t run. But walking a couple blocks
around the neighborhood a few nights each week wouldn’t hurt. Bellamy never let her walk alone,
because he said his neighborhood was too shady for that. So every other night, even if he’d
exhausted himself at work that day, he walked with her, hand in hand, telling her stories about the
people and places around his house. Some were flattering, some not so flattering, but all of them
were interesting.

And then there was the house party towards the end of the month. Sure, every Saturday night was a
house party in a way, but Clarke suggested they clear their schedules and spend an entire Saturday
living it up. Octavia was going to have the baby soon, so she and Lincoln would be busy with him;
and despite reading ahead, Bellamy was going to have more responsibilities on his plate once his
class started up. She thought it might be fun to get everyone together to just be young and wild for a
while. After all, that was kind of their specialty.

When she suggested it to the boys, they took the idea and ran with it. Murphy found a portable grill
at the thrift store, then went out and got some burgers and brawts and declared himself the grill
master, even though Bellamy would probably end up doing most of the grilling. Clarke couldn’t wait
to see that. Bellamy was so sexy when he cooked. Well, Bellamy was pretty much just sexy all the
time.

The DIY slip and slide was Miller’s idea, and it was a good one. He told everyone to bring a
swimsuit to the party, and no one seemed to know why until they went out back and saw what he
and Bellamy were working on. They’d gotten a couple big, black plastic sheets and had stretched
them out in the backyard. They were hammering garden stakes into the ground to hold the sides
down and warned their friends, “Don’t try it out until we get it wet.”

“Oh, I hear Bellamy knows all about getting things wet,” Raven joked, nudging Clarke.

“He does,” Clarke confirmed unembarrassedly.

Dish detergent seemed to be the main ingredient for the slip part of the slip and slide, and as long as
they hosed it down pretty frequently and kept a sprinkler running nearby, the sliding part was pretty
easy. At one point, as Niyalah was getting prepared to slide, she noted that it wasn’t looking as soapy
anymore and suggested Bellamy go upstairs and get some lube.

“Oh, gross!” Octavia shrieked, flittering away from the watered down plastic sheet. “I am not
watching you guys slip and slide with my brother’s anal lube!”
“What makes you so sure it’s anal lube?” Bellamy countered.

Everyone just laughed knowingly at that, and Octavia groaned exasperatedly.

So much for keeping the anal sex a private thing, Clarke thought. She and Bellamy were just really not that good at being discreet.

They all took turns playing on the slide, probably being way too juvenile for people in their twenties, but since Octavia couldn’t slide, Clarke made it a point to hang out with her. They set out some towels and sat down on the grass, each with a plate of food. Octavia’s had significantly more on it, of course, since she was eating for two—she’d taken both a burger and a brawt and a sizable helping of potato chips—but Clarke was hungry, too. So once she finished one burger, she’d take a couple bites out of Bellamy’s. He was too busy manning the slip and slide to sit down and eat anyway.

“This was a good idea, Clarke,” Octavia complimented.

“Thanks.”

“Even though I look like a blown-up tick.” Octavia set her plate down atop her rounded stomach, which really seemed to have ballooned these past few weeks, using it as a table. The girl was seven months pregnant and still looked like a supermodel in a swimsuit. It really wasn’t fair.

“Once you have the baby, he’ll be the center of attention whenever we hang out like this,” Clarke anticipated.

“Yeah,” Octavia agreed, smiling happily. “Guess what?”

“What?”

She popped a potato chip into her mouth and revealed, “His middle name’s gonna be Bellamy.”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

Clarke beamed at her, then glanced over at the baby’s soon-to-be uncle. He’d just taken his turn on the slide and was getting up holding his hip, as though he’d had a rough landing that time. He laughed loudly, shook his wet hair out of his face, and then snatched the hose from Murphy, motioning for him to go take his turn.

“He’s gonna love that,” she said. For Bellamy, his nephew inheriting his name would be a huge honor.

“He doesn’t know, though,” Octavia said, “and he’s not gonna find out ‘til the baby’s born, so don’t tell him.”

“I won’t,” Clarke promised. It would be hard to keep it a secret, but it’d be worth it to see that look of surprise on his face when he found out. Probably in the hospital. Probably when he walked into that room to meet and hold his nephew for the first time. It would probably even make him cry.

“He’s gonna be the baby’s godfather, too,” Octavia added as she took a huge bite out of her burger, “of course.”

“Of course,” Clarke agreed. Even if Bellamy and Lincoln still weren’t the closest friends . . . who else could take on that role? Bellamy was going to be like a third parent to that little baby. There
wasn’t a doubt in Clarke’s mind that there would be some babysitting nights in their future.

“I can’t believe I’m gonna be a mom,” Octavia said almost reverently, stopping her food consumption just long enough to shake her head in amazement and acknowledge, “It’s crazy.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. As exciting as it was, it still had to be sort of nerve-racking, too. “You’ll be good at it, though,” she assured her. “Your mom set a good example.”

“She did,” Octavia agreed. “If I’m half as good a mom as she is, I’ll be happy.” She grabbed Clarke’s hand suddenly and brought it over to rest on her stomach, and immediately, Clarke felt the baby kicking. “You feel that?” Octavia asked.

“Oh, yeah, he’s a livewire.”

“Such a hyper kid,” Octavia said, trying to wave Bellamy over. He frowned confusedly, then dropped the hose and started over there when he saw what was going on. But as suddenly as the kicking had started, it stopped, and Clarke removed her hand, wishing he’d been the one sitting next to his sister so he could finally feel it. She sent him an apologetic look, and his shoulders slumped. But luckily, he couldn’t get too down in the dumps about it when Miller all of a sudden tackled him and they went down the slip and slide together. (Yeah, that was hot.)

*This is so fun,* Clarke thought, watching all her friends play around like kids. Like incredibly good-looking kids who kept bringing more and more beers out of the house. Days like this verified what she’d already known to be true: Philadelphia would not have been worth it. She didn’t want to miss out on any of this. Getting to spend this time with them was more important to her than a job was. They really had become . . . her family.

After eating and letting her food settle, she ended up trying the slip and slide only once, because her, uh, natural ‘flotation devices’ weren’t exactly suited for it. Her bikini top popped right off at the end of the slide, and the guys ended up playing Keep Away with it until Bellamy finally got it back for her and shielded her with his arms while she put it back on.

That night, after the afternoon’s spontaneous sexy carwash out on street, Jasper came up with a good idea. It was childish, sure, because it was Jasper, but he suggested a game of hide-and-seek. Not just around the house, though, around the block. Everyone was down for it, but they all agreed that they had to play in partners. Shady neighborhood and everything.

They all paired up randomly, not one of them with their *actual* partner, and Bellamy insisted on being the one to go with Octavia. Clarke ended up with Jasper, which she could tell Bellamy wasn’t too happy about, but she assured him that if anyone tried to mug them or anything, Jasper would protect her. She didn’t believe that for a second, but she also didn’t believe they’d run into any trouble.

Harper and Murphy were dubbed ‘it,’ and they stayed in the house and gave everyone a two-minute head start at getting away. Clarke had only run half a block when she started feeling out of breath, and she hissed, “Jasper, slow down!”

“We gotta go hide in a tree!” he insisted.

“I am not climbing any trees!” She was *so* not a nature girl. If she climbed a tree, she’d probably fall right out of it.

She and Jasper ended up crouching down behind a large for-sale sign at the end of the block, which was a crappy hiding spot, but Harper and Murphy ran right past it. A few seconds later, she heard
squeals and howls of laughter as her friends started to be found. The rule was, as long as they weren’t physically tagged, though, they weren’t out. So people started running everywhere. For whatever reason, Jasper decided it was time for them to abandon their cover and run, too, so he grabbed Clarke’s hand, pulled her to her feet, and took off down the street, back towards the house.

“Jasper!” she whispered, unable to keep up with him.

“Come on, Clarke!” he yelled, already just a blur in the distance.

She made a feeble attempt at running after him, then slowed down to a power walk. Guys were totally ignorant to the fact that someone with a chest like hers could not run that fast. She still had her swimsuit top on, which didn’t offer a whole lot of support, so it kind of felt like running around with two huge water balloons strapped to her chest.

The noise her friends were making started to lessen as she approached the house, and she took that to mean they were all getting found and tagged around the block. She crouched down behind Bellamy’s truck, thinking about pulling down the tailgate so she could just chill out there a while and maybe somehow be the last one found; but suddenly, she felt a pair of arms wrap around her waist, and she yelped as they pulled her backward across the front lawn. She might have screamed had those arms not felt so safe and warm and familiar.

“You were supposed to stay with Jasper,” Bellamy whispered in her ear.

“I know, but he ditched me.” She stumbled over his feet, practically falling in the front door, and asked, “Where’s Octavia?”

“Hide and seek and pregnant women don’t mix very well,” he said, shutting the door. “She and Lincoln took off.”

“Oh.” Clarke frowned, wishing she’d at least gotten to say goodbye. But technically, if she and Bellamy had both been ditched by their game partners, then they were partners with each other now. And she liked the thought of that.

Apparently he did, too, because he spun her around, pressing her back against the front door, a lustful look on his face. “I’ve been wantin’ to fuck you all day,” he told her, sliding his knee in between her legs.

Instinctively, she rubbed against him, eager to create some friction. “I know.” Bellamy never had put on a shirt after playing around in the back yard all day in nothing but his swim trunks, and it had been such delightful torture seeing him roam around bare-chested all day.

“Let’s do it,” he said, hands already crawling up her back. Her bikini top was quite the intricate design, held together with many crisscrossed ties, but he had them all undone in a matter of seconds and tossed it on the floor.

“I don’t think we’re allowed to hide in here,” she said playfully, turning her head to the side as he kissed her cheek and neck.

“I don’t care,” he growled hungrily as his hands smoothed down her back, following the curve of her ass. He squeezed greedily, rolling her cheeks beneath his fingers, and then yanked her swimsuit bottom off, too. She nearly tipped over as she tried to kick them off, but he caught her and held her up.

“Take these off,” she said, tugging insistently on his swim trunks.
He slid them down past his knees and stepped out of them without hesitation, then lifted her up off her feet and carried her over to the couch like she weighed nothing. He sat down, and she settled in his lap, wasting no time getting situated on his cock, lining him up at her entrance and sinking down ardently. Taking it slow didn’t seem to be on his mind, either, because he grabbed her hips, holding her still, and fucked up into her like a man possessed. God, it felt so good.

“Bellamy,” she gasped. She didn’t even have anything sultry to say. Sometimes she just said his name because it felt good and felt right, and she knew he liked hearing it.

His only response was a low growl.

As sweet and romantic as Bellamy could be, she still loved it when he got like this, when he got all animalistic and just had to have her right that second. She loved it when his fingers dug into her skin and when his hips slammed into hers. Grabbing hold of her own breasts, she squeezed and kneaded them and threw her head back and moaned; but he moved her hands aside moments later, and that was hot as hell, because she knew why he’d done it: He wanted to watch them bounce.

So she leaned back and braced her hands against his knees instead, giving him full view of what her body looked like when he pounded her like this. And damn, it really was a pounding. He’d be all snuggly and cuddly afterward, but right now, his wild thrusts were literally jarring her, his big cock stretching her and filling her up. He’d cum soon, and she’d feel it, and that knowledge alone made her want to cum, too.

“She,” he swore suddenly, and she wasn’t sure why until he stood up with her in his arms, still managing to keep himself inside of her but no longer thrusting. There were voices coming from the front lawn. Friends were back.

“Don’t stop,” she begged as he carried her to the stairs. She was faintly aware that their swimsuits were still just lying there on the floor, where everyone would see them and know exactly what they were up to. But really, she didn’t care. The fact that she and Bellamy would sneak off to have sex came as a surprise to no one at this point. They were used to it.

It wasn’t graceful, but he managed to carry her up the stairs quickly and get out of sight right as the front door opened. He waddled into the bedroom, cursing when his cock slipped out of her momentarily, but it didn’t really matter. He had her pinned down to the bed seconds later and sank inside her right away again.

Later that night, thanks to not one but two satisfying orgasms, Clarke woke up feeling hungry. Good sex always made her feel the need to eat afterward, and she was pretty sure there were a few burgers leftover. So she slipped out of bed while Bellamy slept, put on some underwear and one of his shirts, and tiptoed downstairs so as not to wake anyone else up. Turned out, it wasn’t necessary to be so quiet, though. Murphy was sound asleep on his bean bag, and Emori, Miller, and Jackson were all still awake, mulling out about the kitchen themselves. They had the plate with the leftover burgers out and seemed to be talking about whether or not they should each heat one up.

“What about Clarke?” she heard Jackson ask. “Didn’t she want one?”

Emori just snorted. “She doesn’t care. She’s gettin’ fucked.”

Clarke cleared her throat loudly, making her presence known. They all turned around to look at her, and Miller said, “Oh, hey, Clarke. You want a burger?”

“Yeah,” Emori said, “it sounded like you were . . . working up an appetite.”
“I’m good,” she said, not about to take a burger away from them even though she really wanted one. “I’ll just have some chips or something.” She grabbed the bag of Lays off the counter and dug in, disappointed to find mostly crumbs left.

Jackson must have noticed her disappointment, because he said, “On second thought, I’m really not that hungry. You have this one.” He gave her his burger, and she smiled her thanks as he and Miller headed upstairs themselves, maybe to work up an appetite of their own, or maybe just to go to sleep.

With Murphy still zonking out, that left her and Emori alone in the kitchen. After heating up the burgers, Emori hopped up onto the counter while she sat on a stool, and they both ate and made fun of the way Murphy’s ass was falling out of his underwear while he slept. Emori admitted it was a pretty pale ass, but she liked it anyway.

“You know what, Clarke?” Emori said suddenly. “I wasn’t sure what to think about you when I first met you.”

Clarke frowned. “Oh, really?”

“Yeah. I mean, rich girl from the Palace . . .”

“Polaris,” she corrected.

“Same thing.” Emori dug her hand into the bag, scooping out a handful of crumbled chips. She tossed her head back and dumped them in her mouth, then wiped her hands off on her pants. “Anyway, I wasn’t really sure what to think,” she repeated. “But then when you started hanging out with us, you just really fit in.”

“And it was surprising,” Clarke surmised. As well as they all got along, they did come from different backgrounds. There was no denying that.

“Yeah, it was surprising,” Emori said. “But I’m glad. You make Bellamy really happy, and . . . I don’t know, it’s like you belong with us.”

Clarke let that sink in, because despite the nonchalant way Emori said it, it really did mean a lot. She smiled, overwhelmed by that sense of belonging, especially on a day like today. Being a part of this close-knit group of people . . . it wasn’t like anything else she’d ever felt before. But it was nice.

Bellamy’s eyes nearly bulged out of his head when he saw Octavia’s seven-month ultrasound for the first time. “Holy fuck,” he swore, taken aback by how vivid it was.

She grunted. “That’s your reaction to seeing my son?”

“Well, it’s just . . . damn, this 3D shit is lit,” he tried to explain. There was so much detail that he could see the baby’s fingernails, its eyelids, even a little sliver of its tongue between its lips.

“I know, it’s pretty crazy,” Octavia agreed, moving around to the other side of the counter to continue working on some sort of smoothie concoction she’d started putting in her blender. Lots of fruits and vegetables, by the looks of it, so it was probably one of those healthy drinks she’d found on some expectant mom website.

“It looks real,” Bellamy remarked.

“Well, it is real,” she said, talking loudly as she pressed the start button on the blender. “It’s really in
“Yeah, but it seems like I could reach out and touch it.” The 2D ultrasound images didn’t even really compare to this. This made the realness seem really real. If that even made sense.

She released the button on the blender and poured her thick, soupy mixture into a tall glass. “You want some?” she offered.

“No.” It looked like tar, so she could have at it herself.

While she explained to him every ingredient in that smoothie and all the reasons why it was healthy for both her and the baby, he spaced out, lost in the 3D image of an unborn baby in his hands. All the human features were there, formed, or at least almost fully-formed. It didn’t just look like a blob or a fetus. It was a baby. A real human baby.

His and Gina’s baby . . . it wouldn’t have looked like that. It hadn’t gotten the chance.

I wonder if I would have had a son, he pondered sadly. A daughter would have been awesome, too, though, someone he could have taken care of and worried about just like he’d done with Octavia.

“O . . .” He interrupted her, feeling the words right there on the tip of his tongue. The words he could have used to tell her that he’d almost had this exact same thing, that he’d almost become a parent himself. Whenever she showed him images from her monthly check-ups, he got so close to telling her everything. But inevitably, the words always seemed to get stuck right as they were about to come out, and he swallowed them back down again.

She was happy; there was no need to tell her something that would only make her sad.

“What?” she finally asked, looking at him expectantly as she sipped her drink.

He gulped, sliding the ultrasound image back across the counter towards her. “I’m just really excited for you.”

She smiled giddily, forgetting about her smoothie, and gazed down at her son’s image, lovingly placing a hand atop her stomach as she did so. She was going to be a good mom. A young mom, but a good one. Bellamy was sure of it.

That evening, he lay outside with Clarke in a hammock he’d snagged at a neighbor’s garage sale. It was big enough for both of them and stretched perfectly when tied between two trees in the backyard. It was comfortable and relaxing, and he could envision himself spending many summer nights out there with her, holding her, talking to her, falling asleep beneath the stars.

He told her about the ultrasound, about how he couldn’t help but think of Gina whenever he saw one. He confided that he was envious, and he didn’t want to feel that way once the baby was born.

“Don’t worry, Bellamy,” she reassured him, “you’re gonna be a good uncle.”

“I hope so,” he said, lazily threading his hands through her long, blonde hair. “It’s just kinda frustrating, because every time I get so close to telling her, I just . . . can’t.”

She snuggled closer, whispering, “That’s okay, though.”

“I guess.” He wasn’t under any obligation to open up about that. Not to anyone, not even to his sister. “At least I told you, though,” he pointed out.
“Mmm,” she purred, sounding sleepy.

Yeah, it was definitely a good thing he’d told her. Having one person in his life who knew and who could listen, and knowing that he could trust that person to never say anything . . . it meant more to him than she’d probably ever know. It made him feel like he wasn’t dealing with it alone, and that made him feel better.

A few minutes later, when they’d both gone quiet and Bellamy was close to nodding off, Miller poked his head out of the back door and called, “Hey, guys, can you come inside for a minute?”

With a great deal of effort, Bellamy swung his legs out of the hammock and stood up. Clarke was so tired, he had to pull her to her feet, and when he saw that exaggerated pout on her face, he knew he was going to end up carrying her. So he turned around and bent down, and she hopped up onto his back. Piggyback style, he hauled her in the house and plopped down on the couch with her.

Emori was there, on the floor with Murphy playing some board game Bellamy hadn’t even known they owned. They stopped playing once Miller started talking, and Bellamy listened, too, even though he had a hunch he already knew what this was about.

“All right, so you guys might’ve already figured out that Jackson and I have been lookin’ at places,” Miller began. “And we think we found a place, a house, not too far away from here. But it’s closer to the hospital, so it’s closer to where he works. And it’s nice, and it’s in our price range, and we both really like it, so . . .”

“So you guys are moving in together,” Murphy summarized.

Miller nodded, “Yeah, that’s the plan.”

“When?” Bellamy asked, not at all surprised that this was the news.

His friend shrugged. “Maybe next month. Just kinda depends on when we can actually move everything.”

“Right,” Bellamy said. “Well, I’ll help you.” There were a couple big items in this house that belonged to Miller. His bed and everything in his room, of course, the upstairs pull-out couch, the recliner here in the living room.

Miller chuckled. “Can’t wait to get rid of me, huh?”

“No, that’s not it.” Miller was a great roommate, and Bellamy had gotten used to living with him these past four years. He’d miss him, of course, but it wasn’t like they were going to stop being best friends. They’d still hang out all the time, and they’d always be bros. Miller and Jackson would just have a place of their own, too, which was awesome. They deserved it. They were serious, and they were definitely gonna last.

“Well, congratulations,” Murphy said, quickly redirecting all his attention to his girlfriend. “You know what this means,” he said.

Emori’s whole face lit up with excitement.

Murphy grinned at her. “You wanna move in with me?”

She barely let him finish the question before screaming gleefully at the top of her lungs, flinging herself at him and tackling him to the floor. She hugged him, squealing and giggling and acting way more girly than Bellamy had ever seen her act before.
“I’ll take that as a yes?” Murphy choked out.

“Yes!” she exclaimed.

Bellamy shook his head, laughing. *Well, good,* he thought. Emori would actually help with rent and expenses, unlike her boyfriend there, and it wouldn’t be some huge change to have her live there since she already spent so much time over there anyway.

But Bellamy knew there was someone else who spent a lot of time there, and she was sitting right next to him. Hopefully she wasn’t expecting to get the same invitation. They’d talked about it—sort of—and it just didn’t seem necessary. Why changing something up when everything was working fine?

“You’re good with the way things are, right?” he asked as Murphy and Emori continued to make a spectacle of themselves.

“Yeah,” Clarke replied, smiling at him, nodding.

He breathed an internal sigh of relief. *Good.* That was good.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Somehow, Clarke got roped into moving duty. Everyone else was working, Emori claimed, and Clarke wasn’t working as much. When Clarke pointed out that Emori’s very own boyfriend wasn’t working at all, the response she got was, “John doesn’t do moving.” And that was that.

Truth be told, she didn’t really mind helping Emori. They got along well, always had, and it was kind of interesting to see Emori’s apartment. Clarke had never actually been over there before, but it was cool. Very distinctively Emori, as all the walls had designs drawn on them, like tattoos. It was definitely small, though, more of a studio apartment than anything else, and the couch seemed to double as Emori’s bed. No wonder she was so eager to move into a bigger house.

“This is gonna be great,” Emori said as she dumped a bunch of plastic bowls and lids into a cardboard box. “I’ve always wanted to live over there.”

“Yeah, it’s a nice house,” Clarke agreed as she folded Emori’s dishtowels.

“And it’s just like the center of everything for all of us. You know how on *Friends* they had the coffee shop? And on *90210* they had the Peach Pit? That house is like our Peach Pit.”

Clarke laughed, setting the dishtowels down in a different box. “*You* watched *90210*?”

“Only the 90s version,” Emori answered proudly. She motioned for Clarke to follow her into the living room. “Look at this,” she said, handing her a framed photo off the end table. The screen was cracked down the middle, but the photo was still epic.

“Oh my god, is that Murphy dressed up as . . . Dylan McKay?” Clarke gasped.

“Yep. He knew I was a fan, so he surprised me,” Emori said. “That was Halloween last year.”

“Well, you have to pack that,” Clarke said, handing it back to her.

“Oh, definitely.” Emori stared at the photo adoringly for a few seconds, then set it back down. She flopped onto the couch, causing the springs to squeak and the cushion to sink down pretty low. She’d already said she didn’t plan on bringing that with her. The couch, among other items in that
apartment, was destined for the thrift store.

“Are you gonna miss it here at all?” Clarke inquired, sitting down next to her.

Emori shrugged. “Not really. I mean, it was my first place, but I never really loved living here. It never felt like home, you know?”

Clarke nodded. Oh, yeah, she knew. In fact, she felt that exact same way about her Polaris apartment.

“And I spend a lot of nights over at the house anyway,” Emori added on, “so it just makes sense.”

Yeah, it does, Clarke thought, determined not to be jealous. The other night after Miller had made this big announcement, Bellamy had asked her if she was good with this, and she was; she really was. She was excited for Murphy and Emori to get to live together, and she was excited for Miller and Jackson to get to live together. There was no reason not to be. Sure, if Bellamy had asked her, she would have said yes in a heartbeat, but he hadn’t, so . . .

Whatever. It was fine.

“You were freaking out,” Clarke recalled, hugging one of the couch pillows to her stomach. “I can only imagine what you’re gonna be like when he proposes.”

“Oh, I know,” Emori said. “Wait a minute, when do you think he’s gonna do that?”

“Well, not like tomorrow,” Clarke replied, “but I’m sure he will eventually.”

“Eventually,” Emori echoed, sighing wistfully. “I know not everybody gets John Murphy, you know, but I’ll tell you, Clarke . . . I’m so in love with the guy, I can’t even see straight.”

Clarke smiled. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I mean, I know he’s not perfect, but neither am I. And deep down, he’s just this really amazing guy.”

“Hmm.” Clarke didn’t doubt that. Over the past few months, she’d gotten to know Murphy pretty well. As weird and bizarre and lazy as he could be, he really did care about people. Particularly Emori. Clarke had stumbled upon the two of them asleep on the floor or on the couch or the trampoline so many times, and it was clear just in the way he held her that he adored her. More than anything.

“Hey, you know what?” Emori exclaimed suddenly, angling her torso towards Clarke. “Now that I’m moving in and you practically already live there, we should have some girls nights!”

“Girls nights?” Clarke echoed. Like the kind she had with Raven?

“Yeah, we should go out tonight,” Emori suggested. “Just us, no boys. We could go wild. We could go to a strip club. We could get drunk and make them come pick us up. We could get tattoos, Clarke.”

“Well, I don’t know about tattoos,” Clarke said, cringing inwardly as she imagined the pain of it, “but we could probably go out for a while.” Emori was a little wild, sure, but so was Raven. Clarke figured she could handle it.

As it turned out, there was a lot to handle at their first stop that night. The Kitten Corral. Emori had
been dead serious about the strip club idea. The girls there were very eager to please and got right up to the edge of the stage when they did their routines. They were all young and hot, so Clarke appreciated the show, of course, but she didn’t really need the lap dance Emori paid extra for. A particularly curvy girl got all up on her and shook and shimmied around, but Clarke insisted she keep her clothes on. And she didn’t touch. Not because she wasn’t allowed—no, it was harmless, and Bellamy wouldn’t have cared—but just because . . . the stripper really didn’t do much to turn her on. Places like this were just an act, and the passion was so forced. She had some very real, very natural passion waiting for her at home, and this really couldn’t compare to that.

Emori, however, was having a great time. She may not have been bisexual, but she was definitely willing to play around. She ended up with two topless girls on her lap and motor-boatèd them both.

They walked to Dropship after that, both of them a little buzzed already and reluctant to get behind the wheel. They vowed to either take a taxi home or call the boys to come get them, because it didn’t take either one of them long to get drunk.

A couple beers and several shots in, Emori asked a little too loudly, “Isn’t this where you and Bellamy first had sex?”

“Yeah,” Clarke replied, convinced that she had to speak loudly, too, to be heard over the jukebox. “It was a magical night.”

“What?”

“I said it was a magical night.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” Emori said. “Bellamy’s, like . . . a pro.”

Clarke nodded emphatically.

“And he’s like a porn star with his big dick,” Emori added.

“Mmm-hmm.” She’d watched some porn in her day, and truth be told, she had yet to see any guy’s dick that was as perfect as Bellamy’s. Of course, she was totally biased, too, because she knew what incredible things he could do with it. “That’s where he kissed me for the first time,” she told Emori, pointing around the corner to where the hallway outside the bathroom was at. “And I think we had sex there once, too.”

Emori set her empty shot glass down and gave Clarke an exasperated look. “My god, where haven’t you guys done it?”

“I don’t know,” Clarke said, shrugging innocently. “We do it everywhere.” She took another shot, feeling . . . kind of loopy. In a fun way.

“Where’s the craziest place you’ve done it?” Emori asked.

“Well . . .” She thought back to their road trip, because that had really been a trip when it came to the sex. “We did it on an open highway in Illinois,” she blurted.

Emori’s eyes widened.

“Yeah, people drove past and everything,” Clarke confessed. “And we did it at Lexa’s wedding. And we did it on the dance floor at Mount Weather once.”

“The dance floor?” Emori shrieked.

Emori just stared at her in astonishment.

“I can’t help it,” Clarke said. “I’m such a slut for him.”

“No, you’re not a slut,” Emori argued, her words slurring together a bit. “You’re . . . a princess, Clarke. You’re his princess.”

Clarke smiled, liking the sound of that. “His princess.” She really couldn’t remember what it was like to not have that nickname.
Chapter 42

From the second she awoke, Clarke felt nauseous. In fact, it was probably because of the nausea that she woke up in the first place. It would have been nice to just sleep in all morning, because she was pretty sure she’d had a late night and needed some rest to feel better, but her stomach was churning angrily and doing backflips. She couldn’t just keep lying there. It wouldn’t be ignored.

“Oh god,” she groaned, struggling to sit up. “Oh god.” The wastebasket was right next to the side of the bed—no doubt Bellamy had put it there for her—but she felt like it was going to be too massive for that. She got to her feet and held one hand to her stomach, one hand over her mouth as she ran into the bathroom. “Move,” she said, bumping Bellamy aside as he stood at the sink, shaving his face. She dropped to her knees in front of the toilet just in time to throw up. It was disgusting.

“Well, good morning to you, too, Clarke,” Bellamy greeted, splashing some water on his face. “Rough night?”

She just groaned in agony as her stomach lurched again, and even more contents came up.

“Want me to hold your hair?” he offered.

“No, I’m fine,” she said, flushing the toilet. She sat back against the tub, feeling like death, and asked him, “How did I even get home last night?”

“I came and got you,” he replied, handing her a couple tissues so she could wipe off her face. “Emori called Murphy at midnight, said you guys were at Dropship. But when we got there, you guys were gone. Spent the next hour roamin’ around town, trying to find you.”

“Where were we?” Clarke asked, unable to remember. Everything past Dropship was a blur.

“Well, you guys were just walking around town, ended up wandering over to Walmart,” Bellamy explained. “We found you playing around on a karaoke machine.”

“What? Oh . . .” She groaned again, rubbing her aching head. “Why would I go there? I hate that store.”

“I don’t know, but there you were.” He shrugged. “It was like a scavenger hunt. We just kept asking people if they’d seen two hot drunk girls, and they led us right to you.”

“That’s embarrassing,” she said, clutching at her stomach as it gurgled again. Oh, this was not good. She leaned forward over the toilet again, ready to regurgitate even more of herself if that was what her body needed to do. But this time, nothing came out. Regardless, she felt like she must have looked so gross and unattractive right now.

“Uh, Clarke?” Bellamy said suddenly.

“What?” The room was spinning, so she doubted she could carry on much of a conversation.

“I think you did something else last night that you don’t remember.”

“Oh god, no.” She hadn’t tried to have sex with him right there in Walmart, had she? Because that place was so not sexy, but sometimes she got kind of frisky if she had some whiskey . . .
“Come here,” he said, grabbing her underneath both her arms to pull her to her feet.

“Ugh, too fast,” she cautioned.

“Sorry.” He lifted up the back of her shirt and said, “Uh-huh.”

“What?” she asked.

“You got a tattoo.”

“What?!” She tried to twist around and see what he was seeing, but that was no use. She was like a dog chasing its tail until he stopped her from spinning and said, “Look,” motioning towards the mirror.

She stood up on her tiptoes and lifted the back of her shirt up, revealing a tiny tramp stamp right there on her lower back, right above her ass. “Oh . . . my god,” she said dramatically, trying to make out what it even was. A word, obviously, but it was hard to read reflected in the mirror. “What’s that even say?” she asked in a panic. “Pineapple?” Had she really just inked herself for life with the word pineapple?

“Princess,” he informed her.

“Oh, thank God,” she sighed in relief. At least that had meaning and wasn’t random. But still . . . a tattoo? In her drunken state, she’d actually let Emori convince her to get a tattoo? Whimpering, she rubbed at the tattoo, which couldn’t have been any wider than a half dollar, just to see if it was fake and would smear off. It didn’t, though, and the fact that the surrounding skin was slightly red and slightly sore was proof of how real it was. “Oh, I can’t believe I did this. I’m gonna kill Emori!”

“Why?” Bellamy said. “I think it’s cool. I like it.”

“Well, of course you like it.” He wasn’t the one who’d just permanently marked up his body. Besides, it was the nickname he’d given her. He probably felt all proud. “Oh, my mom’s gonna kill me,” she fretted.

“Clarke, your mom walked in on you having sex with me, and she knows you got arrested for having sex with me,” he reminded her. “I think she’ll be fine with a tattoo.”

“I just won’t ever let her see it,” she decided, tugging her shirt back down. “Oh my god, I got a tattoo.”

“How do you not remember getting it?” He laughed.

“There’s a lot I don’t remember about last night, okay? This is why I need you with me.”

“Okay. No more girls nights,” he said, cupping the back of her head. He pressed a kiss to her temple and said, “I’d kiss you on the mouth, but . . .” He cringed.

“Yeah, no, it’s disgusting,” she admitted. Now that the nausea seemed to have passed, she was going to brush her teeth for five minutes straight to get rid of the taste in her mouth. And then she would get back to freaking out about this tattoo situation.

“I gotta get to work,” he said, backing out of the bathroom. “But hey, when I get home . . . sex. Preferably doggy style. Okay?”

She laughed weakly. “Okay.” At least one of them was loving this tattoo.
“I’ll see you later,” he said, grinning at her as he left the bathroom.

She sighed heavily, turning around and lifting up the back of her shirt again. She shook her head in horrified awe as the reflected Princess stared back at her in the mirror. At least it was small. And kind of pretty, what with it being in cursive writing and all. And at least it didn’t say pineapple.

Since she was slow-moving that morning, she skipped class and instead lounged around downstairs with Murphy, watching The View. He teased her mercilessly about her tattoo, and when Emori finally got up, she strolled out into the living room and proudly showed off the brand new J.M. she’d had inked on her wrist. She assured Clarke that her tattoo wouldn’t get infected or anything, because they’d gotten it at the very parlor where she worked, and according to her, it was very safe and sanitary.

Clarke sent Raven and Niylah each a picture of her tattoo, and they both texted back, raving about it. Niylah already had one on her ankle, and Raven wanted a bird—a raven, naturally—on her shoulder blade. Hearing other people’s compliments made Clarke feel less self-conscious about it. She’d never wanted a tattoo or imagined herself as the type of girl who could pull one off, but then again, she’d never imagined herself as the type of girl to get arrested for public indecency, either. And obviously that had happened.

That afternoon, once she was finally feeling functional and more like herself again, she got together with Wells for a late lunch. They’d scheduled this yesterday, because he was leaving Arkadia in just a few days. He’d made arrangements to finish out his classes early—which was something Clarke didn’t even know you could do—and had already taken all his final exams. He was going to miss the graduation ceremony, because he was in a hurry to get to Dover and start his internship with his girlfriend’s father. Before he left, he was trying to squeeze in some time with his friends, because once he was gone, they wouldn’t get to see each other very much. He would be busy, and a lot of their interaction would have to happen online.

“Let me see this,” he said, standing behind Clarke.

“You heard about it, huh?” she said, lifting the back of her shirt up.

“Yeah, Raven told me.” Wells chuckled, shaking his head. “Wow.”

“What, do you think it looks bad?”

“No,” he said. “It’s just . . . it’s a tattoo.”

“I know.” She put her shirt back down, and they resumed walking down the sidewalk towards the sandwich shop near campus.

“I mean, you branded yourself with the name he calls you.”

She made a face, not sure how she felt about that word. “I didn’t brand myself.”

“You kinda did.” He shrugged. “I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with it; it’s just . . . that’s commitment.”

“It was a spur of the moment decision,” she said. “Or at least that’s what I’m told. I really don’t remember.” According to Emori, she’d practically had to drag Clarke into the tattoo parlor, but once she’d gotten in there, she’d lost all her inhibitions and decided to go for it.

“It’s just really permanent,” Wells said. “But I guess you could always pay to have it removed.”
Clarke touched her back, frowning. “No,” she said, already oddly attached to it. “I mean . . . why would I do that?”

“Well, I’m not saying you should or you have to,” Wells said. “It’s just an option. But I don’t think you will, ‘cause . . . you know, you and Bellamy . . .” He trailed off, as though she were supposed to just magically understand what he was saying even though he wasn’t saying it.

“What about me and Bellamy?” she pressed.

“Well, you know, you guys have your . . . thing.”

“Thing?” she echoed. Yeah, they definitely had a thing. She wished Wells would just say whatever he so obviously wanted to say, rather than dance around the subject. “Just spit it out, Wells,” she told her friend.

He sighed impatiently, flapping his arms against his sides. “Alright, I guess I really have nothing to lose here,” he said, “since I’m gonna be leaving in a couple days.”

Clarke slowed to a stop, turning to face him, her forehead furrowed in confusion.

“Listen, you and Bellamy . . . you guys are close,” Wells said. “Everyone knows it. You guys know it.”

“Well, you know, you guys have your . . . thing.”

“Yeah, so?” Was there something wrong with being close to someone? She was close to Raven and Niylah and him, too. She’d grown close to Emori, Murphy, Miller, and everybody else these past few months, too.

“I mean, you’re . . . close,” Wells said with emphasis. “You guys do everything together. You’re around each other all the time.”

“Because we’re friends,” she asserted.

“Yeah, but . . .” Wells made a face. “Come on, it’s a little more than that.”

She frowned, not sure where he was going with this. “Okay, fine, friends who have sex. That’s nothing new.”

“No, you’re not just . . .” Wells trailed off, sighing frustratedly. “You guys aren’t just friends, Clarke,” he said, “and you know it.”

Her frown intensified, and she actually started to feel a bit . . . a bit angry that he would choose to have this particular conversation with her on one of the last days that they could just hang out and be college kids together.

“You guys act like it’s so different,” Wells went on, “but it’s not different. Everything I feel for Sasha or Raven feels for Roan or Niylah feels for Luna . . . it’s what you guys feel for each other, and I don’t know why you don’t just own up to it.”

“It is different,” Clarke insisted. She and Bellamy had made a promise months ago that it would be different, and by now, she was more than accustomed to even their closest friends not understanding it.

“Clarke, you got a tattoo that says Princess,” Wells pointed out. “You probably haven’t slept in your own bed in weeks. You did an entire exhibit at Trikru about the guy. I mean, what else is it gonna take to open your eyes?”
“My eyes are open,” she insisted. “Look, you just don’t get it, okay? But Bellamy and I do, and that’s all that matters.”

Wells sighed again, almost dejectedly this time, and shrugged his shoulders. “Alright,” he said. “Just thought I’d try to drop a truth bomb before I go.”

She shook her head as they continued down the sidewalk, trying to rid her mind of what he’d just said. Truth bombs only worked when there was some truth to what was being said, and in this case . . . Wells just didn’t know enough about her situation to be able to judge it. He’d never had a serious girlfriend until Sasha, who had been his first in every sense of the word. He didn’t understand how it was possible to be so close to someone without slapping a girlfriend/boyfriend title onto it, because he’d never done that before. He couldn’t relate.

She wasn’t mad at him for saying what he’d said. Honestly. But she did kind of wish he wouldn’t have said anything at all.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Bellamy was nearly done with the first of the books for his Twentieth Century Europe class. One more chapter and he’d be finished. He’d placed sticky notes on the chapters he thought might be referenced a lot, just so he could go back and re-read if necessary.

God, was he the biggest nerd on the planet or what?

Clarke got home that evening, later than he’d anticipated, though she had texted him to say she was having dinner with Raven and Niylah. She looked tired when she walked in the bedroom, though not awful like she had this morning. The poor girl just couldn’t handle hangovers very well.

“Hey,” he said, closing his book.

“Hey,” she returned, shutting the door. She dropped her purse down on the floor and kicked off her sandals, swaying towards him in the cutest jean shorts he’d ever seen on a girl. This warmer weather was nice. The clothes got smaller and skimpier, and that wasn’t a problem for him.

“How’s the tattoo?” he asked, setting his book aside.

“Permanent.”

“Yeah.” He reached up and grabbed her hand, pulling her down onto his lap so he could kiss her sensually. On account of the puking, he’d passed up an opportunity to kiss her this morning, but now that that was done and over with, he just had to have his lips on hers.

While his tongue explored her warm, wet mouth, his hands slid down her back to duck beneath her cutoff shorts. They were a little too loose around the waistline, so it was ridiculously easy to grab hold of her ass and give it a good squeeze. He made sure to trace his fingers over her new ink, too, just because he found it sexy as fuck and wanted her to know that.

“I missed you last night,” she murmured against his lips. “Not that I don’t like hanging out with Emori, but . . . you know.”

“Yeah.” He’d missed her, too. Greedily, he sucked her bottom lip between his again, then got to work undressing her. He lifted her shirt over her head for her and tossed it onto the floor, then took a moment to appreciate how gorgeous her breasts looked in the lacy maroon bra she was wearing. They were practically spilling out of the cups.
“You think I should spoil you tonight?” he asked, tracing his fingers along her cleavage.

“If you want to,” she replied.

Oh, he wanted to. In fact, he’d been thinking about this all day. He probably hadn’t done his best work on Diana’s garage door repair just because, in the back of his mind, he’d had all these fantasies forming of what he would do to Clarke once he got his hands on her. He wanted to pound her from behind and get a good look at that tattoo while he fucked her, no doubt. But he also wanted to eat her pussy so bad right now, because there was no better way to spoil a princess than to do that.

He lifted her off his lap just long enough to get off the bed and kneel down beside it. Confused at first, she let him maneuver her into position so that she was lying down with her legs dangling off the side of the bed. “Lift up,” he told her, and she obediently raised her hips off the mattress so he could tug down on her shorts. He hooked his hands into the sides of her thong and brought it down at the same time as her shorts. She almost kicked him in the face as he lowered them past her knees and ankles, but he dodged her foot just in time.

“What’re you gonna do to me?” she asked almost innocently, curling her legs together.

“I don’t know,” he said, even though he did know. He pressed on her knees, urging her legs apart, and pulled on her ankles, bringing her closer to the edge of the bed so that her beautiful pussy was right there, easily within reach.

She propped herself up on her forearms and nudged his shoulders with her feet. “You should leave your glasses on,” she suggested.

He reached up and readjusted his big old specs, having forgotten at this point that he was even still wearing them. He needed them for reading, but right now . . . ah, they worked for this, too. They helped him see things close-up, after all, and he was about to get up close and personal with her pussy.

“Can I taste you?” he said quietly, not even sure why he was asking for permission. He didn’t need to, not when he could already smell her arousal.

“Please,” she pleaded earnestly.

Smiling, he scooted forward on his knees and brought his mouth down on her lower lips, planting a kiss there similar to the kisses he’d just given her mouth. He licked a line up her folds, teasing her slit, and then kissed her again, right on her clit this time. Her hips jerked towards his face, and a small moan came from deep in her throat. She liked that.

He licked at her some more, savoring the taste, because god, she tasted good, and she always left him wanting more. No matter how many times he went down on her, lost himself with his head between her legs, he never got tired of doing it, because she always got so wet for him. Because of him. It was like a drug, the taste of Clarke Griffin, and he was addicted.

“Mmm, yeah,” she purred, rolling her head back as he gave her a thorough tonguing. He lapped at the juices seeping out of her folds, flicked and zig-zagged his tongue against her clit to keep the juices coming, and occasionally just gusted out some hot air against her, the sensation of which made her shiver and her inner thighs shake.

“Bellamy . . .”

Yeah, baby, say my name, he thought, switching tactics so that his tongue was now moving up and down in broad, flat strokes. She always seemed to like that.
Suddenly, she surprised him by reaching down and burrowing one hand in his hair, clamping down hard so she could hold his head in place. Wantonly, she rolled her hips against his face, totally using him to her utmost satisfaction. It was hot as hell, watching and feeling her writhe against him, especially because he was used to just ravaging her while she lay there and come undone. This was a lot more . . . aggressive on her part, and it was fucking sexy.

He held his tongue out while she grinded down on his face, and he hoped she’d get off like this. He wanted to drink her down, get the full taste of her, but his dick had also gotten rock hard at this point and wanted in on the action. So reluctantly, when her movements started to slow, he lifted his head, having to wipe off his glasses because they were getting all messy and steamed up. He then plunged a finger into her, pumping it in and out a few times before quickly adding another one, and he spent a little time finger-fingering her to increase her arousal.

“Oh, fuck yes,” she choked out, sitting up all the way now. She reached behind her back to finally unclasp her bra, and when her tits sprang free, he leaned forward and tried to capture them in his mouth. He kissed and sucked at them sloppily, sometimes able to get her nipples between his lips, sometimes getting the surrounding area. She arched her chest out against his mouth and again tangled her hand in his hair, gently guiding his face back and forth from one breast to the other while his fingers continued to pump away inside her.

*She’s so beautiful,* he thought, wrapping his free arm around her waist. He slowly stood, picking her up with him, and moved her backward on the bed. “Turn around,” he said, hurriedly taking off his sweatpants. His erect cock sprang into his own hands, and he gave it a few strokes as she sultrily rolled over onto her side, then onto her stomach. It was like she was moving in slow motion, just to torture him. Instinctively, she lifted her backside into the air once she was on her stomach, giving him the perfect angle to penetrate her. He got on the bed and walked forward on his knees, lining himself up behind her, but he wanted a better view of this new tattoo of hers. So he told her, “Sit up,” and she pushed herself up onto her hands and knees.

“Like that?” she asked.

“Yeah.” *This was perfect.* That cute little nickname was right there, right above that cute little ass. He gave her a gentle spank, then immediately smoothed his hands over the flesh he’d just hit, even though he knew it hadn’t hurt her.

“Do it again,” she urged, wriggling her rump suggestively.

He smacked her other cheek this time, not too hard but with enough gusto enough to make her whole ass move. He rubbed her slightly reddened skin, not sure how much of this he wanted to do. A spank here and there was fine, but he didn’t want to go overboard.

*I gotta fuck her,* he thought, unable to hold back any longer. His cock was painfully hard and dripping with pre-cum, and her pussy was still all shiny and wet from his oral explorations. He slid into her with ease, amazed at the way her body had come to accommodate him. It always snug, but he fit in there so well nowadays, like she’d gotten used to taking him.

“Oh . . .” she moaned, shutting her eyes.

He gave her—and himself—only a few seconds to adjust to the feeling before he started thrusting, *really* concentrating on rolling his hips into her. He watched his cock slide almost all the way in, then almost all the way out, gradually becoming more and more coated with her juices. Anytime he got close to slipping out, she clamped down around him, pulling him back in, and damn, it was so fucking hot to watch that.
When he wasn’t watching his own dick fuck in and out of her, he cast a quick glance up at her face to see how she was doing, or he fixated on the tattoo. *Princess.* Fuck yeah, he was the one who called her that, the only one, as far as he knew, and she liked it enough to get it tattooed on her body. Right in a place where he was the only one privileged enough to see it.

That was fucking hot.

He did her for a long time, drawing it out to the point where he was sweating pretty profusely and needed to take a break. So he stopped moving altogether, much to her dismay, and gave her a challenging look when she peeked over her shoulder and frowned. If she wanted it, she could still have it.

Indeed, she wanted it, because she started pressing her ass backward, moving herself up and down the length of his cock, fucking him now with obvious determination. He completely removed his hands from her body and just watched her work, appreciating the sheen of sweat that had gathered on her skin as well. The hair up by her forehead was damp with exertion, and she was panting for air.

*Good girl,* he thought, needing to do something to treat her. Thinking quickly, he spit on his right hand, then rubbed his saliva around her asshole, which caused her to freeze immediately.

“Don’t worry,” he said, squeezing just one finger into that tight little entrance.

“Oh!” she cried out, squeezing her eyes shut. She didn’t look like she was in any pain, but it definitely had to be a new feeling for her, having his finger in her ass while his cock was in her pussy. “I’m alright,” she said quickly, as though she’d known he was about to ask.

He began thrusting into her again, just shallow thrusts this time, mimicking each movement with his finger. Good god, this girl was incredible. The things she did with him never failed to blow his mind.

“You look so good,” he told her, mesmerized by the sight of both holes taking something at once.

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” She started to slump forward, but since he was adamant about not losing sight of that tattoo, he withdrew his finger from her ass and shot his hand forward to grab hold of her hair. He tugged on it just enough to raise her head and shoulders, then kept a hold of it as he began to pound into her. She’d waited long enough; time to get her off.

“Uh!” she gasped, craning her head and neck backwards. He didn’t really pull Clarke’s hair much when they were having sex, but it just felt right tonight, and she seemed to like the feel of it as much as he liked the look of it. It felt rough, it felt dirty, and it felt pretty animalistic. And it went hand-in-hand with the position.

“I’m gonna cum,” she warned him, and then seconds later, her pussy was squeezing him as she did just that. He felt her clench and pulsate around him, felt it grow wetter and wetter down there as her orgasm seared through her; it felt like a blowjob, only better, like she was tugging him deeper, sucking him in. Her whole body quivered and convulsed, and he could tell she had no control over what was happening to her. It was the greatest feeling in the world, knowing how much pleasure he’d just brought to her, knowing she felt this amazing because of him.

It must have been a pretty powerful orgasm, because she couldn’t stay upright after it was over. She fell forward onto her stomach, and he was left with a rock-hard erection and nowhere to plug into. So he moved forward, straddling her from behind, and jerked himself off quickly, squirting his load onto her back. He used the tattoo as a target and managed to hit it pretty well. Hot. Even though he preferred to cum inside her, sometimes it was cool to cum *on* her, too.
He collapsed next to her once he was done, on his back, breathing heavily, his dick still in his hand as it started to go limp. “Damn,” he swore. Every single time with Clarke was just . . . at a level ten. In fact, the scale of sexual pleasure didn’t stop at a ten with her. No, she was a fucking twenty.

“That . . . was good,” she managed. Her legs were still shaking a bit, a sure sign that she’d just gotten rocked in the best way possible.

“Fit for a princess?” he teased.

She laughed giddily. “Yes, fit for a princess.”

“Good.” He reached down and swirled his fingers in the cum pooled on her lower back, spreading it around, knowing he was just making the clean-up messier. (But hell, that just gave them an excuse to go do it in the shower, too.) Then he brought his coated fingers up to her lips, and she swirled her tongue around them, licking them clean, tasting him similarly to how he’d tasted her.

“You’re amazing,” he told her, hoping she knew that. He doubted she did, though. No matter how many times he told her how she made him feel or tried to show her . . . she seemed to think that he was the one who was so good in bed, that he was the one who knew what he was doing. But she knew, too, and she was the best he’d ever had. This girl . . . she was special.

She was so special.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Since Clarke and Emori’s one and only girls night out together had resulted in a tattoo and two massive hangovers from hell the next morning, Bellamy and Murphy both figured it was best to just go with them on Friday and make a double date out of it. They went to Dropship and shot some pool, then sat in one of the booths for a while, drinking leisurely and playing a harmless game of Would You Rather. Bellamy liked that he knew what most of Clarke’s answers would be before she said them. Like when Emori asked her if she would rather be on top or bottom during sex. He knew she’d say bottom.

“You left me out there naked with your parents,” Bellamy reminded her. “That was mortifying.”

Yeah, but they still like you.”

“Miraculously.” He really didn’t even know how that was possible, but at this point, he wasn’t gonna question it.

“Okay, fine, getting caught by our parents,” Murphy answered finally. He took a drink, pointed a finger at Bellamy, and asked, “Would you rather give it . . . or get it?”

“Give it,” Bellamy answered without hesitation.

“You know I’m talkin’ about oral, right?”

“Yeah.” His answer remained the same.
“Really?” Murphy wrinkled his nose. “Nah, blowjobs are the best, man.”

“I guess we know your answer then,” Emori grumbled, rolling her eyes.

Clarke laughed at the two of them and pondered out loud, “Why do these games always turn sexual?”

“Because that’s when they’re fun,” Murphy reasoned. “Plus, we’re all young and having lots of sex, so . . .” He shrugged.

“Well . . . we’re having an adequate amount of sex,” Emori corrected, grabbing a couple chips off her boyfriend’s plate. “You and me.”

“Adequate?” he echoed in horror.

“Well, yeah, not as much as they are.” She motioned between Bellamy and Clarke.

“You know we do other stuff, too,” Bellamy jumped in.

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. “We go on walks almost every night. And he’s been trying to teach me how to cook.”

“You’re failing miserably, by the way,” he informed her.

“Thanks.”

“And sometimes we just talk and hang out and stuff,” he added. “You guys act like we never come up for air.”

“Oh, fine, you do, but you gotta admit, it’s pretty . . . frequent,” Emori said. “Oh my god, the other night, I didn’t know when it was gonna stop.”

Bellamy shrugged proudly. “I can’t help it that I’m a marathon man.”

“Yeah, I’m definitely not that,” Murphy admitted. “Seriously, though, no wonder Miller wants to move out. He’s had to sleep in the next-door bedroom this whole time.”

“Oh, we have heard plenty from Miller and Jackson, too,” Clarke said. “I think they roleplay.”

Bellamy shuddered, shaking his head. “That was disturbing that one night.”

“Uh-huh,” Clarke agreed emphatically. “Some kind of doctor/patient scenario.”

Bellamy downed the rest of his beer and said, “Let’s just put it this way: I’m terrified of ever getting a prostrate exam now.”

“Gross,” Murphy said, making a face. He leaned back, wrapped his arm around his girlfriend, and belched before announcing, “I need another beer.”

She shot him a glare. “Is that a hint for me to go get you one?”

“Maybe.”

“I’ll go,” Clarke volunteered, already sliding across Bellamy’s lap. “I’m gonna go get another one for myself.”
“Can you get me another one, too, babe?” Bellamy asked her.

“Sure.” She wove through tables and chairs on her way back to the bar, and Bellamy tilted his head to the side to admire the way her ass looked in this sequined gold skirt she’d chosen to wear. Damn, his girl looked good.

“So is Clarke moving in or what?” Emori asked bluntly once she was out of earshot. “Because she should.”

Bellamy shook his head. “Nope, she’s keepin’ her own place.”

“But she’s always over,” Emori pointed out. “Why not make it official so she could help out with rent and stuff?”

“Because they’re not ‘officially’ dating,” Murphy reminded her, rolling his eyes.

“She just needs her own place,” Bellamy said quietly, not about to go into any more of an explanation than that. He’d already thought about it a lot, and it was the only thing that made sense. If she hooked up with someone else someday—when she hooked up with someone else someday, settled down and got serious—it’d be a little weird if she did was still sharing a bed with him. She had to have her place to go back to, because eventually . . .

Well, he didn’t really wanna think about eventually right now.

Emori thankfully let it go, and she and Murphy started talking about how they could possibly make enough room in his closet for all of her clothes, too. Bellamy honestly didn’t care, so he tuned them out, glancing up at the bar instead.

He saw a blonde-haired guy sauntering up to Clarke, introducing himself, trying to be a smooth operator. Bellamy just snorted, because . . . come on, that guy didn’t stand a chance.

He looked away for a few seconds, but inevitably, he ended up returning his gaze to Clarke, watching as she smiled politely and engaged in some harmless conversation with the guy. Key word: harmless. Bellamy wasn’t threatened by him in the slightest. He looked like a stereotypical frat boy who’d wandered a little too far from campus. Well-dressed, clean-cut, All-American, and therefore, boring. Not Clarke’s type. He couldn’t wait to watch her turn him down.

Out of the corner of his eye, he kept watching . . . and waiting. And waiting some more. But this guy just kept on talking to her. She was waiting for the drinks, so it wasn’t like she could go anywhere. She wasn’t really saying much to him. In fact, she kept looking away, like she was trying to give him the brush off, but apparently he wasn’t getting the hint.

“You’re very beautiful,” Bellamy heard him say, and that just made him roll his eyes. Who just walked up to a girl at a bar—a girl who obviously wasn’t interested—and said that? Okay, yeah, sure, maybe he’d done that a time or two himself, but he always made sure the girl was interested first. It was called flirting across the room. And he never approached a girl who was clearly already there with somebody else.

Maybe it’s not clear enough, Bellamy thought. He was sitting here on his ass while she was up there getting hit on. So maybe it was time to clarify some shit.

He got up and stalked towards the bar, leaving his friends in the middle of their closet conversation. Right as he approached, the loser guy tried to put his arm around Clarke, and she flinched away.

“Please don’t,” she said.

“Is he bothering you?” Bellamy roared, closing in protectively at her side.
“It’s fine,” she said, but she sounded . . . uncomfortable.

“Oh, hey, man, we were just talking,” the guy said, holding his hands up in front of himself as if to fend off an attack.

“She doesn’t wanna talk to you,” Bellamy growled.

“I really don’t,” Clarke confirmed. “Sorry.”

Apparently this guy just couldn’t take no for an answer, because he snorted indignantly, like he wasn’t used to being turned down or something. “Whatever,” he muttered. “Didn’t know she was already somebody’s bitch.”

“What’d you call her?” Bellamy demanded, getting up in his face.

“Bellamy, don’t,” Clarke said pleadingly.

Too late. His hands shot out against this jerk’s chest, pushing him back against the counter. “Who’s the bitch now, bitch?” he yelled angrily. Heads all over the bar whipped in their direction to see what the commotion was about.

“Okay, let’s just go,” Clarke said, tugging on his arm, trying to pull him away. “Okay?”

No, he didn’t want to go. He wanted this other guy to go so they could stay and keep drinking. But that probably wasn’t gonna happen, so maybe it was for the best that they leave.

“Let’s go,” she said again, motioning for Murphy and Emori to follow them out. They’d only taken a few steps when Bellamy heard a smacking sound, and beside him, Clarke winced and tensed up.

Oh, hell no. Did this guy really think he could just smack her on the ass?

Bellamy spun and charged at him, pushing him back against the counter, taking a swing at his face.

“Bellamy!” Clarke yelled.

His fist landed with a loud thud, and blood spilled from that fucking jackass’s nose. He only got a few more good punches in before the fight was broken up. The bartender reached across the counter to hold the other guy back while Murphy pulled Bellamy off of him. “Let’s go, man,” he said. “Come on.”

Bellamy struggled against his friend’s hold for a moment, because he really wouldn’t have minded breaking that guy’s nose or rearranging his jaw. But when Clarke stepped in between them and sternly told him, “Stop,” he forced himself to calm down. For her. The bar was oddly quiet as he and his friends walked out, but a few of the regulars gave him a nod of approval as he left.

His hand hurt, and his knuckles were bleeding. Some of it was the other guy’s blood, and some of it was probably his own. So Murphy hopped in the front seat of the truck and drove it home. Bellamy stared out the window, mostly silent, mostly pissed off, and clenched and unclenched his fist. Wasn’t the first time he’d hit some loser in that bar. Probably wouldn’t be the last.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke sat with Bellamy on the bed, shaking her head disappointedly as she lifted the icepack off his hand. “I don’t think this is helping.”

“No, it feels better,” he insisted, stretching out his fingers. He tried to conceal the grimace that found
its way to his face, but Clarke could tell it hurt.

“Bellamy,” she said in a scolding tone, dabbing at his reddened knuckles with a wet washcloth. They’d stopped bleeding, for the most part, but they still looked bad. “Why did you do that?”

“Why?” he spat incredulously. “Because he was hitting on you.”

“I was handling it.”

“He literally hit you right on your ass,” he pointed out. “What was I supposed to do, just let that go?”

“Yes.” She didn’t like it any more than he did, but when it was a minor deal like that . . . that was what girls were accustomed to doing. “Now look at this,” she said. “Look at your hand.”

“So?”

“So? You use your hands for work. And now you’re injured.”

“My hand’s fine,” he claimed, using it to push her hair back from her face. “See?”

She shook her head, not willing to just let him romanticize something that very easily could have gotten out of control. “You shouldn’t have hit him,” she said again.

“Well, he shouldn’t have touched you,” Bellamy countered. “If he does it again, I’ll hit him again.”

Groaning in frustration, she seized the watery icepack and slid off the bed. “I’m gonna go get you some more ice,” she said, starting for the door.

“Why are you mad at me, Clarke?” he blared.

She whirled around. “I’m not mad. I just don’t want you to get hurt or do something stupid that could jeopardize college now that you’re finally in it.”

“Finally,” he echoed.

Oh, she hadn’t meant for it to sound like that. “You know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” he said, “and I’m not jeopardizing anything. It was barely even a fight.”

“But it could’ve been,” she argued. “And . . . okay, I just . . .” She flapped her arms against her sides. “Look, it’s not that I’m not grateful. I know how protective you are. But you don’t always need to protect everyone, okay? Not Octavia, not me . . .”

His gaze lowered, and he stared down at his hand, nodding solemnly. Deep down, he probably wanted to march right back to that bar and pummel the guy some more. But he’d simmered down now, and everything was ultimately okay. His hand looked bad, but nothing felt broken.

“I’m gonna go get some more ice,” she repeated, leaving the room this time. God, this sucked. He was probably going to be in a bad mood the rest of the night, and as fun as that wouldn’t be . . . she supposed it was understandable. Guys got so many mixed messages when it came to this kind of thing. They were supposed to be strong and protective, yet they weren’t supposed to escalate the situation. That could be a hard balance for someone to achieve, especially someone like Bellamy, who had such an inherent need to take care of other people.

As she treaded downstairs, she heard voices in the darkened kitchen: Murphy and Emori were still
up, and Miller seemed to have been told the whole story of what had happened tonight, because they were talking about it quietly. Clarke lingered near the bottom of the stairs, listening in.

“Yeah, vintage Bellamy,” Miller was saying. “Knight in shining armor thing, huh?”

“Well, that guy deserved it,” Emori said. “It’s technically sexual harassment, you know.”

“It’s not technically anything,” Miller said. “It is harassment.”

“Oh, I know,” Murphy said. He sighed heavily, and Clarke could just picture him running his hand through his hair. “Just kind of reminds me of how he was with Gina.”

Clarke’s breath hitched. Gina?

“I just don’t know how long we’re supposed to stand around and act like they’re just--”

Clarke accidentally stepped down onto the bottom stair, and it creaked. All her friends fell silent and looked towards her.

“Hey,” Murphy said. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah,” she replied, making her way into the kitchen. “I just need more ice.”

“Oh, here you go,” Emori said, handing her a Ziploc bag that they’d already prepared by stuffing it full of cubes.

“Thanks,” Clarke said awkwardly, turning to head back upstairs. It was weird knowing that her friends were down there talking about her and Bellamy—mostly Bellamy—but at least they weren’t saying anything . . . bad.

She really wanted to ask Murphy what he’d meant by that, though. Because she knew the story about how Bellamy had gotten in a bar fight to defend Gina’s honor, right there at Dropship. She knew that had been the start of their whole relationship, and she knew how much that relationship had meant to him. So for one of his best friends in the entire world to reference it, to compare this situation to that one . . . it sort of felt like a big deal.

Don’t flatter yourself, she thought as she made it up to the top of the stairs. It wasn’t a big deal. Bellamy had protected her tonight, sure, but he would have done the same for Octavia, for Emori and Harper and Maya. For any of them. He’d been impulsive and reckless and angry about it, but his intentions had been noble. And even though she’d been worried that it would get out of control, she really couldn’t fault him for what he’d done.

That still didn’t mean she was anything like Gina, though. No. She probably didn’t even come close to that.
Clarke wasn’t expecting much out of her last day of her Capstone class. In fact, the only reason why she’d bothered showing up at all was to see if Professor Fuckface would give out grades on final collections. Not that she really gave a damn about his opinion or his reaction to what she’d painted, but she did care about her grade. If she ended the semester with a decent grade in this class, then she could pretty much just wing it on her other final exams. She wasn’t graduating with honors or anything, so as long as she graduated with a solid GPA, that was fine.

Much to her shock, the class wasn’t a total disappointment for once. The mean old professor actually did something right and spent the entire time showing off some of the more ‘exemplary’ pieces that had been turned in. He had them all at the front of the auditorium, about a dozen different canvases, each covered. One by one, he unveiled them and asked the students to share their interpretations of what they saw. There was some weird shit, like a naked girl with a fox tai, or like the close-up of someone’s foot. By the time they were at the second-to-last painting, Clarke had long given up hope that any of her work would be shown. But in a total surprise, when the next painting was revealed, it was one of Bellamy. The most emotional one of him, too: him breaking down into tears as he told her about Gina, about what had happened to her.

Everyone in the room turned to look at Clarke, even before the professor revealed who it was by. They already knew. It was a small campus and not the world’s largest town. People had seen them around together.

“What do we see here?” the professor asked the class.

Hands shot up into the air to give answers, answers that ranged from “Intense sadness” to “profound loss.” Someone said, “Relief,” and then went on to explain, “Whoever he is, it’s like the weight of the world’s been lifted from his shoulders.”

Clarke blinked back tears of her own as she gazed at an image of her own creation. That seemed like such a long time ago now, but it really wasn’t. Just a couple of months. Still, though . . . it seemed like it’d been a really long time since she’d seen him cry that way.

On her way out of the lecture hall, the professor shocked her again when he said, “Clarke,” and motioned her over to his podium. She’d always assumed he didn’t even know her name, that he just thought of her as some blonde girl who came and sat in his class three times a week.

“So what did I get on my collection?” she asked eagerly. Knowing that she was one of only twelve people to have her work shown in front of the class definitely made her feel more confident than she had been walking in.

“You did well,” the professor said, almost kindly. “I must admit, I misjudged this collection in its earliest stages. It turned out to be . . . quite cohesive.”

“Good.” She wasn’t about to thank him, not when she still remembered what a jerk he’d been to Bellamy back at the beginning of the semester. In the art world, cohesive was a major compliment, though. She’d take it.

“It really did tell . . . quite the story,” he went on. “And while I’m skeptical of anyone who focuses a final project on just one person . . . you did choose your subject wisely, and it worked. The way you
feel about him . . . came across."

*The way I feel about him*, Clarke thought, her breath catching in her lungs. *The way I feel.*

She never did find out her exact grade, but she figured it would be posted online over the weekend, and she had high hopes for it now. The whole thing put her in a good mood for the rest of the day, and that carried over into the evening. When Bellamy got home, she told him all about it while he got changed out of his work clothes and into a different t-shirt and jeans. He seemed happy for her.

That good mood carried over into the next day, the next night, even. They lay out on the trampoline together as the sun slowly, gradually crept towards the horizon. Clarke felt this sense of freedom now that the school year was winding down and summertime was starting up. It was nice outside, she could sleep in tomorrow morning, and she had plenty of time with her friends to look forward to tonight. Saturday could only mean one thing: Everyone was coming over. Of course.

Clarke sort of wanted to bounce around on that trampoline for a while—she felt giddy and playful—but unlike her, Bellamy had put in a lot of hours of work today, and he was tired. He lay flat on his back while she curled up against him and halfway on top of him, and he looked like he, too, was enjoying taking it easy.

“Can you believe you’re done with classes?” he asked, tucking a loose strand of her hair behind her ear for her.

“Nope,” she said, perching her chin atop his chest. “It feels weird. I mean, I still have a couple final exams to go take, but other than that . . . it’s done. My undergraduate career . . . over.”

“And mine’s just getting started,” he said.

“Yeah.” She smiled at him proudly, so excited for him. “You’re gonna be so busy this summer,” she warned. “Your class, your job, spending time with your nephew . . .” She slithered one hand down his chest to tickle his lower abdomen. “. . . fooling around with me.”

“Is that the most important thing?” he asked, grinning.

“I’d say it’s pretty important, yeah.”

He chuckled. “Well, then, it’ll be at the top of my to-do list.”

“Really? *I’m* at the top of your to-do list?” She liked the sound of that.

“You’re always at the top of that list, Clarke.”

“Well, you’re at the top of mine, too.” She inched his shirt up, letting her fingers play in the little happy trail of hair that led down into his pants. “Hmm, we should do it right here,” she suggested brazenly.

“Right here?”

“Yeah.” Either the trampoline or the hammock would work for her. They allowed for the semi-public sex kink, but since they were in their own backyard, it wasn’t like there was any real chance of getting arrested.

“I’m down,” he said.

“Oh, you’re not down.” She slid her hand beneath the waistband of his jeans. “In fact, you’re very . .
Rubbing his cock through his underwear, she appreciated how easily it started to get hard at her touch. Then she pulled her hand out and sat back on her legs to unfasten his pants.

“Frisky,” he noted, raising his hips just enough for her to pull his pants and his underwear down. She barely even lowered them to mid-thigh, because once his cock sprang free, she had everything she needed.

Gripping his shaft around its base, she started to work him, slowly stroking his whole length, watching in amazement as it hardened further in her hand and pre-cum began to bead up at the tip. She fondled his balls with her free hand, loving how he had to close his eyes whenever she did that. She liked to think that she’d gotten pretty good at this, and his reaction was proof of that belief.

When she released him, his cock was so hard that it lay flat against his stomach, rigid and begging for more attention. He tried to reach down and stroke it himself, but she pushed his hand away and said, “Let me.” He always made it a point to go down on her, but it wasn’t as habitual of a thing for her to be able to turn the tables and have him completely under her control like this. She wanted to lavish him with attention the way he did with her, wanted to make him feel as good as he made her feel.

Wrapping her more delicate fingers around him, she held his cock steady and slithered down his body. Lowering her head, she first kissed the head of his shaft, then licked at the moisture gathered there, swirling her tongue in circles. Bellamy tasted and smelled so damn masculine down here. It was an absolute rush getting to explore a body so different than her own.

When she did finally envelope him in her mouth, she took it slowly. Because although she’d had plenty of practice deep-throating this cock, it still wasn’t the easiest thing to do. She took a little at a time, lowering her mouth as far as she could without feeling like she was going to gag. When she was satisfied with how much of him she had in her mouth, she started bobbing her head up and down, thoroughly coating him in her saliva.

“That’s good,” Bellamy told her.

She released him with a loud pop but kept holding him with her hand, twisting it around the base. She rubbed and massaged him, taking a moment to appreciate how dark his dick was right now with all the blood rushing to it.

“I like this,” she said, just because she really wanted him to know this wasn’t a chore for her. She liked giving pleasure just as much as he did. That was why she felt a wetness between her legs right now.

Bellamy Blake was completely hers for the taking as he lay there on that trampoline with his pants pulled down. He was completely hers as she traced her tongue along the veins on the underside of his cock, all the way from the base to the tip. He was completely hers as she lifted the whole thing up far enough to press a sucking kiss to his balls, and he was completely mesmerized when she sat up enough to undo the buttons on the plaid flannel shirt she’d wisely chosen to wear outside tonight.

His eyes widened in anticipation as she pulled open the shirt and let her breasts fall free. Forgoing the bra had been a good idea, too.

“Clarke,” he said, sounding like he wanted to say more. But he didn’t have to. She knew what he liked, and she intended to give it to him.

Titty-fucking wasn’t exactly her specialty—they’d only done it a few times here and there—but tonight she was brimming with confidence, so she just went for it. Leaving her shirt on and hanging
open, she placed his straining erection in between her breasts and pressed them around it tightly, creating a nice little passageway for him. She slid her breasts up and down his slickened, stiffened cock and watched as his eyes nearly rolled back into his head. He kept shutting them and then re-opening them seconds later, like he was trying to watch.

“That’s so hot,” he praised her.

It was hot for her, too. Although it didn’t give her the same kind of stimulation it gave him, it still felt good. And she liked knowing that it didn’t take her hands or her mouth to push him closer to the edge. All he needed was to feel his flesh on her flesh. That was enough for him.

It was frustrating, of course, having to stop and start again instead of just being able to be fluid with it. No matter how firmly she tried to keep her breasts squeezed together, inevitably they fell a little too far to the sides, so she had to gather them back up again, press them inward, and rediscover her pace. He didn’t seem to mind, though, and it wasn’t like he was complaining at all.

When his groans started to become louder and more frequent and his hips began lifting off the trampoline, she assumed he was close to cumming, and she figured she could let him do that on her chest. She would have, too, had a noise from next door not distracted her. She heard the sound of a chain-link gate opening and closing, and seconds later, Harper, Monty, Maya, and Jasper all strolled from their backyard into this one.

Clarke collapsed on top of Bellamy, shielding the naked parts of his body with her own. Her shirt still dangled from her shoulders, covering up everything like a blanket, but she knew they must have looked wicked obvious. Seriously, her head on Bellamy’s stomach? It wasn’t exactly a position for cuddling.

Their friends were talking and laughing but stopped right away when they saw them. “Oh . . . hey,” Monty greeted unsurely. “Hey, guys.”

Poor Bellamy was too dazed to formulate a response, and Clarke just smiled at them, trying to look all innocent. She couldn’t sit up or even lift her head, because she was Bellamy’s human blanket right now, and without her, he’d be exposed.

Their friends all stared at them curiously until Jasper finally (and bluntly) asked, “Are you giving him a blowjob?”

Well, there was really no point in denying it, was there? “Kind of,” Clarke squeaked out. His cock was still throbbing against her chest. Poor guy. She’d left him hanging.

“Well,” Harper said, shielding her eyes as she walked past them. “We’ll just let you finish.”

“Yes, we’ll close the blinds for you, too,” Maya offered considerately.

“Thanks,” Clarke said.

“Well, I won’t watch,” Jasper said as Monty pulled him inside. “Much!”

Clarke couldn’t help but laugh and roll her eyes at that. Jasper was weird enough that he probably would try to watch. Murphy, too.

Slowly, once they were inside, she raised her head and asked Bellamy, “You okay?”

He smiled at her in a state of stupor. “Well, now you just sound like me.”
Aww, she thought, sort of loving the fact that she’d learned some things from him. He did ask her that a lot when they were doing it.

The kitchen window opened, and Jasper yelled out of it, “Bellamy and Clarke, please resume your fucking now!”

“Go away!” Clarke yelled back. She waited until she heard the window close, peeked over her shoulder to ensure that the blinds actually were shut, and then wrapped her hand around Bellamy’s engorged cock again. “You wanna cum now?” she asked, pumping him gently.

“Yes,” he growled low in his throat.

“Okay.” She lowered her mouth down onto him again, hoping the sudden upward jerk of his hips meant she’d surprised him. She sucked and slurped at him, willingly being sloppy with it because she was greedy. There was really no other feasible option for his orgasm now. With their friends having already arrived, she couldn’t very well walk in with cum on her chest. She figured she might as well get him to cum in her mouth. Besides, that way she could enjoy the full taste of him.

“Fuck yes,” he swore, tangling one hand in her hair. He pressed her face down more and thrust up into her mouth a few more times, making sure to let go right before he came. She didn’t back away, though, or gag or cringe or anything. She lay there on top of him and let it coat her mouth and her throat. So hot, so sticky, so Bellamy. She loved swallowing for him, mainly because she knew it turned him on to watch her do it.

It was a little messy, but still way cleaner than taking it anywhere else would have been. She licked her lips and purred, “Mmm,” once she’d drunk down everything he’d given her, because even though it didn’t taste traditionally good . . . it tasted good.

After about five minutes had passed, Bellamy finally pulled his pants up and declared himself able to go inside and socialize. Clarke re-buttoned her blouse and walked inside with him, bracing herself for an onslaught of teasing. Mostly everyone was there already, piling blankets and pillows on the floor, settling in at their usual spots.

“Well, well, well,” Murphy said tauntingly, “look who decided to join us.”

“How you feelin’, Bellamy?” Miller asked.

“I’m feeling great,” Bellamy declared proudly.

“Oh, I’m sure.”

Clarke caught Raven’s eye and noticed that her friend seemed to be trying to tell her something as he pointed to her face. Right around the mouth area. Oh, god! Quickly and as inconspicuously as possible, she tried to wipe the evidence of their . . . activities away before anyone else noticed it. She ran her hands under the sink, and of course Jasper came up to her with a glass of water and said, “Here you go. I hear you’ve been thirsty.”

“Shut up, Jasper!” she snapped, swatting the glass out of his hand. Everyone laughed, including her, because at the end of the day, she’d learned to take the teasing in stride. It was all in good fun, and honestly . . . she and Bellamy were not subtle, never had been. They probably deserved it.

Thankfully, Octavia showed up with Lincoln a minute or so later, so that meant everyone had to put the brakes on the blowjob jokes. Clarke settled in with Bellamy on the couch, and Miller tossed everyone except Octavia drinks from the kitchen. They all talked with each other and sometimes over each other for nearly half an hour. No one person dominated the conversation, and nobody was left
out of it. They could be talking about live music at TonDC one minute and Octavia’s impending baby shower the next. It was just like every other Saturday night they’d all spent together.

Except it wasn’t. And they all knew it. Nobody was talking about it, but they all knew that, next week at this time, Miller would no longer be living there. He and Jackson were aiming to have everything moved out by Friday night. Next week at this time, Octavia and Lincoln would be married, and they’d all be living it up at the wedding reception, probably being obnoxious and making fools of themselves.

It sort of felt like things were changing, or at least about to change, and Clarke wasn’t sure how to feel about it.

Casual conversation ended up shifting into competitive conversation as the night wore on, as it often did when they were all around each other like this. It started out when Harper began quizzing Lincoln about how well he knew Octavia, basic things any husband-to-be definitely should know, like her favorite food and her ideal wake-up time and all her hobbies. Maya was better at coming up with harder questions, but Lincoln aced those, too, impressively.

“I bet I still know more than he does,” Bellamy boasted quietly to Clarke.

She just nodded in agreement, even though she was sure Lincoln knew his fiancée better than just about anybody else. There were probably things Octavia had told him that she hadn’t told Bellamy, but Bellamy wouldn’t want to hear that.

Once Lincoln had proved beyond any measure of doubt that he knew everything there was to know about the woman he was set to marry next week, a few of the other couples got in on the game. Harper desperately wanted to see how well Monty knew her, and Raven seemed to think she and Roan would do a great job, even though they hadn’t been dating as long as some of the other couples there had been. Neither Maya nor Emori had high hopes for their boyfriends, but they agreed to play along anyway. Niylah and Luna were a little smashed and were busy making out, so they said they’d answer questions when they felt like it. And Jackson and Miller wanted to host.

“You playin’?” Miller asked Bellamy and Clarke as he searched ‘newlywed game questions’ on his phone.

“Why not?” Bellamy said, wrapping his arm around Clarke. “Let’s crush this.”

She laughed, hoping they would. She felt like they knew each other pretty damn well.

Some of the questions were easy—favorite color? Seriously? Bellamy knew hers was blue right away, just like he knew her response to “Which of your man’s clothing items is your favorite to wear?” would be “His t-shirts.” But some of the questions were a total crapshoot. Like for real, how was he supposed to know the name of her favorite stuffed animal or how many times she’d had strep throat growing up? He took a wild guess on “How many cousins does your significant other have?” and actually got it right.

Nobody was really keeping score or anything, but every time the guys answered a question wrong, the pair was supposed to drink. So that allowed Clarke to gauge how well they were doing. At one point, Bellamy even muttered, “We’re doin’ too good. I’m not even drunk yet.”

“I know,” she agreed. She was slightly buzzed, but . . . then again, it didn’t take much to get her slightly buzzed. Bellamy had definitely gotten more questions right than he’d gotten wrong, and she wanted to do well when it was her turn to answer, too. They all switched it up and had the girls start answering questions about the guys, and it started out simple enough: “What was the last thing the

Bellamy nodded in confirmation. “Bar fight.”

“Which one of your friends does he think would look best in a bikini?” Miller read off his phone. “Ooh.”

Bellamy thought about it for only a second, then proclaimed. “Got it. You got it, Clarke?”

“Maybe.” She wasn’t sure. “Hmm . . . Raven?” It seemed like a logical guess. In fact, she was pretty much assuming everyone would answer Raven for that one, just because she had that fit-but-still-feminine type of body that belonged in Maxim magazine.

“Yep, Raven,” he answered.

Raven squealed delightedly. “Well, thank you, Bellagio!”

“You’re welcome.”

Clarke was legitimately surprised by how many of the guys (and Niylah) answered her for that question, because in what universe was she in better shape than Raven? When Bellamy explained, “It’s ‘cause of your rack, babe,” it all made sense, though.

“Oh, I see.” Well, that was technically a compliment, so she’d take it.

There were funny missteps—apparently Bellamy thought “Pussy Is Mine” would be a good theme song for the two of them, even though she’d never even heard it before—as well as amusing victories. When asked where the most adventurous place they’d ever had sex was, Clarke had to run through the mental catalog of locations where she and Bellamy had done it. She finally settled on, “Open highway in Illinois.” Because strangers had actually driven past and seen them in the act that time.

“Open highway, Illinois!” he agreed, taking a drink even though she hadn’t answered wrong. He was so excited she got it right (and probably happy to be able to publicize that they’d done it there) until, seconds later, Octavia mumbled her response, something about the bathroom of an airplane. Bellamy’s whole face just dropped in horror, because that was how he found out his little sister was a member of the mile high club.

Not one of the pairs actually did bad, but Miller and Jackson declared that nobody could even come close to beating Lincoln and Octavia, and that was how they won. There was no real prize for winning, nor was there a consequence for losing. There was just more laughter and continued conversation. It flowed between them so smoothly, effortlessly, like water. They drank, they joked, they danced, and then they drank some more. Clarke got so caught up in it that she didn’t even realize it was 1:00 a.m. until Octavia yawned, stood up, and announced, “I have to go home. I’m too pregnant for this.”

Things started to die down after Lincoln and Octavia left. Everyone was lazy and everyone was tired, so they turned on one of the stupid Hangover movies, which Bellamy made sure everyone knew was way worse than the Abraham Lincoln film they could have been watching on the History Channel. They all lay around, talking through some parts of the film, laughing at others, and nobody seemed in any big hurry to leave. And nobody had to. If they all fell asleep in that living room, that was fine. Wouldn’t have been the first time.

Clarke first rested her head against Bellamy’s shoulder, then lay down in his lap, struggling to keep her eyes open. Towards the end of the movie, he shifted around so that he was lying down with her,
and she found herself on top of him, using him as a human pillow much like she’d been able to do out on the trampoline. He was warm, comfortable, and she liked the way his hands rubbed lightly up and down her back. Sometimes his fingers threaded through her hair or massaged her scalp. He just kept touching her.

“It’s kinda crazy, isn’t it?” Murphy blurted out during the commercial break.

“What, that Emori would have sex with you?” Miller retorted. “I’ve often thought so.”

“No, this.” Murphy motioned around to the entire living room, the very full living room. “The group . . . it got a lot bigger this year.”

Somehow, even though she was struggling to keep her eyes open, Clarke could feel Bellamy smile. It was no secret that this group had started to expand once she’d become a part of it. She took some pride in that. And also, she’d always said she needed to get out there and meet more people. It’d taken her until her senior year of college, but at long last, she’d done it.

“I like being part of the group,” Raven said. “It’s fun.”

“And it’s a hot group,” Niylah added.

“Very hot,” Raven agreed.

“And that guy . . .” Miller said, pointing to Bellamy. “He’s a lot happier. That’s ‘cause of you, Clarke.”

“Mmm,” she moaned sleepily, managing a small smile.

“It’s not like I was a grump before,” Bellamy said.

“No, you’re the grumpy old man of the social group,” Harper informed him. “Just embrace it; that’s your role.”

“When was I ever grumpy?” Bellamy asked.

“Oh, please!” Murphy scoffed. “You’re the one sitting here saying we should watch an Abe Lincoln documentary.”

Clarke kind of wanted to join in the teasing, but she was too tired. So she shut her eyes and started to nod off to the sounds of her friends’ good-natured bickering, mixed in with the sound of Bellamy’s steady heartbeat beneath her cheek.

Bellamy wanted to surprise Clarke on her last day of finals—she had one on Monday, another on Tuesday, and the last one on Wednesday. She hadn’t studied particularly hard for any of them, but she had woken up early each morning to cram. Like 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. Waking up even at 9:00 would have been a struggle for Clarke, so he knew she must have felt relieved once they were finally over.

He cleared his work schedule on Wednesday and waited outside the student union until she was done with her last exam. Around noon, she trudged past, yawning and looking like she could go right home and go back to bed. But her face lit up when he called her name.

“Clarke!”
Smiling, she scurried towards him. “Hey.”

“Hey.” He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, then twisted to the side to show off the black bag slung over his shoulders. “Look at this, I got a backpack,” he boasted. “I’m officially a college student now.”

“Nice,” she said. “I like it.”

Yeah, it felt good being able to walk around that campus and feel like he actually belonged there. He wasn’t so different than these people anymore. He was a student just like they were. And he had a backpack.

“So was this your final final?” he asked her.

“It was my final final,” she confirmed. “I’m done.”

“And now Sunday you graduate.”

“Yep.” She kicked at the ground and mumbled, “My mom and Marcus aren’t gonna be there.”

“What?” He’d just assumed they would be. A college graduation . . . that was kind of a big deal, after all.

“They’re going on vacation to Aruba,” she explained, then shrugged. “It’s fine. They have to go. My mom’s scheduled to speak at some medical conference, so . . . she has to be there.”

“Still . . .” She had every right to be bummed about it, and he wouldn’t blame her for being upset.

“My dad would’ve been there,” she said sadly, touching the bracelet on her wrist.

“I’ll be there,” he assured her. Not that he was even close to a substitute for her father, but . . . well, maybe it’d make her feel better.

“Thank you,” she said, touching his cheek. “I know college graduations are notoriously boring.”

Any graduation was notoriously boring, but if Clarke had her phone with her, he could text her dirty things the whole time. That’d make it entertaining. “Raven’s gonna be there, too, right?” he asked.

“Mmm-hmm. And Niylah. Don’t bring everyone else, though. I didn’t request that many seats.”

“Alright.” He readjusted his backpack on his shoulders, even though there wasn’t much in there right now, and motioned with his head for him to follow him as he started walking.

“Where are we going?” she asked. “My car’s parked the other way.”

“We’re gonna sit and chill,” he said, scoping out a nice big expanse of green grass where other students were sleeping, listening to music, and doing some last-minute studying for finals. Even though it was the last week of classes, there was a lot of activity. Some people were moving out of the dorms for the summer; others were moving in. A sorority down the block was doing a carwash, and there were some frat guys setting up lawn chairs in their front yard to watch their neighbors parade around in bikinis. It was all very college.

“Since when do you ‘sit and chill’ on a work day?” Clarke asked, dropping her backpack onto the grass.

“It’s not a work day,” he said, setting his bag down beside hers. “I cleared my schedule.”
“So now it’s a hang-out-with-Clarke day?” she asked enthusiastically.

“Pretty much.” He sat down with her, glad that just his presence was enough to excite her.

“You know what we should do?” she said, facing him. “We should go to the library now that we’re both students.”

“We are both students. For a few days.”

“A few days.” She looked around, sighing. “It’s weird. I’ve spent so much time on this campus for the past four years. And now . . . you’re gonna be the one who’s allowed in the library and I won’t be.”

“Ah, I’m sure they’ll still let you in.”

“Hopefully,” she said. “If you’re there studying, I need to be able to come distract you.”

“Oh, yeah?” That sounded promising.

“And what’re you gonna distract me with?”

“I don’t know,” she said innocently, while at the same time not so innocently leaning forward so that her tank top revealed a generous amount of cleavage. “We’ll see.”

He smirked, already envisioning some things. They’d already fucked in the stacks, but he had this idea about going down on her underneath one of those library tables, too. Really, getting arrested for public sex hadn’t dulled his craving for it at all. He just had to make sure they sat at a table that was far enough out of sight and that not many people were around when they did it.

“I am really excited for you, Bellamy,” she said, brushing her hands through his hair. “I mean, I may be over college myself, but I’m ready for you to start.”

“Me, too. In fact . . .” He unzipped the front of his brand new backpack and took out a letter he’d gotten in the mail that morning. From the university. He’d waited long enough to show her.

“What is this?” she asked when he handed it to her.

“Open it.” He couldn’t wait to see the look on her face when she read it.

Almost skeptically, she took the letter out of the envelope and read the first few lines. She gasped in astonishment once she processed what it was. “Oh my god, Bellamy! You got a scholarship?”

“A fifteen-hundred dollar scholarship, yeah.” It’d surprised him, too.

Squealing, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. “Oh my god, that’s amazing!” she exclaimed. “See? It was worth it to apply.”

“Yeah, it’s really good.” This scholarship pretty much covered the books and tuition for his first two classes, and it gave him time to save up some money for all the classes after that. Maybe he’d get more scholarships if he did well this summer, too. He wasn’t expecting to get everything paid for, but any money he could get would help.

“This is great,” she said, re-reading the letter. “I’m so happy for you.”

“Thanks.” He’d had a feeling she would be, which was part of the reason why he’d come to campus today. He couldn’t wait to tell her. “I’m happy, too,” he said, and he really meant it. There had been times in his life when he hadn’t been able to say that. But right now . . .
“We should celebrate,” Clarke decided.

“Oh, we will.” He already had some ideas in mind. A scholarship was a pretty big deal, so he was feeling like he might even be able to score a little backdoor lovin’ later.

She put the letter back in the envelope and handed it back to him. “I’m just so happy for you, Bellamy,” she repeated. “I’m just . . . I’m so happy.”

Something about the way she said that and the way she couldn’t stop smiling when she said that . . . it warmed his heart. Because he knew he’d had an effect on this girl; knowing him had had an effect on her. A good one. If they’d never met in that Walmart parking lot, her senior year would have been a much different one. It seemed like this was better, like she’d enjoyed this year more than she otherwise would have.

“You’re gonna be happy this summer, too,” he told her.

“Oh, I have no doubt.” She grinned flirtatiously.

“No, not just ‘cause of that.” Sure, he planned on having lots of sex with her—what else was new? —but he wanted to entertain her in other ways, too. “We should go somewhere,” he proposed, more than willing to go on another road trip with her. The last one had been fun.

“Where would we go?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Where do you wanna go?” He wasn’t a man of money or means, but he still felt like he could take her anywhere.

She thought about it for a moment, then replied, “Disney World!”

“What?” Out of all the places she could have chosen, he hadn’t expected that one.

“Yeah, I’ve only been there once, back when I was twelve. But it’s so fun. You haven’t lived until you’ve been on the Dumbo ride.”

He chuckled, trying to picture himself on that even though he didn’t know what it looked like.

“Disney, huh?”

“Yeah, you’d like it. In Epcot, they have the World Showcase, like these replicas of all these different countries. So that’s culture and history right there. And in the Magic Kingdom, they have the Hall of Presidents.”

“Oh, well, that’s interesting.” Disney probably wouldn’t have been his first choice for a vacation, but people said it was the happiest place on earth. Octavia had gone there once with Lincoln, and the pictures of the hotel alone . . . damn, that looked like a vacation in and of itself right there. “We’ll go then,” he told her.

“This summer?”

“Well . . .” As nice as it was to pretend that was feasible, it wasn’t. He’d have to save up some money first. “Maybe next summer,” he said. “We’ll do other stuff this summer, though. Like the Arkadia fair. Have you ever been to the Arkadia fair, Clarke?”

She laughed. “No, I have not, Bellamy.”

“Well, we’re gonna go.” It was pretty redneck, and he wasn’t proud of himself for going every single
year, but at the same time . . . it was a fucking blast. “And we’re gonna stuff our faces with cotton candy,” he enticed her. “And ride the Tilt-a-Whirl until we throw up.”

“Oh, god.”

“And then I’m gonna kiss you on top of the Ferris wheel and win you some obnoxiously large stuffed animals playing the carnival games.”

“Oh, that sounds good,” she said. “Count me in.”

“You know what else I should do? I’ve got this acoustic guitar stashed away in a closet at my mom’s house. I should learn to play.” He’d taught himself a couple songs a few years ago, but nothing current. More like ‘On Top of Old Smokey,’ because he’d heard that that was everyone’s first guitar song.

“You should,” she agreed. “And I love singing, so . . . we could be the next big thing. Youtube stardom, here we come.”

“Right.” He chuckled, not sure where he thought he was going to find enough spare time for this brand new hobby. The scholarship had him feeling high on life or something. That was the only explanation.

“Sounds like the possibilities for fun are endless then,” Clarke remarked.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “We can do whatever the hell we want.”

“Whatever the hell we want,” she echoed, smiling. “I like the sound of that.”

So did he. He liked it a lot.

Kissing her, he let his mind run wild, because lately . . . there was no containing it.
“What do you think?” Abby asked, holding a dark blue one-piece swimsuit up to her torso. “Am I too old for swimwear?”

Clarke snorted at the ridiculousness of that thought. “No.” Bathing suits didn’t have an age limit, especially not for someone as in-shape as her mom. “Besides, you’re going to Aruba. I think swimwear’s required.”

“Well, I’ll be at the medical conference part of the time,” her mother said, packing the swimsuit in with the rest of her clothes. “So it won’t all be a vacation.”

“It should still be fun, though.” Clarke ran her hands through the wide array of necklaces and bracelets dangling from her mother’s jewelry holders on her dresser. She had so many nice things, most of which she never wore. A lot of the jewelry was from Marcus, but there were still plenty of things that had been gifts from Clarke’s dad, too.

“Oh, honey, I wish this didn’t fall on the same week as your graduation,” her mother said regretfully as she struggled to close and zip up her very full suitcase. “I feel horrible for missing it.”

“It’s okay,” Clarke assured her. They’d talked about this months ago. It’d been fine then, and it was fine now. College graduations weren’t as big of a deal as high school ones.

“I just feel bad for not being there,” her mother bemoaned, grimacing as she yanked on her suitcase’s zipper, trying to pull it shut.

“No, I understand you’re supposed to be at this conference. Isn’t it, like, a really big deal?”

“Well . . . sort of,” Abby admitted. “Only a certain number of doctors are selected, and I’ve been applying to it for years now. And they’re letting me present my research, so . . .”

“So it’s a big deal,” Clarke summarized. She didn’t want her mom to feel guilty for pursuing something for herself.

“But this is your college graduation,” her mother kept on.

Clarke shrugged. “Not really. I graduate whether I show up and get the diploma or not. It’s just a formality. And besides, I’m still gonna have people there.”

“Who?” her mother asked. “Bellamy?”

Clarke smiled softly. “Yeah. And Raven and Niyah. So it’s all good.”

Her mother finally managed to get her suitcase zipped up and breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m glad Bellamy’s gonna be there,” she said.

“Me, too.” The plan was for him to text her naughty things while they commencement speaker inevitably droned on and on. She couldn’t wait for that.

“I’m really glad,” her mother emphasized. “He’s so . . .” She trailed off, smiling almost wistfully. “Well, he just thinks the world of you. That’s plain to see.”
“Yeah.” Clarke looked down at the gold bracelet on her wrist, smiling appreciatively. It was the most thoughtful gift anyone had ever given her. She’d barely taken it off since she’d opened it.

“He just seems like a really good man,” her mother went on.

“He is,” Clarke agreed. “He’s smart and funny and kind.”

“And now he’s going to college, so . . . that’s just even better,” her mother raved. “Not that there’s anything wrong with not going. It’s just that he’ll have more opportunities this way.”

“Yep.” Clarke lifted a turquoise pendant off her mother’s jewelry rack, sure that it had been a gift from her father. Marcus tended to give her the more traditional diamond stuff. Her father’s tastes had always been a little more unique than that.

“Clarke.”

She spun around, pendant still in hand.

Her mother walked towards her, a serious look on her face. “I really like Bellamy,” she said emphatically.

“I can tell.” The craziest thing was, even getting arrested with Bellamy hadn’t changed her mother’s opinion on him. The guy had overwhelming parental appeal.

“I mean . . . you really like him, right?” her mother asked, her tone indicating that she was trying to hint at something.

“That’s why I’m sleeping with him, Mom,” Clarke mumbled.

“Well, I know, but . . . it’s serious, isn’t it?”

Clarke shifted around a bit, purposefully not answering the question. She and Bellamy had never really explained the specifics of their relationship to her parents. His mom knew, because he could tell her without her making a big deal out of it or questioning it. But her mom would not so easily understand, so they hadn’t told her. She was in the dark, so she sometimes referred to Bellamy as Clarke’s boyfriend, and . . . honestly, Clarke just let her.

“I just think you seem so happy with him,” her mother said. “I don’t know if I’ve ever seen you so happy before.”

*Because I’ve never been so happy before,* Clarke thought jarringly.

“And you know who he reminds me of?” Her mother took the turquoise necklace from her and smiled at it reminiscently. “He reminds me of your dad.”

Clarke shivered, not because she was cold or anything, but because . . . just because. That was quite the thing to say, quite a comparison for her mother to make. To say that . . . it meant something to Clarke. It meant that her mother didn’t just like Bellamy so much because Clarke wasn’t sleeping with girls as long as she was sleeping with him. She saw Bellamy as far more than Clarke’s chance at a so-called ‘normal’ love life; she saw him as her chance at a good one. She saw him as someone who treated Clarke as specially as Clarke’s father had treated her.

Clarke twisted the bracelet back and forth on her wrist, trying not to think about it too much, trying not to let the comparison linger in her mind longer than it needed to. But in her heart . . . she knew it was true. There were so many things Bellamy and her dad had in common.
Thankfully, Clarke had other things to do that day, so she said goodbye to her mom, told her to take lots of pictures in Aruba, and headed back home to Arkadia. She met up with Raven for lunch, then enlisted her help hauling the paintings from her Capstone collection out of the art department building. Only ten of them had been graded, but in total, she’d done about fifteen. She had to take them home today, because the semester technically ended today. If she left them in there over the weekend, they might be gone by Monday.

“That’s a lot of paintings you got there, Clarke,” Raven said as she surveyed the massive display of them. “All of Bellamy?”

“Pretty much.” There was one that was just his hands on her hips, but still . . . it was part of Bellamy.

“Damn, I don’t know if you’re gonna be able to fit all of these in your car;” Raven said. “It’s a pretty small car, and it’s a lot of Bellamy.”

“I’ll make it fit,” Clarke promised.

“Do you think you can? Can you fit this much Bellagio in such a small space?” Raven grinned teasingly.

“I do it every day,” Clarke boasted, getting to work. She carefully removed each canvas from its easel and started stacking them up, larger ones on the bottom.

“Holy shit, Clarke,” Raven gasped, making a beeline for the dirtiest painting of all. In it, Bellamy was lying in bed, naked, head thrown back in ecstasy, one hand wrapped around his cock.

“What?” Clarke said innocently. “Nobody ever said it had to be PG-13.”

“Well, good, ‘cause this definitely isn’t.” Raven stared at the painting some more and shook her head in disbelief. “My god, was your project the raciest one?”

Clarke blushed. “Probably.”

Raven laughed, then walked over and hugged her. “I’m so proud of you,” she said. “Not to say that you were sexually repressed before, because you weren’t, but you’ve just had this, like, year of liberation.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. Being with Bellamy was definitely . . . freeing. “I am a little embarrassed that I painted that, to be honest.”

“Don’t be,” Raven said. “It’s hot. And women are used as nude subjects all the time. Why shouldn’t men be?”

Clarke shrugged. Girl had a point.

“And like I said . . . it’s hot,” Raven repeated, practically drooling as she looked at the painting again. “Damn, Clarke. How did we get so lucky this year? You with Bellamy, me with Roan . . . I mean, I could do my laundry on Roan’s abs. That’s how washboard they are.”

Clarke laughed and agreed, “We’re pretty lucky.”

The paintings were actually kind of heavy, so there was no way to carry them all at once. They each took a stack of four of the larger ones and groaned when they found out the elevator wasn’t working. Carefully, they carried them downstairs and out into the parking lot, where Clarke’s car seemed to be parked an impossibly far distance away.
“So how does Roan stay so in shape?” she asked Raven, just to distract herself from how much her arms were hurting carrying all this stuff.

“Well, he works out, obviously,” Raven replied. “He’s got a home a gym in his basement.”

“Really?”

“Pretty much.” Raven re-hoisted the largest painting when it started to slip from her grasp. “What about Bellamy?”

“I mean, he goes to the gym with Miller sometimes, but not like every day,” Clarke said, a bit envious that he could look so good without even really trying that hard. “I don’t know how he stays so in shape without working out very much.”

“Oh, he works out,” Raven said. “With you.”

“Well . . . okay, yeah, there’s that.”

“Sex burns lots of calories, Clarke.”

“Oh, really? Then why have I gained two pounds?” Clarke countered.

“I don’t know,” Raven replied. “Maybe you should be on top more.”

“Mmm.” Clarke made a face. Not that she disliked being on top. No, there were some definitely benefits to it. But nothing compared to feeling Bellamy on top of her. She never would have imagined that she could like feeling like she wasn’t in control of something, but with him, she did.

Once they’d loaded the first set of paintings into the backseat of Clarke’s car, they headed back inside for the next ones, which, mercifully, were smaller and lighter.

“So . . . Octavia’s wedding tomorrow,” Raven said as they climbed the stairs. “Who’s gonna catch the bouquet?”

“Who knows?” Clarke said, quickly deflecting it from herself. “Not me.”

“But you caught it at Lexa’s wedding, right?”

“No, Lexa launched it at me like a football player,” Clarke corrected. “I didn’t catch anything.”

“Well, maybe you’ll catch this one.” Raven nudged her side playfully.

“Maybe not.”

“Everyone thinks you will.”

She furrowed her eyebrows. “Who’s everyone?”

“Everyone, Clarke.”

“Seriously?” She kind of wished they wouldn’t speculate about it so much. It was a stupid tradition anyway. Whoever caught the bouquet was not guaranteed to be the next girl to get married.

“Well, I’m gonna try to catch it,” Raven said. “I’m gonna get up in there. I want Roan to ask me within the next two years.”
“Oh, I’m sure he will,” Clarke said. Roan was head over heels for Raven, just like she was for him. She and Wick had never had this kind of passion for each other, and they’d spent more time arguing than they had actually enjoying each other’s company. That hadn’t been Raven’s epic love story; this was.

“Why does everyone think I’m gonna catch it, though?” she asked, stopping at the top of the stairs.

“Just . . . because,” Raven said.

No, that wasn’t a good enough answer. Clarke could endure a lot of her friends’ teasing—bed-breaking, getting arrested, trampoline blowjobs—but this just didn’t seem as funny to her. This was just too much pressure. Or something. And she didn’t want Bellamy to feel it, too.

“Murphy and Emori have been together for over two years,” she pointed out. “So have Monty and Harper. Jasper and Maya think the world of each other, and Niylah and Luna have talked about running off and eloping.”

“They have?”

“Yes. And Miller and Jackson . . . as of tonight, they will officially be living together. So why do people keep trying to push this whole me-and-Bellamy thing?”

“Because, you and Bellamy . . .” Raven trailed off, shaking her head. “Never mind.”

“What?” Clarke pressed.

“No, I’m not gonna upset you,” Raven said, shaking her head stubbornly. “Come on,” she said, heading back into the work room to get the rest of paintings. “Let’s finish this up.”

Clarke sighed heavily, wishing she could just drop the conversation from her mind the way Raven had dropped it just now. Maybe her best friend didn’t want to upset her, but . . . it was too late for that. For some reason she couldn’t quite articulate or explain . . . she felt upset.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

“Mom, you have to turn your security system on if you want it to do any good,” Bellamy lectured sternly, pushing some buttons to get it up and running for her. “I don’t know why you’d even turn it off.”

“Bellamy . . .”

“No, I’m serious. You’re a woman living alone. You can never be too careful.”

“Bellamy,” she said again.

He finished re-setting the outdoor motion detector light and spun around.

“Come here,” she said, patting the empty cushion of the couch. “Come sit with me.”

He pushed aside his frustration that she wasn’t making her safety as much of a priority as she was and made his way over to the couch, flopping down beside her. “Sorry,” he apologized, not meaning to get short-tempered with her. “I just worry about you sometimes.”

“I know,” she said, tucking her legs up underneath herself as she turned to face him. She just gazed at him for a moment, then reached over and stroked his hair, brushing out of his eyes the way she used to when she told him it was getting too long and he needed a haircut. “You’re a good son,” she
told him gratefully.

Oh, he tried to be. But sometimes, he knew he fell short. “I’m alright,” he said, knowing he could have done more for her. He could have installed this home security system years ago, could have spent more time with her, gone over to see her more often. She lived on the other side of town, sure, but that town was Arkadia. It wasn’t that big, so there was no excuse.

“You’re the best son I ever could have hoped for,” his mother continued to compliment. “I mean that, Bellamy.”

“Well, thanks for saying that.” He still didn’t think it was true.

“When I first got pregnant with you . . . oh, I was terrified,” his mother admitted, sighing shakily. “I didn’t know how I was gonna raise you all on my own.”

Bellamy grunted, forever pissed at his stupid absentee father for leaving his mom to do everything by herself. “You made it work,” he told her. There had been hardship and there had been struggle, but he was lucky. He’d grown up with a lot of love in his life, which was more than what some kids these days got.

“Well, you made it easy,” she said. “You were an easy kid to raise.”

“Easier than Octavia?” he guessed.

“Oh, yes.”

He chuckled, remembering the all the times teachers had emailed home about Octavia’s attitude or her behavior, all the times she’d gotten grounded and then gotten grounded again when she refused to adhere to the rules of her grounding. She’d made both of them want to pull their hair out plenty of times when she’d been growing up. But he loved her anyway.

“I remember this one time when she was a freshman, she skipped class, left school with some friends,” Bellamy recalled. “The principal wanted to meet with you, but you couldn’t get off work or something. So he pulls me out of calculus, sits me down in his office, and says, ‘Bellamy, I know you’re not her parent, but you’re one hell of an older brother. She needs you to take care of her, and she needs to be in school, so make sure she’s here tomorrow.’”

His mom smiled at him proudly. “And she was. If I remember correctly, you walked her to every class.”

“Yes.” It’d been the only way to make sure she didn’t take off again, so he’d done it for a week. It’d annoyed the hell out of her, too, which was a bonus.

“You’ve done a lot for her,” his mom said. “I’m grateful for it. So is she, even if she doesn’t admit it.”

“Hmm.” For him, though, taking care of Octavia had always been . . . instinctive. Second nature. She was his sister, so she was his responsibility. Simple as that. Except . . .

Except tomorrow, that was gonna change. Right when her last name did.

“I can’t believe she’s getting married tomorrow,” he said, wishing it was still a few more days away. He’d prepared himself for it, for a world where she was less of his responsibility but still very much his sister. But he’d never really be prepared.
His mom seemed a lot more ready for the change than he was. “I always knew one of you would marry young,” she said.

“Yeah? Bet you thought it’d be me, though.”

She nodded slowly. “I did. Because you and . . .” She trailed off momentarily, always hesitant to bring up that particular part of his past. “Well, you and Roma were so close,” she said softly.

“Yeah.” To this day, he loved that girl. That would never change. “I probably would’ve married her.”

“Probably,” she agreed, looking away, falling silent.

He just sat there with her for a moment, remembering what it had been like to wake up in the hospital and hear her tell him his girlfriend was dead. He was pretty sure it’d been one of the hardest things she’d ever had to do in her life, but he’d found out later that she’d insisted he hear it from her, not from one of the doctors.

“Who told you about Gina?” he asked her suddenly, because some of his recollections of that whole ordeal were fuzzy at best. “Was it O?”

“No. Lincoln,” she informed him.

Bellamy frowned. “Really?” He didn’t remember any of that.

“He called me. You and Octavia were both too broken up to talk about it.”

“Yeah.” He knew he’d gotten close to passing out at one point, and Octavia actually had. And all their other friends had been a wreck, too. Lincoln had definitely been sad, but he’d been the only one holding himself together. So it probably made sense that he was the one who’d called. Bellamy had never known he’d been the one to take on that responsibility, though.

“I don’t . . .” He paused, choking on his words. “I don’t know why any of that stuff had to happen,” he said. Even now, years later, he still wasn’t over it; he never would be.

“I don’t know, Bellamy,” she said sympathetically, stroking his cheek with the back of her hand as if he were crying. He wasn’t crying, though. Not this time. “There was no reason for it.”

“No,” he said. Tragic accidents, both of them. That was what it all boiled down to. But as bad as they were, his mom still didn’t know what else he’d lost that night in Ocean City, the night a gas station robbery had gone horribly wrong and a bullet had pierced Gina’s abdomen. She didn’t know, and Octavia didn’t know, and he wanted to be able to tell them; but it was like the words to do so just got trapped inside whenever he even came close to letting them out. Clarke was the only person who’d ever heard those words, and she’d keep them a secret for him as long as he needed her to.

“Mom, Gina was . . .” He tried to just blurt it out for her, just like he had with Clarke. But it didn’t work. He stopped short, swallowing the lump in his throat, and mumbled, “Never mind.”

“Bellamy?” She said his name questioningly.

He shook his head stubbornly, and she knew him well enough to know not to push. Maybe someday he’d tell her, and maybe someday he’d tell Octavia. But today was not that day.

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“Man, what are you, Son of the Year or something?” Miller joked as he and Bellamy ascended the stairs. “You make me feel bad about not visiting my mom more.”

“Ah, I probably should’ve done some work today, too,” Bellamy said, regretting that he’d taken his entire Friday off after already taking Wednesday. “Diana’s gettin’ pissed at me. She’s like, ‘You still haven’t fixed my back porch yet. I need you to fix my back porch.’”

“You sure she said back porch and not backdoor?” Miller asked pointedly.

“Oh god.” That was a terrifying thought. “I hope so.”

“Yeah.” Miller pushed the door to his bedroom open and motioned to Clarke, who was bent over arranging books and old CDs in a box. “We all know there’s only one backdoor you’re interested in.”

Bellamy licked his lips and tilted his head to the side, taking a moment to appreciate the sight. Clarke’s ass looked so sexy in those little pink shorts she had on. He couldn’t resist sneaking up behind her and giving her a little spank.

“Ooh!” she yelped, startling upright.

“Nice view,” he remarked.

Beaming at him, she dropped all of Miller’s CDs haphazardly into the box and leaned against him, practically melting into his chest as she looped her arms around his neck and kissed him.

“Oh, great, that’s productive,” Miller said sarcastically, standing up on a chair so he could continue clearing off the top shelf of his closet. “That’s gonna get me moved out of here in no time.”

“Sorry,” Clarke said, tearing her lips away from Bellamy’s.

“Not sorry,” he retorted, kissing her again. They kept at it until Jackson came back into the room a few seconds later and literally pulled them apart.

“Okay, no,” he said. “That’s not what we’re doing here. You guys can come in here and have all the sex you want after we’re gone, but not until then.”

“Yeah, it might be a good space for you,” Miller said, stepping down off the chair. “It’ll be empty, so . . . no beds to break.”

“Oh, ha, ha, Miller,” Clarke deadpanned, “that joke never gets old.”

“It really doesn’t.”

Bellamy looked around the bedroom, sighing heavily because it was still cluttered with way too much shit, including a heavy desk and bed, both of which he was supposed to help haul downstairs and load up into the moving van Jackson had rented. They were probably only halfway done, and already, he was exhausted. Not good. How was he supposed to fuck his princess tonight if he exerted all of his energy helping his friends move?

He sucked it up and helped, though, because he knew Miller would do the same for him if the situation were reversed. Murphy and Emori had conveniently chosen tonight as a date night, so instead of six people packing shit up, they only had four. And Clarke was trying to do way too much. He was all for feminism and girl power and all that, but there was no way he was going to let her try to carry one of those big-ass dresser drawers downstairs all by herself.
“Give me that,” he said, taking it from her as she started to leave the room.

“I can get it,” she insisted, but he just gave her a warning look. The last thing Clarke needed to do was hurt herself or pull a muscle before walking down the aisle as a bridesmaid tomorrow.

Forty-five minutes into the process, the room was starting to look way emptier. Bellamy worked with Jackson to maneuver the bedframe downstairs, and Miller surfed down afterward on the mattress. Clarke took on the job of cleaning up all the crap underneath his bed, some of which was junk he wanted to hold onto and some of which was just junk that he needed to be thrown away. She piled up box after box of stuff while Bellamy and Miller tried to figure out how the hell they were going to carry that desk downstairs. The thing was massive, and neither of them could even remember how they’d gotten it up there in the first place. It was heavy as fuck.

“Yeah, I’m not really lookin’ to die,” Miller said, “so, uh . . . I don’t know, maybe we should call Lincoln.”

Bellamy made a face, automatically opposed to that idea. “Why?”

“Because he’s stronger than all of us combined,” Miller stated simply.

“Yeah,” Jackson agreed, “he could probably lift it all on his own.”

“No,” Bellamy protested stubbornly, not about to call Lincoln so he could swoop in like Superman and save the day. “We’re three strong, capable men. We got this.” Looking to Clarke, he said, “Right, babe?”

She was leaning back against the wall now, eyes shut, multiple boxes of Miller’s crap packed up at her feet.

“Princess?” he prompted when she didn’t respond.

She blinked her eyes open, rubbing her forehead, and said, “Right.” She looked tired. Sounded tired. But she bent over and picked up another box anyway, slowly trudging out of the room with it.

*She should take a break,* Bellamy thought.

“Okay, let’s just do this then,” Miller said, “Let’s just pick the thing up and go.”

“Maybe we could slide it to the stairs . . .” Jackson suggested.

“You think?” Bellamy scratched his eyebrow, doubting that would work. “I don’t think it’s gonna slide, though. The thing weighs, like—”

A soft, scared, “Bellamy?” suddenly cut him off. His head snapped towards the door just in time to see Clarke drop the heavy box in her arms. It tumbled downstairs, and she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

“Clarke!” he yelled, rushing to her. He crashed down next to her on the floor and scooped her up in his arms, horrified to find her eyes closed. And not opening. “**Clarke**!”


“I don’t know, she just fell!” He tapped the side of her face and gently shook her shoulders, desperately trying to get some sort of response. “Clarke, wake up!”

“Let me see her,” Jackson said, going into doctor mode as he lifted her eyelids and leaned towards
her face, probably to see if she was breathing.

Oh god, Bellamy thought, his chest tightening with fear. Oh god.

“I think she fainted,” Jackson said, giving her shoulders a more forceful shake than Bellamy had. “Clarke. Open your eyes.”

“What do we do?” Bellamy asked frantically.

“I’ll call 911,” Miller volunteered.

“No, hold on,” Jackson said. “Lift her up.”

Bellamy did as instructed, careful to keep one hand underneath the back of her neck so her head didn’t roll back too far. “Like this?” he asked, holding both legs up under the knees.

“Yeah, we’re getting the blood flowing back to her brain,” Jackson explained calmly. “Clarke, can you hear me?”

Still no response.

Panic gripped Bellamy, and he felt like he couldn’t breathe. He had to do something; he couldn’t just sit here. “Clarke, please,” he begged. Oh god, no, he thought, his eyes blurring with tears. He couldn’t do this. “Call 911,” he told Miller.

“No, wait, she’s comin’ to,” Jackson said.

Bellamy looked down at her beautiful face in time to see her eyelids fluttering open. Thank God.

“Keep talkin’ to her,” Jackson told him.

“Clarke?” he choked out through tears. “Clarke, can you hear me? Are you alright?”

“Uh . . .” she groaned, slowly moving her head from side to side.

“I got you, baby,” he told her, holding her closer. “I’m right here.”

“Bellamy?” she croaked out. This time when she said his name, she didn’t sound scared. Just confused.

“I’m here,” he assured her, smiling in relief when she finally opened her blue eyes. “Hey.”

“What . . .” She tried to look around, frowning. “What happened?”

“You fainted,” Jackson explained steadily. Looking to Miller, he said, “Go get her some juice.”

Miller nodded hurriedly and darted downstairs.

“I—I fainted?” she sputtered bewilderedly.

“Yeah, but you’re gonna be fine,” Jackson told her. “You were only out for a few seconds. Bellamy took good care of you.”

“Bell,” she whispered, weakly trying to grab at his shirt.

“You alright?” he asked her, voice shaking.
“I . . . think so,” she said.

“Here, sit up,” Jackson said.

Bellamy didn’t want to let go of her, though. So he didn’t. He sat her up right there on his lap, one arm wrapped around her waist, the other still coiled beneath her legs in case he needed to lift them up again.

Miller returned moments later with one of those little kid juice boxes and handed it to her with the straw already inserted. Her fingers trembled a bit as she drank it, but nothing major. She seemed fine.

But a minute ago, she hadn’t been fine, and Bellamy’s heart was still racing because of it. “What happened?” he asked Jackson.

“I don’t know. Maybe she got dehydrated or something,” his friend replied. “Clarke did you drink anything today? Water, juice?”

“Yeah,” she answered. “A little.”

“A little?” Jackson echoed.

“Well . . . I haven’t really eaten or drank anything since lunch.”

Bellamy glanced up at the clock on the wall. It was almost 9:00.

“I think she was just doing too much with no gas in the tank,” Jackson said. “You ever fainted before, Clarke?”

She took another sip of her juice and nodded. “Yeah, a couple times when I was younger. I got overheated at church once, and I got all shaky and dizzy and passed out when I didn’t eat for like a day this one time.”

“Yeah, like a low blood sugar feeling?” Jackson said. “I’ve had that, too. Did you feel dizzy just now?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah?” He pressed the back of his hand to her head, as if checking for a fever. “You feel dizzy anymore?”

“No, I feel fine,” she said. “Just embarrassed.”

“Don’t be,” Bellamy said, rubbing her back. “I’m just so glad you’re okay.” He’d been so worried. Even now, he was still kind of worried. Jackson probably knew what he was talking about, but he was just a medical intern, not a full-fledged doctor. Bellamy kind of wanted an expert’s opinion on this, just to put his mind at ease.

“Sorry I scared you,” she apologized, gurgling the last of the juice through her straw.

“No, I’m okay,” Bellamy said. “Don’t worry about me.”

“You think you can stand up?” Jackson asked her.

“Yeah.” She tried to climb out of Bellamy’s lap, but he wasn’t about to let go of her. So he helped her to her feet and stood with his arm around her. If she fell again, he’d catch her this time.
“I’m okay,” she told him.

His stomach was still in knots, though. That feeling of concern wasn’t going away.

“You should probably eat something,” Jackson suggested.

“I will,” she said, glancing down to the bottom of the stairs, bemoaning, “Oh, no, I dropped that whole box.”

“Don’t worry about it; it doesn’t matter,” Miller said. “All that matters is that you’re okay. You scared us.”

“Sorry,” she said again.

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Bellamy reminded her, kissing the top of her head.

“Mmm,” she purred, hugging him. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

He caressed his hands up and down her spine as he hugged her in return. She could thank him all she wanted to, but without Jackson there telling him what to do, he probably would’ve been a mess.

Meeting Miller’s eyes over her shoulder, he mouthed, “Get my keys.”

“What?” Miller asked.

“I said ‘get my keys.’”

“What? Why?” Clarke asked, pulling back from his embrace.

“’cause I’m gonna take you to the hospital,” he answered decidedly.

“No, Bellamy, I’m fine,” she said yet again.

“You passed out.”

“Fainted.”

“Same thing.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Bellamy,” Jackson cut in, “I really do think she’s fine. You probably don’t have to--”

“I don’t care,” he snapped. The hospital was ten minutes away. He could have her there in five.

“Keys,” he told Miller again, still not willing to leave Clarke’s side.

“Okay,” Miller sighed, heading towards Bellamy’s bedroom.

“No, not okay. I’m fine,” Clarke kept on. “I just need to eat and drink another juice box. Which, by the way, I was the one who insisted we buy these juice boxes, so maybe they’re not as awful as you thought.”

He smiled sadly, because as much as he admired her attempt to joke and make light of the situation . . . he just couldn’t. When Miller brought his keys out, he told his friend, “Thanks,” and then told Clarke, “We’re going.” No room for debate.

“I’m fine,” she repeated, exasperatedly this time.
Maybe she was. But he wasn’t. And he wouldn’t be until he took her to the hospital and had a real doctor—no offense to Jackson—tell him there was nothing to worry about.

She could protest the decision all she wanted, but there was no way he was changing his mind.

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Clarke tried—she really did—to talk Bellamy out of taking her to the hospital. But it was useless. If she didn’t agree to go, he would have just picked her up and taken her. Hell, even when she did reluctantly agree, he wouldn’t let her walk downstairs without holding onto him, like she was a little old lady in a nursing home or something.

The only part of the hospital where she could see a doctor this late at night was the emergency room. Even though it wasn’t an emergency. He made it look like one, though, when he scooped her up in his arms and carried her inside those big double doors.

“What can we do for you?” the nurse at the front desk asked, looking them over curiously.

Clarke just stared blankly at the wall while Bellamy replied, “She fainted.” He made it sound all urgent, but both Clarke and the nurse knew it wasn’t.

Clearly, their situation was not dire, because the nurse directed them towards the waiting room and gave Clarke a clipboard with several pages of paperwork to fill out. Bellamy seemed pissed that they didn’t get to see a doctor right away, but since there was nothing he could do about it, he sucked it up, sat down with her, and waited. The only other patient in that waiting room was an older man who was coughing and sneezing. Bellamy seemed antsy, like he wanted Clarke to see someone first, but she was fine with it when the old man got called in before her.

“This is bullshit,” Bellamy grumbled. “We’ve been waiting for fifteen minutes.”

“Five,” Clarke corrected, flipping over to the back of the last page of the patient information forms. Her mom used to work the night shift in the emergency room of a D.C. hospital, and even in a big city like that, they were incredibly understaffed during these hours, so often, the doctors had their hands full. Tonight didn’t seem to be one of those busy nights, but still, it wouldn’t have surprised her if there were only a few doctors on duty.

“It still shouldn’t take this long,” Bellamy said.

“It wouldn’t if it was an actual emergency.” If she’d come in there bleeding from the head, they would have gotten her in right away. Quickly, she checked the boxes that related to her family health history, then groaned, “Ugh, I don’t know some of this stuff.”

“What?” Bellamy asked, peeking over at the sheet.

“Immunization records.” She shrugged and checked off all the boxes. “Let’s just assume I got ’em all. My mom’s a big believer in vaccines.” She hesitated for a moment at the next section, which asked for her emergency contact info. Out of habit then, she started to write her mother’s name until Bellamy nudged her arm.

“Put me down,” he said.

For some reason, her breath caught in her chest, and she looked up at him, surprised. But then again . . . not really surprised. Not when he was the one who’d brought her here, after all.

She crossed out her mother’s name and instead scrawled Bellamy Blake, along with his phone
number. There was a line that asked for the relationship to the patient, too, and her pen hovered over it, not writing anything.

When she glanced over at him again, he was looking away this time, brow furrowed and jaw clenched tightly as he watched a doctor come out and talk to a nurse at the front desk. They could have been talking about a patient or puppies for all Clarke knew, but Bellamy looked frustrated that neither one of them was walking into that waiting room to get her.

Quickly, she wrote boyfriend on the line, then scribbled an illegible artist’s signature and date at the bottom of the page. She got up and walked it over to the front desk, even though he offered, “I can do that for you.”

Mentally, she reasoned that it just made more sense to list a boyfriend as an emergency contact than a friend, and she rejoined Bellamy in the waiting room. “I can stand you know,” she said, planting her feet in front of him, hands on her hips.

“I know,” he said.

“I can walk. I can hop.” She demonstrated both those things, too. “I can even dance.”

“You can dance?” he taunted.

“Well, not really, but you know what I mean.”

Reaching out, he took her hands in his, pulling her in closer so she was standing in between his knees. “So are we gonna dance tomorrow at the wedding then?”

“Sure,” she replied. “Slow-dancing, anyway. You might have to liquor me up for the fast stuff.”

“Oh, I’m planning on getting hammered myself,” he revealed.

She shook her head, seeing through that right away. “No, you’re not. You don’t wanna be drunk for your sister’s big day.”

“My sister’s big day,” he echoed, sighing. “Yep.”

“You.” He was holding up alright, but she could tell that, inside, he was feeling nostalgic. Last night, he’d regaled her with a story about how he’d once driven across town to rescue thirteen year-old Octavia from a particularly horrible middle school slumber party. And the night before that, she’d heard all about how Octavia had written about him for her fifth grade ‘Who’s My Hero?’ essay assignment. These days, Octavia claimed no such essay existed, but apparently his mom had held onto it.

“No one’s ever gonna replace you,” she reminded him, squeezing his hands.

“I don’t know,” he mumbled skeptically.

Before she could manage to say anything else reassuring, a doctor came out into the waiting room and introduced herself: Dr. Tsing. Clarke recognized the name more so than she did the appearance, and when she inquired if Dr. Tsing knew her mother, she found out that they used to work together.

“I remember when she brought you to the hospital day care shortly after you were born,” Dr. Tsing recalled as she led them back to an exam room. “Now look at you, all grown up.”

Oh, you have no idea, Clarke thought, grinning at Bellamy.
It probably only would have taken her a minute to explain to the doctor what had happened, but Bellamy kept interrupting and making everything seem more dramatic than it was. According to him, her fall was more of a collapse, and the twenty or so seconds she’d been out had felt like an eternity. Dr. Tsing listened to both of them, smiling knowingly at Bellamy’s melodramatic retelling of the events, and then asked Clarke many of the same questions Jackson already had. Clarke gave her the same answers and then sat through a mandatory “breath in, breathe out,” with a stethoscope on her chest and back.

“Well, I think your friend gave you the right diagnosis,” Dr. Tsing declared. “It sounds like your body just couldn’t keep up with all the demands you placed on it today, with no food or drink in your system for hours.”

“Yeah, it was stupid of me,” Clarke said. Moving all her paintings out of the art department, into her car, and then into her living room had been enough of a chore on its own. But then adding all those heavy boxes and drawers from Miller’s room on top of it . . . she’d just overdone it today. Simple as that.

“Wait, are you sure?” Bellamy asked. “Because we’ve had sex for four hours straight before, and she does fine.”

“Because I get to lay down,” Clarke said, quickly apologizing, “Sorry, this is an overshare.”

“No, it’s fine,” Dr. Tsing assured her. “Do you take breaks during . . . intercourse?”

Clarke couldn’t help but chuckle at the clinical terminology. “Yeah, we take breaks.”

“Not long ones,” Bellamy mumbled.

“One of us usually goes downstairs to get snacks.” Clarke made a face. “Why are we even talking about this? Why did you bring this up, Bellamy?”

“Because, I wanna make sure you’re okay.”

Clarke sighed, shaking her head. “He’s just . . . really protective,” she told the doctor.

“Oh, the best boyfriends always are,” Dr. Tsing said.

There it was, that word again: boyfriend. Clarke noticed it, so Bellamy must have noticed it, too. But he didn’t bother to correct her, so Clarke just let it slide, too.

Dr. Tsing typed some information into her computer, then clasped her hands together and said, “Okay, I’ll tell you what we can do: I can either send you home with a prescription for some rest and relaxation, or, if you really want, we could run some bloodwork just to make sure everything’s a-okay.”

“Ooh.” Clarke cringed. She hated having blood drawn.

“Yes,” Bellamy said, “that.”

“No!” she protested. “I have bad veins. They always hit my muscle.”

“I think I’m pretty painless,” Dr. Tsing said. “But it’s up to you, Clarke.”

She groaned, making the mistake of looking over at Bellamy. At Bellamy’s pretty, pleading face. He needed this more than she did, so she resigned herself to the unnecessary. “Fine.”
“Okay,” Dr. Tsing said, getting up. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

Once she’d left the room, Clarke gave Bellamy a stern look and said, “You owe me for this.”

“What do you want?” he asked, sauntering towards her.

“Much tongue-action between my legs. Think you can handle that?”

He smirked smugly. “Yeah, I pretty much got that covered.”

“Good.” She yawned. “Not tonight, though.”

“Not tonight,” he agreed, combing his fingers through her hair. “Thanks, Clarke.”

She smiled at him softly, because as unneeded as this was . . . it was also very sweet to see him so concerned.

He ended up holding her right hand while the doctor drew blood out of her left arm, and Dr. Tsing definitely knew what she was doing, so it wasn’t so bad. Of course, Bellamy was disappointed that the tests would take a few days and that they’d have to wait for the results, but he still seemed relieved that he’d at least taken her here and that a doctor had confirmed what Jackson had already explained to them. He thanked Dr. Tsing emphatically and then offered to carry Clarke back out to the car; but she shot him a glare to shoot that idea down.

On the drive home, she noticed some lightning off in the distance. A storm was moving in for the night. It was gonna be so nice to just cuddle up with Bellamy and be all warm and cozy while the wind and rain raged outside.

When they were halfway home, he suddenly blurted, “I’m sorry,” drawing her attention away from the lightning. “I don’t know why I get like this.”

She knew, though, which meant he had to. It was obvious. “You do know,” she said quietly, not accusingly. This was a guy who feared something bad happening to his friends and family far more than he feared anything happening to himself. He’d endured traumatic loss twice already, and he was terrified of having to do it again.

“Bellamy,” she said, pausing as she tried to think of a way to say this without making him feel bad. “You have the biggest heart ever, and you know everyone appreciates it. But . . .”

“But it’s annoying,” he filled in.

“No.” Ultimately, it was touching, and she was very grateful for it. “It’s just that . . .” She licked her lips, hesitating again as she collected her thoughts. “You’re gonna have a nephew soon,” she reminded him, “and someday he’s gonna be running around, and he’s gonna fall. He’s gonna get cuts and bruises and maybe even break something, because that’s what kids do.”

Bellamy’s jaw tightened, but he nodded slowly in agreement.

“And when that happens, you can’t think of it like it’s the end of the world.” She didn’t want him to make himself sick with worry over every little thing that went wrong. It was one thing to be concerned; it was another to be paranoid.

“I know,” he said, turning on the windshield wipers as the rain started to fall. “I’ll work on it.”

Sighing, he held his hand out, and she reached over and placed hers within it. Such strong hands, she thought. Such a strong man.
He lifted her hand to his mouth and pressed a kiss to her knuckles. For no apparent reason whatsoever. It was just as sweet and endearing as his overwhelming concern had been.

They grew quiet. And he held her hand the rest of the way home.
Chapter 45

The morning of Lincoln and Octavia’s wedding was a rainy one. The thunderstorms had died down, but the rain continued to pelt the windows, never really letting up. Everything outside was grey and cloudy and wet, and it didn’t look like the sun was coming out anytime soon.

“You think this is a bad omen?” Miller asked as he looked out the kitchen window. “I mean, isn’t it a bad sign to get married on a rainy day?”

“Not for Octavia,” Bellamy said, opening the back door. “She loves the rain.” He stepped outside in his t-shirt and boxers, inhaling the fresh air, and Clarke laughed when he came back inside and shook off his hair like a wet dog.

“Well, that’s one way to take a shower,” Jackson remarked, sitting down next to Clarke at the counter. He had a plate of eggs and toast set to devour, but Clarke was already halfway through her bowl of cereal. “You feelin’ alright today?” he asked her, a doctor-in-training checking in on his patient.

“Yeah. Thanks,” she said. She knew that he and Miller had ended up staying all night, sleeping downstairs on the couch and recliner, respectively, even though last night was supposed to have been their first night together in their new place. If she asked them about it, they’d probably deny that Bellamy had requested that they stick around, but she knew he had. And Bellamy himself hadn’t gotten much sleep last night, either. She’d woken up at 3:00 a.m. only to find that he was still awake, reading one of her awful romance novels and using his cell phone to light the pages. He’d said he just couldn’t sleep, but she suspected he’d stayed awake on purpose just to keep an eye on her.

“I still think it’s a bad omen,” Miller mumbled, leaning back against the counter as he bit into a granola bar.

“Shut up, man,” Bellamy snapped. “My little sister’s gettin’ married today. No bad omens.”

“Maybe she’ll wanna have the wedding outside,” Jackson said, “if she really likes the rain that much.”

Clarke snorted. “She’d better not. I look awful when I’m all wet.”

“Oh, I think you look pretty good,” Bellamy said, grinning at her suggestively.

“Mmm.” There was his trademark innuendo. She’d missed it last night, but he’d taken the doctor’s ‘rest and relaxation’ prescription very seriously.

Before they could do any further flirting, the door to Murphy and Emori’s room swung open, and Murphy came out, clearing his throat loudly. “May I present to you,” he announced, “my incredibly hot girlfriend.” He motioned grandly to the room, and out came Emori, wearing the plum
bridesmaid’s dress Clarke had yet to change into. It fit her like a glove, and she had on heels, too, so she looked more girlish and stylish than Clarke had ever seen her look before.

Jackson whistled and said, “Damn!”

“So not my style, but I think I’m rocking it,” Emori said, doing a little twirl.

“You look really pretty,” Clarke told her, hoping she looked half that good in the dress.

“Thanks, Clarke,” Emori said. “Since you’re a girl who likes girls, I take that as a huge compliment.”

“Yeah, you look nice,” Bellamy agreed.

“Uh, she looks better than nice,” Murphy bragged, slinking one arm around his girlfriend’s waist.

“She looks good enough to do right here.” He tried to lean in and kiss her, but she pressed one hand to his chest to stop him.

“I already did my makeup,” she reminded him.

_Hmm, _Clarke thought, peeking at Bellamy. She hadn’t done _her _makeup yet. Nor had she changed out of the clothes she’d worn to bed. Nor had she bothered fixing her hair or even getting in the shower. The morning was still early. They didn’t have to be at the church for at least another two hours. Which meant they had plenty of time to . . . do things.

“Why’d you get ready so early?” Miller inquired, interrupting Clarke’s not so innocent thoughts.

“Harper and I gotta get there early to do Octavia’s hair and makeup,” Emori explained. “Speaking of . . .” She cringed, asking, “Need some help with that, Clarke?”


“You look like you have a dead hamster on your head,” Murphy noted bluntly.

She reached up and touched her hair, well aware that half of it had fallen out of its messy ponytail during the night. “I’ll get ready later,” she said.

“Later?” Bellamy echoed.

“Yeah.” She gave him a look, hoping to wordlessly communicate that she was horny and wanted to have an early morning roll in the hay first.

He didn’t get it. “What, are you gonna eat some more breakfast or something?”

“Or something.” She tried to inconspicuously motioned upstairs with her head, but judging by her friends’ knowing chuckles, she was being obvious.

“Oh,” Bellamy said, finally getting it. “You wanna go get down?”

“Maybe.”

“Right now?”

“Yeah.” She figured they kind of _had _to do it now. Even though they’d had slutty wedding sex at Lexa’s wedding, this was different. This was _Octavia’s _wedding. No way was Bellamy going to be able to slip off somewhere and do it today.
Quite frankly, she wasn’t about to take no for an answer. Because of her little fainting spell, they hadn’t done anything last night, and that was both rare and unacceptable. “Come on,” she said, hopping down off her counter stool. She grabbed his hand and led him towards the stairs.

“Atta girl, Clarke!” Miller called. “You quench that thirst!”

Rolling her eyes, she groaned in mock annoyance before disappearing from his sight.

When she and Bellamy made it to the bedroom, she shut the door firmly, locking it just in case any of their friends decided it’d be funny to barge in on them. She pulled the ponytail holder out of her hair and made a face when it didn’t really move and instead just remained clumped on the side of her head.

Bellamy smiled at her and combed his fingers through her tangled tresses. “You look fine,” he said. He bent down and kissed her, and she smiled when she felt how stubbly his chin and jaw were. That stubble would feel really good on her inner thighs if he decided to . . . venture down there.

Eager as hell, she pushed her shorts down to the floor, but he stopped her as she was about to step out of them and said, “Slow down.”

She hesitated for a moment, slowly lifting one leg out of them, then flicked her ankle to toss them aside. “I’m not breakable, Bellamy,” she reminded him. She hadn’t even bumped her head last night. Nothing was hurt or was injured, so she was raring to go.

“That’s not why I wanna go slow,” he murmured in her ear, rubbing his hands up and down her arms.

His warm breath rustling her hair made a shiver traverse her spine. Oh, she realized. He wants to savor it.

True to his word, he took his time with her, grabbing hold of one wrist at a time so he could loop her arms around his neck. His hands settled in the curve of her waist, and he kissed her softly, sweetly, sometimes just barely grazing her lips with his. She stood on her tiptoes, trying to press her body against his more fully, and his fingers gradually crept around her back to inch her t-shirt up. His large, calloused hands splayed first against the small of her back, right where her tattoo was, then slid lower to cup and squeeze her backside. She moaned into his mouth, never tiring of the feel of his hands on her. Every time Bellamy touched her, it was just . . .

It was electric.

His tongue had begun to slowly swirl around with hers when he lifted her up off her feet. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around him, holding on with all her limbs as he carried her over to the bed and lay her down on her back. Instead of settling on top of her, he stood back and lifted his own shirt over his head, tossing it aside. His tan, sculpted torso looked so enticing to her, she couldn’t help but reach up and graze her fingers over his abs. Unlike her, Bellamy looked unnaturally good in the morning.

He climbed up onto the bed, but Clarke was surprised when he grabbed her hips and carefully rolled her over. Her bare ass lay perfectly within his reach, but it was her pussy that was begging for him, throbbing with need. She raised her knees underneath herself, elevating her ass in the air, and he took advantage of it. First he kissed her tattoo, then kissed his way down her backside to her pussy, where he proceeded to give her several long, hot licks. She squeezed the pillows beneath her head, amazed by the way his tongue felt. Good God.

“Mmm,” Bellamy moaned, pressing one big kiss to her lower lips before lifting his head. She wanted
him to keep going, but she knew he had a plan for her when he wrapped his arms around her stomach and lifted her torso.

She leaned back against him, so glad when he finally scrunched up the bottom of her shirt and lifted it over her head. “Oh . . .” she whispered, happy to be naked in his arms, especially when both his hands came around to cup her breasts. She threw her head back against his shoulder and arched her chest into his hands, reveling in his touch as he massaged and squeezed the two big mounds of flesh and rolled her nipples beneath his palms. She was so thankful Bellamy was fascinated by her breasts, because they were a huge trigger point for her.

“You like that?” he asked, gently pinching her nipples between his fingers.

“Oh . . .” was all she could manage in response. He made her feel so breathless.

“Yeah?” Wrapping one arm around both her breasts, he continued to hold them and massage them while his free hand sank lower, smoothing over her stomach before dipping between her legs. She gasped when he started to rub her clit with his middle finger, and on their own accord, her hips bucked forward. She couldn’t move much, though. His arms were strong and all-encompassing around her, and his chest was rock hard against her back. She kept feeling his erection brushing against her backside, too, encased by his underwear but still making its presence known.

“Oh . . .” she moaned, trying to grind down on him when he slipped two fingers inside of her. His thumb remained on her clit, applying pressure more than anything else, and she started to wonder if she might just end up cumming on his hand. Because she was feeling pretty ravaged, especially when he rained sloppy kisses down on her shoulder and the side of her neck. And when she felt ravaged, it didn’t take much to get her off. That stubble on his face still tickled her skin, and the hot air from his mouth sent volts of pleasure straight down to her core.

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” She never got tired of saying his name in the throes of passion, just like this.

Even though he probably could have kept touching her, he slowly removed his hands from her body and pressed against her back, urging her to lie down again. She nearly collapsed flat on her stomach, wondering if he was going to lift her hips and go down on her some more or give up with going slow and just cut to the chase. She assumed it would be the latter as he crawled on top of her, straddling her backside, but when he started to grind his hips against her ass, he still had his boxers on. Did he like torturing himself, making himself as hard as possible while there was still clothing in the way? Whatever his motivation, she liked what he was doing. It felt good to feel his arousal sliding up and down the crack of her ass. When he rubbed himself lower, she felt him on her pussy, too, straining against the confines of his underwear.

Put it in, she wanted to tell him, but words escaped her in her lusty haze.

The next thing she knew, his hands were on her waist again, and he was turning her over onto her back. She smiled up at him, pleased to be back in her favorite position. She liked this view of Bellamy, and she knew he liked this view of her.

Again, he took one of her wrists in his hand, slowly lifting her arm above her head. He did the same with the other arm, and then he pushed on her knees, urging her legs open so she was completely sprawled out and exposed for him. He sat back on his heels, his eyes roaming all over her, tongue darting out to lick his lips. He gazed at her like an artist admiring his work. When his fingertips grazed her sides, his touch was almost . . . reverent.

Unreal, she thought, head spinning. She was the actual artist there, yet Bellamy was the one treating her like she was some precious masterpiece.
He bent down, but instead of descending his mouth onto hers, he latched onto the side of her neck, sucking on her pulse point, lavishing so much attention on just one spot that she was sure he’d leave a hickey there. Slowly, he worked his way down over her collarbone to her chest, trailing kisses down the valley between her breasts before lifting one up and holding it steady so he could clamp his mouth down atop it. His tongue flicked and swirled around her nipple, making it impossibly pert and pebbled, and when he pulled away, the sudden rush of cold air sent a shiver up her spine. Luckily, he switched to the other breast, lavishing it with equal consideration, and he kept alternating back and forth like he just couldn’t get enough.

It did feel so damn good, but Clarke could feel her pussy dripping with arousal. She needed something down there—his hands, his mouth, his cock, anything—or she was going to go crazy.

Far too worked up to bother with words, she kicked her feet against his legs to get his attention. She didn’t stop until he finally lifted his head and looked down at her questioningly.

“Please,” she managed to gasp.

He nodded knowingly and slinked further down her body, marking her stomach with feather-light kisses on the way to his destination. When his head was between her legs, she wriggled wantonly, desperate for him to uphold the promise he’d made to her last night. She’d agreed to get her blood drawn; he’d agreed to go down on her. It seemed like a fair trade.

She was so glad when he pressed his face in and used his technique. Because as good as it felt when his tongue was pressing into her, she also loved it when he just kissed her down there, sucking the lips of her pussy between his just like he did with her mouth. He was breathing heavily and groaning, making all sorts of beautifully filthy sounds as gave her what she wanted. The way he was grinding his hips into the mattress reminded her how much he got off on doing this to her, and as much as she wanted to watch him, she felt like she just had to close her eyes and dig her head back into the pillow when his tongue began to trace up and down her folds.

“Oh, fuck,” she whispered, probably not even loud enough for him to hear. That mouth of his, that tongue . . . He was so fucking good at this, he made her feel like she was floating.

He moved his tongue all over her pussy, tracing lazy, unplanned designs. When he lifted his head ever so slightly, she sneaked a glance down at him and saw that his chin was shiny, covered in her wetness. He delved right back in, spreading her pussy apart with both hands so he could really press his tongue into her. The feeling of being tasted so fully threatened to overwhelm her, and when he began rubbing her clit in tandem with his licks, she knew she was a goner.

Her thighs started to shake and clench around his head, but he nudged them apart with his broad shoulders, urging her to keep her legs spread. Quivering from the inside out, she squeezed her eyes shut, opened her mouth, and whisper-screamed as she came. A feeling of utter elation radiated throughout every inch of every limb of her body, from her shoulders to her fingertips, her hips to her toes. Her stomach muscles shuddered as she struggled to catch her breath, and her whole back arched up off the bed.

Bellamy licked and lapped at her as she rode it out, drinking her down, and he frowned when it was over, as if he wanted there to be more. With one more soft kiss to her clit, he crawled back up the length of her body, situating himself on top of her. Even though she felt like she could barely function, the moment his mouth found hers, she responded to his kiss, because she could taste herself all over his lips. And she tasted so different than he did.

“You good?” he asked, cupping her cheek lovingly.
“Mmm,” she purred, tilting her face so she could kiss the palm of his hand. She felt completely satiated, but at the same time, she knew she’d been the one to reap all the benefits of this early morning fuck-fest so far. And she wanted him to feel good, too.

Since her arms were still where he’d placed them, up by her head, she tried to hook her toes into the waistband of his boxers and drag them down. She didn’t have much luck with that, but he noticed what she was doing and did it for her. Once there was finally no underwear holding his cock back, it poked against her pussy, heightening the euphoria she was already feeling in the aftermath of her orgasm.

Without even using his hands, Bellamy managed to get himself into position to penetrate her, but when it came time to actually do so, he did snake one hand down in between them to hold his cock at its base so he could slide in steadily. Clarke moaned in content, because it just felt right. She’d gotten so used to being filled up by Bellamy that she actually felt an ache between her legs when he wasn’t in there.

“I’m not gonna last,” he warned her as he began to roll his hips forward.

“That’s okay.” Whether she came again or not was unimportant. Though she did feel like another orgasm was within her reach if he could just hold out for a couple of minutes.

She knew Bellamy, and she knew he wanted to make her cum again. He buried his face against the side of her neck, grunting and groaning as he fucked her with long, fluid strokes. She was soaked already, so it made it easy to just lie there and enjoy it and marvel at the way his cock felt sliding in and out of her. He always stretched her, but there was nothing uncomfortable about it. It just felt natural, like she had him exactly where he belonged, like they were made to do this with each other. Over and over again.

His hand slid up her forearm as he moved, firmly grasping hers. He linked their fingers together and bore all his weight on that side of his body, on their interlocked hands. At the same time, his thrusts became more forceful, more insistent, and he asked, “Are you close?”

“Yeah.” Something about having him hold her hand in the midst of all this . . . it was a bigger turn-on than even the feel of his cock was. It was a sweet thing to do, holding her hand, just like it was sweet of him to brush her sweaty hair off her forehead and then cup her face as he gave her a kiss.

“Oh my god,” she whispered against his lips. She could feel another wave of pleasure threatening to overcome her, especially when he pushed in as deep as he could go and she felt his balls knocking against her. This had hurt the first time, but now, she loved it when Bellamy bottomed out. It gave him the perfect angle to grind against her clit and give her exactly what she needed to find her release.

“Oh!” she cried suddenly as she came again. It was the tingling kind or orgasm that made her toes curl into the mattress and her fingers squeeze his tightly. He followed her right over the edge, cumming nearly at the same time, pressing down hard against her as he spent himself inside her. She could feel his release, feel the warmth of it flooding through her, feel the pulsating aftershocks as they zapped through his cock. She coiled her legs around him, rubbing her thighs against his sides, and held him in there as he came down from it. He was covered in sweat and breathing laboriously, just like she was.

He looked beautiful.

Afterward, they both lay together, still connected, both still gasping for air. He didn’t seem to be in any big hurry to move, which was fine by her, because she liked keeping him inside of her after it
was over. In fact, if she could have stayed there with him all day, she would have. Bellamy and a bed . . . it was pretty much the closest thing she’d ever felt to heaven. Nothing else could even compare.

He kissed her. He nuzzled her nose. He kept her fingers interlaced with his. And everything felt perfect.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

It was still raining when Bellamy and Clarke got to the church, and Clarke had given up on her hair a long time ago. It was supposed to have been straightened, but the humidity was making it do its naturally curly thing, so she just clipped it back in her signature half ponytail and called it good. Really, today was all about Octavia anyway. She was the one who was supposed to look beautiful. And she would. Because in addition to being the bride, she had that whole pregnancy glow thing going on.

Bellamy opened up an umbrella and handed it to her when they got out of the car. She thanked him but had only taken a few steps when she stepped on her high heel wrong, rolled her ankle, and nearly fell. He grabbed her arm and caught her and muttered, “Jesus, Clarke. Should I just carry you again?”

“No, I got this.”

“Well, at least I caught you this time,” he said. “Don’t go fainting up at the alter now.”

“I’ll try not to.” She felt water splattering her skin, which definitely didn’t feel right, and when she glanced down, she noticed a brand new tear in the side of her dress. “Oh, no,” she whined. “My dress ripped.”

“Let me see.” He lifted her arm and pinched the two sides of the fabric together. “That’s not bad,” he said. “My mom can sew that for you.”

She certainly hoped that was true, because she really didn’t care to walk down the aisle showing off any side-boob.

Thankfully, Bellamy knew his mother well. The woman was a seamstress who literally walked around with a needle and thread in her purse, so when she got there, she and Clarke went back to the girls’ changing room and got to work. The only thread she had was black, but that would be just fine. Nobody would look at the dress closely enough to notice.

“Thank you so much, Aurora,” Clarke said gratefully, standing still as Bellamy’s mom threaded the side of her dress back together. “I wish I knew how to sew. Where’d you learn?”

“Oh, taught myself,” Aurora replied. Clarke laughed a little. Of course she had. Maybe that was where all of Bellamy’s self-teaching tendencies came from.

“I couldn’t afford a lot of new clothes for my kids, so we had to get a lot of use out of what we had,” Aurora went on. “If something ripped, I had to fix it. So I did.”

“Hmm.” Clarke doubted her mom knew how to sew. Stitching up a patient? No problem. Stitching together a dress? Problem. If their clothes had ever worn out, they’d always just gone out and bought new ones.
Emori came into the room and said, “Oh, sorry, I was looking for my boyfriend. I thought he might be playing Peeping Tom back here.”

“I think he’s outside splashing around in the puddles,” Clarke informed her. That was where she’d last seen him.

Emori rolled her eyes. “Great.” She looked at what Aurora was doing and said, “Don’t sew her into that too tightly, Mrs. Blake. I bet your son’s gonna wanna get her out of it later.”

Clarke pressed her lips together tightly and said, “Goodbye, Emori.”

“Bye.” Emori ducked out of the room and started yelling Murphy’s first name as she stomped down the hall.

“Sorry,” Clarke apologized. Even though it was no secret she and Bellamy were sexually active, his poor mom didn’t need to hear about it.

“It’s fine,” Aurora said, stepping back once she’d finished her work. “There we go,” she said. “Good as new.”

Clarke twisted to the side, checking it out in the mirror. “Looks good,” she said. She couldn’t even tell it was sewn.

“And Bellamy can still get you out of it later, if he wants,” Aurora added.

Clarke blushed, embarrassed only because it was Bellamy’s mom and not one of his friends teasing her this time.

Aurora put her needle and thread back in her purse and asked, “How’s he doing today? Do you know?”

“Oh, today? He’s . . .” Clarke sighed, smiling and shrugging. “I don’t know, it’s tough to say. I think it’s bound to be an emotional day for him, no matter what. But he really is happy for her.”

Aurora nodded. “Yeah. He’s, um . . . his bond with her, it’s just very unique and rare.”

“Yeah,” Clarke agreed. It all came as a product of helping raise Octavia, she supposed. Bellamy almost had a fatherly love for her, which was definitely different, but heartwarming all the same.

“He’s a—a special big brother,” Aurora said, beaming with obvious pride for her son. “Actually, he’s just a special person, really.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said softly, “he is.” She’d never met anyone like Bellamy Blake before. He was one of a kind, and she felt so lucky to know him.

Bellamy inhaled a deep breath, then knocked on the door of the room his sister was getting ready in. “Come in,” she called. Just as he started to twist the doorknob, she added, “Unless you’re Lincoln!”

He grunted, pushing open the door. “Just me.”

“Hey.” She was alone, standing in front of a full length mirror with her hair all fixed, makeup all done. And she had her dress on. The baby bump was very visible, but the dress still fit her perfectly.

“Well?” she said, flapping her arms against her sides. “What do you think?”
He had to swallow his tears, because he didn’t want to well up and become a sap with only twenty minutes to go until the wedding started. “You look beautiful,” he told her.

“Thanks,” she said, turning to survey her reflection in the mirror again. “Never envisioned being pregnant on my wedding day, but lo and behold, here I am.”

He shoved his hands in his pockets and shuffled forward, standing behind her. Him in a nice tux, her in a nice dress. They’d come a long way from the trailer park they’d lived in as kids.

“You nervous?” he asked her.

She shook her head. “No. Nothing to be nervous about. He’s the one for me.”

Bellamy smiled, hoping that was true. As reluctant as he’d been to warm up to Lincoln . . . the guy had proved his devotion to Octavia time and time again. He did everything for her and with her. And when their son entered the world, he’d probably do everything for him, too.

“Come here,” Octavia said, gliding towards a couch on the other side of the room. She motioned for him to follow her. They sat down together, and in the back of his mind, he couldn’t help but think that this was the last time they’d do this before she was no longer Octavia Blake. The next time they spent one-on-one time together like this, she’d be Octavia Woods, wife of Lincoln. Still his little sister, but a wife first and foremost.

“I wanted to ask you for something,” Octavia revealed, “a favor. And I know it’s kind of last minute, so feel free to say no, but—”

“Anything,” he cut in. He’d do anything for her. Always.

“You sure?”

“Yeah. What do you need?”

She bit her bottom lip, then started in. “Okay, I know it’s kind of archaic,” she admitted, “the whole idea that a father gives his daughter away at the wedding. I mean, you told me men used to trade cows for their daughters, and I’m worth far more than a cow, obviously, but . . .” She exhaled, smiling hopefully, and entreated, “Would you walk me down the aisle today?”

Stunned by her request, he just stared at her, not sure if he’d even heard her correctly. She wanted him to . . .

“What?” he managed to get out.

“Please,” she begged. “I know it’s kind of weird, because you’re my brother, not my dad; but you’ve always taken care of me, and . . . I don’t know, I just thought . . .”

“Yes,” he answered quickly once his mind could finally process the request. “Yeah, I’ll . . .” He gulped, blinking back tears, and forced himself to keep it together. “I’d love to.”

“Really?” Her whole face lit up with a smile, and she threw her arms around him, hugging him gratefully. “Thank you,” she said.

She didn’t have to thank him, though. Honestly, for him . . . it was a privilege.

“You’ll never know how much this means to me,” she said tearfully.

_No_, he thought, _you’ll never know how much it means to me_. Octavia asking him to do this, to walk her down the aisle in place of a father she barely knew . . . it touched him. It made him feel like he’d
done something right with his life, because really, how many big brothers got such an honor?

She pulled back suddenly, eyes wide, and touched her stomach with her right hand. “Oh my god!” she exclaimed.

“What?” His first thought was that something was wrong.

“He’s kicking! You have to feel!” She grabbed his hand and quickly placed it atop her stomach, and this time, for the first time . . . he actually felt it. He wasn’t a split-second too late. He felt Octavia’s son, his nephew, kicking inside her belly. And he’d never felt anything like that before.

“Wow,” he said, astonished. That baby had picked a hell of a time to let Bellamy finally feel him. As if this shit wasn’t already emotional enough . . .

“I think he’s saying hi,” Octavia said.

Bellamy slowly withdrew his hand as the kicking let up. “Finally,” he said, glad that he’d gotten to feel this just once before Octavia tied the knot. Finally.

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When it came time for the “Does anyone object to this union?” part of the ceremony, almost everyone looked at Bellamy. It was honestly comical.

“What?” he said.

Light laughter arose from everybody in attendance, and Lincoln breathed a small sigh of relief when it was clear that Bellamy wasn’t going to object.

The minister went on to talk for a few minutes about love and about marriage, and Clarke actually listened. He said it was sacred and compared it to the rings Lincoln and Octavia were about to exchange. Like the rings, love was continuous, with no end. The rings, he explained, were a symbol of an endless commitment Lincoln and Octavia were making to each other today. Clarke liked the comparison, and she made a mental note to request a similar speech at her own wedding someday.

Her own wedding? She scoffed inwardly, not sure why she was thinking about her own wedding when her friends were getting married right in front of her. That seemed sort of selfish.

Focus, she told herself, shaking her head to rid herself of . . . any other thoughts. Lincoln and Octavia. They looked so perfect standing there together. Lincoln and Octavia.

“May we see the rings?” the minister requested.

Since they’d decided not to have a ring bearer, Lincoln’s best man, Nyko, had them in the inner pocket of his tuxedo jacket. He handed them over, a thick silver band for Lincoln, and a thinner, shinier ring for Octavia.

Clarke cast another quick glance at Bellamy, just to see how he was doing. He looked like he was having to hold back some tears now, but he was managing pretty well.

“Lincoln and Octavia have chosen to write their own vows,” the minister announced. He gave Octavia Lincoln’s ring and invited her to begin.

She looked down at the ring, spinning it between her fingers. It took her a moment to say anything, and Clarke wondered if she had forgotten her vows, or if perhaps she hadn’t written any and was instead going to just say whatever was in her heart in that moment. If she felt any nerves at all, though, they vanished the instant she lifted her gaze into Lincoln’s eyes. This blissfully happy expression came over her, and when she started talking, it seemed as if all the words just flowed.

“Lincoln,” she said, holding his hands. “When I first met you, I had no idea how much my life was about to change. I mean, how could I have known? I’d never met anyone like you before.”

Again, Clarke looked at Bellamy. His eyes were on his sister, but Clarke . . . just couldn’t focus. She heard Octavia say that, and all she could think about was meeting Bellamy for the first time, purely by accident, in a Walmart parking lot of all places.

A lot had changed since then.

“But even when I didn’t know you well, I was intrigued by you,” Octavia went on, “and I wanted to know you better.”

Hmm, Clarke thought. That sounded . . . familiar.

Maybe too familiar.

She tensed.
“When I learned who you are, I also learned how you are,” Octavia said, more eloquent and mature than Clarke had ever known her to be. “I learned how smart you are and how brave you can be. I learned that you have this amazing heart, one that makes you so kind and so compassionate.”

Clarke’s gaze settled on Bellamy again. Bellamy, who was kind. Bellamy, who was compassionate. Bellamy, whose heart dictated almost everything he did.

Her own heart beat faster.

“But I didn’t just learn about you,” Octavia continued. “You taught me things about myself, too, about who I really am and who I can be. You taught me to love in ways I’d never known I was capable of. You taught me to love fearlessly and passionately. And that’s how I came to love you. That’s how I learned what it means to be truly happy.”

Clarke felt a lump in her throat as she gazed longingly across the altar. She wasn’t sure whether she wanted Bellamy to look at her or not. All she knew was that she couldn’t stop watching him.

“Our love and the happiness it’s brought us is incredible,” Octavia declared, beaming. “And it was probably inevitable. I think from the moment we met, it was bound to happen eventually.”

Her breath hitched. Eventually?

“I didn’t know it when I met you, but you are my other half. You are my best and truest friend.”

My best friend, Clarke thought, panicking. My best friend?

“Nobody knows me like you do. Nobody can, because you are the love of my life. You’re the most amazing man I’ve ever known, and you make me feel adored every single day.”

She felt a tightening in her chest and stomach as she thought of how adored Bellamy made her feel. It was in the way he said her name, called her “Princess,” in the way he touched her and kissed her and made her feel beautiful, even when she wasn’t.

“I am so excited to be standing here with you right now,” Octavia said to Lincoln, “my best friend, my soulmate, my everything.”

Tears stung Clarke’s eyes. She hoped nobody could see them.

“I promise to be your best friend and faithful partner for the rest of my life,” Octavia vowed. “I promise to support you and comfort you during life’s sorrows and to celebrate and cherish all of life’s joys.”

Joy. Sorrow. Clarke’s stomach clenched, because they were words she knew well. But Bellamy knew them even better than she did. She wasn’t sure which one she felt in that moment, but she definitely felt . . . something.

Something undeniable. Something she’d probably felt for a long, long time.

“I love you, Lincoln.”

Bellamy . . .

“And I will always love you.”

Her heart fluttered in her chest, much as it had the first time she’d met him. She didn’t want to admit it, but deep down, she already knew it was true.
Bellamy smiled at his sister as he watched her slide the ring onto Lincoln’s finger. He had a beautiful smile.

Because he was a beautiful person.

Inside and out.

And I love him, she thought, the words ricocheting and reverberating through her mind. More than anything.

So shaken by her own ridiculous epiphany, Clarke couldn’t even listen to Lincoln’s vows. They were probably great, but she didn’t hear a word that he said to his best friend, because she was too busy staring at her best friend.

Too busy picturing the way her best friend looked when he was asleep.

Too busy thinking about how safe she felt in her best friend’s arms.

Too busy hearing the sound of her best friend’s laughter, envisioning his smile.

Too busy remembering what it felt like to make love to her best friend just this morning.

Part of Lincoln’s vows must have been funny, because people laughed. Not Clarke. She didn’t hear what he said.

Oh god, she thought frantically, unable to push the thoughts aside this time. She pictured herself writing boyfriend last night on that emergency contact info, and now she knew why. Oh god. That was what he was to her, what he’d been for such a long time now, and she’d been lying to herself. There was no way he was just a friend, not when everything Octavia had just said to Lincoln was something Clarke could have said, too.

To Bellamy.

Because she loved him.

“Lincoln and Octavia, in the presence of your family and friends, I am honored to pronounce you husband and wife,” the minister announced at the end of the ceremony. “Lincoln . . . you may kiss the bride.”

Lincoln didn’t even hesitate to capture Octavia’s lips in his own. Everyone stood and cheered for them. There was music again. Clarke applauded halfheartedly, not because she wasn’t happy for them, but because . . . all she could think about . . . the only thing on her mind . . .

Oh, no. She wanted to run away and hide. But she couldn’t. She had to get through this.

Bellamy clapped for them. He was crying a bit, but . . . just a little bit.

Clarke felt like crying, too. But not for them.

Harper and Nyko joined arms and followed the newlyweds down the aisle. Then Emori and Miller. Then Maya and Lincoln’s cousin, whose name escaped Clarke at the moment. In the end, it was just her and Bellamy up there. They walked towards each other, and he looked completely normal, but she felt so on edge.

Like the gentleman he was, he held out his arm for her and said, “Let’s go, Princess.”
She inhaled shakily, trying to conceal how that nickname affected her right now. He didn’t say it any differently than he usually did, but . . . it just felt different.

Linking her arm with his, she walked with him down the aisle, past his smiling mother, past all of their wild friends. She tried to get her heart to stop pounding in her chest, but nothing could stop it. Not now.

Not anymore.

Not when she was in love with Bellamy Blake.
Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the feedback! I know that last chapter was a big one.

Also . . . 5x03. That is all.

Chapter 46

The wedding reception was supposed to have been outdoors, but because of the weather, they ended up having to move it inside. Luckily, the church had enough space for it, and it wasn’t like it was the biggest wedding in the world anyway. Most of the guests stayed, so there were plenty of people to make a party out of it, but at the same time, it wasn’t too crowded.

Lincoln and Octavia had their first dance as man and wife to some super romantic song by Ed Sheeran. Everyone was watching them, but it was almost as if they only saw each other. She looked up into his eyes longingly, and he gazed down into hers lovingly. Her perfect little baby bump took up some space between them, but it didn’t prevent them from holding each other close and swaying in time to the music, lost in their own little world.

Clarke sat at one of the tables reserved for “the whole crew,” as Octavia had put it, and watched them dance together. She’d known how in love they were for a long time now, but never had she seen them look so in love.

She felt pangs of envy when she watched them. Literal pangs.

Raven scooted up beside her as the couple’s first dance wore on, a plate of wedding cake in her hand. “Hey,” she said. “The cake’s really good. I’d get some sooner rather than later if I were you.”

“No,” Clarke replied dazedly, her eyes never leaving the happy couple. They were so, so happy.

“I mean, it’s really good,” Raven emphasized. “And I heard Octavia’s mom made it?” She snorted incredulously. “Seriously, is there anything the Blakes can’t do?”

“Hey, are you okay?” Raven asked suddenly, quietly.

Clarke tore her eyes away from Bellamy and tried to smile at her friend. “Yeah,” she said, hoping she could be convincing. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Well, I heard you fainted or something last night,” Raven whispered. “And then when you were standing up there today . . . you kinda looked like you were about to faint again.”
“I did?” Oh god, she really hoped no one else had noticed that. She may have been having a life-altering epiphany during Octavia’s vows, but never had she intended to take any attention away from the bride.

“So are you okay?” Raven asked again.

*Of course she can tell,* Clarke thought. Raven knew her better than anybody else—well, *almost* anybody. They’d been friends for years, so of course she knew when something was going on. “I’m fine,” Clarke lied. As much as she wanted to tell her everything she was feeling in this moment—the fear, the confusion, the *elation*—she also knew this wasn’t the right time or place for it. The day still very much belonged to Octavia and Lincoln, and it needed to stay that way.

“Oh, okay,” Raven said. “Just checking.” As Lincoln and Octavia’s dance came to an end, she clapped for them along with everyone else, and Clarke joined in. So sweet. So heartwarming. So something she couldn’t help but picture for herself and a certain someone else.

Damn.

Raven got up and left, presumably to go get another slice of cake, and some other people started to file out to the dance floor. Lincoln’s father—a big, burly man just like his son—approached Octavia and asked her to dance, and Lincoln held out his hand for Aurora, sweeping her away onto the dance floor. Emori dragged Murphy out there, and Monty happily accompanied Harper.

When Clarke saw Bellamy approaching, she feared he might ask her to dance. That would be bad. Not only was she still rhythmically challenged, but . . . she wasn’t sure if she could feel his hands on her right now. What if it was too much?

Thankfully, he sat down beside her instead, sighing heavily. “I made it,” he said.

She wasn’t sure whether he was talking about making it through the wedding or making it through the happy newlyweds’ first dance, so she just said, “Yeah,” and put both hands on her lap, trying not to look too . . . obvious.

“It was a nice ceremony,” he remarked. “O did a good job on her vows.”

*Yeah,* Clarke thought, tensing. *She really did.*

“Do you think I should give a speech?” he asked her suddenly.

A speech? Right now, her mind could barely even comprehend the meaning of that very simple word. She was too distracted by how good he looked in that tux, how *completely* relaxed and at ease he seemed around her right now. It wasn’t fair. “W-what?” she sputtered, trying to focus and act normal.

“A speech,” he repeated. “You know how people give speeches at the reception.”

*Reception,* she thought. *Right. Because that’s where I am.* She felt like she could barely formulate coherent thoughts, let alone sentences. “Yeah, but isn’t that something the best man and maid of honor usually do?” she pointed out.

“Yeah, but I’m her brother,” he reasoned. “I walked her down the aisle today. I think that qualifies me for speech-giving.”

She supposed it did, but it was hard telling what Bellamy might stand up and say. “Then go ahead and give one, if you want,” she encouraged.
“I don’t know.” He thought about it for a moment, then yawned and stretched his arm across the table, right behind her back. It wasn’t even touching her, but it was so close to her, and she was hyperaware of it.

She would have loved to sit there and have his arm around her. Half an hour ago, it wouldn’t have even felt like a big deal. But right now, it felt like everything, and everything was just a little too much for her to deal with.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” she blurted, figuring it was her quickest and most reasonable escape. She got up and hurried away from the table, trying to just walk fast rather than run and make it obvious she was hurrying. She left the reception hall and wound her way through a few hallways until she nearly collided with a mother and her young daughter as they left the restroom.

“Excuse me,” the mother said.

Clarke couldn’t even smile or be polite or anything. She squeezed past them and slammed the bathroom door shut, locking it into place. Feeling like she couldn’t breathe, gasping for air, she gripped the edge of the sink tightly, trying to calm herself down. She couldn’t be like this for the rest of the reception. It was going to last for a couple of hours, and she had to get control over her emotions.

Control, she thought, slowly raising her eyes to look at her reflection. Something I always used to have.

That devastated look on her face, however, was only proof of how out of control her feelings were right now. And it was all Bellamy’s fault. She was only out of control because of him. Her stomach was all knotted up, and her heart was still beating fast with trepidation. Even her palms were sweaty, and she hadn’t dealt with sweaty palms since junior high.

What do I do? she wondered fearfully. Even if she did manage to make it through the reception without Bellamy suspecting anything was up, what was she supposed to do when they returned home tonight? How was she supposed to lie in bed next to him and act like everything was the same when, in reality, everything was different? How was she supposed to react when he kissed her? What if he wanted to . . . do more than kissing?

All these things had just felt natural and normal when she’d woken up this morning, but now . . . it all felt heightened now.

Leaning back against the wall, she shut her eyes, trying not to cry. But some tears seeped out anyway, decorating her cheeks. Try as she might, she couldn’t stop thinking about him, couldn’t shut off the feelings that had probably existed for a long time now.

But how long? It hadn’t been love at first sight. She knew that.

It had been lust.

“I’m Clarke,” she remembered introducing herself, having no idea where it would all lead to at the time.

“Bellamy.”

She tried to sniff back her tears, but they kept falling.

“Do you wanna . . . hang out for a while or something?”
Why had she asked him that? Never in her life had she been so forward with someone else, so willing to make the first move. So why, with Bellamy, had she done that? Why had she gone to Dropship to hang out with a guy who was a virtual stranger, with a guy who could have been anyone but had ended up becoming the most important person in her life?

What if it was fate or something? Did such a thing even exist? What if it was . . . meant to be?

She wiped off her cheeks as memories began to assault her mind. The first time he’d kissed her, right there in that shabby old bar. Going out to his truck with him and having sex for the first time. It probably was supposed to have been a one-night stand. But there were so many nights after that. Nights at Dropship, at TonDC. Nights when she’d fallen asleep in his bed, even though she had a perfectly nice bed and apartment of her own.

And nights without him. Nights when he’d been angry with her for making too much of an effort to get to know him.

Oh god, she thought, thinking back to the night he’d sat with her on her living room couch and told her everything about Roma. That was when things had changed for her, wasn’t it? That was when it had happened. Up until that point, she’d really liked Bellamy Blake. But even though she wasn’t supposed to, even though they’d made a promise that they would never be anything more than friends . . . that was the night that lust and like had turned into love.

For her, at least.

She loved him.

The tears kept falling as the memories kept invading. Stupid, silly things like bouncing around out on the trampoline with him, making fun of cheesy romance novels, dancing horribly whenever they went out to TonDC. Fun things like Christmas with him and his family, Saturday nights with their friends, and their road trip to Missouri. Sexual, sensual things, like the way his body felt on top of her when it was sweaty and undulating on top of her, the way his hands wove through her hair when they were in the shower together, the way the stubble on his cheek grazed her thighs when his head was between her legs.

And she thought about the sad times, too. Her arms and hands still remembered what it was like to feel him shaking uncontrollably next to her on New Year’s. She remembered that tragic look on his face when he told her about how he’d lost Gina, and the resigned, almost lost, one that had taken its place when he told her he was supposed to have had a baby. Moments like those had strengthened their bond, made them closer than they ever could have been otherwise.

He’d told her things he’d never told anyone before, and she’d done things with him that . . .

Get it together, she told herself, wiping all her tears away. She leaned towards the mirror and took another look at herself, knowing she had to fix herself up before she showed her face out there again.

Once she’d washed off her smeared makeup and had taken a moment to let her red, puffy eyes get back to normal, she took a few deep breaths and left the bathroom. When she got back out to the reception area, everyone was seated at their tables, and Nyko was already giving his best man’s speech. Clarke caught the tail end of what he was saying, something about not letting the kid drive them crazy, and when he ended it all with “Congratulations,” everyone raised their glasses to toast the happy couple and then took a drink.

Clarke scurried back to her table and sat down next to Bellamy. He gave her a curious look and remarked, “Long bathroom break.”
Not long enough, she thought, completely unable to even look at him.

As the maid of honor, it was Harper’s turn next. She stood up at their table and said, “Okay, so I’m not very good at speeches, but I’m gonna do my best here. Because Octavia is my best friend, and she deserves the best.” She exhaled shakily, smiling at the bride, and said, “I remember when you met Lincoln for the first time. You were . . . smitten, I guess, is the word for it.”

Octavia smiled at Lincoln and actually blushed for once.

“She seriously couldn’t stop talking about him, or thinking about him,” Harper went on. “I knew she was gonna fall in love with him, and it didn’t take him long to fall in love with her. So here we are. I don’t think anyone’s really that surprised.”

Because it was inevitable, Clarke thought, remembering that that was the word Octavia had used in her vows. Glancing at Bellamy out of the corner of her eye, she wondered if their relationship had been inevitable, too, if she should have seen it coming and should have realized it long before this. Probably. God, she felt like an idiot.

“Octavia and Lincoln have a once in a lifetime love,” Harper went on. “Nothing else is ever gonna compare to what they feel for each other, the love that they share.”

Clarke’s stomach rumbled. A once in a lifetime love? What if Bellamy had already had that? With Roma? Or Gina? Or maybe he’d had a twice in a lifetime love, and . . . that was it. It was different for her. Finn had been a first love, ill-advised and something she could easily move on from. Lexa had been more serious, but even that . . . it paled in comparison to what she felt for Bellamy. He was the thing that was once in a lifetime for her, but . . . what if she wasn’t that same thing for him?

“The way you two care about each other . . . it’s inspiring,” Harper went on. “I see the way you guys look at each other, and I know it’s meant to be.”

Clarke looked at Bellamy, because she couldn’t help it. His eyes were flitting back and forth between Harper and Octavia.

“You two belong together, and you’re gonna be together for the rest of your lives,” Harper predicted. “You’re gonna have a family and be the most amazing parents. You’ll have a home filled with so much happiness and so much love, because that’s what you create together.” Blinking back tears, she raised her glass and said, “So . . . to Octavia and Lincoln. Congratulations. And thank you for making all of us believe in true love.”

A light “Aww” rose up from all the guests, and again, they raised their glasses and drank. Clarke downed about half the champagne in her glass, hoping it would make her feel a little better. She needed to be careful and not get drunk, though, because if she did, then she might say something she shouldn’t, something she’d regret.

“I’m gonna do it,” Bellamy mumbled, standing up as Harper sat down. “Alright, I know I’m not the best man or anything,” he said, “so I’m just gonna keep it short and sweet.” He looked down beside him at Octavia and said, “O . . . you’re my little sister; you’ll always be my little sister, even though you don’t have the same last name as me anymore.”

That got a little laugh out of her.

“I will always be there for you, whenever you need me,” he promised. “You’re one of the most important people in the world to me, and you always will be.” He swallowed hard and said, “I love you.” Then he shot a stern look at Lincoln and warned, “So you’d better take care of her.”
“I will,” Lincoln promised.

“Oh, Bell . . .” Octavia stood up and hugged him, and Clarke heard her whisper that she loved him, too. Everyone awed even louder this time and eventually clapped for them. When Bellamy sat back down, he asked Clarke, “How was that?”

“It was good,” she told him. She wanted to reach over and rub his back or give his shoulder a squeeze, something she normally would have done. But she couldn’t do that right now.

“Alright, enough sappy stuff!” Octavia exclaimed. “Let’s party!”

The DJ started the music again, a more lively song this time, and Jasper was the first one back out on the dance floor. Lots of people remained sitting to eat and drink and talk, and Clarke took a minute to really look at just where she was sitting. She was at the head table with the family. The only other people who weren’t related to Octavia or Lincoln who were sitting at that table were Harper and Nyko. Clarke knew she was mainly there as an extension of Bellamy, but still . . .

She was seated at a table with the family.

Bellamy loved his family; that much was obvious. Most of his attention today was on Octavia, and that was fine. Clarke sat there in relative silence and watched as the siblings both picked at the food on their plate, neither one quite sure what it was that they were eating. Bellamy told her about his rabbit-eating experience and how that had scarred him for life, and that got a loud laugh out of her. Then their mom chimed in with how she had once eaten alligator and that it wasn’t bad, tasted a lot like chicken.

He loves them so much, Clarke thought, the wheels of her mind spinning with the possibilities for what that might mean for her. Yes, Bellamy was resistant to romantic love after everything that had happened with Roma and Gina. He’d closed himself off to the possibility and didn’t seem to think that it would ever happen for him again. But he did love people, with all his heart. Octavia and Aurora were probably the most obvious examples, but that love extended to everyone else, too: Miller, Murphy, Emori, Harper . . . all of them. He loved all his friends as if they were his family, and Clarke knew that included her. After all, she was his best friend; he’d told her that himself once. So he had to love her. Maybe somewhere along the way, that platonic type of love had shifted for him, too, changed into something more. Maybe he did feel what she felt, and like her, was just reluctant to admit it.

She didn’t want to get her hopes up, but at the same time . . . how was she supposed to feel anything but hopeful?

The enormity of the day’s epiphany weighed down on her even an hour later, when she was beyond-finished with her meal but kept venturing over to the food table to get more to eat anyway. Her friends were all living it up. Murphy was drunk, so he was dancing like a lunatic. Jasper was talking about proposing to Maya but needing to be high to do it, and Miller and Jackson had started a subtle food fight at their table. Bellamy was now out there on the dance floor with Octavia, twirling her all around, and she seemed to be loving it. It was clear that, for today at least, she was his princess.

Why am I so hungry? Clarke wondered as she popped another cheese cube into her mouth. The answer, of course, was obvious: She wasn’t hungry. Not at all. She just needed something to do to keep herself occupied so she didn’t just sit there staring at her non-boyfriend like a lovesick puppy for the entire reception.

This is ridiculous, she thought as she loaded up a whole plate with various types of cheese. What was supposed to have been a fun day with friends had become . . . this. She felt like she was walking
around on pins and needles, so afraid that she might say or do something she’d regret.

When she turned to head back to the table, she bumped into Octavia, and several of her cheese cubes fell to the floor. “Oh, sorry,” she apologized.

“No, I made you drop your cheese. My bad,” Octavia said.

“You’re the bride; you don’t get blamed for anything today,” Clarke said, setting her plate down so she didn’t drop anymore. “What’s up? Having fun?”

“So much fun,” Octavia replied, smiling from ear to ear. “This is . . . the happiest day of my life.”

And there it was, that pang of envy again, but Clarke tried to ignore it as best she could. “Well, good,” she said. “That’s what it’s supposed to be.”

“Yeah, and Bellamy’s been amazing,” Octavia said, glancing over her shoulder. Clarke followed her gaze and saw that Bellamy was dancing with his mother now. Like the perfect son. The perfect man.

“He is amazing,” Clarke whispered, unable to keep it in.

“Best big brother ever,” Octavia agreed. “And he’s gonna be the best uncle.”

“And godfather,” Clarke added. In a few months, they’d all be back together for another celebration, another landmark moment: a baptism.

“Yeah,” Octavia said. “Actually, that’s kind of what I wanted to talk to you about.”

Clarke frowned, not sure what she was getting at. “What do you mean?”

“Well, we know who the baby’s godfather’s gonna be,” Octavia said, “but we haven’t settled on a godmother yet.”

Clarke felt her whole body start to tense up, because . . . no way. Octavia couldn’t possibly be hinting that . . .

“I was kinda hoping it might be you.”

She felt her eyebrows shoot upward on her face in utter surprise. “Me?” she echoed in disbelief.

“Yeah.”

What? her mind screamed. Out of all the people she could have asked, Octavia wanted her to be the godmother? “But what about Harper?” she asked. “Or Emori or Maya or . . .” She didn’t want to seem ungrateful or anything; it was just that Octavia had other friends whom she’d known longer.

“Well, Harper already got to be my maid of honor,” Octavia explained. “And I love Emori and Maya to death, but . . . I mean, if Bellamy’s gonna be the godfather, Lincoln and I just thought it would make sense if . . .” She trailed off, her smile fading. “But it’s okay,” she said. “If you don’t wanna do it . . .”

“No,” Clarke cut in quickly. “It’s not that. Um . . .” She didn’t know how to explain why she was reacting the way she was without spilling the beans that her feelings for Bellamy were at a whole different level right now, and making a commitment like this with him . . . it just felt like a really big deal.

“Listen, Clarke, I know I haven’t known you as long as some of the other girls,” Octavia
acknowledged, “but I trust you. I trust that, if anything ever happened to me and Lincoln, you and Bellamy would raise our son right. And that’s what you’re supposed to look for in a godparent.”

A godparent, Clarke’s mind registered. With no siblings or family members whom she would even remotely consider close friends, Clarke had always known that her only chance at being a godparent or being “Aunt Clarke” would be if someone like Raven had kids and chose her for the job, or if . . .

If she got married someday. And had in-laws. And a whole other family.

But she wasn’t married to Bellamy. Hell, she wasn’t even technically his girlfriend.

She realized she’d left Octavia hanging without an answer, so although her mind was spinning, she went with her gut: “Sure.”

“Really?” Octavia’s whole face lit up with excitement. “You’ll do it?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure? Because I don’t want you to feel like you have to . . .”

“No, I’d be . . . I’d be honored,” Clarke told her. And she meant that. This was a really big deal, especially since she and Bellamy were doing it together. She wouldn’t take the title or the responsibility that came along with it lightly.

Octavia hugged her, thanked her repeatedly, and then ventured off to find her husband again. He was talking to Nyko, but when she sat down on his lap, all his attention shifted to her.

Clarke’s eyes drifted out to the dance floor again, where Bellamy was still gliding back and forth with his mom. He wasn’t embarrassed to dance with her the way some guys his age might have been. He loved and admired that woman with all his heart. The kind of parent she was to him . . . that was the kind of godparent he’d be to his nephew. That was the kind of father he would have been if Gina . . .

Clarke lowered her head, trying not to compare herself to a girl—two girls—she hadn’t even known. What gave her the right to assume that she could ever measure up to them in his eyes? With them, he’d experienced love. Deep, profound, and, ultimately, painful love. With her . . . there was lust. A lot of it. And probably the most meaningful friendship she’d ever develop in her life. But what if it just stopped there? What if, despite how much she loved him, he just didn’t feel the same?

It was terrifying to even think about. Completely terrifying.

As if the day hadn’t already been stressful enough . . . she’d forgotten about the bouquet toss. When it became clear that it was finally happening, she tried to sneak off into the bathroom again so she could just avoid the whole damn thing, but Niylah grabbed her arm and said, “Get out there,” pulling her out onto the dance floor.

All the girls, single or taken, amassed together, each one eager to catch the bouquet. But Clarke didn’t want to. No, she didn’t even want to come close to it. The last thing she needed was some stupid tradition seeping into her brain, making her think that she was going to be the next one to get married when really, Emori and Harper and these other girls were probably a lot closer to that point than she was.

Octavia turned her back towards them and tossed the bouquet of flowers into the air. Clarke was prepared to dodge it if she had to, but luckily, it went well over her head and straight to the back of the crowd, where Emori had smartly placed herself. She caught it with one hand and let out a loud,
“Woo!” before turning to her boyfriend and saying, “Look, John! Look what I have. What’re we gonna do about this, huh?”

Murphy was sprawled out on two chairs, so drunk that he could barely lift his head. He just gave her a little wave to indicate that he’d heard her and then shut his eyes.

*Thank God,* Clarke thought. Emori was the perfect person to catch the bouquet, because regardless of Murphy’s . . . well, Murphy-ness, he really did love that girl, and they probably *would* tie the knot next. Or at the very least, get engaged.

Clarke sulked back to her seat, wishing she could put on a better act and be less of a damp dishcloth today. It wasn’t that she was in a bad mood or anything; she was just . . . spinning, her mind a massive blur of thoughts and hopes and dreams. And worry.

Another uber-romantic Ed Sheeran song started to play, and all the couples found their way out onto the dance floor. Even drunk Murphy, though Emori practically had to drag him. Clarke had no intention of getting out there until a familiar hand laid out in front of her.

“Wanna dance, Princess?”

She looked up and met Bellamy’s warm brown eyes, momentarily losing herself in them. The way he looked at her sometimes . . . it didn’t *feel* any different than the way Lincoln looked at Octavia.

Part of her didn’t want to dance, but another part just couldn’t say no. She placed her hand in his and allowed him to pull her to her feet. She followed him out onto the dance floor, trying to calm her shaking nerves, trying to act normal when he turned to face her and put his arms around her waist. She put her left hand on his shoulder, her right hand on his chest, and prayed she wasn’t trembling on the outside like she was on the inside.

But his hands . . . they felt so big and strong on her back.

And his breath was so warm as it rustled her hair.

And he didn’t complain when she accidentally stepped on his toes.

“I know I’ve been busy with O and my mom today,” he said quietly, apologetically. “Sorry.”

She shook her head, having envisioned nothing else. “That’s understandable.”

“But I saved this dance for you.” He grinned. “Because I know how much you *love* dancing.”

She managed to laugh, and god, that felt good. Laughing made a tear fall out of the corner of her eye, though, so she looked down to conceal it. Then she looked away from him completely, to the couple dancing beside them: Raven and Roan. Despite their reputation for being wild and extremely hot and heavy, in that moment, they looked utterly romantic. There was zero space between them as they danced, and her head was on his shoulder. Both of them had their eyes closed and looked so content just to be in each other’s arms.

Clarke looked beyond them, and there were Niylah and Luna, who were taking a different approach to the dance but looked no less intimate. They were talking to each other, making each other laugh while they moved. They looked happy, too.

She turned her head to the other side, in time to see Monty twirl and then dip Harper like they were in an old romance movie or something. And Jasper kissed Maya’s forehead while they swayed together, which was probably the sweetest thing she’d ever seen him do. Murphy was stumbling all
over Emori, but she didn’t seem to mind. Miller and Jackson were almost just standing still, both of them lost in a long, drawn-out kiss with each other.

And then there was Lincoln and Octavia, off towards the far end of the dance floor now. Their height difference was so great that she could just rest her cheek against his chest, and he danced with his chin atop her head. They looked like they never wanted to let go. And now that they were married . . . they never had to.

Is that what Bellamy and I look like? she wondered, wishing she could see themselves through her friends’ eyes. They were always saying things about them, sometimes making jokes, but often dropping subtle hints that certainly felt more serious. They told her she was good for him, said he’d been a lot happier this year because of her. That had to mean something. Didn’t it?

“You okay?” Bellamy asked her suddenly.

She lifted her gaze towards his and nodded, even though that wasn’t entirely true. Regardless of whether she and Bellamy had the same type of relationship as these other couples or not . . . for right now, she was out there on that dance floor with him, safe in his warm arms. Even if it didn’t last, for right now, she got to be his princess.

Looking down at the hand she had covering his heart, she wished she could feel it beating, wished it was thundering in his chest the way hers was. Then she would have known. She would’ve known this moment meant just as much to him as it did to her. And that would have put her nerves at ease.

“Hey . . .” He put his hand underneath her chin, lifting her head so their eyes met again. He smiled at her softly, innocently, completely unassumingly, and she felt weak in the knees. Quite literally. It was the same feeling she’d had when she’d introduced herself in a parking lot eight months ago. In all that time, she hadn’t grown tired of seeing this face, hearing that voice, feeling these hands. If anything, she’d grown to appreciate him even more.

He stopped dancing, cupped her cheek with his hand, and bent down, giving her what felt like the most tender kiss of her entire life. I felt just as electric as the first one he’d ever given her, probably even more so, and it didn’t feel strange to kiss him back. It felt as natural as ever, like his mouth was made to be on hers, like his lips were one piece of the puzzle, and hers were the piece they were meant to connect to. It felt meant to be.

When he slowly pulled away, she kept her eyes closed, savoring the sensation, unwilling to let it go. She didn’t want that to be the last time he ever kissed her, and it didn’t have to be. If she just didn’t say anything, if she just kept the feelings inside . . .

Her eyes opened, staring straight up into his and she knew . . . there was just no way she could do that. As nice as it would have been to go home and play house with him and settle into bed with him tonight like nothing had changed . . . everything had changed.

And he deserved to know that.

“Bellamy . . .” she whispered, feeling the words on the tip of her tongue. They were right there, and she wanted to say them. I love you. I love you so much.

He gazed down at her curiously, questioningly, like he could tell there was something she wanted to say. But he didn’t say anything to her, either.

Just as she felt she’d worked up the courage, the song came to a quiet end, and in an instant, her courage vanished. The words on the tip of her tongue disappeared in the back of her throat, and she
lost her nerve. Taking a step back from him, she tried to tell herself that it was just because they were surrounded by people right now, and because they were at his sister’s wedding reception. That was why she didn’t tell him. It was a big bombshell, after all, and she couldn’t very well drop it right here.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

She averted her eyes. Of course he knew. He knew something wasn’t right. There would be no going home tonight and pretending that things were normal. She had to tell him.

“I think I need to leave,” she said.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “Are you okay?”

She shook her head.

“You want me to take you back to the hospital?” he immediately offered.

“No.” She definitely wasn’t okay, but she wasn’t sick, either. But she wasn’t sure how to get him to understand that without telling him everything right here. “Can you just take me home?” she asked quietly. Other people were starting to leave. The reception was dying down. But still . . . maybe he wanted to stay until the end with his mom and his sister. “Or I can just go by myself,” she said. “You don’t have to go with me.” Maybe that’d be better. She could get home, plan out what she wanted to say, and figure out how the hell she was going to work up the nerve to say it.

“No, I’ll go with you,” he said. “Just give me a minute.” He left the dance floor and went back over to their table. He said something to his mom, then gave her a kiss on the cheek, and she poked her head around his frame and gave a little goodbye wave to Clarke. Clarke waved back, managing a small smile.

Bellamy got her purse for her, then interrupted Lincoln and Octavia’s dance to say goodbye to them, too. Octavia pulled herself apart from her husband long enough to give her brother a big hug. Miller must have noticed that he was leaving, because he and Jackson finally came up for air long enough for him to tease, “Cuttin’ out right before the cleaning starts, huh?”

“Somethin’ like that.” Bellamy waved goodbye to all of them and returned to Clarke’s side. “Ready?” he asked, handing her her purse. He’d already taken the umbrella out for her.

She nodded, looking down at her feet as she walked. When they got outside, he opened up that umbrella and held it over her head, wrapping his arm around her shoulders, pulling her closer so they could walk under it . . . together.

Together, she thought, her stomach roiling with worry. How long had they been together now?

How much longer would they be?
Chapter 47

Thanks for sticking with this long story and for all the feedback so far! Onward we go to a chapter that was very intense to write.

Chapter 47

The rain had picked up once again by the time Bellamy and Clarke got home. And it was so windy that the umbrella blew upward, not really protecting them from everything. They had to make a run from the truck from the house.

Clarke really hoped Miller wasn’t right about weather being a bad omen. Right now, she could have used a good one. A ray of sunshine, a break in the clouds. Hell, even a rainbow. Something.

“Fuckin’ downpour out there,” Bellamy said, tossing the useless umbrella aside.

Clarke wrapped her arms around herself, shivering. And Bellamy quickly noticed.

“Here,” he said, grabbing the blanket off the back of the couch. He wrapped it around her shoulders, using it like a towel to dry her off. “Better?” he asked.

She nodded wordlessly, touched by this thoughtfulness. Here he was, soaked to the bone just like her, and yet she was the one he wanted to make sure was getting dry.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep you warm tonight,” he promised, a sweet and adorable gleam in his eyes. Will you? she wondered. If she blurted it out right now that she loved him, would he still crawl into bed with her and hold her while she slept tonight? Or would he take off running for the hills? Because this wasn’t what he’d wanted.

“Clarke, what’s wrong?” he asked, rubbing her arms and shoulders. He sounded concerned about her. And why wouldn’t he be? She’d barely said two words the whole ride home. “Did something happen today?” he asked when she failed to respond.

She almost laughed at that. Because yes, something had happened. Something major.

Bellamy flapped his arms against his sides, almost as if he were a bit frustrated now. “Alright, fine, don’t tell me.” He took off his tie, tossed it onto the couch, and removed his tuxedo jacket, too. Then he walked into the laundry room, probably to toss it in the washer for later. Even with a tux, Bellamy wasn’t a dry-cleaner guy.

The irony of standing here not opening up to him about how she felt when she’d not once but twice practically begged him to open up to her . . . it wasn’t lost on her. And she felt like total crap for being such a hypocrite.

The blanket fell from her shoulders, and she didn’t bother to pick it up off the floor.

When Bellamy came back out, he seemed to have regained his patience with her, because he went
into the kitchen and kindly offered, “Want me to make you something to eat?”

“I’m not hungry,” she mumbled.

“Well, then . . . I don’t know, you want me to go get a hot bath ready for you or something?”

*Oh, Bellamy . . .* It was heartwarming how badly he wanted to take care of her right now. He was being such a good guy, even though she probably wasn’t making it easy on him. It all felt so . . . bittersweet.

Her body moved on its own accord as she crossed the room and went to him. She encircled her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly, her brow furrowed with worry as she struggled to muster up the courage to do what needed to be done.

“Clarke . . .” He didn’t seem to know what to think, didn’t even hug her back at first because he was so caught off-guard. But when she didn’t let go of him, he put his arms around her, too, massaging her back and her wet hair.

She really didn’t want to let go of him. Ever. In fact, she was pretty sure she could have just held onto him for the rest of her life and been perfectly content. But she knew they couldn’t stay like that forever. And even if they could have, she still needed to be honest with him sooner or later.

Sooner was better. Right? She’d already waited long enough.

Gradually, she stepped away from his embrace, turned her back to him, and walked into the living room again, trying to think of how to start, what to say. Should she just blurt it out? Or build up to it? Was there any good way to go about this? Was there a wrong way?

“Clarke, please, talk to me,” he pleaded, his voice wavering. She really had him worried, and she felt so bad about that.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized quietly.

“Sorry?” he echoed. “For what?”

Honestly . . . she wasn’t sure. Was she sorry for worrying him right now? Yes. Was she sorry for making him leave the reception early? Of course. Was she sorry for falling in love with him, for breaking the promise they’d made to never let their relationship become . . . this?

Maybe. It sort of depended on whether or not he’d broken their promise, too.

“Bellamy,” she said, spinning around to face him, “what were you thinking during the ceremony today?”

“The ceremony?” he asked. “You mean, the actual wedding?”

“Yes.” She wanted to know; she *needed* to know. If he’d been thinking about her, if he’d let his thoughts venture there for just one second, then that was a good sign. Wasn’t it?

“I was thinking . . .” He made a face, shrugging cluelessly. “I don’t really know what I was thinking. I know what I was *feeling.*”

“Then what were you feeling?” She needed to know that, too.

“I felt really happy that I got to walk her down the aisle,” he replied. “Lucky.”
“No,” she cut in before he could go any further with that. “During their vows.” That was the part of the ceremony she needed to find out about, because that was the part where her own mind had started to run wild.

“Well, I was proud of her, I guess,” he said. “She did a good job. Lincoln’s were good, too.”

Good? she thought, sort of . . . detesting that word. Octavia’s vows hadn’t just been good; they’d opened Clarke’s eyes, inspired her. Had they really done nothing for him?

None of his answers to her questions so far were particularly reassuring, but . . . that didn’t mean the situation was hopeless. Maybe he hadn’t had an epiphany at the wedding because he already knew how he felt. Or maybe he still hadn’t figured it out, but . . . that was okay. She could tell him how she felt, and maybe that would be his huge, eye-opening moment. Maybe that was what it would take for him to realize that their relationship had transcended friendship a long, long time ago, and there was just no turning back.

“I don’t really know what you’re getting at, Clarke,” he admitted, slowly shuffling towards her.

She took a step back, putting her hands up, needing to keep some space in between them. If he got too close, she’d just throw her arms around him and hug him again. And then they’d never get anywhere with this.

“What did I do wrong?” he asked desperately. “Please, just tell me and I’ll fix it.”

She shook her head, holding back tears. This wasn’t one of the many things he was able to fix. “You didn’t do anything wrong,” she assured him.

“Then why are you being like this?”

“Because I can’t . . .” She didn’t even know what she’d intended to say.

“You can’t what?” he demanded.

Can’t keep pretending, she thought, wishing he could just look at her and understand. Can’t keep lying to myself.

“Why won’t you talk to me?” he nearly yelled.

“I’m trying to,” she insisted weakly.

“No, you’re not trying; you’re just standing here.”

“No, it’s . . . it’s when I was standing up there today, Bellamy,” she tried to explain. “I didn’t know it was gonna happen, but it did, and—”

“What happened, Clarke?” he roared. “You’re not making any sense.”

She knew he was frustrated, but she really needed him to just let her talk without interrupting her. “Please,” she begged.

“Please what?”

“Please, just . . .” She felt like crying, because this was so hard and so terrifying, and he had no idea that about a million different emotions were running through her mind and heart right now, ready to be unleashed.
“Clarke, I don’t understand.”

“I know.” It wasn’t his fault. She wasn’t telling him everything. She was dancing around it, and everyone knew she wasn’t a good dancer.

“You’re scaring the shit out of me right now.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. Just tell me--”

“Bellamy, I love you,” she finally blurted. The words on the tip of her tongue finally spilled out, and . . . it wasn’t as freeing as she’d expected it would be. If anything, it made her feel like she couldn’t breathe.

*Oh god,* she thought, not even blinking as she stared at him, waiting for a response. She’d really just said that out loud.

Bellamy stared right back at her, looking . . . surprised. Silent and surprised. But a few seconds later, he blinked rapidly, processing what she’d said, shoved his hand in his pocket, and casually replied, “Well, I love you, too.”

At first, her heart leapt at that. But then she realized what he meant. He was talking about that best friend kind of love, the kind she already knew he felt for her because it’d happened so easily.

“No,” she said.

“No?” He frowned.

Shit, this was mortifying. But she couldn’t very well go back now. The words had already left her mouth; there was no taking them back.

“Bellamy . . .” She tried to smile, because the way she felt about him . . . it really *did* make her happy, and it really was something to smile about. “I was standing up there today listening to Octavia say all those things to Lincoln, and all I could think was . . . I could say every single one of those things.” Her heart felt lighter somehow, and air returned to her lungs when she told him, “And I could say them to you.”

Bellamy’s expression didn’t change. The frown was still there, but he didn’t look angry. Just sort of . . . confused? Caught off guard, maybe?

“He’s her best friend? Well, you’re *my* best friend,” she said, sort of feeling like she was giving her own vows now. “You know me better than anybody. You know my heart, my . . . my body.” She actually blushed, ridiculous as it was to do so at this point, because some of the things she’d done with him . . . oh, yeah. He *definitely* knew her body.

“Clarke . . .” It was his turn now to struggle with words. The frown left his face, but it was replaced by an expression she couldn’t quite read.

“And I know you,” she went on, feeling like she could say everything now that she’d finally said that one thing. “I know you’re already freakishly smart, and you’re only gonna get smarter now that you’re in college. I know that you’re brave, because you’ve gone through so much.”

Bellamy gulped.
“And I know that you’re so kind, and you put everyone else above yourself. Your friends, your family . . . me.” She smiled shakily, a feeling of hopefulness washing over her as she raved him up. “I mean, it’s not like I can’t take care of myself or anything, but you . . . you take care of me. You try to get me to eat right, and you haul me around if I’ve had too much to drink. You punch out stupid idiots at the bar when they won’t stop hitting on me, and you make me go to the doctor, even when I don’t really need to. You just . . .” Tears clouded her eyes, because that was really just scratching the surface of everything he did for her. She could have gone on and on and on. The list was endless. “You’re the most amazing man—person—I’ve ever met,” she told him, hoping he wouldn’t be so humble that he couldn’t accept that very big compliment. “I love you, Bellamy,” she said, wanting to shout it at the top of her lungs now. “I’m in love with you.”

He didn’t blink. Didn’t move. Didn’t say anything to give her any indication of how he was reacting to this. Obviously he was shocked, but beyond that . . . she couldn’t tell what he was.

“Say something,” she whispered, needing to know. She’d just poured her heart out to this guy, and . . . she really wanted him to do the same to her.

Or not. He could also just kiss her.

“Clarke . . .” He finally managed to say.

She stared at him expectantly, waiting for more. She didn’t get it. All he said was her name. But it was a start.

“I know it’s a lot to take in,” she acknowledged, willing herself to be patient with him. “Trust me, it was a lot for me to deal with when I was standing up there and it just dawned on me.” She doubted she’d ever forget what it had felt like to come to such a huge realization. It’d felt like getting hit by a train or something. “But now that I’ve had time to think about it, I realize it’s not just something that happened yesterday or today,” she said. “It’s . . . it’s something I’ve felt for a long time now.” She thought about telling him how it was the night at her apartment that everything had changed for her, that glimpsing his vulnerability was what had made her go from liking him to loving him, but . . . he was probably overloaded already. She could tell him that later. “Bellamy, I fell in love with you,” she said, so happy to be able to say that, “and I think you fell in love with me, too.”

Still . . . just silence. No agreement from him or big, dramatic realization.

She waited, giving him time. He was still processing. It was okay.

She waited some more.

Finally, though . . . “Clarke,” he said again.

“Why do you--” She stopped short of asking him why he kept saying her name like that, and a troubling observation occurred to her: He was just saying her name. Not Princess. Not the nickname she’d gone out and gotten tattooed on her body. And there wasn’t even a hint of a smile on his face.

Something wasn’t right.

“No,” she said, not wanting to consider the possibility. She shook her head stubbornly, refusing to believe what he wasn’t saying. “No, don’t do this to me, Bellamy.”

“Clarke--”

“Stop saying my name like that!” she yelled, taking another step back when he once again moved closer.
“Like what?”

“Like you feel sorry for me.” This wasn’t the way he was supposed to be talking to her right now. He was supposed to sound . . . excited. Or something. Just not like this.

“You love me,” she stated matter-of-factly. “You can’t deny that. You just said it.”

“Yeah,” he said, nodding. “I love you.”

“So then—”

“But I’m not . . .” He paused, the most drawn-out, painful pause of her life. “I’m not . . . in love with you.”

Clarke stared at him in horror, mouth agape, unable to believe she’d heard that right. No, her mind cried. No. “You’re not?” she squeaked out, feeling pathetic.

At the very least, he respected her enough to look her in the eye. But that didn’t make it any easier when he shook his head sadly.

Bellamy Blake wasn’t in love with her? How was that possible? Everyone thought he was. Her parents, his sister, their friends . . . hell, even Lexa thought that, and she barely knew him. How could everyone be so wrong? How could she be so wrong? It didn’t make any sense.

“No,” she said defiantly, closing the gap between them. “No, I don’t believe that.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, his voice even deeper and more gravelly than usual.

“Bellamy . . .” She clutched at his shirt, pulling his face closer to hers. “You’ve told me things you’ve never told anyone. Why would you do that if—”

“Because you’re my best friend, Clarke,” he interrupted.

“But we—we do everything together,” she sputtered. “We’re around each other all the time.”

“Because we’re friends,” he repeated.

“Yeah, but why would you . . .” She trailed off, slowly letting go of his damp shirt, suddenly feeling like she didn’t have any right to have her hands on him anymore. “If you’re not in love with me,” she whimpered, hearing the hurt that permeated her own voice, “why would you make love to me?”

An agonized look crashed onto his face. And he didn’t have an answer for her that time.

“I know that’s what we did. Over and over,” she said, shuddering as she thought of how his fingertips felt on her skin. “Now what, are you gonna tell me that was just meaningless sex?”

“No, of course not,” he responded vehemently, sounding slightly . . . offended. “You know I didn’t just use you.”

He was right. On some level, she did still know that. Nothing, not even the horror of this, could take away how it had felt to be with him in that way. Connecting physically had never been a problem for them. The other stuff, the emotions . . . apparently that was where the problem lay.

“How do you touch someone like that without loving them?” she wanted to know.

“I do love you.”
“You know what I mean.” She narrowed her eyes at him, angry now. She felt like an absolute fool, like he had made a fool of her. And the worst part was, she was still foolish enough to think that he might somehow change his mind.

Bellamy’s eyes narrowed right back at her. He looked pissed, too. “I touched you because I wanted to touch you,” he said simply. “I kissed you because I wanted to kiss you. Whatever we did—had sex, made love, fucked each other’s brains out . . . whatever you wanna call it, we did it because we wanted to. And we both enjoyed it. Don’t try to make it sound like I used sex to manipulate you.”

“Didn’t you?”

“No!”

Deep down, she knew he hadn’t. But she was so upset right now, she didn’t even care if she offended him.

“Screw you, Clarke,” he muttered furiously.

“Oh, you already did that,” she reminded him resentfully. “Plenty of times.”

“Yeah, I did. And you know what? I’m not gonna stand here and apologize for it. I’m not gonna act like I’m sorry for—for feeling attracted to you!”

“Attracted?” she echoed pitifully. “I’m in love with you, and you’re attracted to me?” She laughed sadly, humiliated now. “Oh my god.” She turned around, trying not to let him see her cry. She didn’t want to cry, didn’t want to be this girl who crumbled under the weight of her own hurt feelings. She wanted to just be angry. Anger was easier.

“It’s more than that,” he assured her, his voice suddenly soft and caring again.

“Not enough,” she whispered, still unwilling to fully accept that this was happening right now. As if to remind her that it was, though, thunder rumbled outside. Miller was right, she realized. It was a bad omen. Just not for Octavia and Lincoln.

“Why, Bellamy?” she whirled around and asked, not even bothering to wipe the tear tracks off her cheeks. “Why are you not in love with me?” She didn’t mean for it to sound like such a self-righteous question, but she honestly just did not understand.

His eyes were brimming with tears, too, his jaw trembling as he tried to hold them in. “Clarke, we’ve been through this,” he reminded her. “Back when we started up this whole thing, we both agreed—”

“Yeah, I know what we agreed!” she snapped. She just didn’t care about that anymore.

“We promised we weren’t gonna let it get to this point, remember? We said we would always just be friends.”

She threw her arms in the air exasperatedly, huffing, “I’m sorry, I can’t control whether or not I fall in love with you!”

“You were supposed to!” he yelled accusatorily.

“Oh, like you did?”

“Yes!” He paced to the side, raking his hand through his hair, then walked back again. “Look, I told you it’s not in the cards for me. I told you I was never gonna fall in love again.”
She tried to protest. “Yeah, but--”

“No, that’s it, Clarke. I told you. And I know you didn’t know about Roma and Gina at the time, but I ended up telling you about them, too, so you should know . . .” His voice immediately became choked up with tears after he mentioned them. “So you know why I can’t . . . you know, Clarke. You know more than anyone.”

She sniffed back more tears of her own, looking down at the floor. Yeah, she knew. But right now . . . she still didn’t understand.

“I never meant to hurt you, I promise,” he said. “But I can’t . . . I can’t do that anymore. I can’t let someone in like that again.”

“But I’m already in,” she argued. “You have let me in. You know you have. And I don’t understand how it’s any different, Bellamy.”

“It just is,” he insisted, and he sounded so determined to believe it was true.

“But how? I don’t get it!” She suddenly understood why all of their friends were so skeptical of their stupid friends with benefits arrangement: because it was complete bullshit. “I know I’m not technically your girlfriend; I don’t have that title or whatever. We . . . we sleep together. In more ways than one. I mean, Bellamy, I—I practically live here.”

“I know,” he said, averting his eyes, almost as if he were ashamed he’d let it go this far.

“We talked about what we were gonna do this summer. We talked about what we were gonna do next summer. We made plans for a future together, Bellamy.” If that wasn’t proof that he saw himself having some sort of life with her, then she didn’t know what was.

Of course . . . all those plans were probably shot to hell now.

“It’s not different,” she claimed. They were dating in every sense of the word, and she should have just owned up to that sooner.

“No, it is,” he argued some more. “Because there’s something better out there for you, Clarke, someone better.”

He always said that. And quite frankly . . . she hated it. “Did you not hear my profess my love to you? I said you’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met. There is no one better!” she shouted at him.

He just shook his head, like he couldn’t believe that. Or wouldn’t.

“You always act like I’m just gonna fall in love with someone else and just forget all about you!” she cried. “But I could never forget about you. You’ve changed my whole life.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, as though that were a bad thing.

“No, but you—you changed it for the better,” she stuttered, wishing she was coherent enough to explain to him how beautiful and adored he felt when she was with him, how good it felt to be his support system, how much she’d loved learning about herself from him. “Why would I ever fall in love with anyone else when I have everything I could ever want with you?”

“I can’t give you everything,” he mumbled.
“What, like money? I don’t care about that.”

“No, I can’t . . .” His voice cracked, cutting off, and he cried, openly cried, right there in front of her, the way he had several times before. “I can’t love you the way you deserve to be loved, Clarke.”


“You don’t.”

She frowned, hating that utterly decided tone. “Don’t tell me what I feel.”

“I don’t know what else to tell you.”

“The truth,” she growled.

“The truth . . .” He swallowed hard. “The truth is that I’m not . . . in love with you.”

“Yes, you are,” she whispered, still holding onto the last shreds of her hope. He had to be.

“Clarke, I’ve been in love before!” he shouted suddenly. “I fucking know what it feels like!”

For some reason, that . . . it was like the final nail in her coffin. Because he was basically comparing her to Roma and Gina and saying . . . she didn’t measure up.

Oh god.

There was no use in trying to convince him otherwise then, was there? If she wasn’t Roma Bragg or Gina Martin, then it didn’t really matter if he was the love of her life. Because she wasn’t his.

All the persistence and all the fight . . . it was like it just left her body. And a black hole of despair settled in instead.

“Figures,” she mumbled, more to herself than to him. “Out of all the guys in the world, I just happen to pick the emotionally-stunted one.”

His expression didn’t change, but the way he said, “Nice,” made it clear that that hurt him.

She was hurting, too, though, so she couldn’t apologize or try to make him feel better. She didn’t want to.

“I wish you hadn’t done this,” he admitted, turning his back to her. He put his hands on his hips, but his shoulders were slumped, eyes downcast as he breathed heavily.

I had to, she thought, but admittedly . . . now she was second-guessing that decision, too. She hadn’t anticipated him reacting this way. Even though she’d known it was possible, she hadn’t thought it was probable. In her mind, she’d gotten her hopes up, allowed herself to believe that, once she confessed her feelings, he’d do the same. And then he would have kissed her, the first of many time-stopping kisses she’d get to have for the rest of her life. She’d imagined the fairytale ending with him sweeping her off her feet and carrying her upstairs, bringing her into their bedroom bridal style before laying her down and just . . .

She stopped herself from imagining further. Because . . . she’d just thought of it as their bedroom.

She glanced over at the stairs and then up at the ceiling, nearly breaking down. No, it wasn’t theirs. Nothing here was theirs. She didn’t live here.
“I should go,” she said quietly.

“No, just . . .” He spun back around, motioning outside. “You can’t. Look at it out there.”

Yeah, it was pretty stormy. But then again . . . it wasn’t much better in here.

“Just stay,” he told her. “I’ll . . . sleep down here on the couch tonight.”

“It’s your room,” she snarled, starting for the door.

“Clarke, what’re you doin’?”

She opened it and walked right out into the rain.

“Clarke!” he yelled, running out after her. In a matter of seconds, they were both drenched. The thin material of her bridesmaid’s dress did little to protect her from the storm’s cold.

“Come on, come back inside,” he told her.

No. She walked past his truck stubbornly, wishing she’d driven her own car over there last night. There was no way she could stay, not after . . . all of this.

“Where are you going?” he bellowed, stopping at his truck.

“Leave me alone!” she blared back. This guy . . . had just broken her heart. Honestly. It felt like it was in shambles. She couldn’t be around him.

“Come on, let me give you a ride home, at least,” he offered.

She wiped off her cheeks, fully aware that her tears were mixing with the rain. Home, she thought bitterly. Yeah, right. What awaited her at Polaris was just an apartment, nothing more.

“Clarke!” Growling angrily, he ran after her. “Come on, you’re gonna get pneumonia out here.”

So he didn’t want to date her but he still wanted to take care of her? No, it didn’t work that way. She continued to march down the wet sidewalk, never so much as casting him a glance.

“You can’t just walk all the way home,” he said.

“Watch me.” Sure, it’d take her a while, but she’d get there. Eventually.

“Dammit, Clarke.” He tried to grab her arm, but she yanked it from his grasp.

“Don’t touch me!” Finally, she stopped walking and looked at him, completely horrified that it had come to this. He looked . . . just as devastated as she felt. The rain plastered his dark hair to his forehead, and his soaked clothing clung to his frame.

He didn’t look like the same guy who’d ravaged her this morning. Because he wasn’t.

She’d just told Bellamy Blake not to touch her.

Determined not to have to rely on him anymore, she turned and continued walking. Bellamy didn’t follow her this time, and for a second, she thought he just might let her go. But soon enough, she heard his heavier footsteps sloshing down the sidewalk, probably twenty or so feet behind her. Thankfully, he kept his distance, didn’t say anything this time. But she knew what he was doing. If she was walking to Polaris, he was going to walk behind her the whole way there.
She’d only made it about one more block when a car coasted down the street, pulling up to the curb and splashing water on her bare legs. Neither she nor Bellamy freaked out, because they both knew who it was.

The passenger’s side window rolled down, revealing Jackson and Miller inside. “Clarke?” Miller said, clearly confused. “What’s going on?”

She slowed to a stop, shivering. As much as she wanted to march off into the storm and be all angry and scorned, it was a long walk. And the rain was really cold.

“Can you drive me home?” she asked him. Miller hadn’t taken a sledgehammer to her heart and left it in ruins. There was nothing pathetic about catching a ride with him.

Bellamy sidled up to the car, and Clarke saw him give Miller a wordless nod out of the corner of her eye.

“Sure,” Miller finally replied. “Hop in.”

Bellamy actually had the audacity to open the back door for her and stand there holding it like a gentleman. But he wasn’t her man, and nothing about his rejection had been gentle. It stung. It burned. It hurt worse than anything else ever had.

She ignored him and walked around to the other side of the car, getting in on her own. Miller looked completely bewildered, and Jackson’s mouth was literally hanging open. Clearly they were both stunned by what was going on here, even though neither one of them knew anything about it.

Bellamy shut the door he shouldn’t have even bothered to open and stepped back up onto the curb, motioning for Miller to just go. For someone who usually drove so fast, Miller sure did take his sweet time pulling away from that sidewalk.

The windshield wipers squeaked and silence filled the car as they drove off. Clarke didn’t want to, but she couldn’t help turning around to look out the back window, just to catch one more glimpse of Bellamy. He’d stepped out onto the street, both hands in his pockets, and he was watching her go.

He looked as sad as she felt.

Lips quivering as she struggled to contain her tears, she turned back around, looking down at her lap, at her trembling, freezing fingers. It wasn’t just the cold rain that was making her shake; it was everything.

Leaving that house was hard, but it wasn’t what filled her stomach with such a painful, longing ache. At the end of the day, as much as she loved it there, it was really just walls and a roof. That wasn’t her home.

The man who lived there? He was.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Wow. WOW. So many comments! I’m stunned, floored, and flattered. I honestly cannot thank you all enough for the way you have invested yourselves in this fic. It really blows me away.

That last chapter was such a hard one to write, in that I love this version of Bellamy and Clarke that I’ve created, but at the same time . . . I’m such a sucker for angsty scenes like that. So in that respect, I loved writing it. Thanks again for all the feedback!

Chapter 48

Bellamy stood in the rain for a long time. Longer than he probably should have. Long after Miller’s car had already disappeared from his sight. In fact, it took almost getting hit by his jackass neighbor’s car and said jackass neighbor yelling, “Get outta the fuckin’ road, Bellamy!” for him to lumber back home.

He zombied his way down the sidewalk, not even sure if he was really . . . alive.

Soaked and freezing, he dripped water all over the carpet when he got back inside his house. He undid a few buttons on his shirt with shaking fingers, and then he just stopped and leaned back against the door, trying to . . . be okay.

Nothing was okay, though. Not anymore.

He closed his eyes and saw Clarke’s tear-filled ones staring pleadingly into his. So he opened them again, but that didn’t help. He still saw her. He saw her smiling hopefully, nervously, when she told him how she felt. He saw her bottom lip tremble with hurt when he didn’t tell her the same. He saw the tears streaming down her face, her beautiful face . . . all because of him.

Dammit, he thought, mind spinning. He was so pissed at himself for not handling that better, but it’d just hit him like a freight train out of nowhere. He’d never meant to hurt Clarke Griffin, though. But now he had, and . . .

What the hell was he supposed to do now?

He paced into the living room, tracking water everywhere, and walked back and forth and in circles like an idiot. He dragged his hand through his hair, pushing it back off his forehead, and wracked his dumbass brain for some kind of way to fix this.

But this didn’t feel like something he could fix.

“Fuck,” he muttered, shaking his head angrily. Pissed as he was at himself, he was pissed at Clarke, too. Why the hell had she gone and done that? Why had she told him all that stuff? They’d had a good thing going together, a real fucking good thing, and now they didn’t. Because of her. She’d ruined it; she’d ruined everything.

It was all her fault.
“Fuck!” he yelled, marching over to the kitchen counter. He grabbed one of the stools and threw it at the front door. But it just hit and then landed on the floor. Nothing broke, and it didn’t make him feel any better.

*Shit, Clarke.* She shouldn’t have said anything. She shouldn’t have felt anything, or at least not love. It wasn’t his fault he couldn’t fall in love anymore. It was just . . . everything that had happened in his life . . . it was too much.

He stormed towards the stairs, but he couldn’t bring himself to go up them just yet. So he stood down at the bottom, gripping the railing so tightly his knuckles turned white.

Things had been good. Everything had been . . . so good between them. Easy, simple. And he’d gotten used to it. He’d gotten so used to waking up next to Clarke every morning and kissing her goodbye before he left for work, to falling asleep with her at night and having to grab back some of the covers from her when she stole them all from him. Fuck, he couldn’t even remember the last night they hadn’t shared a bed, and now . . . would they ever share one again? How could they? They couldn’t. It wasn’t possible. Not when she felt something he just wasn’t capable of feeling. Not when she was in love with him and he was just . . .

“Dammit!” he roared, curling his hand into a fist. He swung hard at the wall . . . and punched a hole into it.

It hurt like hell. Probably. But he didn’t feel a thing.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

*Home sweet home,* Clarke thought bitterly as Miller pulled up outside the Polaris complex. Never had she been so simultaneously relieved and heartbroken to see this place.

Miller shut off the car and turned around in his seat. “Here we are,” he said glumly. The poor guy had tried talking to her as he drove, but she hadn’t said anything. Bellamy could tell him everything if he wanted to. Or not. It really didn’t matter; he wasn’t an idiot, so he could probably figure it out.

“Clarke, are you okay?” Miller asked her softly.

No. She wasn’t. Not by a long shot. She didn’t say that, but she figured her silence said it all.

“What happened?” Jackson asked. He didn’t sound nosy, just concerned.

*I opened my big mouth and ruined everything,* she thought, wishing she could go back in time and make a different decision, decide to keep everything inside rather than letting it all out.

“Clarke?” Miller said, frowning. “You seem . . .”

“Thanks for driving me,” she cut in, her voice alarmingly robotic and monotone as she reached for the door handle.

“You want us to come inside with you?” Jackson offered kindly.

“No.” These guys had already done enough for her in the past twenty-four hours. She didn’t need to burden them with more. Besides . . . she just needed to be alone. “Thanks,” she said again, getting out of the car. She felt like she didn’t even have the strength to wave goodbye to them, so she didn’t. She just trudged up the sidewalk to the big glass doors, put in her security code, and sulked inside.

The elevators, for some reason, weren’t working, so she had to take the stairs up to her floor. Each
step felt like agony. And it got harder and harder to put one foot in front of the next. By the time she finally made it to her apartment, her whole body felt like it was about to give out. She didn’t bother turning on the light; it was dark in there because of the gloomy weather outside, so she let it remain that way.

Her bedroom may as well have been a stranger’s room at this point, but she went in there anyway. She stood in the doorway and unzipped the back of her soaking wet bridesmaid’s dress, shrugged it off her shoulders, and let it fall to the floor. Then she removed her shoes and undergarments, and when she was naked, she actually felt warmer. But still not warm.

Even though she probably needed a hot shower right about now, she didn’t feel like doing anything. All she wanted to do was lie down in that bed and cry. And be pathetic.

With what felt like a great deal of effort, she made her way over to her dresser and opened the top drawer, struck by how incredibly empty it was. So many of her clothes, her things . . . they were over at Bellamy’s.

And he had a few things here, too. The first shirt she pulled out of that drawer was another grey one of his. It had the name of his high school on the front and all the members of its National Honor Society—including his name, of course—on the back.

She took one look at it and turned into a puddle, just like all the puddles outside. She didn’t even know the last time she’d seen him wear that shirt, but still . . . it smelled like him. So she put it on. It was a dumb thing to do, of course, because it only made her think about what it felt like to have his arms around her. And when it occurred to her that she would probably never feel that again, she started to cry harder. She’d always liked wearing his clothes, but it paled in comparison to curling up in his arms and falling asleep.

Sadly, she took the shirt off and threw it to the floor, quickly finding her own clothes instead. She tugged on a plain white t-shirt and stupid pink shorts and made her way to the bed. It used to be that she would sprawl out in the middle, but these past few months, she’d gotten used to having a side. She went to his side and lay down, unable to hold back the tears any longer. They fell onto her pillowcase, making it even damper than her wet hair did. She curled all the covers up over her shoulders, wondering if she’d ever be able to warm up, or if she’d just stay cold all night.

Without Bellamy lying next to her . . . getting warm didn’t seem possible.

~*_~*_~*_~*_~*_~

Bellamy’s hand fucking hurt. Punching a wall was a lot different than punching out some loser at a bar. And cleaning up his bloody knuckles and trying to apply ice to the damn thing . . . well, it worked a lot better when Clarke was the one doing it, rather than him trying to do it himself.

Growling frustratedly, he lifted up the icepack and surveyed the damage. Yeah, he might have really fucked a couple fingers up. It hurt to straighten them. And he was still bleeding, so he ran it under cold water again to clean it off. He’d probably have to wrap it. Hopefully it wouldn’t hinder his work this week. He had jobs to do and money to make and . . . a life to get back to. A routine.

He didn’t even bother to look up when the front door flew open. In walked Miller, not quite as soaked as Bellamy had been, so that must have meant the storm was letting up.

“Alright, what the--” Miller stopped abruptly, noticing the brand new hole in the wall. “Ah, well,
that’s an interesting decorative statement.”

Bellamy tossed the useless icepack in the sink and used the towel to carefully dry off his hurting hand. He wanted to ask Miller if Clarke had gotten home okay, but . . . of course she had. That was why he was back here now.

“You wanna tell me what the hell’s goin’ on?” Miller asked, his voice low and serious.

“No,” Bellamy muttered. The last thing he wanted to do was relive it.

‘cause Clarke didn’t say anything, either,” Miller said, “the whole drive home.”

Just imagining what she was doing right now, how hard she was probably crying, how lonely she probably felt . . . it made his heart sink down into the pit of his stomach, landing with a guilty thud. As much as he tried to blame her, this whole thing was his fault, too, and he knew it. He’d let it get too deep between them, too close. He should’ve kept some better boundaries between them, spent less time with her, something.

Or maybe . . . maybe they just never should’ve started up anything in the first place. A one-night stand probably would’ve been best. He never would’ve broken her heart that way.

“Bellamy, what the hell happened?” Miller demanded. “What kind of fucking fight did you guys have that would . . .” He trailed off, motioning to the wall. “I mean, really.”

Really? Bellamy thought, dragging his feet forward. Really, it was way more than an ordinary fight. This made their previous fights look insignificant in comparison. Because this wasn’t some argument they could talk through and move past. This was . . .

. . . an ending.

“Are you gonna say anything or not?” Miller asked impatiently.

“I can’t,” Bellamy said, keeping his head down as he walked towards the stairs, pushed past his friend, and headed up to his room. Miller didn’t follow him, and even if he did . . . Bellamy wasn’t gonna say anything. He couldn’t. No, he couldn’t talk about it.

He threw himself into his bedroom and locked the door, relieved that he could just hide out here for the rest for the night. But that relief quickly turned to dread when he flipped on the light and took a look around.

His bedroom. His whole bedroom, the biggest one in that house . . . and it felt empty. Clarke wasn’t there.

A lump rose in his throat, because she could’ve been. If she hadn’t said anything, if she hadn’t felt anything, they could’ve just kept going the way they were. It would’ve ended someday, but not today. He hadn’t been ready for it to end today.

God, he thought, devastated. How fucked up was it that his sister’s freaking wedding wasn’t even the biggest thing that had happened to him today?

He leaned back against the door and slowly slid down to the floor, unable to go sit on that bed, unable to even look around. Because if he did, he was sure he’d see way too many things that made him think of her.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~
Clarke was dreaming about Bellamy when she heard his voice saying her name.

“Clarke.”

Slowly, she opened her heavy eyelids, hoping he was really there and that she wasn’t still asleep.

“Clarke?”

But when her eyes adjusted to the light and the blurry figure of a person standing next to her bed came into focus, she realized it wasn’t his deep voice she was hearing. It wasn’t even close. Raven was there, gently shaking her awake, and Bellamy’s voice was just a leftover remnant from her dream.

“Hey,” Raven said, smiling sadly. “Sorry to wake you.”

Clarke was sorry, too. She couldn’t remember what she was dreaming, but she would have loved to have kept dreaming it. The fact that she’d even managed to fall asleep at all was miraculous. She must have exhausted herself crying last night, because she’d literally done that for hours.

“I just wanted to see if you were okay,” Raven said softly.

Okay. Clarke sat up slowly, feeling like she was going to be hearing that word a lot these next few days. Everyone would want to know if she was okay. But she was so far from okay, she barely even knew the meaning of the word.

“What’s going on?” Raven asked, sitting down beside her on the side of the bed. “I wake up this morning and see this text from Miller asking if you were feeling any better. So I text him back saying I didn’t even know you were sick and he should ask Bellamy.”

Clarke nearly flinched just hearing his name.

“And then he tells me I should come check on you.” Raven frowned confusedly. “What happened?”

Clarke looked down at her lap, shaking her head. She really didn’t want to talk about it. But at the same time, she knew she needed to, so she cleared her throat and used her voice for the first time in hours when she answered, “Bellamy and I broke up.”

“Well, I don’t—I don’t understand,” Raven sputtered. “How did you guys just . . .” She trailed off, a look of utter bewilderment on her face. “You guys were at the wedding and you were fine. What happened?”

Pulling absentmindedly at the loose thread in her bedspread, Clarke kept her eyes downcast and explained it as succinctly as she could. “I found out I’m in love with him. And he doesn’t feel the
“You . . .” Raven literally grabbed her by the shoulders, forcing her to look at her. “Clarke. You finally figured that out?”

She blinked back tears, nodding morosely. “Yep.” It didn’t matter, though. She would’ve been better off never knowing.


“At the wedding,” Clarke replied. “It kinda just dawned on me.”

“Oh my god, that’s huge!” Raven exclaimed. She actually sounded excited, so she must not have heard the part about how Bellamy didn’t love her back. “So have you told him?” she asked eagerly.

Clarke nodded, choking out a strangled, “Yep,” her jaw quivering as she clenched it, trying to keep the tears in.

Raven’s happy, hopeful expression fell almost immediately, and she started to connect the dots. “And?”

“And . . .” Clarke tried to use her words, but they wouldn’t come. So she just dabbed at the corners of her eyes, shaking her head.

“What does that mean?” Raven asked. “He . . . he didn’t know how to react?”

“No, he reacted,” Clarke mumbled. It just hadn’t been the reaction she’d been hoping for.

“Clarke, he loves you,” Raven said.

“I know.” At the very least, she’d gotten that much of an admission out of him. “He’s just not in love with me.”

“No, he is,” Raven insisted.

“He’s not; he told me.”

“Then he’s lying or--”

“Raven, he’s been in love before,” Clarke cut in vehemently. “He knows what it feels like.” When she realized that was exactly what he’d said to her, she felt all the tears well up at the bottom of her eyelids, obscuring her vision.

“Oh, come here,” Raven said, wrapping her arms around Clarke, pulling her into a tight, supportive embrace. It was the kind of hug where Clarke knew she could just break down and let it all out if she had to, but she’d cried so much last night, and she didn’t want to cry anymore. A fear tears spilled out, but she refused to let them become waterfalls this time.

“I’m so sorry,” Raven said, in full on consolation mode. “I can’t believe he said that.”

Clarke pulled away slowly, wiping off her cheeks. She knew she’d said some things, too, things she shouldn’t have. Like calling him emotionally-stunted, claiming he may have used sex to manipulate her. But really, there was nothing that could compare to pouring your heart out to a person, and then finding out they didn’t feel the same.

“I don’t believe him,” Raven said. “Clarke, that guy loves you.”
“Not enough,” she squeaked out dejectedly. It was nice that Raven was still trying to hold onto some semblance of optimism and hope, but Clarke didn’t have any of that anymore.

“Oh my god,” Raven groaned, running one hand through her hair. “I can’t even . . .”

Clarke knew it was going to take some time for it to sink in for Raven. Hell, everyone was going to be blindsided by this. And she didn’t even want to think about what this meant for all of the new friendships she’d made this year. Would she drift apart from everyone she’d grown to love? It wasn’t like she could just go hang out over there on Saturday now. Most likely, the people who had been her friends first would stay her friends, and the people who’d known Bellamy for years would stick with him. Their breakup—or whatever it was called—would fracture their entire group. So yeah. There was also that to look forward to.

“I have to pee,” Clarke mumbled, tossing the covers aside. She hadn’t gotten out of bed since she’d fallen into it, and a glance at her clock told her it was 8:00 now. Her bladder was screaming at her, so as much as she would have liked to huddle down under the covers forever, she really couldn’t.

“Alright,” Raven said, moving aside. “I’ll fix you something to eat, okay?”

“Kay,” Clarke muttered. But she wasn’t hungry.

On her way to the bathroom, she spotted Bellamy’s shirt on her bedroom floor. And it actually hurt to look at it.

Once she’d relieved her bladder and brushed her teeth, Clarke dragged herself out into the kitchen, where Raven was making good on her promise of a breakfast. Except Clarke hadn’t bothered to go get groceries and replenish the food in her kitchen for a long time, so breakfast was going to be a bowl of questionably old Lucky Charms cereal. She’d shove down a couple spoonfuls, just to avoid another fainting spell as a result of not eating. But that was it.

“I wish I could do more,” Raven admitted, placing the bowl in front of Clarke.

Clarke slumped over the counter, stirring the cereal, trying to get all the dry pieces milky. “This is enough,” she said, in full-on sulk mode.

Raven sighed heavily, facing away from Clarke. She gripped the counter of the sink tightly, sniffling a bit, and Clarke realized how sad this whole thing was making her. Maybe it was best friend sympathy, or maybe the very sad realization that their happy family was no longer so happy was sinking in for her, too.

“Oh, okay,” Raven said, spinning around suddenly. She suddenly looked very determined and Raven-like again. “What’re we gonna do today? You and me, babe. We got hours before your graduation.”

Clarke snorted, not even able to fathom getting up on stage in a stupid cap and gown right now. “I’m not going,” she said.

“You’re not going to your own graduation?”

“No.”

Raven made a face. “Why?”

Clarke gave her a look. “Because I’m a mess,” she stated simply.
“Yeah, but . . . we have to go,” Raven insisted. “You came to my graduation last year.”

“Yeah, but you got to be recognized with all the high-achieving students,” Clarke pointed out. In college, unlike high school, she’d been a pretty darn average achiever, so there would be no special moment of recognition for her. “I’m literally gonna sit there for an hour, then get up and walk across the stage for a couple seconds just to get a piece of paper saying I graduated, which I already know. It’s pointless.”

“It’s not pointless,” Raven argued. “You should go.”

Clarke shook her head stubbornly, just not even able to find it in herself to care about that stupid ceremony right now. Her parents wouldn’t be there. Now Bellamy wouldn’t be there, either.

“Just think about it,” Raven urged. “You’ll regret it if you don’t go.”

Clarke continued stirring her cereal, zoning out, fixating on that word: regret. Right now, there was only one thing she regretted, and that was not keeping her damn mouth shut.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Two hours. That was how much sleep Bellamy had to function on. Two measly hours of sleep. Sleep that hadn’t felt all that restful, either, but waking up had been a letdown nonetheless.

He’d holed himself up in his bedroom all night, hadn’t gone downstairs once. Murphy, to his credit, had ventured upstairs and knocked on his door around 10:00, asking him if he was doing okay. He’d mustered up an unconvincing, “I’m fine,” in response and then ignored his roommate’s offer to talk about it. It. Murphy didn’t elaborate on what it was, but clearly Clarke wasn’t there, and clearly that meant something. Hell, Miller had probably told him what he knew, too.

So all night, Bellamy had paced around his room, stressed as fuck, rehashing in his mind everything he and Clarke had said to each other.

She was in love with him.

She thought he was the most amazing person she’d ever met, said he’d changed her whole life.

She didn’t want anyone besides him.

That was all plenty to take in on its own, but when he thought about the way he’d reacted, his whole head started to spin.

He’d gotten angry at her for breaking their promise, but only after telling her he wasn’t in love with her.

He’d admitted he couldn’t give her everything.

And even know, he still knew she’d find somebody better than him someday.

The two hours of sleep happened solely as a product of exhaustion. He finally lay down on his bed at 5:00 a.m., and even though it felt way too big and way too empty without her lying next to him, he’d nodded off. But his body was used to waking up early, so a little after 7:00, he rolled out of bed, got in the shower, and started getting ready for the day.

He moved slower than normal, only because . . . he wasn’t really enthused about anything the day had in store for him. He stood under the water for a long time, lost in thought, and when he finally
did get out of the shower, he neglected to shave. Because he didn’t want to stand in that bathroom at that sink and dwell on the fact that it was covered with Clarke’s stuff: her toothbrush, her perfume, her ponytail holders, her makeup. The whole counter was a mess because it was littered with all her stuff. So he got out of there as quickly as he could. It didn’t really matter, though. When he searched through his dresser for something to wear, he saw all sorts of reminders of her there, too. Shirts and shorts and jeans and bras and shit.

Damn. She was all over that room, yet nowhere to be seen.

After that, he just sat on his bed, lost in many of the same thoughts that had plagued his mind last night. On a normal day, he would have been more eager to get up and go do something, but . . . not today.

It was 9:00 by the time he finally dragged his ass out of the bedroom and decided to go face the world, but he only made it to the top of the stairs before stopping. Staying out of sight, he listened as Murphy and Emori talked to each other downstairs. He could tell they were talking about him.

“I mean, how fucked up do you have to be feelin’ to punch a hole through a wall?” Murphy was saying.

“Seriously,” Emori agreed.

_Pretty fucked up_, Bellamy thought, heading downstairs to confront the damage he’d done last night. His hand still hurt because of it, but at least nothing seemed broken.

“Oh, hey, man,” Murphy said, taking a step back from the wall.

“Hey.” Bellamy stopped and took a look at the hole, figuring he could go out and buy some crap to repair to today. It wasn’t like he had anything better to do.

His friends both stared at him unsurely, as if they were waiting for him to say something more. So he quickly assured them, “I’ll fix it.” Hell, maybe a little project like this would be good for him. Right now, something he could actually fix was probably just what he needed.

“What’s Clarke?” Emori asked suddenly, sternly as if she wouldn’t let him slide by without answering.

Bellamy tried not to react to the sound of her name, but hearing it automatically felt like a punch in the gut. “She’s at home,” he mumbled in response, barely able to look at her.

But Emori glared right at him, her voice accusatory when she bit out, “This _is_ her home.”

He frowned sadly, not able to disagree with that, but unable to say anything else about it, either. And Emori seemed to sense that she wasn’t going to get much more out of him, because she turned and stomped into the kitchen to make herself some breakfast.

Murphy, however, stayed with Bellamy, tried to strike up a conversation. “Yeah,” he said, “Miller kinda told us--”

“I don’t wanna talk about it,” Bellamy cut in sharply. As immense as his feelings were, he didn’t talk about them easily, especially not when he felt like crap like he did right now. It’d taken a therapist to get him talking about Roma after she’d died, and last he’d checked, Miller and Murphy didn’t have that job title. And Clarke was the only person who had ever _really_ gotten him talking about Gina, so . . .
Clarke. He winced inwardly just thinking about her.

“Alright, fine,” Murphy said, holding his hands up as if to deflect Bellamy’s anger when he backed away. “I just thought . . .” He shook his head disappointedly, muttering, “Never mind,” as he went to join his girlfriend in the kitchen.

Sorry, guys, Bellamy thought, feeling awful. He knew his friends were all just going to want to listen and help. He didn’t mean to get upset with them for that. But there was nothing they could do to help. He’d screwed things up so bad.

He stood at the bottom of the stairs, neither hungry nor energetic, and wondered how he was even supposed to go about his day. Glancing into the kitchen, he couldn’t help but notice that Emori was pouring herself a bowl of cereal. Lucky Charms. Pure sugar. That cereal was Clarke’s.

Dammit, he thought, turning back towards the hole in the wall. This was going to be one long, hard day.

All of a sudden, there was a loud, pounding knock on the front door. In the kitchen, Murphy and Emori practically froze, so that left Bellamy to answer it. If it was Clarke, he wasn’t sure what he’d do, what he’d say. Which was dumb, because he’d had all night to think about it.

When he opened the door, it was Raven standing on the other side, looking like she wanted to strangle him.

“You, me, backyard, now,” she growled tersely, walking right past him. She marched through the house without so much as a hello to either Murphy or Emori and stormed out back. When he didn’t follow her right away, she yelled, “Today, Bellagio!”

Oh, this isn’t gonna be good, Bellamy anticipated as he lumbered outside after her. Raven Reyes was an intense person under normal circumstances, but right now, she was obviously fuming. All of that rage was going to come out and be directed at him.

Oh, well. He probably deserved it. He’d hurt the girl’s best friend pretty bad.

Raven paced around the back yard, arms crossed over her chest, face locked into an angry expression. “I already heard Clarke’s version of the story,” she started in. “I’m interested in hearing your side, too, if you even have one.”

He shrugged dejectedly, not naïve enough to think that he could tell her anything that would make her feel sorry for him. Raven would support and defend Clarke no matter what right now, which was understandable.

“That’s it?” she spat. “You won’t even say anything?”

He wasn’t gonna stand there and rehash the whole argument over again, no. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t gonna say anything. “How is she?” he asked, desperate to know, to have some kind of update.

“How do you think?” Raven shot back. “She’s a wreck, Bellamy. Because of you.”

He looked down at the ground, feeling so guilty. God, he’d never meant to hurt Clarke like this. He cared about her so much, and now it probably seemed like he didn’t care at all.

“I mean, the girl’s in love with you,” Raven stated bluntly. “She has been for a while now. How did you not know that?”
“I didn’t . . .” He searched his brain for an answer and couldn’t come up with one. “I just didn’t know.”

“That’s crap,” Raven snarled. “You’re not an idiot. In fact, according to Clarke, you’re the smartest person she’s ever met. Well, you and her dad, of course.”

He flinched because . . . she’d compared him to her father? He didn’t even feel like he deserved that.

“So you had to know, Bellamy.”

He shook his head, firmly denying that. “No, I knew we’d gotten close, but I didn’t know . . . I didn’t know it was that close.”

“Really? Because she was basically living over here and you guys were fucking like bunnies every chance you could get.”

“Yeah, but we always said--”

“It doesn’t matter what you said,” Raven interrupted vehemently. “It matters what you did, and the fact of the matter is, even though you guys said you were just gonna be friends, you became more than that. A lot more. She fell in love with you, and her heart is breaking right now because you . . . it’s like you just used her, Bellamy!”

“No, I didn’t,” he argued.

But Raven wouldn’t let up. “Do you think your mom and your sister are gonna be proud when they find out you just used Clarke as your sex toy?”

“Hey, I didn’t use her!” he yelled, set off when she brought up his family.

“I love Clarke. She’s my best friend.”

“Well, I hate to break it to you, but you’re not her best friend anymore,” Raven informed him. “That kinda happens when you tell her you’re not in love with her.”

He threw his arms up in the air, feeling like she was going to make him out to be the bad guy here no matter what he said to try to explain himself.

“Well, what was I supposed to do, huh? Lie to her?”

Raven narrowed her eyes and said in disbelief, “Do you really think telling her you’re in love with her would’ve been a lie?”

He swallowed hard, really wishing people could just understand that there were certain things he wasn’t capable of anymore. Life had damaged him beyond repair. He could fix toilets and sinks and that damn hole in the wall, but he couldn’t fix himself.

“I don’t really think you used her, Bellamy,” Raven admitted, her tone a less venomous one now. “Maybe it was all about sex at first, but somewhere along the way, it changed. And you ended up treating her really well.”

He sighed, feeling like that was true . . . at least until yesterday. Until he hadn’t.

“I think you got caught up in it, just like she did,” Raven went on. “I mean, I’ve seen the way you look at her, the way you act around her. If that’s not love, then I don’t know what is.”

His mind started to flood itself with the smallest memories, like touching Clarke’s hair while she slept with her head in his lap. Kissing her cheek before he left for work every morning. Holding her hand
while he drove her home from the hospital the other night. The little things like that really had added up. And he should’ve been more aware of it, more careful. Now people were going to think he’d intentionally led her on, and that wasn’t the case at all.

“Look, Bellamy,” Raven said, her whole voice softer and more sympathetic now, “I know you’ve been through things . . .”

“You know, but you don’t understand,” Bellamy told her. There was a difference. “You know who should understand?”

Raven took a moment, then guessed the obvious. “Clarke?”

“Yeah, because I opened up to her more than I ever opened up to anybody.”

Raven made a face. “So even though she’s madly, hopelessly, deliriously in love with you, she should just understand that you’re not in love with her, too?”

Well, when she put it like that, it sounded pretty fucking harsh.

Raven snorted indignantly. “You know what I think, Bellamy? I think you’re full of crap.”

Great. Her and everyone else, probably.

“It’s not that you can’t love again,” Raven argued, her eyes boring straight into his. “It’s that you’re afraid to.”

Bellamy gulped looking away, wishing there was no truth in that. Because Clarke said he was brave, but inside, he knew he was a coward. Hell yeah, he was afraid to love again. But he couldn’t do anything about that. There were certain fears people couldn’t overcome, so why even try?

Raven spun on her hell and walked off, disappearing around the side of the house. He trudged back inside once he heard her car starting up and driving off, and when he opened the back door, Murphy and Emori both scampered away from it. Clearly they’d been eavesdropping. Neither one of them said anything or even looked at him. And that was fine. But after a few seconds, as he pulled the door shut, Emori lifted her head and sadly asked, “You and Clarke broke up?”

He could have corrected her, could have reminded her that they’d never officially been together. But clearly none of his friends understood or believed that, and honestly, at this point, he wasn’t sure he understood it himself. So he didn’t bother to correct her and instead just stared back at her with the same sadness.

In the three years he’d known Emori, he’d never seen her cry or get emotional over anything. But there were definitely tears in her eyes when she fled to the bedroom. Maybe she felt bad for Clarke, maybe even for him. Murphy went after her right away, leaving Bellamy alone in the kitchen. By himself. No one to talk to, not that he was much of a conversationalist right now anyway.

He’d never felt more alone in his entire life.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

In a cruel twist of fate, Clarke had set all her paintings of Bellamy in her living room after bringing them home on Friday. So now she couldn’t even sit on her couch and watch TV or plop down in her chair and draw, because the paintings were taking up that space. She spent an hour that morning contemplating whether or not she just wanted to take them all down to the dumpster and get rid of them, but ultimately, she decided against it. Just because . . . she couldn’t.
Yesterday’s considerable rainstorm had given way to a bright, sunny day, one she had no interest in being part of, so instead of sitting outside on her balcony, she sulked back into her bedroom, prepared to lie down and mope and be miserable for the entire afternoon. But when Raven had been there earlier, she’d pulled out her graduation robe and hat and laid them on her bed. A not so subtle hint.

Clarke sat down on the side of the bed and picked up the ugly square hat, absentmindedly playing with the gold tassel. It wasn’t that she wanted to skip her graduation, even though it wasn’t going to be the most exciting event of her the year. It was just that . . . without Bellamy there, it would feel different.

Niylah showed up while she was in the middle of debating whether or not to pull herself together and try to get ready in time. She didn’t say anything when she saw Clarke sitting sullenly on the bed, just sat down beside her and hugged her. One by one, it seemed people were finding out about her and Bellamy. She’d probably hear from Harper and Emori and Maya next. Bellamy would want Octavia to be in the dark about it as long as possible so that she could enjoy her time as a newlywed.

“You okay?” Niylah finally asked.

Clarke nodded sadly, but really . . . she wasn’t okay. And that had to be obvious.

Good friend that she was, Niylah convinced Clarke to get dressed for graduation. She picked out a comfortable dress for her and matched it with some equally comfortable shoes. Then she sat Clarke down at her vanity and curled her hair for her. She talked about a lot of random things while she did that, probably trying to get Clarke’s mind off Bellamy: the classes she was dreading taking next fall, her crazy idea to dye her hair red, and a song she hated but couldn’t get out of her head. She slipped up, though, and started talking about a problem her car was having. Clarke told her Bellamy could probably fix it, just because . . . well, he probably could. But both she and Niylah got really quiet after that.

The only reason Clarke ended up wearing makeup was because Niylah did it for her. When Raven showed up, she seemed delighted to see Clarke looking so . . . presentable. She didn’t say it, of course, but Clarke knew this look was a far cry from how disastrous she’d looked when she’d woken up this morning.

It was all just an illusion, though. On the inside, she was still very much a wreck.

“I’m so glad you decided to go,” Raven said, giving Clarke’s shoulders a supportive squeeze. “It’s your graduation day, Clarke. It’s a big deal.”

Clarke nodded, but . . . it felt like a big deal for all the wrong reasons. It felt like a big deal because Bellamy wasn’t going to be there.

They barely got to the convention center where the ceremony was being held in time, but Clarke found her place in line for the processional and strode out with her fellow graduates, all of whom looked happier and more excited to be there than she was. They were all seated alphabetically, so on either side of her were two people she didn’t even know, wearing the same black robe and square cap that she was. They actually seemed to be paying attention to the commencement speaker, though, while Clarke was tuning him out.

Her eyes flitted upward to the stands, where Raven and Niylah were likewise not listening to the speaker. They were talking to each other, and they kept motioning down to Clarke, which made her suspect they were talking about her.
Beside them was a noticeable empty seat. It was hard not to look at it and imagine what it would have been like if Bellamy was there. When her mom found out he hadn’t come, she’d feel even worse for not attending, so . . .

*My mom,* she thought. *My stepdad.* She was going to have to tell them something, maybe not today or tomorrow, but at some point. They’d talked about taking her and Bellamy out to eat when they got back from Aruba. But now that wouldn’t happen, so . . .

She blinked back fresh tears, dreading that conversation. They both liked him so much. And her mom seemed to be of the opinion that they were going to last forever.

When it finally came time for the diplomas, Clarke waited obediently until her name was called, then walked up on stage and got hers. She didn’t even bother looking at it. And when she walked down off the stage, there was this photographer taking pictures of all the graduates. She didn’t smile or strike a pose or anything. She didn’t even pause or slow down. She walked right by, barely giving him time to snap the picture.

Once everyone had their diplomas, the ceremony came to an end, and they all did the traditional thing where they moved the tassel from the right side to the left side of their caps. But Clarke didn’t bother. A few people threw their hats in the air, but she just took hers off before filing out of their with all the other new graduates.

She’d just graduated. Graduated *college.* And it didn’t even feel significant.

Afterwards, she found Niylah and Raven, and they hugged and congratulated her. Bless their hearts, they were trying to keep her spirits up by being overtly cheerful. They talked about going out to eat and asked Clarke where she wanted to go, but she told them they could choose. Despite their insistence that it was her big day and that she should be the one to choose, she let them decide.

As they left the convention center, she saw a guy with tan skin and dark curly hair walking out into the parking lot. Her heart leapt, thinking it might be Bellamy. But when he got into a car instead of a truck and she saw his distinctly non-freckled face, she realized it had just been wishful thinking. Bellamy wasn’t there. Why would he be? He wasn’t her boyfriend. And now, depressing as it was, he wasn’t even her friend. He was just . . . he was just Bellamy. And she wasn’t his princess anymore.

Clarke barely said two words at dinner, which meant it was an awkward dinner. But her friends powered through it on her behalf, and then Raven took her home. Almost as if she thought Clarke was too fragile to leave alone, Raven walked her inside, and then proceeded to do everything for her. She unlocked the door, held it open, turned on the lights.

Walking inside and seeing all those paintings in her living room . . . it just hit Clarke. Hard. And before Raven had even shut the door, she started to cry.

“Oh, Clarke, it’s okay,” Raven said sympathetically, rubbing her back. “Just let it all out. You don’t have to hold it in.”

She didn’t want to be so pathetic, but . . . honestly, she felt like she could cry about this forever. “Did you go see him today?” she asked her friend, suspecting that she had.

“Yeah,” Raven admitted, shaking her head. “I’m so pissed at him for doing this to you.”

Clarke’s whole body shook as she cried and sniffled, and she wiped her nose with the back of her hand. “Was he . . .” She didn’t even know how to ask what she really wanted to know. Was he as
devastated as she was? Was he a sobbing mess just like this?

“He’s . . . he doesn’t even know what he is, Clarke,” Raven said. “But he’s sad. And he asked about you.”

“He did?” Well, at least he still cared a little bit. “What’d he say?”

“He just asked how you were doing.”

She grunted, wiping off her cheeks. “Not good.” Emotionally, she was obviously wrecked, but it’d gotten to the point where she felt physically awful, too. Her head was throbbing, because all this crying had given her a headache. And her stomach was starting to flip flop. “I think I’m gonna be sick,” she predicted.

“Yeah, I’m pretty disgusted by him right now, too,” Raven said.

“No, like sick.” Her mom had told her about this, how anxiety and depression and even something so non-medical as heartbreak could manifest itself physically. She felt like it was about to.

Clutching her stomach, she ran for the bathroom, barely making it inside before she knelt down in front of the toilet and threw up. It was quick and gross and then it was over, but even though she immediately felt better physically . . . emotionally, she still felt completely torn up.

She flushed the toilet, then sat back against the bathtub, crying her eyes out. The last time she’d cried like this . . . she couldn’t even remember the last time. Probably when her dad had died.

For five minutes, she sat in that bathroom and cried, and Raven just let her. She didn’t come in and try to console her. She just gave her the time and space to let it all out. And eventually, Clarke was able to stop crying. She still felt like crap, but the tears had run their course. For tonight, at least.

After splashing some water on her face to remove the makeup that her tears hadn’t been able to, she treaded morosely back out into the living room. Raven was hurriedly stashing the last of Clarke’s Bellamy paintings in the back of her coat closet, which seemed like a good place for them. When she saw Clarke standing there, she said, “Come here,” and headed over to the couch, motioning for Clarke to come sit down beside her.

She plopped down next to her friend and rested her head on her shoulder. Raven turned on the TV and channel surfed for a while before finding the perfect movie: *Thelma and Louise.*

Clarke sat there in a daze, halfway watching the movie she could quote entire sections of, recalling how, not even a year ago, she and Raven had watched this very same film after she’d broken up with Wick. Raven and Wick had been together for years, and she’d managed to bounce back from that. It may not have been the perfect relationship, but they both had been in love with each other. And now they never saw each other, didn’t even speak. They’d gone from being a constant part of each other’s lives to having no relationship whatsoever.

And Raven was fine.

“I wish I was strong like you,” Clarke said wistfully.

“I’m not that strong,” Raven denied.

“Yes, you are.” Raven may have cried about Wick, but she hadn’t made herself sick over it, hadn’t laid in bed for hours in a near-incapacitated state moping about it. Raven had gone out and had fun and had continued to enjoy her life, and then she’d even met someone new. Clarke didn’t feel like
she could do any of those things. Especially not the last one.

“You’re strong, too,” Raven assured her, stroking her hair.

Maybe she could be, once in a while. But not right now. Right now, she felt weak. And it wouldn’t surprise her if she felt that way for a long time.

During one of the movie’s boring scenes, she looked down at her wrist, at the gold bracelet that still rested there. It may have been her father’s handwriting, but it wasn’t just a reminder of him anymore. Now it was a reminder of two people she’d lost.
Chapter 49

The first day of summer classes was supposed to have been a good day for Bellamy. And two days ago, it would have been. But getting up on Monday and driving to campus ended up feeling more like a chore than anything else. It wasn’t that he wasn’t looking forward to the class. He was. He just couldn’t concentrate on it.

Twentieth Century Europe ended up being held in the same auditorium he’d ghosted a few times prior. Since this was the summer session, though, there weren’t nearly as many people. So he took a seat in the second row, a little off to the side, and took the textbook out of his brand new backpack. He’d stuck a Post-It note in the middle of the third chapter last week, since that was where he’d left off with the reading. Figuring he could skim a few more pages before the professor showed up, he opened to that page. And that was a mistake.

Clarke had drawn on this particular sticky note. He remembered the night she’d done it, because she’d been her usual thirsty self, and she’d been lying on her stomach in bed, waiting for him to get done with his reading so they could have some fun. She’d doodled while he’d read, and this was the end result: two cartoon versions of them, posed as if for a smiling selfie. And underneath it, in fancy handwriting, she’d scrawled Bellamy and Clarke.

It was bittersweet to see what she’d drawn and how happy even the cartoon versions of themselves looked. But he couldn’t help but smile at it.

“That’s pretty good,” the guy beside him remarked, motioning to the drawing.

Bellamy just gave him a dumb stare, then looked down at the drawing again without responding. Yeah, it was good. Clarke was a talented artist. A talented artist who’d turned down a job opportunity in Philadelphia for him.

Great. As if he didn’t have enough to feel guilty about.

The professor was a few minutes late, but then again, so were plenty of the students. They kept filing in even about ten minutes after he had, and unlike that jackass who’d taught Clarke, he didn’t call anybody out or berate anyone. This professor was younger, more laid back, and since Bellamy had already sat in on a couple of his classes during the spring semester, he knew they’d get along fine.

It’d be an easy class. And it’d probably be good for him. He was going to need distractions like school and work to keep from dwelling on . . . other things.

Unfortunately, all he could do was dwell on those other things while the professor talked through the syllabus and explained how the course would be condensed for the summer section. Bellamy found himself spacing, and he wasn’t sure whether it was just because he was out of practice as a student or because he couldn’t stop thinking about how happy Clarke would have been for him today. If things were still normal, he would have gone home after this, probably would’ve found her still sleeping, and he would’ve woken her up so he could tell her how great it felt to finally be in college, to finally feel like he belonged on that campus and wasn’t just a visitor. And then he would have thanked her, because if it hadn’t been for her, he highly doubted he would have ended up here.

But now, it was just a day, one that he couldn’t very well celebrate on his own the way he would have celebrated it with her.
He felt lonely as fuck despite being surrounded by all these other students. They looked bored, but he felt miserable.

After class, he had to go to the administration building and get his photo taken for his student ID. It turned out worse than his worst driver’s license picture ever had, but whatever. They gave him an electronic card with his student ID and told him all about how that card was his ticket to everything around there. It was a debit card, credit card, and electronic key card all rolled into one. He only halfway listened.

Since he had a couple hours to spare before he needed to head home and start his work day, he ventured over to the library, flashed his brand new ID, and was able to go in without problem. It felt weird being there without Clarke, though. Really weird.

He sat down at a table, amazed at how quiet that place was during the summer, and took out the syllabus. Looking ahead, he saw that there was a paper due next week, so he figured he’d might as well start on it now. Being busy and being productive . . . it would help. When he had downtime, that was when he’d feel most alone.

Taking his textbook and a notebook out of his backpack, he wondered if he should have brought his computer, or if there were some around there that he could use. His handwriting sucked, so he wasn’t much of a rough draft person. In high school, he’d always typed papers, edited them once, and submitted them. Easy.

As he was looking around for the computers, he spotted a girl standing in between two shelves, her face buried in a book. She had long blonde hair, like Clarke, but unlike hers, it was completely straight. On the other side of the shelf stood a guy in a baseball t-shirt, and Bellamy wasn’t sure they knew each other until he jumped around the shelf and scared her. She laughed, and then he wound his arms around her waist, and got her to put the book down as he kissed her.

Watching them made Bellamy remember how he and Clarke had kissed each other right there in those very same stacks . . . and how they’d done a little more than kissing. He wasn’t shocked that the memory of it hit him. Lately, everything was reminding him of her. In fact, he’d probably never be able to set foot in that library without remembering.

It really didn’t help that that happy couple was just so damn happy, and that they basically wouldn’t stop making out with each other. It made that feeling of loneliness inside his chest multiply, to the point where he couldn’t even pretend like he was gonna get any part of this paper written. He shut his book and shoved it back in his bag. But not before taking the Post-It bookmark out and crumpling it up in his hand. He couldn’t very well stare at that every time he opened his book, not when it basically rendered him useless.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke had developed a fondness for daytime talk shows, mostly because she’d watched so many with Murphy. That guy made The View a serious priority, and on the mornings that she could, she’d sat down in the living room with him and watched the entire hour of it. She preferred The Real, though, which came on afterwards, because the hosts were funnier and spent less time talking about politics.

God. She even missed Murphy. The realization hit her just as The View was ending.

I’ve got way too much time on my hands, she thought as she dug into a box of crackers. They tasted stale, so who knew how long they’d been up in her kitchen cabinet? She kept eating them, though, occasionally squirting some canned cheese onto them to give them more flavor.
She was in full on veg mode, prepared for an afternoon of soap operas and game shows, when someone knocked on her door.

*Bellamy?* she wondered. *She hoped.*

Tossing her blanket aside, she shot to her feet, brushed the crumbs off the couch cushions, and set her snacks down on the end table. She knew she looked like crap, on account of feeling like crap these past couple days, and nothing was going to change that; but the least she could do was smooth out her wrinkled clothes and tuck in the loose strands of her ponytail as she approached the door.

Not that it would make a difference. It wasn’t like Bellamy was going to see her standing there and all of a sudden decide that he loved her, too.

Another knock. Another chance to get her hopes up.

When she peered out the peephole, her hopes deflated when she saw that it definitely wasn’t Bellamy. It looked like two people, but the only one she could make out clearly was Emori.

Oh, well. She’d known it was a long-shot. Every time she and Bellamy fought, they went a week without talking afterwards. But this had been a bigger fight, so . . . it would be longer.

Opening the door, she revealed two of her friends on the other side: Emori *and* Harper. They both looked relieved to see her. And immediately sympathetic.

“Hey,” Clarke said, attempting to smile.

Emori came inside and enveloped Clarke in a hug right away. Harper followed and put her arms around both of them. It felt good seeing them again, knowing they cared and that she had their support. Raven and Niylah had been friends of hers for years now, but the friendships she’d made this year were important, too.

“Sorry we didn’t come sooner,” Emori apologized, finally letting go of Clarke. “We wanted to give you some space.”

“Yeah, and Maya wanted to come with us today,” Harper added, “but she had to work. She might stop by later.”

Clarke nodded, appreciative of their concern. “Well, thanks for . . . checking up on me.”

“Of course,” Emori said. “We kept waiting for you to return our texts, but you never did, so . . .”

“Yeah, sorry,” Clarke mumbled. “I haven’t really been in a texting mood.”


“Yeah,” Emori agreed. “We get it.”

Clarke breathed a sigh of relief, because . . . well, that was a small miracle, wasn’t it? These girls weren’t upset at her for being standoffish.

“So did you get all your stuff moved in?” she asked Emori, eager to talk about something good and something other than herself.

“Yeah,” Emori said, and it was clear that she was downplaying her excitement about it. “It’s not the same without you there, though.”
And just like that, the conversation had come back around to Clarke again. “Well . . .” She flapped her arms against her sides, looking around at her apartment, which, by all conventional definitions, was very nice. “This is my home.” Maybe if she put up some Christmas lights in her bedroom, she could make it cozier. And she could paint one of the walls in her living room a warm brown. What was that called, an accent wall or something? Yeah, she could have one of those.

“Just so you know, Bellamy’s not doin’ so well right now,” Emori informed her.

She wasn’t about to take any delight in that. In fact, it was more of a concern than a comfort. “What do you mean?” she asked. “He still went to his class today, right?”

“Oh, yeah, he went,” Emori replied. “And he’ll go to work this afternoon. You know . . . going through the motions.”

Just like me, Clarke thought sullenly. Except her motions weren’t work and school right now. More like junk food and TV.

“But he’ll probably just come home and go hide out in his room all night.” Emori sighed heavily, rolling her eyes. “He won’t talk to anyone. Not me, not Murphy, not even Miller.”

That’s because I’m usually the person he talks to, Clarke thought. God, it wasn’t good for Bellamy to be bottling up his feelings, but at least he had one more person in his life who he could definitely confide in. “What about Octavia?” she asked.

Emori bit her bottom lip, and Harper sort of cringed as she answered, “Octavia doesn’t know yet. She and Lincoln are technically on their honeymoon, even though she’s too pregnant to travel anywhere. So no one’s told her.”

“And I’m sure Bellamy doesn’t want her to know,” Emori said. “She’s gonna be pissed at him.”

“Why?” Clarke asked.

Emori huffed. “Because we’re all pissed at him for screwing things up with you.”

“Yeah,” Harper agreed, “especially when it seems so obvious that you’re meant to be together.”

“Obvious, huh?” Clarke choked out a sad laugh. “I guess not.”

“It’s just . . . mind-boggling,” Harper said, shaking her head as if to shake out some of the confusion. “I think we all assumed you guys would figure it out eventually, but we just thought . . .” She and Emori exchanged a sad glance. “We thought if one of you figured it out first, the other one would . . .” She trailed off, pouting.

“Feel the same?” Clarke filled in. “Yeah, that’s what I was hoping for.”

“I think he does, though,” Emori said. “I mean, he feels something. He punched a freakin’ hole in the wall.”

“He did?” The more Clarke was hearing, the more worried she was becoming. Bellamy could be an impulsive guy. She didn’t want him going out and picking a fight with somebody or doing something to get himself hurt, all because he had these feelings bottling up.

“Clarke, the guy is not okay right now,” Emori said. “He misses you. Maybe if you just talk to him . . .”
“No, I can’t do that,” Clarke cut her off, quickly squashing that idea. Unless he made the first move, a conversation wasn’t likely to happen. She was too afraid of getting her heart broken all over again to risk talking to him.

“Well, he really does miss you,” Emori reiterated. “We all do.”

“Yeah, but we’re here for you, okay?” Harper reassured her. “We don’t want you to think we’re just gonna stop being friends with you because you and Bellamy aren’t . . . together anymore. We’re your friends no matter what.”

“No matter what,” Emori emphasized. “Got it?”

Clarke smiled a little, a genuine smile this time. “Got it,” she said. “Thanks.” If nothing else, these people still cared about her. Even if Bellamy didn’t care enough.

“Just let us know what we can do to help and we’ll do it,” Harper offered. And it was an offer Clarke knew she could immediately take her up on.

“Actually,” she said, “I do need a favor.”

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Feeling exhausted, Bellamy trudged through the front door. He couldn’t stifle his yawn, and when his backpack slipped off his shoulders and landed on the floor with a thud, he just let it sit there. He felt dead on his feet, because all afternoon long, he’d been at Diana’s, working on cleaning out her swimming pool. Because she was one of his only customers who had enough money in her bank account to own a pool. And every single summer, after letting it get filthy for months on end, she hired him to clean it out.

Whatever. It was a job. It was money. And it was part of his routine.

Needing to eat, he started into the kitchen, but he’d only taken a few steps when he heard movement upstairs. “Clarke?” he immediately assumed, and he dashed up the stairs.

Maybe she was waiting up there for him, wanting to talk. He wasn’t sure what he would say to her, but . . . at the very least, he could apologize. For making her cry. For making her feel horrible. For letting things get so deep between them. For everything.

When he opened the door to his bedroom, it was a letdown. Because it wasn’t Clarke he found in there. It was Emori, and she was pulling all of Clarke’s clothes out of the closet, packing up a suitcase.

“What’re you doin’?” Bellamy asked her, even though it was obvious.

Emori rolled her eyes as though his mere presence annoyed her right now. “Clarke asked us to pack up all her things,” she explained. “We’re doing her a favor.”

“We?” he echoed.

Out of the bathroom came Harper, her arms loaded down with lotions and hair products and perfumes. “Congratulations,” she muttered joylessly, “you’re getting your bathroom back.” She dumped all of those items into a box that already looked pretty full.

“So you guys saw Clarke today?” he asked.
“Yeah,” Emori replied without elaborating. She tried to press Clarke’s clothes down as far as they would go and make more room in the suitcase, but it was pretty clear that not everything would fit. “God, she has so much stuff here,” Emori groaned.


They both stopped packing, shooting him an accusatory glare for a moment. He averted his eyes guiltily. Neither one of them was saying that they blamed him for all of this, but it was clear that they did.

“I can pack up her stuff,” he offered. Clarke had lingerie and shit stashed away in those drawers, stuff she’d worn just for him. Stuff that was private.

“She asked us to do it,” Emori said, pulling open his nightstand drawer as Harper retreated to the bathroom. “ What about in here?” she asked. “Does she have anything in here?”

“Uh . . .” Bellamy didn’t even get a chance to answer as Emori started rifling through the drawer.

“Gold watch,” she said, holding up that item.

“Mine.” It was a family heirloom, one he might have to sell now to help pay for college.

“iPod?” Emori asked.

“Hers.”

She tossed that onto the bed, then pulled out his silver tin box full of memorabilia. “Hers?” she guessed.

“No, mine.” He watched intently as she put it back in the drawer where it belonged.

“Oh, goodness,” Emori said dramatically. “Who owns the anal lube?”

“Uh . . .” He scratched his eyebrow, only slightly embarrassed that she’d discovered that. “Me, technically.”

Emori threw her hands up in the air and said, “You know what? You can sort through that drawer.” She brushed past him on her way to his dresser and groaned when she pulled open the drawer where Clarke had stashed all her jeans and shorts and sweatpants. “Good God,” she groaned, raking her hand through her hair, stressed. “We’re gonna need a bigger suitcase.”

Harper poked her head out of the bathroom and said, “We’ll just make two trips.”

“Good idea.”

“I should be doing this,” Bellamy said more to himself than the two girls. Hell, he was the guy who’d practically let Clarke move in. So now he should have been the one to . . . move her out.

“You’ve already done more than enough,” Emori snapped.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means . . .” She whirled around, narrowing her eyes at him. “God, what’s wrong with you, Bellamy?”

“What’s wrong?” he roared. “You wanna know what’s wrong with me?”
“Yes.”

“Guys!” Harper hissed, scurrying out of the bathroom to try to interject. “Can we not? This is already un-fun enough without fighting.”

Bellamy ignored her plea to stop and bellowed, “What’s wrong with me is that I lost two girls I loved. So why the hell is everyone so surprised that I don’t wanna fall in love again?”

“And why can’t you just accept the fact that you did?” Emori shot back. “God, Bellamy.” She turned her back to him and continued pulling Clarke’s pants and shorts out of the drawer, dropping them all onto the floor.

“This whole thing kind of just sucks, you know?” Harper said, taking a less hostile approach than Emori had. “For you. For Clarke. For all of us.”

He swallowed the lump in his throat, understanding that much.

“Not to sound selfish or anything, but this affects everyone,” Harper pointed out. “We love Clarke, too. She’s our friend. She’s part of our group. But now that you two aren’t . . .” She trailed off, wrinkling her forehead in confusion. “It’s just . . . what’re we supposed to do now? Are you guys gonna try to stay friends or . . . what?”

“I don’t know,” he admitted, rubbing his forehead, trying to ease the impending headache. “I don’t . . .” He didn’t see how that would be possible. “I don’t think so.”

“So then what?” Emori snarled, spinning around again. “We just alternate? Friday nights at her place, Saturday nights here? We don’t talk about you around her, we don’t talk about her around you? I mean . . . this isn’t how it was supposed to . . .” She trailed off frustratedly, and Bellamy thought he even saw tears in her eyes. Rare thing. Emori had cried a lot when Gina had died, but other than that . . .

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. He hadn’t meant to tear their group apart, not when he was supposed to be the guy who’d brought them all together. He hadn’t meant to screw anything, let alone absolutely everything, up.

“Don’t apologize,” Emori grumbled. “Just—just let us do this for her.” She opened the next drawer and started tearing through it, pulling out t-shirts that she’d probably seen Clarke wear on more than one occasion that were technically his.

“Just let me do it,” Bellamy entreated. “Please?” It wasn’t like he wanted to spend his entire night divesting his room of Clarke Griffin, but . . . it was no one else’s responsibility to bear but his own. “You guys can drop it off at her place when I’m done.”

Emori stopped moving, and she and Harper exchanged a glance. Harper nodded, and Emori huffed, “Fine,” before storming out of the room without so much as a second glance at him. Harper followed, shooting Bellamy a semi-apologetic look on the way. He didn’t mind if they were pissed at him, though. They had every right to be.

He stood there looking at all of Clarke’s clothes that lay strewn across his bed and floor, all the odds and ends that were still stashed away in his drawers. Her computer, her iPad, and even her sketchbook lay atop his desk, and if he went in the bathroom, he was sure he’d still find things on his counter and in his cabinets that belonged to her. He stood there surrounded by things that belonged to her, and he felt like he should feel so much regret for letting things get this close between them, this deep. And he did, to some extent. Because he’d hurt her. But still . . .
There was a part of him that didn’t—that couldn’t—regret anything he’d shared with Clarke Griffin.
Not one moment. Not one second.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

When her phone rang that night, Clarke refused to let herself get her hopes up and think that it might be Bellamy. Clearly he didn’t want to see her, didn’t want to talk to her. Clearly they were done.

She picked her phone up off her desk and saw that it was her mom calling. Even though she wasn’t necessarily in the mood to talk to her mom, Clarke figured she’d just end up worrying her if she didn’t pick up. So she flung herself down on her bed and answered, “Hey, Mom,” trying to inflect her voice with as much cheerfulness as she could. Which wasn’t much.

“Hi, honey,” her mom said. “How are you?”

“Oh . . .” She could lie, she knew, say she was fine or even that she was good, but she didn’t want to. Didn’t wanna tell the truth, though, either. Her mom was on vacation. The last thing she needed to do was be worrying about a brokenhearted daughter back home. “Probably not as good as you are,” she finally settled on saying. “How’s Aruba?”

“Oh, it’s just beautiful,” her mother raved. “The hotel’s right on the beach, and the other night we went to this fancy restaurant. It’s really, really nice. We’re having a great time.”

“Good,” Clarke said. At least one of them was.

“And the conference is going well,” her mother added. She started rambling on about the research she’d presented, as well as some of the other presentations she’d heard the past couple of days. Clarke mainly just lay there, letting it all go in one ear and out the other, until her mother shifted gears and asked, “So what about you? What have you been up to?”

Words could not express how much she didn’t want to talk about herself right now, but it was all anyone else seemed to want to talk to her about. “Oh, you know,” she said nonchalantly, “Octavia’s wedding.”

“Octavia,” her mother echoed. “That’s Bellamy’s sister, right?”

God, was there ever going to be a day when the mere sound of his name didn’t make her chest tighten with longing? “Right.”

“And weren’t you a bridesmaid?”

“I was.” She’d probably been a lousy one, because she’d ended up making the day about her and Bellamy when it just should have been about Octavia and Lincoln.

“And how’d it go?” her mom asked.

“Oh . . . it was an eventful day,” Clarke replied vaguely. She looked down at the bracelet on her wrist, wondering if she should just suck it up and take it off. She didn’t need to be walking around with a constant reminder of Bellamy glaring her in the face. But it was a reminder of her dad, too, so . . . it was complicated.

Her mother never had been smooth at segueing a conversation, and she wasn’t this time, either, when she proposed, “You know what? Marcus and I were talking, and we’d really like to come back to Aruba at the end of summer, when we don’t have a conference occupying half of our time. And we’d like to take you and Bellamy with us.”
“Me and . . .” Clarke hesitated. “Me and Bellamy?”

“Yeah.”

Her heart sank. How could she get her mom to understand that there was no her and Bellamy anymore? Maybe there never really had been.

“I don’t know,” Clarke replied. “That’s probably kind of expensive.”

“Well, we’d pay for both of you,” her mother offered.

And there it was, an easy excuse, a simple way out of it. “Yeah, Bellamy would never go for that,” she said. “He won’t ever let anyone pay for him.”

“Well, we could just pay his airfare then or something,” her mother said. “Trust me, you two would love it down here.”

I’m sure we would, she thought sadly. She and Bellamy had only gotten to take two small trips together, one to D.C., the other to a middle of nowhere town in Missouri. She wasn’t the biggest jetsetter in the world by any means, but there were so many places she would have loved to have traveled with him. She would have loved to have been the girl to accompany him for that European vacation he and Roma had imagined and never gotten to take together.

“We’ll see,” Clarke said. She didn’t want to give her mom any false hope, but at the same time, she didn’t have the heart to drop the break up bombshell over the phone.

“Just ask him about it next time you see him, okay?” her mother said.

The next time she saw him? God only knew when that would be. They’d probably have another random run-in at Walmart someday, and it’d be all sorts of awkward. “Okay,” she said, though she obviously had no intention with following through.

“Oh, her mother said, pausing a moment before asking, “Honey, are you okay?”

No, she thought. And as nice as it was to have the comfort and support and help of all her friends right now, part of her wanted to just curl up in her mom’s arms and cry. Just like she had when she’d found out Finn had cheated on her. Just like she had when her dad had died. Back then, she’d been young enough and naïve enough that a hug from her mom had made things feel better.

“Clarke?” her mother prompted.

“I’m fine,” she lied. “Just tired.”

“Well, I’ll let you go so you can get some sleep then, alright?”


“Bye.”

She ended the call, setting her phone aside, and sighed heavily. Because she knew what conversation awaited her and her mother. She was going to have to tell her the truth, tell her that she and Bellamy were no longer together. But her mom wasn’t going to understand why they weren’t, because she assumed Bellamy was her boyfriend. And Clarke had let her think that. Hell, maybe she’d even let herself think it.
Chapter 50

Having class every day for five weeks meant that Bellamy had to rearrange his work schedule. And he had to be more efficient. Ninety minutes of Twentieth Century Europe meant ninety fewer minutes of work time. He didn’t want to let any of his customers down, nor did he want his earnings to decrease. After all, he needed money now more than ever. So he’d work his ass of when he could and skip a lunch break. Simple enough.

His stomach rumbled with hunger, and he ignored it as he pounded a stake down into the ground, laying out the measurements for what would someday be Diana’s new shed. What she needed a shed for, he had no idea, but she’d asked him to build her one out in her backyard. So here he was. It’d be a big project, and she’d promised to pay him well for it. But that didn’t mean he was looking forward to working on it. It’d take all summer. And he’d never actually built a shed before, but . . . well, first time for everything.

“Oh, Bellamy!” Diana called suddenly from inside the house. She poked her head outside and announced, “You have a visitor.”

A visitor? That was weird. No one ever came and visited him at work, especially not here.

Forgetting about the shed for the time being, he walked inside the house, expecting to find someone waiting for him in there. But there was only Diana, dressed down in her favorite silky gold robe, drinking her way to the bottom of what not long ago had been a full glass of wine. “It’s a girl,” she snarled, motioning outside.

Clarke? he thought. But when he looked out the big bay window, he recognized Octavia’s long, dark hair right away.

“That’s my sister,” he informed Diana.

“Good.”

He rolled his eyes at her, moving past her on his way out the front door. “Hey, O,” he said. He hadn’t seen her or talked to her in days, not since the wedding.

“Hey,” she said in return, practically covering her eyes when she glanced at him. “God, do you always work shirtless?”

“Here, yeah.” He strode over to his truck and took a t-shirt out of the front seat. “She pays me better when I do,” he explained.

Octavia grunted. “Way to whore yourself out, Bell.”

“Hey, I do what I gotta do, okay?” He tugged his shirt over his head, not in the mood for any judgment.

“Whatever,” she muttered, crossing her arms over her chest, letting them rest atop her rounded stomach. “I refuse to set foot in there.”

“Explains why you’re out here then.”
“Well, that and . . . I didn’t think you’d want your most loyal customer overhearing the conversation we’re about to have.”

*Oh, shit,* he thought, sensing where this was going immediately. This wasn’t just any visit. She was here because she *knew.*

“What do you mean?” he asked, attempting to play dumb anyway.

“You know exactly what I mean,” she growled impatiently. “You and Clarke. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because it was—it was your wedding day,” he sputtered in response. “And then after that, you were on your honeymoon.”

“I was at the Holiday Inn, like, ten miles away,” Octavia pointed out. “You could’ve called me.”

“I didn’t wanna ruin it for you.” Octavia’s honeymoon already had to be . . . watered down. He had no doubt that she and Lincoln had enjoyed their uninterrupted time together in their hotel room—disturbing—but he hadn’t wanted to bog her down with his problems. “How’d you find out anyway?” he asked.

“Harper texted me, said she was worried about you. When I asked her why, she told me everything.”

Of course it had been one of the girls. He should have figured one of them would tell her before he got the chance to. “Well, I’m fine,” he assured her. “I started my class. I’m busy with work.”

“You’re not fine, Bellamy,” she argued. “So don’t pretend to be.”

Well . . . she was right. But he wanted to pretend, for her sake. She wasn’t the one who was supposed to worry about him; it was the other way around.

“Why the hell would you break up with Clarke?” she demanded, as though it were the craziest thing in the world. “That girl is the best thing that’s happened to you in a long, long time.”

“I know,” he acknowledged. “So then why—”

“She fell in love with me, Octavia,” he cut in. “What was I supposed to do?”

“Love her back.”

He sighed, frustrated. She made it sound so simple. And maybe it was for her. She’d loved and been with one person her entire life, the person she was now married to. There was no history of loss for her to deal with, not like there was for him. “I can’t do that,” he mumbled.

“Yes, you can.”

“O . . .” He gave her a warning look. “We’re not having this conversation.”

“Like hell we aren’t!” she roared, stomping towards him. She was so pissed and so pregnant, and that combination actually kind of scared him. “Bellamy, I’m so sick and tired of you acting like you’re damaged beyond the point of no return. You’re not as messed up as you think you are. And I know you loved Roma and lost her, and I know you loved Gina and lost her, but . . .” She threw her hands up at her sides and asked, “What if Clarke’s the love of your life?”
“She’s not,” he claimed. He hadn’t let himself get *that* close; he hadn’t been that careless.

“Then who is?” Octavia countered. “Roma? Or Gina?”

He frowned. What the hell kind of question was that? It wasn’t like he could choose.

“Maybe it’s possible to have more than one love of your life,” his sister suggested. “And maybe Clarke is one of them for you.”

“Or maybe she’s my best friend and that’s it.”

“Well, congratulations, you lost your best friend then.” She snorted, shaking her head. “Do you not get it? You didn’t wanna lose anyone else you love, so that’s why you never let Clarke be your *girlfriend* or whatever. But it doesn’t matter, because you *do* love her. And you lost her anyway. Because you pushed her away.”

He swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to find some way to disagree with all of that. But he had nothing. She was right, he had lost her. Breaking up with somebody wasn’t the same as finding out they had died, but still . . . it was definitely loss nonetheless. And he and loss went *way* back.

“I didn’t know it was gonna end up like this,” he said.

“Well, it did,” she snapped. “So now what?”

He shrugged helplessly, wishing he had an answer to that question.

“Now she just goes on with her life, finds somebody new? Would you really be okay with that?”

Right now, he knew he wouldn’t be. But eventually . . . he had to be.

“And what about you? Are you just gonna go back to picking up random chicks and having one night stands?” she asked almost accusingly.

“I don’t know.” His last one night stand . . . hadn’t exactly stopped at one night.

“Well, figure it out!” she yelled at him.

“Hey, I’m trying my best, alright?”

“No, you’re not trying,” she argued, shaking her head sadly. “You’re just . . . giving up. You’re giving up on Clarke and on your feelings for her. You’re giving up on the possibility of *ever* finding love again, and that . . . makes me so scared for you, Bellamy.”

“Why?” He didn’t mean to scare her, worry her, or upset her in any way. But clearly he was doing all three of those things right now.

“Because you’re gonna end up alone,” she whined tearfully. “And I don’t want that for you.”

Trying to smile reassuringly, he reminded her, “I’m not alone. I have you, Mom, everybody. I’m gonna have a nephew soon.”

“Yeah, but it’s not the same.” She looked down, sighing heavily. “God, Bellamy,” she groaned. “I just asked her to be the baby’s godmother.”

She . . . what? *Oh, fuck,* he thought, averting his eyes guiltily. That was a really big deal, and truth be told, it kind of caught him off guard.
“She said yes, by the way,” Octavia added sadly.

_Shit._ He hadn’t known; he’d had no idea. And Clarke hadn’t mentioned it to him, so it must have been recent. Like at the wedding or something.

Octavia and Lincoln wanted them to be godparents. They trusted their child with _them_. But now . . .

Dammit, this whole thing really was bigger than him and Clarke, wasn’t it? He’d already known that, of course, based on how upsetting it was to his friends, but now that she was telling him this . . . now he _really_ knew.

“I can’t even . . .” Octavia shook her head, storming past him to where her car—Lincoln’s car, technically—was parked behind his truck. She whirled around before reaching for the door, though, and blurted, “Oh, the baby’s middle name’s gonna be Bellamy, by the way.”

The baby’s middle name was . . . his name? “What?” he choked out.

“Yeah. Because for a long time, I thought of you as this brave, fearless person,” she elaborated, “and I want him to be brave and fearless, too.”

It was a lot to take in, the thought of his name being passed down to Octavia’s son. Even as a middle name, that meant something. It was significant. He felt like he didn’t even deserve such an honor.

“But right now,” Octavia added on, her gaze unwaveringly severe, “I don’t think you’re so brave. I think you’re being a coward.”

He winced at that, hating that she could ever have that opinion of him.

Since he didn’t say anything to stop her, she got in the car and slammed the door shut. He stood there with the wind knocked out of him and watched her drive off, wondering if she and Lincoln would pick out a new middle name now. Or if they’d pick a new godfather. He wouldn’t blame them if they did.

It was a horrible to feel like he’d let people down, disappointed them. But unfortunately, he was getting used to feeling that way.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

There was so much stuff. So much stuff to unpack and arrange.

Clarke stood in her living room, surrounded by boxes and a bulging suitcase, sacks and an overly-stuffed duffle bag. She knew she’d made herself at home at Bellamy’s place, but . . . damn, she’d underestimated just how many things she had over there when she’d asked Harper and Emori to retrieve it all for her.

“Wow,” she said, feeling bad that she’d made such a big job for them. “Thanks, you guys.” This must have taken them hours. She probably should have just gone over there herself while Bellamy was at work, but she couldn’t bear the thought of setting foot in that house right now. Especially not in that bedroom, where so much of her stuff had been.

“This should be everything,” Harper said. “Bellamy packed it himself, so . . .”

Emori elbowed her sharply.

“I mean . . .” Harper cringed apologetically. “It wasn’t, like, something he did happily.”
“It’s okay,” Clarke said. She’d assumed that they would have to ask Bellamy for help. So many of her things had been mixed in with his.

“Did he have anything here?” Emori asked. “Because we can bring it to him if that’s what you want.”

“Um . . .” Clarke cleared her throat, trying to be strong about this instead of sentimental. “Yeah, I packed up some stuff,” she replied. “It’s in the bedroom. I’ll go get it.” She slipped in between them and headed into her room, dreading this. Absolutely dreading it. There was a big cardboard box on her bed, mostly clothes inside of it. Not as many as she’d had at his place, but still . . . two pairs of jeans, two pairs of sweatpants, tank tops and underwear. And t-shirts. So many t-shirts.

She pulled one of them out of the box, a plain black one that went so well with his tan skin, and held it up, debating whether or not it would be wrong and/or pathetic to hold onto it. Maybe it wouldn’t be wrong, because Bellamy wouldn’t even notice it was missing. But it would most definitely be pathetic, so she folded it back up and set it down atop the rest of them before reluctantly carrying that box out to Harper and Emori.

“Here you go,” she said, setting it on the kitchen counter. “Pretty lightweight.”

“You definitely had more stuff over at his place,” Harper observed.

“Definitely,” Clarke agreed. “I liked it there.”

A sad silence descended upon the three of them for a moment until Emori pointed out, “You can still show your face there, you know. Murphy will never say it, but he misses you. He said something about The View?”

Clarke laughed lightly. “Yeah, we were gonna watch it together a lot this summer.”

“You still could. And you could come hang out with me.”

“And you can still come over Saturday night,” Harper added. “I mean, if we even do Saturday night this week.”

“We probably won’t,” Emori said. “But next week, maybe? Maybe things will be better by then?”

Clarke shook her head sadly. “Sorry,” she said, appreciative that they still wanted her around, unrealistic as that was. “I don’t think I can . . . hang out over there anymore.”

Emori sighed, placing a hand on Clarke’s shoulder. “Okay, we should go out and do some day drinking,” she suggested. “You want to?”

Clarke looked at her skeptically. “Last time I got drunk with you, I ended up getting a tattoo. Which I should probably get removed now.” No one would ever call her Princess again, so she really didn’t need the word tramp stamped on her back as a constant reminder.

“It’s kind of expensive,” Emori warned her. “Although . . .” Looking around the apartment, which was about four times the size of her studio one, she added, “Probably not to you.”

“Can you remove it for me?” Clarke implored.

Emori shrugged. “If you’re sure that’s what you want.”

She wasn’t sure. She wasn’t sure at all. But the tattoo . . . it was gonna have to be removed.
“Think about it,” Emori said, picking up the box. “You ready?” she asked Harper.

“Yeah.” Harper gave Clarke a quick hug and said, “We’ll see you later.”

“Bye.” Clarke waited until they were gone to let the small, fake smile vanish from her face. They took all reminders of Bellamy with them except for those paintings that Raven had stashed in the coat closet. She was tempted to go look at one of them, but that would probably make her feel worse rather than better. Besides, she had a hell of a lot of unpacking to do.

Luckily, Raven and Niylah were coming over later. It was going to be a full on sleepover night, which was . . . juvenile, but necessary. It helped her from dwelling on how lonely she felt. Like right now.

_Time to unpack_, she thought, determined to be productive. She unzipped the suitcase, and tons of clothes fell right out. There was an overflowing heap of them, including one that didn’t belong to her: a grey Redskins t-shirt she’d grown quite fond of wearing to bed. If Bellamy had packed this stuff up, then did that mean he wanted her to have it?

_Don’t be pathetic_, she coached herself. _Don’t be pathetic_. But deep down, she already knew . . . she was about to be pathetic.

Whether it was in there on purpose or on accident, she decided she didn’t care. She took off the shirt she was wearing and put his t-shirt on instead. She’d worn it so much that it smelled more like her than it did him, but still . . . it was his. For a few seconds right after she put it on, she actually felt better.

For a few seconds.

Bellamy was so tired of being shirtless. Just knowing that Diana had spent all afternoon ogling him, that she hired him for these jobs for physical reasons rather than for the quality of his work . . . it was frustrating. Demeaning, actually. And he knew he just encouraged it by continually going back.

“I’m gonna call it a day,” he announced, putting his shirt back on as he entered the house. “It’s gettin’ too hot out there.”

She sat on the couch, her robe only loosely tied around her waist now, as she downed yet another glass of wine. “Do you know what today is, Bellamy?” she asked. “It’s the anniversary. Of my divorce.”

Well, this had just gotten awkward as fuck. How the hell was he supposed to respond to that? Since he didn’t know, he didn’t say anything.

“You get so used to being with someone, you know?” she said, swirling the liquid around in her glass. “It hurts to be without them.”

Even though he didn’t understand anything about this woman . . . he understood that pretty well.

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” Diana stood up, stumbling over to the counter to set her glass down, then practically threw herself into his arms. He caught her, feeling like she needed someone to help hold her upright. But she used it as an excuse to start rubbing her hands all over his back and shoulders and press herself closer to him. “Mmm,” she murmured, snaking her hands around to his chest.

“Diana, stop,” he said, grabbing her arms just to get them off of him. “You’re drunk.”
“And you’re . . . here,” she said, smiling lazily at him. “Tell me, just how much do I have to pay you to get you to sleep with me?”

Oh, god, he felt like throwing up. This was definitely the most forward she’d ever been with him, and he wanted to shut it down quick. “I’m not interested,” he answered, letting go of her. He started for the door, eager to get the hell out of there and go fix his friend Zoe’s broken door lock. It’d be nice to do a job for someone who wouldn’t treat him like a piece of meat.

“Are you sure?” Diana asked, not letting up. “Because I hear you’re in college now.”

For some stupid reason, he stopped in his tracks.

“I could help you out with that,” she offered. “Think of it like a scholarship.”

Slowly, he turned back around. “I got it covered.”

“Fine, a loan then,” she amended. “I give you money, and you give me . . . whatever I want.” She grinned smugly, as if she actually expected him to agree to this, and reached down for the tie on her robe, loosening it some more.

“Not gonna happen,” he told her bluntly.

“Bellamy . . .” She pouted exaggeratedly, then pulled open her robe. She had a white slip on underneath, and honestly, her body wasn’t bad. But he had no interest in it whatsoever. It didn’t matter how much she offered to pay him; he wasn’t stooping this low.

“I know I’m older than you,” she said, flipping her hair over her shoulder, “but I can be your type. I mean . . . I’m blonde, after all.”

He tensed. What the hell was she—

“Blonde just like the little friend you fucked all over this town,” she said, smiling. “You could pretend I’m her.”

What she was suggesting was both so upsetting and so disgusting to him that he’d had it. Just fucking had it. She could stare at him and make passes at him all she wanted to, but he drew the line here, with her talking about Clarke. She had no right to even mention her, and she was delusional if she seriously thought she could ever compare.

“You can find somebody else to build your fucking shed,” he told her. “I quit.”

At first, she laughed arrogantly, like she didn’t believe him. But when he turned and headed for the door, she huffed, “Bellamy!” And when he didn’t stop, she yelled, “Get back here!”

He stormed out, done with that place, done with that woman, done subjecting himself to what was basically sexual harassment on a daily basis. Screw Diana Sydney’s money. He’d figure something else out.

Climbing into his truck, he felt pissed. But thankfully, he wouldn’t have to do this forever. It’d take him a while, but he’d get his degree. And whatever he ended up doing with it would be better than this.

“Bellamy, wait!” Diana yelled, literally staggering out the door onto her front lawn, robe blowing open in the breeze.
He didn’t wait. Instead, he drove off down the street, leaving his highest-paying customer behind.

Damn, first his argument with Octavia, now this? It seemed like the day just kept getting worse and worse.

Why am I here? Clarke wondered as she dragged herself into Walmart. She hated this store so much, and there were smaller grocery stores in town she could have gone to. Yes, she needed food, but that didn’t mean she had to get it here.

Regardless of how much she hated the place, Clarke grabbed a cart and wheeled it on in. The greeter didn’t bother to greet her, which probably meant she looked like she was in a bad mood and didn’t want anyone to talk to her.

Come on, just suck it up and be productive, she thought. She had a legitimate reason for being there: food. Food, food, food. Now that she was back in her apartment, she had to stock up the kitchen again. In the past couple days, she’d eaten everything in sight, and now there was nothing left. She also needed a break from unpacking the tremendous amount of crap she’d accumulated at Bellamy’s, so . . . Walmart it was.

She moseyed on down the aisles, straying away from her usual Hot Pockets and gummy snacks. Since she had a whole summer in front of her and nobody to truly spend it with, she figured she had all the time in the world to learn to cook. She could wake up a little earlier and start watching Rachel Ray before The View came on. Rachel Ray was a good cook, and her dishes looked simple and quick enough to make. It was the perfect summer project to keep her mind off of . . . other things.

She loaded up her cart with things she assumed a chef would use: nutmeg, flour, eggs . . . stuff like that. And then she also put in a six-pack of beer because . . . well, why not? She could bust that out at the sleepover tonight.

Of course, with Walmart being the annoying superstore that it was, she inevitably left the grocery store part of it and found herself meandering the department store for things she didn’t really want or need. Like Celine Dion’s greatest hits CD, new throw pillows for her couch, and even a set of boys’ baby clothes for Octavia. Well, technically, she did need the last one. Octavia’s baby shower was next month, and . . . as far as she knew, she was still the godmother. Even if that changed, she’d still go to the baby shower.

Pushing that troublesome thought down as far as it would go, she deposited the baby clothes into her cart and made her way towards the checkout counters. She was so ready to leave.

Since she had a lot of items and wasn’t confident in her ability to do the self-checkout stuff, she waited in line behind a father and his young daughter. The little girl was helping him unload all the items of their cart onto the conveyor belt, and Clarke got a kick out of it as she watched. The pop bottles that little girl was trying to lift probably weighed as much as she did.

“You let me get that, sweetheart,” the father said, taking the watermelon from her as she tried to lift it in her little hands.

Runaway watermelon, Clarke thought reminiscently, her eyes locking onto it. Those were two of the first words Bellamy had ever said to her. Nothing romantic or even flirtatious about them. Weird as it was to meet somebody the way she had, that was how it had all begun for them. A chance meeting. And it’d changed her whole life.
God, she felt so stupid getting all choked up at the sight of a freaking watermelon, but it was enough to make her want to cry. Without that pesky melon, she and Bellamy might never have met. Arkadia wasn’t a huge town by any means, but still, she’d lived there for three years without meeting him, without knowing him. But now that she did, she couldn’t imagine not knowing him, not loving him.

She really didn’t want to have a breakdown in public at this store of all places, but the tears started to fall as she waited there in that line, and she was powerless to stop them. The cashier’s voice barely registered to her when she told Clarke to start putting her items on the conveyor belt. She just stood there, unable to move, unable to function. Crying her eyes out.

She was pretty sure the cashier then asked if she was okay, so she nodded. She also asked if Clarke needed any help, so she shook her head. What she needed . . . was to just get out of there. Right now. It’d been a mistake to go in there in the first place. She knew that now.

Leaving all her items in the cart, she grabbed her purse and took off. She practically fled the store, knowing she must have looked hysterical and crazy and so many other unflattering things. She ran out into the parking lot, narrowly dodging a minivan as it backed out of its space, and she got in her car and drove away.

She managed to dry her eyes while she drove back to her apartment, but she left the radio off, left the windows rolled up. It was a somber, joyless drive, and when she pulled into the parking lot at the Polaris complex . . . god, she didn’t wanna go in there.

Sobs shook her body as she slumped against her steering wheel, feeling lost, feeling helpless. How long was it going to be like this? How long was this grief over Bellamy going to dominate her life? Was it even possible to move on, because right now, it didn’t feel possible. How could she ever move on? He wasn’t just some guy; he was the one person who knew her better than anyone else in the world. He was her best friend, the love of her life. There was no getting over that.

She knew she needed to get it together, and she tried to convince herself to get out of the car, go upstairs to her apartment, and keep unpacking. Because she still had so much to do, and she had to do it. She had to put those clothes back in her closet just to squash any remaining hope that they’d ever find their way back into his. She had to make her apartment into a home again, because she lived there whether she liked it or not. Alone. Without him.

But god . . . she felt so lonely. That loneliness mixed with despair and regret . . . it was all too much in that moment. She had to do something, and as terrified as she was to do it . . . all she wanted to do was talk to him again. Just to see if he’d changed his mind. To see if he ever would.

It was a long shot, and she knew it. But there was still a chance.

It couldn’t be over the phone. She had to do it face to face.

Even though she knew it might just result in her getting her heart crushed all over again, she worked up the courage and decided to do it. She backed out of the parking space she’d just pulled into, feeling determined and motivated for the first time in days. She was going to see Bellamy. Nothing, not even heartache or fear, could stop her. She was going to see him and spill her guts to him again, because she had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Maybe there was some way she could say things differently this time. Maybe she could say something that no one else in the history of the world had ever said, and it’d spark some sort of realization in him. She wracked her brain for words, finding none, and resigned herself to speaking spontaneously and from the heart. Because her heart was bursting for this man. Even now. Even after he’d rejected her.
She wasn’t giving up on him. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

Because she didn’t drive fast and didn’t know every single shortcut in town like Miller did, it seemed as if it were taking forever to get there. Her fingers trembled on the steering wheel, and her heart beat loud as a drum in her chest. She was so nervous. What if he took one look at her and ignored her? What if he didn’t want to talk to her or refused?

She pulled up to a red light, using the temporary to stop to reach into her purse and grab her phone. She pressed one number to speed dial Bellamy, and her heart just beat faster. What was she even doing? Warning him she was coming over? Was that a good idea? Or should she just show up?

She didn’t know what to do, so she just sat there and listened to the phone ring. He didn’t answer. Instead, his voicemail kicked on just as the traffic light in front of her turned green.

“Hey, it’s Bellamy. Leave me a message.”

It beeped, and the car behind her honked impatiently, almost in unison. Clarke choked back tears, slowly rolling through the intersection, and hoped this didn’t mean he was screening her calls. Just hearing his voice, though, his deep and gravelly voice . . . even if it was just on his voicemail, it made her realize just how much she missed hearing it.

“How?” she squeaked out tearfully, imagining how he would react when he heard this. “It’s me.” She wished she knew what to say, and she wished she didn’t sound like such a blubbering mess saying it. “I’m sorry, I know you’re probably working right now, but I had to call you because . . .” She drove by the Dropship bar, and a fresh wave of tears spilled onto her cheeks. “I miss you, Bellamy,” she whimpered, trying to blink them away since she didn’t have a free hand to wipe them away. “I miss you so much.” It felt like such an understatement, but she didn’t have the time to elaborate on a voicemail. Sixty seconds, probably. That was all the time she had until it beeped again and cut her off.

“I hate how we ended things,” she admitted, still holding onto hope that it didn’t have to be an ending at all. “I hate all of this. I hate not seeing you and not talking to you. It feels like . . .” She cried harder, slowing to another stop at another red light. “It feels like part of me is missing, and I can’t find it. And I know I sound pathetic right now, but I don’t care.” She exhaled heavily, shakily, wondering if he felt pathetic, too, if he could understand.

Hopefully he could.

“So I’m coming over now, to talk,” she told himdecidedly, “and if you’re not there, I’ll just wait. I’ll just wait for you, Bellamy, as long as I have to.” She inhaled sharply, mouth quivering, her whole body shaking as she realized what she meant by that. She wasn’t just saying she’d wait for him to come home. She’d wait. Wait for him to feel the same. “I’ll just keep waiting,” she promised, unable to even fathom finding someone else who could ever make her feel this way. There was no one else; there was just Bellamy.

“I love you,” she made sure to say, because it felt like her sixty seconds were almost up and she had to make sure he knew that. She didn’t know what else to say, so she just ended the call there, tossing her phone back into her purse, hoping this hadn’t done more harm than good.

The light before her finally turned green, and she pulled forward, picturing the house that was only a couple miles away now, the bedroom that used to be her own. Picturing Bellamy and letting herself picture a life with him.

In the middle of the intersection, she heard a loud screech of a car’s brakes, and she barely had time
to glance to her right and see one barreling towards her at full speed. Her whole body jolted forward as the other vehicle smashed into the side of her car. And for a split-second, she felt terror, panic, as her car rolled through the air.
Bellamy had been hoping that he’d feel better once he got home, but when he called out, “Murphy? Emori?” and got no response from either of them, he just felt worse. They must have gone out, which meant that he had a night alone to look forward to. Great.

He could study, he supposed, since they already had a quiz coming up on Friday. But he already knew the material. So it’d be better to sit down and figure out what the hell he was gonna do now that he’d just quit on his highest-paying customer. She’d call him tomorrow, no doubt, apologize for being inappropriate, and beg him to come back over and keep working on her shed. She’d offer to pay him double or something. And quite honestly . . . it’d be tempting. He needed the money. But he wasn’t going back this time. He had to have some kind of self-respect, and it was hard to have any of that over there.

Probably means I gotta get another job, he figured, flopping down tiredly on the couch. There were definitely some places on campus he could apply at, and now that the was actually a student, they might hire him. Or there was always his old high school. Seemed like they were in constant need of tutors or . . . janitors or something.

He sighed heavily, resigning himself to that idea. Yeah. He could be a janitor. For now. With his years of handyman experience, they’d probably hire him on the spot.

Making a mental note to stop by the school after class tomorrow, he yawned and turned on the TV. Cartoon Network? Really? Murphy must’ve been the last one to watch anything. Bellamy switched it to the History Channel immediately, but even they weren’t showing anything decent. Some Pearl Harbor documentary he’d seen a thousand times. It had more inaccuracies than it did merit.

Whatever. He tossed the remote aside. It wasn’t like he was gonna sit there and watch TV anyway. No, he was going to sit there lost in his thoughts, stressing out about work, dwelling on the fact that his little sister had called him a coward today . . . wondering if it was true.

He took his phone out of his pocket, thinking about calling her until he noticed he had a missed call. And a voicemail. None of his friends ever called him—they texted everything—so he assumed the voicemail either had to be from his mom or from a customer. He thought about just listening to it without checking to see who it was from, but . . . he didn’t. For some reason, he checked. And what he saw on that small screen shocked the hell out of him.

The thought of hearing her voice, even over the phone . . . it was enticing. He missed it, missed the
way his name sounded on her lips. He missed talking to her even more than he missed kissing her. And now he had the chance not to talk to her, but to at least hear her voice.

His thumb hovered over the button to access his voicemail. All he had to do was press it and he was in.

But he didn’t. He couldn’t. As much as he wanted to, it just wasn’t the right thing to do. The only way to get through this thing with Clarke, to help her get through it, was to give her a clean break, to set her free from him. If he listened to that voicemail just once, he’d listen to it a thousand times more. Even if it was only a few seconds long and she barely said anything, it would mean way too much to him. He couldn’t risk that.

So he deleted it with a few quick taps of his thumb. And it was gone. Almost like it had never been there in the first place. But that didn’t stop him from thinking about it, from wondering what she’d said, why she’d called.

He set his phone down on the couch and got up, stretching out his limbs. This was gonna be a long fucking night. It was only 6:00, and already, he felt like he could go to bed. Food was definitely a priority, too, though, so he trudged towards the kitchen to see if they had any leftovers in the fridge. He really didn’t feel like making anything.

His phone rang, stopping him after only a few steps, and his first thought was that it might be Clarke again. Or maybe O. Or maybe his mom, if Octavia had told her that he and Clarke were no longer . . . doing whatever they’d been doing. She’d want to check up on him.

Sulking back over to the couch, he picked up his phone, frowning in confusion at the number on his screen. It was local, but he didn’t recognize it. People got his number all the time, though, through word of mouth, so maybe it was somebody new wanting to hire him for a job.

“Yeah?” he answered, not really in the mood to talk about work. Or . . . anything.

“Bellamy Blake?”

“Yeah?” He didn’t recognize the voice, either, but it sounded like a woman. No woman he knew.

“I’m calling from the hospital,” she explained. “It’s about your girlfriend.”

“My . . .” He was so confused. And a little worried. “Clarke?”

“Yes, you’re listed as her emergency contact.”

His frown intensified, and his stomach clenched up at that word. “Emergency?” He didn’t like the sound of this.

“Yes.” There was a slight pause, an agonizing one, and the woman’s next words chilled him to the bone. “She’s been in a car accident.”

He froze. Whole body locked up. And it was like he couldn’t move, couldn’t think, at least not about anything but those two words.

Car accident. Car accident.

Car accident?

The phone fell from his shaking hand.
Four nights ago, Bellamy had driven to the hospital, just like this. Except . . . it hadn’t been just like this. Because Clarke had been with him. And he’d been worried about her fainting, but not terrified of her dying.

Right now, he was terrified. The most terrified he’d been since he’d heard a gunshot in Ocean City.

He kept picturing things, horrible things, in his mind, even though he didn’t know what to picture. He pictured Clarke’s car flipping over, or rolling off the side of the road. He pictured her jostling around in it while the airbags deployed, or maybe her just flying out of it altogether. He pictured her on a stretcher, covered in blood.

He pictured a funeral, a gravestone, even though he didn’t want to.

All those pictures made him sick. But not as sick as he felt when he came up to an intersection he drove through almost every single day and saw her car on the back of a tow truck. The passenger’s side was smashed in, and the glass in all the windows was shattered. There was another car, a bigger one, on another tow truck, smashed in on the front. It must have hit her. A side collision.

He tried not to think about his own car accident with Roma tried not to think about how his car had looked the same as hers did now and how Roma hadn’t survived it. He tried to push those parallels out of his mind and concentrate on one thing: getting to her.

It felt like it took hours to reach the hospital instead of minutes. He raced into the emergency room wing, heart pounding, and breathlessly asked the first person he saw, “Where is she?”

The person he grabbed looked bewildered and clearly wasn’t a doctor or even a nurse. It was just someone else there, some random person who looked as panicked as he felt.

Bellamy raced to the front desk, which was swarming with nurses right now. He caught the attention of one of them and asked, “Clarke Griffin? Where is she?”

“Who are you?”

“I’m her boyfriend. Please . . .” He stared at her pleadingly, needing to know. Good or bad, he needed to know if she was . . .

“Okay, she’s in surgery right now,” the nurse told him. “They just brought her in thirty minutes ago.”

“Surgery?” he echoed, his mind spinning as he now pictured her lying on an operating table, doctors cutting into her.

“Yes, that’s all I can tell you right now. I’m sorry,” the nurse said apologetically.

“I need to see,” Bellamy decided, but he’d only taken one step when the nurse’s hand shot out to stop him.

“You can’t see her right now,” she said. “She’s got a lot of doctors working on her. They’re gonna do everything they can, okay? But you need to let them work.”

Everything they can? he thought fearfully. What if it wasn’t enough?

She motioned to the waiting room, silently directing him to go sit in there. He didn’t wanna wait. He wanted to go be with Clarke, hold her hand, let her know he was there. But he knew he couldn’t do
that. He couldn’t get in the way.

So he staggered into the waiting room, feeling completely useless. He sat down a few chairs away from the man he’d first grabbed when he walked in, someone older than him who was crying. Maybe he was there for the other driver. Or someone else. Maybe he was crying because he’d already gotten bad news.

Bellamy couldn’t handle any bad news. He couldn’t.

Since he couldn’t do anything, he just sat there in a state of shock, going over everything the nurse had said. Which wasn’t much. Surgery. Thirty minutes ago. Lots of doctors working on her.

Lots? That wasn’t good. If lots of doctors were working on her, that meant lots of things were wrong.

He bent forward, resting his elbows on his knees, and held his head in his hands. Oh god, how was this happening again? He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t lose Clarke; he couldn’t lose another person who meant so much to him.

But what if he was already losing her? What if she was in that operating room right now, dying? What if he never got to see her or talk to her again?

He started to cry as he thought of that voicemail he’d just deleted. She must have left it right before the crash. And she must have been on her way over to see him. That was why the crash was only a couple miles away from his house.

It’s all my fault, he thought guiltily. If he would’ve just answered the phone, or if he would’ve just been talking to her in the first place, then maybe she never would have gotten in the car.

If she died because of him . . . he’d never forgive himself.

“Bellamy?”

His head snapped up when somebody said his name, a doctor, a young one. He got up and crossed the waiting room, immediately asking him, “How is she?”

“You’re the guy who’s here for Clarke, right?” the doctor asked.

“Yeah.”

The doctor nodded. “Okay, well, Clarke’s in surgery.”

“Yeah, but how is she?”

“She’s . . . having her spleen removed right now,” the doctor explained. Bellamy must have looked fearful, because he immediately assured him, “But she can live without a spleen.”

“So she’s gonna—she’s gonna live?” Bellamy stuttered.

The young doctor looked nervous, and he didn’t exactly reassure Bellamy of that. “Look, I’m just out here to let you know what happened,” he said. “Clarke’s car was hit by another car. It rolled over. She’s lucky to be alive right now. And we’re doing everything we can to make sure she stays that way.”

There it was again, that whole everything we can thing. If it took more than that, then they had to do more. There was no other alternative. “She can’t die,” Bellamy said, his eyes brimming with fresh
tears, threatening to overflow. “Please, please, don’t let her die.”

“We’re gonna take care of her,” the doctor promised. “Now I know you were listed as her emergency contact, but is there anyone else you can call?”

He thought about all the people who cared about Clarke, people who would want to know that this was happening, and he nodded dazedly.

“Okay, why don’t you call someone then?” the doctor suggested. “You’re probably gonna be here a while. It’s best if you’re not alone.”

The doctor didn’t have to come out and say it, but Bellamy knew what he meant there: If the worst happened and Clarke didn’t make it, it’d be better if he had people there to console him.

He didn’t even wanna think about that, but . . . how could he not?

As he wandered back over to his seat, he took out his cell phone, not sure who he should call first. Her parents? They were on vacation in Aruba. They weren’t anywhere close. And he could picture her mom losing it if he called her right now with such little information; so he called Raven instead, not even sure if she’d pick up. If she didn’t, he’d try Niylah. Then Emori, then Harper.

Not Octavia. He didn’t want to put her through the stress of this until he knew more.

Thankfully, Raven answered on the second ring, but she didn’t sound too happy to hear from him. “What do you want, jackass?” she snapped.

He grimaced at her hostile tone. “Raven, you gotta get to the hospital,” he told her. “It’s Clarke.”

“What?” she said confusedly. “What happened?”

He swallowed the lump in his throat, barely able to get the words out. “She was in a car accident.”

“What?” she shrieked, immediately panicked. “Oh my god, is she gonna be okay?”

He wished he could assure her that she was, but he had to settle for a more realistic, “I don’t know,” instead. Because he didn’t know.

Raven didn’t hesitate. “I can be there in half an hour. I’m on my way,” she said quickly before ending the call.

He re-pocketed his phone, knowing he should have called all the others, too. But he just didn’t have it in him to be the one to tell them that a friend of theirs might be dying again. They’d have questions, and he didn’t have answers, and . . .

He sat there and started crying again, feeling weak. But this all felt so familiar. Too familiar. It couldn’t happen again, not to Clarke. She was twenty-two years old, she had her whole life ahead of her. And she was so special. Special to him.

But what if he lost her? What if he never saw that beautiful smile of hers again, never heard that infectious laugh that always made him laugh, too? What if he never got to touch her hair or watch her fall asleep? What if those soft hands of hers never sketched or painted again? What if he never got to tell her . . .

He squeezed his eyes shut, taking a deep breath to try to calm himself down. It didn’t work.

That voicemail. God, he would’ve given anything to be able to listen to it now. To hear her voice for
what might actually be the last time. He couldn’t remember the last words they’d said to each other, but he knew whatever they were wasn’t what she deserved. He wished he would have heard her calling so he could have picked up that phone and talked to her, maybe told her to pull over if she sounded upset. He could’ve met up with her somewhere and talked to her, could’ve told her . . . he could’ve told her . . .

But now it was too late for that. And he might never see her again. The last time he’d seen her was the night of their . . . break-up. He’d been standing out in the middle of the road in the rain, and she’d been staring at him sadly through the back window of Miller’s car. Was that it? Was that really the last image of Clarke Griffin he’d ever have?

It couldn’t be. It wasn’t good enough. He wanted more. He wanted her. He loved her.

He loved her so much.

And she didn’t know. She was lying there right now on an operating table, possibly dying, and she didn’t know how much he loved her.

Roma had known. Gina had known. But Clarke didn’t know. Because he’d never told her.

He dragged his hands through his hair, trying to pull himself together and stop crying. He sat there, trying to focus on just breathing, because this was so much to deal with, and he’d dealt with it too many times before.

He remembered being in that exact same hospital when he was eighteen, waking up in one of the beds. Octavia had been curled up next to him, asleep, and his mother had been pacing around the room. When he’d asked about Roma, she’d woken Octavia and asked her to leave the room. And that was when he’d known something was seriously wrong.

He still remembered the way his mom’s voice had kept cracking while she tried to calmly explain what had happened. The car had hit on Roma’s side, she’d said, not his. He was lucky to be alive. But Roma hadn’t been so lucky. Roma hadn’t made it.

He’d cried and yelled and kicked and screamed, refusing to accept that. He’d been so upset that the doctors had given him something to sedate him. But it hadn’t helped. He’d cried all night, feeling like it should have been him. If he could have, he would’ve traded places with her in a heartbeat. Just like he would have traded places with Gina.

Just like he would’ve traded places with Clarke.

“Bellamy?”

Another voice. Another voice saying his name sympathetically. But this one was slightly more familiar.

He snapped himself out of his depressive thoughts and looked up to see Dr. Tsing standing in front of him, the same woman who had done the checkup on Clarke the other night.

“Is she still alive?” he asked nervously, clamoring to his feet.

Dr. Tsing motioned for him to follow her to the far side of the waiting room, away from the other crying man, and his stomach dropped. This was it. She was going to tell him Clarke was dead. He was gonna have to go to another funeral and put another girl in the ground. A girl who was his best friend. A girl who was . . .
. . . the love of his life.

“Clarke’s out of surgery,” Dr. Tsing informed him.

Out of . . . out of surgery? That meant . . . “She’s not dead?” he said incredulously.

“No, she’s not dead, Bellamy.”

A huge sob shook through his whole body, and he nearly crumbled. “Are you sure?” he asked. Because every girl he loved died on him.

Dr. Tsing smiled sadly. “I’m sure. I was one of the doctors who operated on her. And I’m gonna be the one to monitor her while we wait for her to wake up.”

He nodded, processing that. More waiting. Okay. He could wait. He’d wait as long as he had to for her. “How long’s that gonna take?” he inquired, hoping to know what to expect. This was good news and everything, but he’d feel a lot more relieved once she opened her eyes.

Dr. Tsing bit her bottom lip, almost worriedly. “That’s what we don’t know,” she said steadily. “Clarke was in what we call a traumatic car accident, Bellamy.”

“Yes, I’ve been in one myself.”

She sighed. “Then you know that--”

“People don’t always wake up after them?” he filled in, all his fears of losing Clarke crashing back. “Is she gonna wake up?”

Dr. Tsing put her hand on his arm, probably trying to be comforting. “I’m optimistic.”

Optimistic? No, that wasn’t enough. He wanted her to be sure. He needed her to be completely, absolutely, undoubtedly sure.

“I can’t give you a time frame,” Dr. Tsing went on, “but I’m hoping she’ll wake up within forty-eight hours. And then . . . we’ll see.”

“See?” he echoed confusedly. “See what?”

“If she has any . . . effects,” the doctor replied. “She might not have any, or she could have something short-term, like a concussion, or something long-term. She could . . .”

Bellamy nodded solemnly. “Not remember who I am?”

“That kind of traumatic brain injury is extremely rare,” Dr. Tsing assured him. “Is it possible? Yes. Is it likely? No. We ran some initial scans, and they look promising. Like I said, Bellamy, I’m optimistic.”

It was good that she was. But he had to be realistic. He could still lose Clarke. She wasn’t out of the woods just yet. He looked down at the ground, still fearing the worst.

“We’ve done everything we can for now,” Dr. Tsing assured him, “for both her and the baby.”

Bellamy’s head snapped up. “The what?”

Dr. Tsing’s mouth dropped open, and she looked as stunned as he was. “I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I thought one of our other doctors had already told you.”
His mind started to whirl. The words car crash were suddenly replaced with new ones: The baby. The baby.

The baby?

Dr. Tsing smiled softly. “Clarke’s pregnant.”

Bellamy’s bottom lip quivered as the words sank in, as he tried to process it. She was . . . pregnant? With a baby? With their baby?

“One of the bloodwork tests we ran the other night was a pregnancy test,” Dr. Tsing explained to him, so he must have looked confused. “We just got the results back today. Someone was gonna call her, but . . .”

But she was already here, he thought. On an operating table. Having her spleen removed.

Bellamy felt like he needed to sit down; but he also felt like he couldn’t move.

Clarke was pregnant.

Holy shit.

He tried to talk, but his mouth felt dry. “Is the . . .” He could barely even hear himself, maybe because he was afraid to ask. “Is the baby . . .”

“We’ll have to wait and see,” Dr. Tsing said. “I’m sorry I can’t be more definitive.”

He nodded, understanding that she didn’t want to make any false promises, not when it came to Clarke, not when it came to . . . the baby.

There was a baby. And it was Clarke’s. And his.

If it was even still alive. If it wasn’t already dead like his other one.

“Thank you,” he told the doctor, his mind still racing.

Dr. Tsing nodded, slowly turned, and walked back down the hall. Bellamy lumbered back into the waiting room, feeling like he’d just been hit by a ten-ton truck. Or a freight train. Or both. It was all just kind of a lot to take in.

Clarke was alive. But unconscious.

Clarke might wake up. But she might not.

Clarke was pregnant. Clarke was . . .

He thought of Octavia’s rounded stomach, and how it felt when that baby kicked. He remembered putting his head on Gina’s stomach and talking to a baby—or at least the beginning of a baby—that hadn’t been able to understand him. He pictured a miniature version of himself and Clarke running around his house, and for a second . . . he felt happy.

But then he took a look around at where he was, reminded himself of what was happening.

Oh god, he thought, terrified again. Oh god.
Chapter 52

Yes, your suspicions were confirmed in that last chapter.

Oh, um, also, you can get voicemails back on an iPhone? Huh. Didn't know that. Well, Bellamy doesn't have an iPhone.

Chapter 52

True to her word, Raven got to the hospital half an hour after Bellamy called her. She swept in those big double doors of the emergency room and immediately located him. “I’m so sorry it took me so long,” she apologized profusely. “I was out of town. I’m so sorry.”

He stood up, shoving his hands in his pockets. “It’s alright,” he said. She was here now. It really was a relief—a small one—to not be alone.

“How is she?” Raven asked, her voice shaky and afraid. “Is she okay?”

“She’s out of surgery,” he replied.

Raven’s eyes widened at that word. “Surgery? How bad of an accident was it?”

He gulped. “Pretty bad.”

“Like . . .”

“She had to have her spleen removed.”

“Her spleen?”

“Yeah. Another car hit her, she rolled over . . .” He shook his head, trying not to picture it. “Now we’re just waiting for her to wake up.”

“So . . . so she’s gonna be okay, though,” Raven surmised. “Right?”

He felt like he was the doctor now, unable to reassure her of everything he wished he could. “We’ll see,” he said, parroting Dr. Tsing.

“What does that mean?”

Exactly what you think it means, he thought but didn’t say. Instead, he opted for the words of a professional again: “The doctor’s optimistic.”

Raven breathed a small sigh of relief. “Well, that’s good,” she said. “If they really thought she wouldn’t wake up, they wouldn’t have said that.”

That was what he kept trying to tell himself, but unfortunately, he couldn’t quite make himself believe it. And the doctor hadn’t said anything about feeling optimistic for his baby.
“Oh, Bellamy, come here,” Raven said, suddenly enveloping him in a big hug. It was like every remaining ounce of disdain and animosity and vitriol she felt towards him had vanished, and she was his friend again. Because in that moment, they were both just worried about Clarke. And nothing else mattered.

“Oh,” she said, taking a step back. “Who else did you call?”

“No one,” he admitted. He probably should have, though. Her mom and her stepdad, at least . . . they needed to know.

“I can call her parents,” Raven offered, as if she were reading his mind. “I’m gonna call Niylah, too.”

“Can you just . . . call everyone?” he begged. She seemed to be handling this a lot better than he was. She’d be calmer in the midst of this crisis, so it was best if they all heard it from her.

“Sure,” she said. “Just hang in there, okay?”

He nodded, still in a bit of a stupor. He was trying, though. He was trying to keep himself together.

She left the waiting room to go make the calls, and he sat back down again, casting a curious glance towards the man a few chairs down. His red puffy eyes were starting to match his red puffy beard. Bellamy wondered if he looked like as much of a mess as that guy.

A police officer had been in a few minutes ago, talking to the man, and then that same officer had pulled Bellamy aside for a few minutes, too. He had to be telling them the same thing: There was no evidence that alcohol or anything had factored into the crash. All signs pointed to an accident, nothing more. The other driver had run a red light. And Clarke had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The other man had stopped crying by now, as had Bellamy, but he was tapping his foot nervously and wringing his hands together. Bellamy noticed a wedding band on his left ring finger, so he made an educated guess. “Is it your wife?”

It took the man a second to answer, like he didn’t register at first that Bellamy was talking to him. “Yeah,” he finally replied. “You?”

Bellamy thought about just nodding, but his ring-less hand was probably a pretty good indicator. “No,” he answered. “Girlfriend.”

The man swallowed hard and nodded. Clearly he sensed that Bellamy could empathize, though it had to be awkward as fuck for him, knowing he was sitting there right next to the boyfriend of the girl whose car his wife had hit.

“Is she gonna be okay?” Bellamy asked him.

He nodded, looking sure. “Yeah, she was conscious when the brought her in. And now they said she’s sleeping, so . . . I think she’ll be alright.”

Sleeping, Bellamy thought enviously. Was that what Clarke was doing right now? Or was it something else?

“What about your girlfriend?” the man asked him. “Is she . . .” He trailed off, almost as if he were afraid to find out.

Bellamy could have lied to him, because the poor guy was clearly worried about his wife and
worried that his wife may have accidentally hurt or killed someone else. But any lie he told to him would just feel like a lie to himself, and he wasn’t about to do that. “We have to wait,” he said. “She hasn’t woken up yet.”

The man inhaled shudderingly, looking like he was about to say something more, maybe apologize on his wife’s behalf, when suddenly an excited, high-pitched “Daddy!” rang out.

Bellamy watched intently as a little girl with long brown hair scurried into the waiting room and launched herself into her father’s arms.

“Oh, sweetie, you don’t know how good it is to see you,” he said, hugging her tightly.

“Where’s Mama?” she asked, pouting.

“She’s resting.”

Bellamy didn’t mean to stare, and normally, he wouldn’t have. But right now more than ever . . . he couldn’t look away. It wasn’t just some guy sitting two chairs down; it was a husband, a father.

A relatively young woman, presumably the babysitter, came and sat down beside him, a coloring book and crayons in her hands. She and the husband started talking, and Bellamy let all his focus drift to the little girl. She plucked at the hairs of her father’s beard, then started pulling some loose thread on his shirt even looser. At one point, she looked over at Bellamy, and instead of being freaked out by how he was staring at her, she just smiled at him. He managed a sad smile back.

A minute later, as if on cue, a nurse came out and told the man his wife was awake and ready to see him. He instructed his daughter to wait out there and be good for the babysitter, and he didn’t hesitate to follow the nurse out of the waiting room and down the hall.

Bellamy wanted to get up, too. He’d been sitting out there for like forty-five minutes now. Doing nothing. Being useless. So what if Clarke wasn’t awake yet? He could still go sit with her, talk to her. Maybe if he was around, he could wake her up.

So he stood, approaching the front desk and the same nurse he’d talked to when he’d first come in. “Can I go see her?” he asked desperately.

She shouldn’t have been alone right now. The nurse narrowed her eyes at him. “You’re here for the girl from the car crash, right?”

“She had a name; she wasn’t just some girl.

“Right, Clarke. Let me check . . .” She sat down at one of the computers, rapidly typed in a few things, and then informed him, “It says she’s not allowed visitors yet. That probably means they’re still getting her situated in her room.”

Bellamy frowned. Wherever they put her . . . that wasn’t her room. Her room was his. “So I can’t see her?” he asked, just to be sure.

“I’m sorry, not yet.”

He sighed heavily, feeling like . . . a failure. Like he’d failed her. Like he was letting her down by not being in there right now. What if she woke up and he wasn’t there? She was all alone. She’d be so scared, so confused.

There wasn’t much he could do about it, though, so he lowered his head and sulked back into the waiting room. Raven intercepted him this time before he got back to his uncomfortable chair.
“Okay, I got a hold of her mom,” she said. “They’re gonna catch the first flight back that they can. And I called Niyah and Miller and . . . well, Roan, selfishly.”

“That’s not selfish,” he said. This was a lot for her to deal with, too. She needed her boyfriend there.

“They’re gonna tell everyone, so . . . everyone’s on their way,” she said. “Everyone’s gonna be here for you, and here for Clarke when she . . . you know, wakes up.”

He nodded. “Yeah.” If she woke up, though. In his mind, he couldn’t get past the fact that it wasn’t a certainty.

Raven’s brow furrowed deeply, and she shook her head. “I’m trying not to picture it,” she said, “but it’s hard not to.”

“Her car looked . . . pretty bad,” he admitted.

Raven tilted her head to the side curiously. “You saw her car?”

“Yeah. It happened close to my house.”

“Really?” She seemed surprised. “Were you guys, like, meeting up or something?”

“No.” Not to his knowledge, anyway. But then again, he hadn’t listened to her voicemail.

“Well, she must’ve been on her way to see you,” Raven speculated. “Don’t you think?”

“I don’t know, Raven,” he snapped. That was definitely one thing he was trying hard not to think about.

“It’s okay, I’m not blaming you or anything,” she said. “I’m just trying to piece everything together.”

So was he . . . but he was blaming himself in the process.

“She didn’t say anything about going to see you when I talked to her this morning,” Raven went on, “but . . . maybe she just decided she needed to see you or talk to you or . . .”

Needed to see me? he thought. Needed to talk to me?

Oh, no.

Raven’s voice faded out as a horrific thought occurred to him. Maybe there was nothing random about it. Maybe she’d been on her way to see him to talk about something huge. And small.

The baby.

His stomach knotted up, and he looked over at the little girl while Raven kept talking. She was coloring a picture now, not one from her coloring book, but something she’d drawn herself. An artist.

No, no, no, he thought, hating himself in that moment. It all made sense, though, as much as any of this did. Clarke definitely hadn’t known she was pregnant the other night when she’d fainted. She would have told him and told Dr. Tsing. But maybe someone from the hospital had called her today, or maybe she’d found out on her own.

He imagined her sitting there in her bathroom by herself, taking a home test, probably breaking down into tears because of how scared she was. He should’ve been there with her.
God, he felt sick to his stomach.

Clarke knew. And that was why she’d called him. Maybe that was what her message to him had been about. Or maybe she’d been waiting to tell him face to face. Either way, the fact that he’d gotten her pregnant was what had gotten her into that car, and now . . .

Now maybe she wasn’t even pregnant anymore.

“Bellamy?” Raven said softly. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” he replied, but it was a lie. He was so fucking far from okay right now.

“Maybe you should sit down,” she suggested.

“No, I’m fine,” he insisted, pulling his arm away when she tried to grab hold of him. He felt sort of . . . dizzy, though. Lightheaded. “I just need to . . .” He couldn’t come up with the words to finish his sentence. He felt so out of it.

“You really don’t look so good,” Raven told him worriedly.

He didn’t feel so good. Black spots were popping up in his vision now.

“Bellamy?”

The last thing he remembered seeing was the scared look on the little girl’s face before everything just went black.

What happened? The thought ran through Bellamy’s mind as he struggled to open his heavy eyelids. It wasn’t like he was tired or anything. Just sort of . . . out of it. He heard sounds around him, but they were muffled and distant. He saw slivers of light as he tried to open his eyes, but it took so much effort to do so.

Wake up, his mind screamed at him through it all. You have to wake up.

The sounds around him gradually became clearer, and everything came into focus when he forced his eyes open. He hoped to find himself asleep in his own bed, to find out that everything at the hospital had just been a bad dream.

But no. He was at the hospital. In a hospital bed himself now. He wasn’t dreaming anything.

Looking around, he saw patients, mostly just people with minor scrapes and bruises, sitting up in the beds surrounding him. Nurses and younger doctors, presumably interns like Jackson, were tending to them. Clearly this wasn’t the urgent part of the emergency room.

Bellamy surveyed himself, trying to get his bearings. He wasn’t hooked up to anything. He was just lying down.

“Welcome back,” one of the nurses said as she sidled up to his bed.

“What happened?” he asked, trying to remember. The last thing he remembered was . . . talking to Raven?

“You passed out,” the nurse explained. “You’ve been a little out of it for the past fifteen minutes.”
Fifteen minutes? Had he really just been lying there that long? God, some great emergency contact he was turning out to be.

“Clarke,” he said, sitting up.

“You should rest,” the nurse suggested. “You’ve been through a lot today.”

He wasn’t about to just lie there and sleep, not when Clarke needed him. “I wanna see her,” he said, getting out of bed despite the nurse’s advice. He nearly tripped over his own feet as he headed back out towards the waiting room, feeling like . . . like he was done waiting. He needed to go be with Clarke. Right now. End of discussion.

As he neared the waiting room, he heard a bunch of voices. Loud, demanding, familiar voices. When he rounded the corner, he saw his friends—all of them—circled around the young doctor who had come out to talk to him before Dr. Tsing had. They were all talking over each other and over the doctor, to the point where the doctor actually had to raise his voice and tell them, “I’m sorry, but only family members can go visit her right now.”

“We are her family,” Murphy growled stubbornly.

“Damn right,” Octavia snapped. “Now if you don’t—” She looked like she was about to let the overwhelmed doctor have a piece of her mind until she saw Bellamy plodding her way. “Bellamy!” she cried, rushing towards him. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him as close as her rounded stomach would allow. “Oh, thank God,” she said, sounding relieved. “I was worried. Raven said you passed out.”

“Yeah.” That was really embarrassing, but it’d just been too much for him for a minute there. Even now, it was still too much, but . . . well, he was gonna have to deal with it.

“You okay?” she asked him.

He shook his head, opting for an honest answer. “No.”

She stared at him sympathetically, then hugged him again. For the first time in his life, he felt like his little sister was the one taking care of him. And it wasn’t supposed to be that way.

Raven came over and hugged him next, confessing, “You had me worried, Bellagio.”

“Sorry,” he apologized.

“Don’t be,” she said. “It’s . . . it’s a lot.”

Oh, you have no idea, he thought. None of them knew. Unless Clarke had told someone else about the baby before she’d planned on telling him. That didn’t seem likely, though. Raven would have asked about it if she knew. And if Raven didn’t already know, then what were the chances that anyone else did?

“Alright, if you’re not gonna let us go see her, at least let him,” Murphy begged the doctor. “Please.”

“Yeah,” all his friends agreed, nodding.

The doctor gave Bellamy a curious look and questioned, “You’re her boyfriend, right?”

“Yes,” they all answered for him.

“Um . . .” Bellamy motioned the doctor aside, out of earshot from the group, and spoke quietly so
there was no chance his friends would overhear him. “She’s pregnant,” he said. “I’m the father, so . . .”

The young doctor’s face registered surprise, like he hadn’t been aware of that fact. “I’ll talk to Dr. Tsing,” he said, scampering off quickly.

*That has to be enough,* Bellamy thought. He hadn’t put a ring on Clarke’s finger, but he’d put a baby in her belly. They were definitely family now.

When he returned to his friends, Jackson was the first to ask, “Are they gonna let you see her?”


“Because I can talk to someone,” Jackson offered, “if . . .”

“I think they’ll let me go see her,” he said, feeling confident about at least that much. Dr. Tsing had seen them together. She knew how close they were. She’d give him clearance, especially given the . . . circumstances.

“You should sit down, man,” Miller said putting his hand on Bellamy’s shoulder. “Come on.”

Bellamy shuffled back over to his good old chair, tired of sitting but knowing he had to. It was for the best right now. He couldn’t pass out again if he was already sitting down. Miller took a seat to his left, Octavia to his right, and everyone else found a chair of their own. They filled up that whole waiting room; there were so many of them. Murphy was the only one who didn’t sit; he seemed way too agitated. He paced back and forth near Emori, who barely took her eyes off him.

*Here we are,* he thought somberly. This was the whole group, gathered in a room just like on Saturday nights. Except this was all . . . different. Not just the location, but . . . but *them.* Jasper was somber instead of smashed. Harper was still as a statue instead of up on her feet, dancing. Niylah was crying, Monty looked worried, and Maya’s fingers were shaking. Even Raven, who had been a pillar of strength so far, let herself cry quietly when Roan put his arm around her.

Octavia reached over and grabbed Bellamy’s hand, giving it a supportive squeeze. And she didn’t let go. It was a small comfort, if anything, but he was grateful for it. He was grateful for all of them. So many of these people had been mad at him these past few days, but now . . . they were just worried. And they were *there.*

Surprisingly, it was the normally-quiet Lincoln who was the first one to say anything. “Clarke will make it through this,” he declared confidently. “She’s strong.”

“Yeah,” Miller agreed. “She’ll be alright, man.”

God, he hoped so. He wasn’t a religious guy or anything, but he was praying.

“We’ll have to throw her a big party when she comes home,” Emori said. “Huge.”

Nobody questioned that; in fact, they all nodded in agreement. But Bellamy knew they were wondering . . . what even was home for Clarke anymore? If she got out of here, would she go home to her apartment? Or to his place?

He supposed it didn’t matter as long as she went home at all. Right now, that was the most important thing.

“I’m sorry,” Niylah wept suddenly, her whole body shaking. “It’s just . . .”
her hands through her long hair. “She’s one of my closest friends. She has to be okay.” She cried harder, and Raven got up and went over to her, hugging her, consoling her, reassuring her that it would all be alright.

*They’ve never done this before*, Bellamy thought. But looking around at his friends . . . they all had. The shell-shocked look on Jasper’s face was an exact replica of the one he’d worn in the wake of Gina’s death. And Murphy had his back to everyone and was trying to cry inconspicuously, just like he’d done in Ocean City. Miller had been through this with him twice before. Poor guy.

It all felt so familiar. And so wrong. Clarke was a part of this group, this family. His favorite part. She should’ve been out there with them. If only he could have traded places with her. He would have. He wanted to so bad.

“It’s my fault,” he blurted suddenly, just because he needed to own up to it.

Everyone stared at him in confusion.

“She was on her way to see me,” he explained. And he knew why she’d been on her way there, too. He knew why.

“Hey.” Octavia gave his hand a little tug, enough to get him to look at her. “That does not make it your fault.”

“It always is,” he lamented. What happened to Roma may have been a tragic accident, but still . . . he’d been the one driving the car that she’d died in. And he’d been the one lying in a hotel room lazily while Gina went to get him a snack across the street. He’d been the one to get Clarke pregnant and push her away before she’d ever gotten to tell him.

Before his friends could pile on the false reassurances that he wasn’t the one to blame for all of this, Dr. Tsing came into waiting room and addressed him. “Bellamy?” she said. “You can come see her now.”

He took in a deep, shaky breath, nervous as hell. What if she was . . . covered in bruises and cuts and scrapes? What if she didn’t even look like the Clarke Griffin he knew and loved? Could he handle that? Could he bear seeing her like this?

He had to. She needed him.

Standing up, he’d only taken a few steps when Octavia sprang to her feet and gave him another hug. “We’re all right out here if you need us,” she reminded him, kissing his cheek.

They were. And they weren’t going anywhere. He knew his friends, knew how devoted they were. They’d stay there with him all night. They’d be there tomorrow, too.

Heart pounding, he followed Dr. Tsing through a maze of hallways towards a quieter, calmer part of the hospital. Everything seemed to get very still as they neared Clarke’s room. Her name was written on a white board outside the closed door, but they’d spelled it wrong. “You forgot the e,” he said, pointing out the mistake. “It’s Clarke with an e at the end.” For some reason, he felt like that really mattered somehow. *Stupid.*

“I’ll fix that,” Dr. Tsing said. “Now, Bellamy, I want you to prepare yourself. She’s hooked up to a lot of machines right now, which can be an overwhelming sight, and she’s got a couple visible injuries, too. If it gets to be too much for you and you feel like you need to leave and take care of yourself, nobody would judge you.”
“I’m not leaving,” he said decisively. “Thanks.” He opened the door and sipped inside, shutting it just as quickly. At first, he didn’t even look over at Clarke. He just stood there, listening to the steady hum of all those machines, the quiet beeping of the heart monitor.

Clarke was hooked up to a heart monitor. His own heart clenched at the thought.

Slowly, he raised his head, taking in the sight of her. She was lying on her back, propped up more than looked comfortable, a tube in her nose, IV in her hand. They’d put her in a hospital gown, and the hair around her forehead looked damp and curly, like maybe they’d had to . . . to wash some blood out of it. Or something.

It was shocking to see her so immobile and unresponsive. But part of him was actually relieved, because she looked better than he’d thought she would. When he got closer, though, his heart sank, because there was a cut on her bottom lip, and her right eye was swollen. She had tiny little scrapes all over her arms, and her left forearm was bandaged.

He wondered what her stomach looked like.

Gazing down at her, he thought she still looked beautiful, though. Even like this. She wasn’t meant to be like this—she was meant to be standing behind an easel with a paintbrush in her hand—but even a car crash couldn’t cover up how damn pretty she was.

It would have been nice for her to just sense him there and miraculously open her eyes. But that kind of thing only happened in really bad movies, and this was very, very real.

He didn’t know what to do. But he knew he wanted to talk to her, in hopes that she could hear him. He wanted to let her know that he was there and that he wasn’t going anywhere. So, in a voice cloaked with tears, he said the first thing that came to mind.

“Hey, Princess.”

And he got no response.
Chapter 53

Sleep wasn’t an option. Not for Bellamy. Not that night. He pulled a chair up next to Clarke’s bed, sat down, took her hand in his, and held it long after the sun was down. The only time he let go of it was to get up and go to the bathroom, or to pull the thin blankets up over her chest when he thought she looked cold. Five minutes later, though, he worried she was getting too hot, so he lowered the blankets down to her lap again.

He peeled them back and took a look at her stomach, just because . . . because he had to. The hospital gown was loose, but he could tell that it was still very flat. There was no noticeable baby bump. And maybe now there never would be.

As the night wore on, he started talking to her more and more. He told her about how her parents were on her way, and how everyone else was already there, just waiting on her to wake up. He tried to talk to her about something other than the accident, so he had a thirty minute one-sided conversation about how Murphy was seriously considering growing his hair long enough to put into a man bun, and how Emori was vehemently opposed to it. He told her about Jasper and Monty’s plan to hit the gym this summer—they’d never follow through with it—and he hinted that there was a hip hop dance class Harper wanted to take. He teased Clarke about taking that class with her, because he figured hip hop would be her worst nightmare. She’d never even really gotten the Mean Girls dance down that well.

God, she’d looked adorable trying, though. Clarke was . . . a pretty amazing girl.

Nurses had come in to check on Clarke at various points throughout the night. Dr. Tsing had, too, and she came in when the sun was coming up, which led Bellamy to suspect that she wasn’t going home. She assured him that it wasn’t uncommon after a traumatic injury for a patient to be unconscious for several hours, possibly even days. But she did admit that the sooner Clarke woke up, the better.

Around 8:00, the door opened again, but for the first time, it wasn’t a nurse or doctor coming into the room. It was Raven.

“Hey,” she said, “they’re finally allowing the rest of us to . . .” She trailed off, her eyes locked onto Clarke, and her bottom lip trembled. “How is she?” she asked.

He took a look at Clarke, who hadn’t moved, whose blank, sleeping expression hadn’t changed, and just shrugged. Because she was the same.

Raven definitely looked like she wanted to cry, but she blinked the tears away quickly and came further into the room. “I’ve, uh . . . I’ve been talking to her mom a lot,” she said. “They’re stranded at an airport in Miami right now. They’re having really bad storms. They can’t fly anywhere.”

“Oh.” No wonder they weren’t there yet, then. He’d assumed that Marcus would pay for a private plane to get them home, but if the weather was bad, then all the money in the world wouldn’t get them home.

“Abby really wants to talk to you,” Raven informed him.

To me? he thought, not sure it would do any good. There wasn’t anything he could tell her that Raven hadn’t.
Well . . . there was one thing. But it wouldn’t calm her anxiety at all.

“I think you should call her,” Raven suggested.

“Yeah.” He could do that. Reaching into his pocket, he took out his phone and started swiping through his contacts for her number.

Raven put his hand on his arm and said, “You should go get some air. You’ve been in here for hours. I can stay with Clarke.”

The prospect of leaving her side was so daunting, he didn’t even know if he could do it. But he knew Raven was right. He did need to get up and leave that room, stretch his legs, maybe even go get some chips out of the vending machine. He wasn’t hungry, but he had to eat something.

“Oh, okay,” he said, still reluctant to move. He looked down at Clarke, hoping he’d see her eyelids flutter or her hand twitch. Just some kind of sign that she was still there, that she was coming back to him. But he didn’t. Maybe Raven would have better luck.

He bent down and pressed a soft kiss to her forehead, just like he did in the mornings before he went to work. Sometimes that got a contented little purr out of her, but . . . not now. Now, there was just nothing.

Leaving that room was hard, and he took one last glance over his shoulder before he walked out, just in case she was waking up. Raven sat down in his chair, took Clarke’s hand in both of her own, and started talking, so he let them be and slipped out into the hallway. He didn’t go far, though. Because if Clarke did suddenly wake up or even move just slightly, he wanted to be there, right there, and be one of the first things she saw when she opened her beautiful blue eyes.

It didn’t take Abby long to answer her phone when he called. One ring was all, and then she was saying, “Oh, Bellamy, I’m so glad you called. How is she? Is she awake yet?”

Oh, he wished she was, but he couldn’t lie to her. “No,” he answered honestly. “She’s still the same.”

He heard Abby let out a shuddering exhale, then mumble to Marcus, “She’s still the same.”

Sorry, he thought. He wanted to have better news.

“But you’re there with her, right?” Abby asked tearfully. “You’ve been there?”

“Yeah.”

Abby breathed a sigh of relief. “Just stay with her, okay? Tell her we’re on our way. We’re gonna be there as soon as we can.”

He’d tell her, but it wouldn’t matter. She wouldn’t hear him. She hadn’t heard him so far.

“Just stay with her,” Abby repeated. “She needs you.”

That was what he’d told himself, but the longer he sat in that room getting no response, the more he wondered if he was doing more harm than good. Maybe Clarke hated him now. Maybe he was the last person in the world she’d wake up for.

“Bellamy?”

He realized he’d been spacing and apologized. “Yeah. Sorry.”
“Don’t leave her,” Abby requested. “Please? I can’t be there, but . . . promise me you won’t leave her.”

I already did, he thought guiltily. He’d left her the night of Octavia’s wedding. Because she’d told him she loved him and . . . and he’d just lied to her and pushed her away. God, he’d been such an idiot.

“I won’t leave,” he promised anyway, because even though he already had . . . he could try to make up for it now. He could try to do better.

“Thank you,” she said gratefully, crying now. “Thank you, Bellamy.”

He felt like . . . like he didn’t deserve her thanks. Or any gratitude whatsoever. In her mind, he was Clarke’s devoted boyfriend, but in reality . . . he was the guy who’d broken her heart.

With his promise to Abby at the forefront of his mind, he went back into the hospital room immediately after ending the call, abandoning any notion of going to get himself some food or going back out to the waiting room to see how the rest of his friends were doing. Raven looked a bit surprised to see him again so quickly, but she let go of Clarke’s hand and got right up, making room for him to sit down beside her again.

“Are you sure you’re okay in here?” she asked. “If you need to take a break . . .”

“I’m fine,” he cut in decidedly.

“Bellamy . . .”

“I’m not leaving her,” he mumbled, massaging her scraped up knuckles with his thumb. If someone wanted to bring him in some food, then they could. If someone wanted to come check on him, they could have at it. If Clarke was in that room, then he was in that room. Simple as that.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Even though he tried to stay awake, Bellamy just couldn’t do it. Sometime around noon, he lay his head down on the side of the hospital bed, closed his eyes for just a split second, and ended up falling asleep. He woke up again when he felt a hand on his shoulder, gently shaking him. He lifted his head up to find Octavia standing beside him.

“Hey,” she said, “you wanna come outside with me for a minute?”

He looked at Clarke, at the way his hand was still holding hers. And hers wasn’t holding him back. “No,” he said. He didn’t wanna be that far away from her.

Octavia hesitated a moment, then said, “You kinda have to. They wanna run some tests on her. You can’t be in here while they do that.”

He looked past her, noting the two doctors out in the hallway. They were both waiting patiently. For now.

Raven couldn’t get him to leave. Even Octavia couldn’t get him to leave. But if the doctors wanted in and told him he had to go out . . . dammit, he was pretty much at their mercy, wasn’t he? They were really the ones who were taking care of Clarke. He wasn’t doing anything except sitting next to her holding her hand.

He hated having to do it, having to break his promise to Abby and leave her, but what else could he
do? He got up and followed Octavia out of the room. On the way, he noticed that someone had
brought him in a tray of food, looked like something straight out of the hospital cafeteria. He’d eat it
later. Maybe.

Octavia led him past the waiting room, where his friends were mostly still gathered, all of them
slumped over against each other, sleeping. Lincoln was the only one who was awake. He was
drawing something on the back of a magazine. When he saw Bellamy walk by, he gave him a
solemn nod, and Bellamy just nodded back.

He followed Octavia outside, trying to appreciate the fresh air, but all he could think was that every
second he spent out here was a second Clarke spent alone. Not alone, really, because she had
doctors with her, but . . . she didn’t know them, and they didn’t know her. Not like he knew her. Not
like she knew him.

Octavia walked back and forth in front of him while he sat down on a bench, staring forlornly at the
ground, the sky, at her. She held both hands against her back, and he could tell she was stiff and
 cramped from sitting in that waiting room so long. He thought about telling her to go home, because
she was pregnant, and she didn’t need the stress of this. But he knew there was no way she’d just
leave him there. Right now, she was probably thinking that he was her brother, her responsibility.

“I think we should call Mom,” she blurted suddenly. “Do you want me to?”

“No,” he responded quickly.

“Why not?”

“Because . . .” He shook his head sadly. “I don’t want her seeing me this way.”

“Bellamy.” She gave him a look, then came and sat down beside him. “She’s seen you this way
before,” she reminded him, “with Roma and with Gina.”

He stiffened nervously.

“Not that this is the same,” she quickly amended. “Clarke’s not . . .” She trailed off, sighing heavily.
“I’m really screwing this up.”

“It’s okay.” He understood what she was trying to say. His mother was no stranger to comforting
him in a time of need. Maybe having her there would help. He didn’t think so, though. If he saw her,
he might break down, and he couldn’t afford to do that right now.

“Mom adores Clarke,” Octavia said. “She’d wanna know. She’d wanna be here for you.”

He sighed heavily, so unused to this. He wasn’t used to needing so much help, so much support. As
devastated as he’d been about Roma and Gina, eventually he’d just picked himself up and moved on
from it the best he could. But if Clarke didn’t survive this, if she never woke up . . . there was no
moving on from this one. If she didn’t make it, he didn’t see how he was supposed to. And that was
one disturbing, sobering thought. So disturbing that he reluctantly nodded in agreement with Octavia
and said, “Alright, go ahead and call her.”

“Okay,” she said. “I will.” She reached over and put her hand on his back, rubbing gently. He’d
never known Octavia to be gentle before, but . . . well, wonders never ceased. “How are you holding
up?” she asked, her voice full of evident concern.

He could have tried to placate her with a lie, but it probably would have been an obvious one, one
she would have seen through easily. “I’m scared, O,” he told her.
“Well, of course you are,” she said sympathetically. “You love her.”

“It’s more than that.” He swallowed the lump in his throat and finally—finally—confessed what he now knew to be true. “I’m in love with her.”

Octavia’s eyes momentarily widened, and her mouth dropped open a bit. She looked . . . stunned. Not because he was in love with her—that wasn’t surprising anyone—but because he’d finally admitted it out loud. And to himself.

“And I didn’t tell her,” he went on regretfully. “It took all of this for me to even realize it. God, I’m such a loser.”

“You’re not a loser,” she argued. “Bellamy . . .” She looked away for a moment, blinking back tears, and then turned back to him and said, “You’re my hero.”

He snorted and shook his head. “You are,” she insisted. “You always have been.”

He looked at her closely, frowning, trying to pick up on some sort of indication that maybe she was just telling him that right now to make him feel better. But she looked completely sure and completely serious. She’d just gotten married a few days ago, yet he was still the guy she looked up to, the guy she thought of as . . . as a hero? He felt like he didn’t even deserve that. Heroes saved people. But he couldn’t save anyone.

She leaned against him, her head on his shoulder, and wrapped her hands around his arm. He rested his head against hers, looking down at her rounded belly, watching it move ever so slightly as her happy, healthy baby kicked.

Bellamy didn’t stay out there with Octavia for long. Twenty minutes, maybe? Whatever tests those doctors were running, they could surely run them in twenty minutes. She stayed out there after that to give their mom a call, and he headed back inside, going straight to Clarke’s room. He let himself do something stupid and imagine walking in that door and finding her away, a big, bright smile on her face as she exclaimed his name. But the realist in him knew she’d still be asleep. Or unconscious. Whatever you called it. He expected that.

What he didn’t expect to find was Murphy in there with her. Not even with Emori. Just him, by himself, sitting next to Clarke’s bed. He was talking to her.

Bellamy stood in the doorway and listened.

“That leg lamp . . .” Murphy was saying. “That’s pretty cool. That was a good gift. You did good, Clarke.”

Bellamy couldn’t help but smile a bit. That leg lamp was an eyesore. But then again, most of Murphy’s things were.

He thought about clearing his throat or walking further into the room to announce his presence, but Murphy’s expression became very serious very suddenly, and he wiped a tear from his cheeks.

“You gotta pull through this, Clarke,” he said. “I don’t think . . . I don’t think Bellamy can lose you.”

I can’t, Bellamy thought in agreement.

“I’ve never seen him so . . .” Murphy trailed off, as if he were struggling to articulate what he wanted
to. “He’s just really happy with you. Happier than he’s ever been. But right now, he’s not—he’s not doin’ so good. I think he’s really scared.”

I am. Murphy was right about that, too.

“He needs you,” Murphy said to her, “and we all need him, so . . .” He took in a shuddering breath and muttered, “Dammit Clarke, just open your eyes.”

Bellamy watched her intently for a few seconds, studying her closely for any subtle change. It didn’t have to be him or Raven sitting in there with her. Didn’t have to be her mom and stepdad. If something someone else said got through to her, he’d take it. He’d take anything at this point.

He must have breathed in too loudly or shifted his weight or something, because Murphy heard him, looked over, and quickly tried to cover up the fact that he’d been sitting there getting emotional. “Oh, hey, man,” he said, pushing the chair back. He stood up and walked towards Bellamy. “Just keepin’ her company while you were away.”

“Thanks,” Bellamy said. He just stood there and let Murphy walk past him, let himself be somewhat amazed that he, out of all his friends, seemed to be taking this the hardest. Murphy acted like he didn’t care about people, but he did. He cared. Octavia cared. Miller cared. They all cared. They all cared about Clarke. They loved her.

But Bellamy was pretty sure he loved her more than anyone else in the world did. And when she did finally wake up, he was gonna work up the nerve to tell her that.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

All the tests the doctors had run on Clarke indicated that her vitals looked good, so it was still just a matter of waiting until she woke up, they said. Dr. Tsing told Bellamy to keep talking to her. If she registered his voice, it might lure her into waking up.

It hadn’t worked so far.

Bellamy wasn’t about to give up, but the more the hours ticked by, the more upset he became. He kept trying, though. He had hours of conversations by himself. Raven brought in some of Clarke’s horrible romance novels that afternoon, so he picked out one with an especially awful cover and read some chapters to her. They used to sit together or lie together in bed and do this a lot. Inevitably, they’d always found some horrible passages that made them both laugh out loud.

“Oh then he kissed her,” he read, trying to keep a straight face, “like a butterfly kisses the . . . windshield of a Porsche on the Autobahn?” He made a face, so distracted by the odd imagery that he couldn’t even keep reading. “Who even writes this shit?” he asked. “I bet you and I could write a better romance novel than this, don’t you think?” He paused, as if giving her time to answer, even though she wasn’t saying anything. Conscious Clarke would have agreed with him and told him to read more. But he was tired of reading.

Her eyelids hadn’t even flickered, not once in almost twenty-four hours now. He’d been sitting there all day, and every single one of their friends had come in and talked to her, too. But not one of their voices seemed to be getting through.

He closed the book and set it aside, feeling like he had some serious eye strain from staring at the pages so long. He needed his glasses for all this reading.

Clarke liked the way he looked in his glasses.
“Raven went to your place and got some of your stuff,” he told her, looking around the room. There were clothes, pictures, blankets . . . even her sketchbook, which he wasn’t about to open, though he knew it contained plenty of drawings of him. The doctors had brought in her bracelet, too, the one he’d given to her for her birthday. Unfortunately, they’d had to cut it off her wrist, because her forearm was bruised and had swollen up after the crash.

He could fix it for her, though. There were still some things in the world he could fix.

“Miller went home and got some stuff for me,” he added, plucking at the shirt Octavia had practically forced him to change into. She wanted him to go home and take a shower, too, but he wasn’t leaving the hospital. “He brought a lot of my shirts, so if you wanna wear ‘em after you wake up, go on ahead. They look better on you anyway.” He grinned, so used to being able to make her blush when he flirted with her like that. But getting no reaction out of her was so unnerving. No blush. Not even a smile. It was almost like she just . . . wasn’t really there.

“How is she? What if there was no way to pull Clarke out of this? What if she either just woke up on her own or . . . she didn’t?”

The door opened suddenly, and in the doorway stood Abby and Marcus. Last he’d heard from them, they’d rented a car to drive up to Orlando, with the intention of catching a flight home from there. And now here they were.

Abby looked devastated to see her daughter lying there, unconscious. She may have been a doctor, but she was still a mother. Bellamy doubted any of her experiences with patients had prepared her for this. She clasped one hand over her mouth and came into the room with tears already falling from her eyes. “Oh, Clarke,” she said, stroking her daughter’s hair lovingly. “I’m here.”

Bellamy stood up, giving her a little space, and nearly backed into Marcus.

“How is she? It was good of you to stay with her this whole time,” Marcus said. “Thank you.”

He shrugged. “The same.” Maybe that would change now that her mom was here, though. They may have had their differences over the years, but this was the one person in the world Clarke had known longer than any other. They were family.

“It was good of you to stay with her this whole time,” Marcus said. “Thank you.”

Bellamy just nodded, not sure if he really deserved any gratitude. Maybe Clarke wasn’t waking up for him because she didn’t want to come back to him. It was sort of an irrational thought, but he couldn’t help thinking it.

“Oh, Marcus, she looks good, don’t you think?” Abby asked her husband hopefully. “I mean . . . I envisioned her looking worse.”

“Me, too,” Marcus said, stepping around Bellamy. “She looks strong.” He picked up his stepdaughter’s hand and gave it a squeeze, and Bellamy noticed a flicker of disappointment in his eyes when she didn’t squeeze it back. But he concealed it well and assured his wife, “She’ll make it through this.”

“She will,” Abby agreed, wiping the tears off her cheeks. She sat down on the side of the bed and started smoothing out the wrinkles in Clarke’s hospital gown and threading her fingers through her long, blonde hair. “You hear that, sweetie?” she said. “We believe in you.”

Bellamy backed up towards the door, mumbling, “I’ll give you guys some time with her.” But he
was pretty sure neither one of them heard him or noticed him leave the room. All of their focus and attention was on Clarke, just as it should have been.

He hated leaving her, but he reminded himself that he wasn’t the only person who loved her. They needed their time with her, too.

He lumbered back out into the waiting room, where his friends had practically set up camp, and found Monty and Jasper halfheartedly playing a card game. Roan was handing out vending machine snacks to everyone who was still awake, and Harper was flipping through a magazine with a look of disinterest on her face. When she saw him, she set it down and eagerly asked, “Is she awake?”

Bellamy shook his head sadly, and Harper picked up the magazine again.

“Did her parents get here?” Raven asked sleepily. She and Niylah were leaning against each other, both with their eyes closed.

“Yeah.” He picked up a blanket from where it had fallen at her feet and spread it across both of them. They looked as exhausted as he felt.

Octavia was asleep, too, curled up on the couch with her head in Lincoln’s lap. So Bellamy sat down next to Miller, who looked like he could also nod off at any minute.

“Jackson went up to the cafeteria to get us all some dinner,” Miller told him. “He says the chicken fried steak’s really good, so . . . he’s gonna see if he can bring it down here for everyone.”

Bellamy nodded, not really hungry for much of anything, let alone something as huge and hearty as chicken fried steak. It wasn’t that he wasn’t appreciative, but he’d probably take a few bites of it and be done.

“You hangin’ in there?” Miller asked him.

“I don’t know,” he muttered in response, still struggling to even process that any of this was actually happening. He probably should have been better at this, given how many times he’d gone through it, but . . . he had a girlfriend to worry about and a baby to worry about right now. And the two of them combined had him so scared.

“Do you really think she’s gonna be alright?” he asked his friend. “Or are you just saying that to make me feel better?”

“No,” Miller answered quickly. “I really do think it.” He waited a moment, then added, “You wanna know what else I think?”

God, this almost felt strange, talking to somebody who actually talked back. But Bellamy just shrugged and waited for him to go on.

“I think that, when she wakes up from this, you guys are gonna be together again,” Miller said. “Because the way you feel about her . . . it’s never been more obvious.”

The way I feel about her, Bellamy thought, immediately filled with regret. There were so many things he hadn’t told her about the way he felt, things he might never get the chance to tell her now. If she never woke up, she’d never know. How was he supposed to live with that?

He thought about asking Miller to come outside with him, because he really had some things he needed to get off his chest. But all of a sudden, into the waiting room came his mother. She looked like she’d driven here straight from work, because she wasn’t wearing her normal clothes.
“Mom,” he said, pushing himself to his feet. He felt like everyone stopped what they were doing and watched as she came towards him and wordlessly wrapped her arms around him, enveloping him.

He remembered falling off his bike when he was little, scraping up his knee. Hugging her had made him feel better back then. He remembered getting into a fight some kids at school who’d been making fun of him and all the other ‘free lunch kids.’ Hugging her had made him feel better then, too. He’d hugged her at Roma’s funeral and Gina’s funeral, and even those hugs had managed to make him feel better. But just for a second.

This hug felt a lot like that.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get here sooner,” she apologized. “I worked a double shift and didn’t check my phone until I got off. Your sister . . . she called so much today, left me so many messages.”

Bellamy looked down at Octavia’s sleeping form. She looked peaceful and comfortable right now, and Lincoln was still awake, one hand draped protectively over her round stomach. She looked . . . taken care of. For the first time in his life, he wasn’t worried about her.

“Bellamy,” His mother put her hand on his cheek, forcing him to turn his head and look at her. “Are you okay?” she questioned.

He nodded, well aware how unconvincing he must seem.

So she asked him again. “Are you okay?”

He didn’t want to worry her. But she was his mom; she knew. So he shook his head honestly that time, feeling the tears start to well up, feeling his jaw tremble as he struggled to keep it clenched. All day, he’d been trying to hold it together so he could talk to the doctors and Clarke’s parents and even Clarke herself. But if there was anyone in the world he could be vulnerable with besides Clarke, it was this woman right here.

“Come with me,” she said, taking his hand. She led him out of the room, out the big double doors into the parking lot. They made it to his truck, got inside, and sat there in silence for a good five minutes. Or at least it felt like five minutes to Bellamy. Might have been less than that. She didn’t push him to say anything, and he didn’t. He just sat there, thinking about Clarke, trying to remember the last time he’d kissed her. At the wedding, right? He wasn’t sure. And he was trying to forget the last words he’d said to her, because they’d broken her heart. Of that much, he was sure.

“I can’t lose her, Mom,” he finally blurted, and despite how hard he tried to hold them in, the tears seeped out of the corners of his eyes. He started to cry openly, and she reached over to rub his back and shoulders when he slumped forward against the steering wheel. His whole body shook with sobs, almost uncontrollably, and he felt so weak. But he couldn’t be strong, not when he was imagining what life would be like if he never heard Clarke’s voice again. If he never saw her smile. Heard her laugh. There were so many things she did—little, incredible things—that he’d taken for granted. But if she woke up, he wasn’t going to be such an idiot anymore. He knew now how lucky he was to have her, and he was sure he didn’t deserve her.

It wasn’t fair. He’d only had her in his life for a few short months. Seven and a half amazing months, sure, but they’d gone too fast. Seven and a half months. That was all.

It wasn’t fair.

None of this was fair.
Chapter 54

It took Bellamy nearly an hour to pull himself together. His mom insisted on taking him somewhere to get some food, somewhere outside of the hospital, and he begrudgingly went along with it. He hated being away from Clarke’s side for so long, but he knew her mom and stepdad needed some time with her. Besides, when his mom said that he needed to eat something, she was right. He hadn’t thought he was hungry, but he ended up eating a heaping Subway sandwich in record time and feeling like he still had room for more.

She mentioned that he might want to go home for a while and get some rest tonight, but that was too much. If Clarke woke up and he wasn’t at the hospital with her, he’d feel like crap. Even more like crap than he already did. So he returned to the hospital, and his mom joined his crew of friends while he made the trek down the halls to Clarke’s room.

He knocked on the door lightly, then opened it slowly, hoping he wasn’t disrupting Abby and Marcus. Abby was sitting in the chair he’d sat in all night last night, holding Clarke’s hand just as he had. Marcus was standing by the window, looking down at his cell phone, mumbling something.

“Hi, Bellamy,” Abby said.

“Hey.” He shut the door, about to ask if there had been any change, when Marcus all of a sudden grumbled, “Son of a bitch.”


“Oh, one of my top critics is at it again,” he explained. “That liberal writer who likes to publish all those lies about me found out Clarke was in an accident. Apparently he posted an article about it, claiming she was intoxicated, and now he’s sharing it all over social media.”

Abby groaned. “Honestly . . .”

“That’s bullshit,” Bellamy snapped. Clarke hadn’t been drunk when she’d been driving. She wasn’t an idiot. “Why the hell would anyone do that?”

“Because this guy doesn’t like me, Bellamy, doesn’t like having me as a senator.” Marcus sighed heavily, shaking his head. “He’ll use anything he can to try to make me look bad, even a family tragedy.”

“You need to set the record straight,” Abby told him firmly. “I don’t want people out there thinking my daughter would be so irresponsible.”

“I’ll make a statement,” Marcus said, making his way over to her. He bent and pressed a kissed to the top of her head, assuring her, “I’ll take care of this.” He clapped Bellamy on the shoulder and walked out of the room, sounding determined and sure of himself, even though his shoulders were slumped and he looked discouraged.

“God,” Abby grunted. “Whatever happened to basic human decency?”

Bellamy pulled a chair around to the other side of the bed and took a seat, picking up Clarke’s free hand in his own. Every time he touched her, he worried she’d feel cold. But her body temperature was normal. Her breathing was steady and she no longer had a tube up her nose. Even her swollen
right eye was looking less swollen and bruised than it had last night. Now, it just looked like she’d run into a door or something. She didn’t *look* bad, but she didn’t look like herself, either, and that would never not be alarming.

Abby sniffed back tears, wiping underneath her nose with the back of her hand, and said to Bellamy, “You know, I’m a doctor. I work with patients every day, some who get better and some who don’t. I’m calm and professional with them; I don’t get worked up. So you’d think I would be better at this, but . . .” She shook her head. “Not when it’s my own family.”

Bellamy grazed his thumb over the back of Clarke’s knuckles, nodding in understanding. “She’s your daughter,” he said. It made sense that she wouldn’t be feeling calm and professional right now.

“She is,” Abby said, reaching up to stroke Clarke’s hair and the side of her face. “There’s nothing worse than not knowing if your child’s gonna be okay.”

Warily, Bellamy looked at Clarke’s midsection, hidden right now by a sheet and a thin blanket. “I’ll bet,” he said, wondering if a part of him was still in there or if it was just . . . gone.

Since he didn’t look at Abby, he didn’t see her looking at him. But he felt it, an intense gaze, a curious one. He averted his eyes from Clarke’s stomach and just stared down at her pale hand in his darker one. He wasn’t about to tell Abby that she might or might not be a grandmother within the next nine months. That conversation, whenever it happened, was one Clarke should have with her. No one else.

If she suspected anything, she didn’t say anything, and for that, he was relieved. In fact, she changed the subject completely when she asked, “How was your sister’s wedding?”

“Oh . . .” Eventful, he thought. But he settled for a vague, “Good,” instead. It had been good. It was everything afterwards that had been a train wreck.

“I think Clarke was excited to be a bridesmaid,” Abby said. “She really adores . . . everyone out there. I should really go meet them.”

“Yeah, they . . . they adore her, too,” he told her. “Octavia asked her to be the baby’s godmother, actually.”

“Really?” Abby smiled first at him, then at Clarke. “That’s amazing,” she said. “And you’ll be the godfather, I assume?”

He nodded. “Yep.” Octavia and Lincoln had wanted them to do that *together*. But even prior to the accident, he’d screwed that idea up.

“That’s a big responsibility,” Abby noted. “But I’m sure you two are perfect for the job.”

He gulped as all the guilt crept back in. Had it ever really left? Probably not.

“It’s serious, isn’t it?” Abby said. “You and her.”

*Screw friends with benefits,* he thought, knowing it hadn’t been just that for a long, *long* time. It was serious in every sense of the word. “Yeah,” he replied.

“You love her, right?” Abby asked, a hopeful look on her face.

God, did he ever. More than she knew. “Yes,” he said.
“And she loves you,” Abby told him. “She’s crazy about you. I’ve never seen her so happy before.”

He looked down again, ashamed. That may have been true, but Abby had probably also never seen her so sad, so devastated before. And he’d been responsible for that, too.

“When she wakes up,” Abby said shakily, “do you think you might . . . marry her?”

His head snapped up, and he probably looked more alarmed than he’d intended to. If there was ever any doubt that Clarke hadn’t told her mom about what had gone down between them on Saturday, this conversation pretty much squashed it. Abby was completely clueless to the fact that he’d broken her daughter’s heart.

“You’ve been together for a while,” she went on. “I don’t mean to sound pushy, but . . . do you think you might?”

She wasn’t being pushy. Just hopeful. She had hope that her daughter would wake up from this, hope that she’d have a happy, perfect life ahead of her when she did. He didn’t want to crush those hopes by any means, but . . . he didn’t want to lie to her, either. “I don’t know,” he mumbled in response.

“You don’t know?” She pouted a bit disappointedly, but then she quickly added, “That’s okay. You’re both young. You don’t have to rush anything.”

“Abby . . .” Shit, he felt horrible for having to do this, but letting her sit there believing that he and Clarke were still together was practically the same thing as lying to her. “Clarke and I broke up,” he confessed quietly without making eye contact.

At first, Abby didn’t say anything. But after a few seconds came this shocked, “What?” She huffed incredulously and asked, “When? I just talked to her before the accident, and she didn’t say anything.”

“It was Saturday,” he told her. “After the wedding.”


Too much to go into, he thought, so he just shrugged.

“What happened, Bellamy?” she demanded, her voice rising in volume as she rose from her chair in anger. “You were supposed to take care of her. You promised me you’d take care of her. I trusted you with my daughter.”

“I know.” It wasn’t fun feeling like he’d let her down.

“Then why would you--”

“Look,” he cut in, shooting to his feet. He didn’t want to argue with her with an unconscious Clarke lying in between them, so he lowered his voice, willing himself to remain calm. “There’s a lot of stuff that I can’t explain. But I do love your daughter. I wanna take care of her.”

She glared at him, shaking her head. “But you didn’t.”

Yeah. He knew that.

Any of Abby’s efforts to remain calm fell by the wayside when she launched in on him, almost accusatorily. “Who knows?” she said. “Maybe if you’d been with her, this whole accident never
would have happened. Maybe she’d be awake and okay right now if you just hadn’t–"

“I’m sorry,” he cut in, tearful again. Her mind was spinning, he was sure, and she was reeling from this revelation for the first time. But he’d had plenty of time to think about it. He’d had plenty of time to dwell on the fact that, if he and Clarke were still together, she likely would have never gotten in that car and driven over to see him. She probably would have been safe and sound at home, waiting for him to get back from work so she could tell him then. So she could tell him about the baby. A baby Abby still didn’t even know existed. A baby he wasn’t even sure existed anymore.

“Sorry isn’t good enough,” Abby growled, rubbing her forehead, shaking her head in what was either utter contempt or utter disappointment. Right now, he couldn’t tell the difference. “Just leave,” she told him. “Please.”

He felt his heart sink. Not that he’d expected a good reaction, but this was the same woman who, twelve hours ago, had begged him not to leave her daughter’s side. And now she didn’t want him anywhere near her.

God, he’d screwed things up so much.

Even though he’d been the one there with Clarke virtually this whole time, he didn’t feel like he could argue with her mother. So he lowered his head and sulked out of the room, resigned to not being there if—when—Clarke woke up now. If she ever did open her eyes, she’d see her mom and her stepdad and maybe Raven or somebody else there. But not him. He didn’t deserve to be the person who pulled her out of this.

He felt . . . completely lost when he walked out of that room. If he couldn’t sit in there with Clarke, then what was he supposed to do? Just sit out with his friends and his sister and his mom, pretending like this wasn’t the most terrified he’d ever been in his entire life? He hated feeling so fucking useless.

He saw Dr. Tsing’s long dark hair retreating down the hall, so he called out to her. “Dr. Tsing!”

She turned around as he raced to catch up with her. “Dr. Tsing!”

“Are you still optimistic?” he asked her.

“About . . . about Clarke?” she stuttered unsurely.

“Yes.” He needed an honest answer. “Because it’s been a day now, and she still hasn’t woken up, so are you still optimistic she will?”

Dr. Tsing stared at him sympathetically for a moment, and he braced himself to hear something horrible, like maybe she wasn’t as optimistic as she had been last night, or maybe something just didn’t seem right. But instead, she affirmed, “I am.”

His mouth trembled as he tried to find that same kind of optimism for himself. He wasn’t giving up on Clarke, but . . . he was just so used to dealing with tragedy that it almost made it hard to be hopeful.

“I know you’re worried,” she said, “and would I like for her to wake up right now? Yes, of course I would. But Bellamy, it’s not uncommon for patients to be unconscious for several days after trauma. I know you want her to open her eyes, and I really think she will. We just have to give her time.”

*How much time?* he wanted to know. It would have been helpful to have an exact number of days. Right now, everything was so vague, so wait-and-see, and it had every single one of his nerves fried.
Dr. Tsing turned to walk away again, but she stopped abruptly when he asked, “What about the baby? Are you optimistic about that, too?”

Slowly, she turned back around, and she wasn’t so quickly to assure him this time. “I have all the hope in the world,” she said.

Hope was different than optimism, though, more desperate. Even his tired mind could register the deliberateness of that word choice.

“I’m not gonna lie to you, Bellamy,” she said. “Is there a risk? Yes, a significant one. The human body has ways of protecting a child, but the risk of infant mortality is always highest early on in the pregnancy.”

And this was definitely early. Of that much, Bellamy was certain. Clarke wouldn’t have withheld something like this from him for long. Plus, she didn’t even look pregnant.

And maybe she wasn’t anymore.

“I wish I could give you a definitive answer,” she said, “but I can’t.”

He nodded, reluctantly accepting that fact. He was just going to have to live with not knowing. For a little while longer, at least. The most important thing right now was getting Clarke back. Beyond that . . . he could only hope.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Bellamy fell asleep that night. It must have been pure exhaustion, because his intention had been to stay awake. He woke up in the morning to a nudge on his shoulder from his sister. “Hey, I have to go home for a while,” she said softly. “Mom and Lincoln are gonna take me.”

“You okay?” he asked her.

“Yeah. Just . . . cramped up and uncomfortable,” she said, holding her back. “I’ll come back later, though.”

He nodded, appreciative of how much she’d been there for him. This couldn’t be easy on her. At eight months pregnant, she should have been spending all her time at home, relaxing, taking it easy. Yet here she was. “Just go take care of yourself,” he told her. That was the most important thing.

After Octavia left, his other friends gradually began to do the same. Each one promised they’d be back, but . . . he understood. There was only so much waiting a person could do. Emori had to go explain to her boss, in person, why she might not be coming in to work this week. Harper had to go to work or she’d be fired. Jackson actually went to work right there in that hospital, and everyone else . . . it seemed like everyone else just needed a change of scenery for a couple hours, whether it was going home and taking a shower, taking a nap, or getting some actual food that hadn’t come from a vending machine or a hospital cafeteria.

They’d be back tonight, Bellamy was sure. And as each one of them left, they offered to take him with them. But he declined and told them he was fine there.

The waiting room felt strangely empty as he sat there alone for a couple of hours. He found things to do, like emailing his professor to explain why he wasn’t in class and why he was probably going to miss the quiz on Friday. He texted his clients and explained to them why he hadn’t shown up to work on all the things they’d hired him to work on. Everyone was really understanding, and anyone who knew Clarke or who had even just seen her around the neighborhood wished her a speedy
recovery.

Around noon, his stomach started to rumble, and as if on cue, somebody showed up with a burger and fries from the local burger joint in hand. But it wasn’t the somebody he expected. It was Lincoln.

“Thanks,” Bellamy said when Lincoln dropped the lunch on his lap. “Where’s O?”

“She’s resting,” Lincoln replied. “Your mom’s still with her. But she wanted me to come back and check on you. She doesn’t want you to be alone.”

“Oh.” So she’d sent him? The only guy in that waiting room who he wasn’t super close to? Well . . . it was something, he supposed. And honestly, Lincoln was his brother-in-law now, so . . . maybe they’d get close somehow or another.

“You should eat,” Lincoln suggested. “I made myself sick when I was here with my mom, because I didn’t eat anything, didn’t get enough sleep.”

Bellamy started to reach into the sack, then paused. “Your mom?” he echoed.

“Yeah.” Lincoln looked down at his lap sadly, then over at Bellamy. “She died when I was seventeen.”

Bellamy frowned, feeling like an idiot for not knowing that. “Sorry,” he said. Octavia had probably mentioned it at some point, but he’d always been too busy getting pissed at Lincoln to get to know him at all.

“It was a long time ago,” Lincoln said.

“What happened?”

Even though it was a long time ago, the memories were clearly still fresh, because Lincoln’s eyes glazed over for a second. “Car accident,” he finally replied.

*Just like Roma,* Bellamy thought morosely. *Just like Clarke.*

“So you waited for her to wake up?” Bellamy asked him. That’s how he’d made it sound.

“For a few days,” Lincoln said. “We knew it wasn’t . . .” He shuddered, looking down at his lap. “We knew it wasn’t gonna end well,” he said. “The doctors told us there was nothing they could do. She held on a lot longer than we thought she would. And we got to say goodbye, at least.”

*At least,* Bellamy thought. What was the last thing he’d ever said to Clarke? He couldn’t even remember. Just like he couldn’t remember the last thing he’d said to Roma or to Gina.

“I wasn’t close with her,” Lincoln went on. “Not like you and Octavia are with your mom.”

“But still . . .” Bellamy said. “She was your mother.”

“Yeah.” Lincoln smiled sadly, but at least he could look back on his memories of her without becoming an emotional mess. If the worst happened and Clarke never recovered from this, Bellamy didn’t think he’d ever recover, either. He remembered depression well, remembered having to deal with it in therapy following Roma’s death. But he’d managed to overcome it then. Unfortunately, he didn’t feel like he was strong enough to do that anymore.

“Clarke’s mom kicked me out of the room,” he revealed shamefully, setting the food Lincoln had brought him aside. “That’s why I’m not in there. I told her we broke up and . . . now she doesn’t
want me there, I guess.”

Lincoln frowned, shaking his head. “No,” he said, “That’s exactly where you need to be.”

“You think?” Bellamy asked him.

“Yes.” Lincoln sighed heavily before telling Bellamy, “Look, I don’t know if Clarke can hear anything any of us has said to her. And I’m sure her mother just feels protective and wants to be there for her when she wakes up. But Bellamy . . . if there’s one voice in the world she’ll hear above all the others, it’s yours. Without a doubt.”

Is it? Bellamy wondered. Even after everything he’d said to her, even after he’d hurt her so bad . . . was that still true? Dr. Tsing seemed to think so. His friends thought so. Lincoln wasn’t a man of many words, but he meant what he said, so . . . he definitely thought so.

That didn’t mean it was true, though.

Bellamy ate all the food Lincoln had brought him, then went wandering. He just needed to stretch out his legs and arms and try to clear his muddled head. So he walked all over that hospital, getting turned around on more than one occasion. It wasn’t his plan to walk over to the hospital nursery, but somehow, he just ended up there. He peeked in at half a dozen newborn babies, three boys and three girls exactly. There were two sets of parents standing outside the window, looking in at them with big, adoring smiles on their faces.

Octavia and Lincoln would have a baby boy in here soon. A baby boy with the middle name of Bellamy.

If everything went perfectly, he and Clarke would have one, too. Maybe a boy, in which case, Jake was really the only name coming to mind. After her father, of course. And if it was a girl . . . well, if it was a girl, he had a few names in mind.

“Which one’s yours?” the man standing next to him asked.

“Oh, uh . . .” He must have looked like a dazed idiot, and the man next to him gave him a confused look when he didn’t answer right away. “None of them,” he finally said. All the babies’ cribs had nametags, so he saw a Landon down there and a Grant and an Andrew. For the girls, there was an Avery and an Emily and . . . who the hell had named their kid Cleobella? As someone with an unusual name himself, he sympathized.

But there wasn’t one little person down there who was a part of him and Clarke. That little person—or at least the beginning of that person—wasn’t something he could see yet. But if it still existed, it existed within Clarke. And the person sitting by her bedside right now didn’t know that.

Maybe Lincoln was right and Clarke was more likely to hear his voice than anyone else’s. But even if he wasn’t . . . maybe their child somehow could. If it was still in there, then maybe . . .

He marched back down the hall in what he thought was the right direction, but he’d walked around that hospital so much that it took him a good five minutes to find his way back to Clarke’s room. He didn’t hesitate to open the door and walk back inside. Abby looked surprised to see him again, but Marcus just smiled, like he’d known he would be back.

“Alright, I don’t mean to offend you,” Bellamy started in, locking eyes with hers, “because I know you’re dealin’ with a lot of stress just like I am. But before you got here, I was the one sitting with Clarke all night. I’m the guy they called as her emergency contact, not you. You know why? Because there’s no one else in the world who knows Clarke the way I do, who’s as close to her as I
am. So if she’s gonna hear somebody’s voice, it’s gonna be mine. It doesn’t matter whether we’re together now or not. I love her more than anyone in the world, more than I’ve ever loved anybody before.” He surprised himself with those words, but he kept going, because he could see Abby’s expression changing into one that wasn’t so upset with him anymore. “Please,” he begged from the bottom of his heart. “I have to be with her.”

Abby and Marcus exchanged a look, and Marcus didn’t hesitate to get up from his chair. He walked past Bellamy, gave him a pat on the back, and told him he was a good man. It took Abby a bit longer, but eventually, she let go of her daughter’s hand, got up, and motioned for Bellamy to take her seat. He did, hesitantly because . . . it wasn’t like he was trying to take her place or something. It wasn’t like she couldn’t be in there, too. He just knew that he and Clarke . . . they needed to be together right now. They just needed to be together.

Abby didn’t say anything, but she did bend down and give him a kiss on the cheek, much in the same way his own mother sometimes did. He felt the shift in her demeanor, a drastic one. She didn’t resent him for storming back into that room and standing up to her; she respected him for it.

When she left and the door was firmly shut and it was just him and Clarke again, he pulled down the blankets to get a closer look at her flat stomach. He pressed his palm against it, with only the thin material of her hospital gown in the way, and even though he knew better than to expect to feel any kicks . . . he still imagined what it would be like. Someday.

“Hey, you,” he said, bending down close, letting himself hope beyond the telling of it that he and this little baby could somehow . . . make a connection. “I’m your dad,” he said, the enormity of the words finally sinking in. Whether that baby survived all of this or not . . . he was a dad. Again.

“Bellamy?”

Clarke? he thought overzealously. But it wasn’t Clarke’s voice waking him up; it was Octavia’s.

Blinking his eyes open, he mentally swore at himself for falling asleep again. One of his hands was still resting on Clarke’s stomach, so he quickly removed it and covered her back up with the blankets.

“Can I sit with you?” Octavia asked.

“Sure,” he said, about to give her his chair when she pulled one up next to his.

“I see you reclaimed your spot,” she noted.

“Yeah.” It looked like the hospital staff had pulled a cot into the room, too, so clearly they knew he was staying there again tonight.

“Did you get some rest at home?” he asked her.

“I did,” she said. “And Mom cleaned my kitchen.”

“Hmm.” Yeah, that sounded like their mom.

“She’s gonna stay here tonight,” Octavia told him, “but she has to go back to work tomorrow, so . . .”

He nodded, figuring as much. That was fine. He didn’t expect everyone else’s life to stop just
because his had.

“But I’ll still be here,” she quickly assured him. “Everyone else came back, too. We all just wanna be here when Clarke . . . you know, when she wakes up.”

“If she wakes up,” he mumbled, feeling defeated by the whole thing again.

“Bellamy.”

“I just . . .” He dragged his hand through his hair, wishing he could be as unwaveringly optimistic as Dr. Tsing was. “I go back and forth. One second, I’m full of hope she’s gonna wake up, and the next, I’m so worried she won’t.”

“She will.”

“But what if she doesn’t?” No one seemed willing to talk to him about that, not even the doctors. It was like everyone thought he couldn’t handle it or something, that it’d break him. And they were right. It probably would.

“Bellamy, I know what you’re thinking, but this is not like before,” Octavia said.

“Yes, it is,” he insisted. “It’s the exact same type of car accident that killed Roma.”

“But Clarke’s alive!” she pointed out emphatically. “She’s not dead. You haven’t lost her, Bellamy.”

“Yeah, but if she doesn’t wake up . . .” If Clarke never opened her eyes, it was virtually the same thing as being gone forever.

“You need to stop fearing the worst and start hoping for the best,” Octavia advised. “Clarke is gonna wake up, and you’re gonna tell her how much you love her, and the two of you are gonna live happily ever after.”

_The two of us? _Bellamy thought, contemplating if it was completely far-fetched to hope that there might still be three. “She’s pregnant,” he blurted suddenly, wincing as he said the words.

“She’s . . .” Octavia trailed off abruptly, her mouth slowly dropping open in shock as she looked at Clarke, glanced down at her stomach the way everyone would when they found out the big news.

For a second, Bellamy felt relieved that he’d finally managed to tell someone. And of course it had been Octavia. She deserved to know that, if miracles happened and all this worked out, she’d be an aunt. Her son would have a cousin.

“Oh my god,” she gasped, smiling shakily at him. “Bellamy . . .”

“I didn’t know,” he admitted. “Not until I got here.”

“Is it—is it okay then?” she sputtered nervously.

“I don’t know.” He looked down at his lap, wondering if any son or daughter of theirs would have blonde hair like her or dark hair like him. Or maybe some combination. Would it have her blue eyes or his brown ones? Her fair skin tone or his olive one?

What if he never got the chance to find out?

“Well, now I know for sure you’re not gonna lose her,” Octavia said confidently. “She’s pregnant.”
“So was Gina,” he muttered, barely loud enough for her to hear him.

“Gina?” Octavia echoed. “Gina wasn’t . . .” She let her sentence fade again as the harsh realization finally dawned on her. She clasped one hand over her agape mouth and gazed at him in utter disbelief. He could barely even look her in the eye, because he almost felt guilty for keeping it a secret for so long.

This wasn’t exactly how he’d wanted to tell her about . . . that. But finally, he’d done it. Told his sister. Revealed the truth to someone besides Clarke Griffin. He’d just dropped two huge bombshells of information on her within the span of minutes, so he figured he’d leave out the part about it being all his fault that Clarke was in this hospital bed right now. Since she’d been coming over to see him, to tell him the news. If Clarke didn’t recover, he’d confide that in her later. Maybe.

“Oh, Bellamy,” she gasped in astonishment. “I didn’t know.”

“I never told anybody,” he confessed. “Except Clarke.”

“Oh . . .” Octavia bent forward, holding her head in her hands. “God.”

“Gina wasn’t very far along,” he informed her. “Neither is Clarke, so . . .” He trailed off. Another unfortunate parallel between his past and his present. There was no need to enlighten Octavia about the risks of miscarriage in the first trimester. As an expectant mother, she knew. And even though he hadn’t gotten online and looked anything up about pregnant women in car crashes, he knew, too, that even the pressure from a seatbelt could be deadly to a developing baby. Not to mention the airbags or the fact that Clarke had literally undergone a splenectomy.

There were so many variables working against that baby. And he knew it.

“Oh god, Bellamy, come here,” Octavia said, leaning over to hug him. He wrapped his arms around her, glad he’d told her, because now at least he had someone to talk to. But he couldn’t handle everyone knowing. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

“Don’t tell anyone, okay?” he requested.

“I won’t,” she promised.

“Just don’t tell ’em.” If the worst happened, then there was no need for the people he cared about to mourn the loss of two lives. He could shoulder that burden for them. He’d done it before.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Octavia . . . was kind of a wreck after Bellamy told her everything. She and Gina had been close, practically like sisters, and finding out that she’d died while carrying a baby was kind of a lot for her to handle. Bellamy called Lincoln into the room, and when he saw his wife crying, he got worried. Octavia assured him that she was okay, but clearly she wasn’t, so Bellamy told her she could tell him everything. Lincoln was her husband now. They shouldn’t have secrets.

Bellamy swapped out with Raven and Niylah for a few minutes after that, because he needed something to eat again. Chips would be fine, he supposed. Maybe chips and some M&Ms. He was getting used to eating a whole bunch of crap.

He dug around in his pocket for loose change, afraid he’d have to go ask Miller for a couple bucks; but he heard Miller’s voice as he approached the vending machine. He was talking about . . . Jackson?
“Yeah, I don’t think I wanna waste any more time,” he was saying. “I think I’m gonna ask him to marry me at some point this summer.”

Bellamy stopped, hanging back, peering around the corner. Monty and Jasper and Roan were there, along with Murphy, who was hitting the side of the vending machine to dislodge something that was stuck.

“This whole thing kinda just . . . puts things in perspective,” Miller said, and the other guys all nodded in agreement.

“I know what you mean,” Murphy said, finally just inserting more quarter to get his candy out. “I never used to tell Emori I love her. Not because I don’t, you know, but just because . . .” He shrugged as two Snickers bars dropped from their position. “I don’t really say it.”

“Yeah, but she knows,” Monty assured him.

“But I’m gonna tell her,” Murphy decided as he bent down to retrieve his purchases. “I’m gonna tell her every day now. She deserves to hear it.”

Bellamy stayed concealed, watching as his friends all stood there solemnly, each one looking lost in their own thoughts. What had happened to Clarke seemed to have opened their eyes to just how special their significant others were to them. Murphy, especially, seemed profoundly affected by the whole thing, and Bellamy had a feeling Miller wasn’t going to be the only one popping the question in the next few months.

Murphy and Emori. Miller and Jackson. Yeah, they’d get married soon enough. It all seemed sort of inevitable. Raven and Roan, Monty and Harper, Jasper and Maya, Niyalah and Luna . . . they’d all probably tie the knot someday, too. And hell, Lincoln and Octavia already had.

So what about him and Clarke then? Where did that leave them?

He forgot about his hunger for the time being and turned, heading back to Clarke’s hospital room. He felt . . . inspired, oddly enough. Overhearing his friends made him realize he was still holding something back. And he couldn’t do that anymore.

There was something he had to tell her.

Raven and Niyalah were playing music for Clarke off of Raven’s phone when he walked into the room. Sounded a lot like the Spice Girls. Or Britney Spears. He really couldn’t tell the difference.

“I heard sometimes music can . . . get people to wake up after this kind of thing,” Raven said. “We all got drunk and danced to this song a few years ago.”

“Well, Clarke tried to dance,” Niyalah amended.

“Tried,” Raven agreed. She stopped the song and sighed. “Well, it was worth a shot.”

“Yeah,” Bellamy said. It was good of them to try. And he didn’t want to kick them out or make them stop trying or anything, but . . . he needed a minute alone with his girl. Desperately.

“Do you want us to go?” Niyalah asked.

He did. But he didn’t know how to say that without sounding like a jackass.

“We’ll go,” Raven said. She and Niyalah both gave his arm a supportive squeeze as they slid past him
on their way out of the room.

He shut the door, wishing he could lock it, because he didn’t want anyone to interrupt him. And he definitely didn’t want anyone to walk in and overhear him. But it didn’t lock, so a closed door was gonna have to do.

“Clarke,” he said, walking towards her bed. “You gotta help me out here. Because I’m trying, but . . . .” He pulled the chair close to the side of the bed and sat down, folding his hands over his mouth. “Dammit,” he swore. Even now, this wasn’t easy.

“I’ve tried talking to you; I’ve tried talking to the baby,” he said. “We’re having a baby, Clarke. But I guess you . . . probably already know that.” He sniffed back tears, wanting to just be happy about that instead of being filled with dread and fear. He wanted to celebrate it with her. He wanted to watch her sketch what their child might look like. He wanted to talk through ideas for names. If she’d driven through that intersection just five seconds earlier, he would have been doing all those things.

“But nothing works,” he bemoaned. “You haven’t moved. You haven’t said anything. And it’s been two days now. Two days, Clarke.” That was forty-eight hours. Forty-eight of the most stressful, anxious hours of his life.

He took her hand, holding it tightly between both of his, and kissed the back of it. “I’m so sorry,” he apologized tearfully. “I know I screwed things up. I pushed you away. And I didn’t mean to. ‘cause you’re the best thing that’s happened to me in a long time. And I need you to know that.” Even now, though . . . she probably wasn’t hearing him. He hated that. He hated knowing that he should have said all of this sooner, back when she’d been able to hear it.

This wasn’t what he needed to say, though. Not really. These weren’t the words on the tip of his tongue. They were right there, but part of him wanted to wait just a little longer, to see if she’d wake up. And then he could tell her when she was listening.

But hadn’t he already waited long enough?

“I love you, Clarke,” he told her, his voice merely a hoarse whisper. “I love you so much.” He gazed down at their hands, pulling the long-hidden words out of their confines, finally working up the courage to tell her what she both deserved and longed to hear. “I’m in love with you.” His eyes fluttered back to hers, hoping beyond hope to see some movement. Here he was, finally pouring his heart out to the girl, and he wanted it to be enough. He wanted these words to be the words that brought her back to him. If there was anything that would, that could . . . wouldn’t this be it?

“God, I’m so in love with you, Clarke,” he said, the words spilling out like a waterfall now. “I love the things you say, the things you do.” He touched her face with his free hand, stroking her cheek adoringly. “I love the way you think. The way you move.” What he would have given to see even the most microscopic of movements out of her right now, or even to hear just one tiny sound. “I love everything about you, Clarke,” he told her. “And I wanna be with you. I wanna be with you and—and raise this baby with you. If we still have one.” He blinked rapidly as the tears fell out at the same rate his words now did. “I wanna spend my life with you, because you’re my best friend and the love of my life and my family and . . . and if you don’t wake up . . .” He squeezed his eyes shut, shaking his head stubbornly. “You gotta wake up, Clarke,” he said pitifully. “Please.”

He stopped and studied her face, holding his breath as he watched her. He paid close attention for any movement. Any movement whatsoever. Anything.

“Come on, please,” he begged. This was pretty much the most powerful thing he’d ever said to her.
If this didn’t work, if it wasn’t enough . . .

She didn’t move. She didn’t wake up.

No, he thought, feeling, in that moment, like all the hope was leaving him. He’d allowed himself to believe that this might work, but . . . loving Roma hadn’t saved her. Loving Gina hadn’t saved her or his child. Love couldn’t fix this.

He felt it fully in that moment, the agony, the despair. He felt like she was truly gone, that even though her body was there, she was never really coming back to him. So he let go of her hand and got up, trudging over to the window, looking out on the familiar streets of Arkadia at night time with tears clouding his eyes. Three girls loved, three girls lost. Not one of them was coming back to him. Not one of them was ever . . .

“Bellamy?”

He spun around, thinking he was hearing things. Going crazy or something. But her mouth was open ever so slightly, and her eyelids were fluttering.

“Clarke?” He rushed to her side, swooping her hand up into his own again. “Can you hear me?”

She didn’t answer, but her hand—her soft, beautiful hand—actually squeezed his a little bit. For the first time in days. And it felt amazing.

“Bell,” she said again, and slowly, slowly but surely . . . she opened her eyes.

“I’m here,” he told her, his heart leaping with joy as he smiled down at her. “I’m here, Princess.”

The nickname didn’t elicit the same response as it usually did, mostly because . . . she was still kind of out of it. Her eyes closed again for a few seconds, but then she turned her head to the side and opened them again. She looked right at him; their eyes actually met. And she was the most goddamn beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“Water,” she croaked out.

His ridiculously relieved and overjoyed mind barely registered the request. “Oh,” he said, reaching for the glass on the bedside table. He’d drank some of it earlier himself, but there was still plenty left for her. “Here,” he said, cupping one hand behind her head while he brought the rim of the glass up to her dry lips. She’d been getting fluid through a tube for two days straight now. No wonder she was thirsty.

She didn’t drink much, but her voice wasn’t as scratchy when she spoke again. “What happened to me?” she asked weakly.

“You got in an accident,” he told her, keeping it simple. “But you’re gonna be okay now.” Not only had she just woken up, but she’d woken up saying his name. She knew him, remembered him. Hopefully that meant there wasn’t any long-term damage.

“Am I . . . in the hospital?” she asked, squinting her eyes as she looked around the bright room.

“Yeah.” It was probably a bit disorienting seeing so much of her stuff there in a room that clearly wasn’t hers. “I gotta tell the doctors you woke up, okay?”

She nodded a little, as best she could. “Okay.”
She woke up, his mind screamed in ecstasy as he walked towards the closed door. He wanted to go shout it from the rooftops that she’d actually woken up. But instead, he grabbed the first doctor he saw and told him as much, and that doctor instructed one of the nurses, “Go tell her parents.”

“Can you get Dr. Tsing in here?” Bellamy asked him.

The doctor nodded. “I’ll go find her.”

“Thanks.” He slipped back into the room, wanting to selfishly enjoy a few more moments alone with Clarke before they were invaded by doctors and nurses and before her parents came in. He sat down on the edge of the bed and bent down to kiss her forehead, murmuring thankfully against her skin, “You came back.”

“Mmm,” she purred in response. She still sounded tired.

A moment later, he heard an eruption of happy cries and shouts coming from the waiting room, and he knew everyone out there had just heard the good news. He wasn’t sure if Clarke heard it, too, or not. He wasn’t sure if she’d heard anything he’d said at her bedside, either. But it didn’t matter. She was awake now.

She was alive.
Chapter 55

Clarke’s head had to be spinning. Waking up after two days of unconsciousness and finding out she’d been in a car accident had to throw her for a loop. Bellamy felt for her, especially because, from the moment her mom, stepdad, and Dr. Tsing came into the room, it was clear she was going to be asked a lot of questions.

Dr. Tsing looked her over fully, as did her equally medically competent mother. Marcus cracked a few jokes with her and got her to laugh a little, and Bellamy mainly just hung back, leaning against the window, trying to stay out of the way while her parents stood at her bedside.

The doctor’s physical exam all looked positive, and she said Clarke definitely seemed to be on the mend. She wanted to ask her some things, though, just to ensure that there was no cognitive damage.

“Fire away,” Clarke invited her.

“Okay. What’s your mother’s birthday?” Dr. Tsing inquired.


“The name of your first pet?”

“Never really had one. Mom wouldn’t let me get one.” Clarke sent her mother a slightly miffed glare.

“They’re unsanitary,” Abby claimed.

“What are the last four digits of your phone number?” Dr. Tsing asked.

“3415.”

The doctor smiled, a clear indicator that this was going well. “How about your first kiss?”

“Ugh,” Clarke groaned, making a face of disgust. “Finn Collins, janitor’s closet.”

Dr. Tsing laughed a little. “Who’s president?”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “I’d rather not think about that.”

“Okay, who’s your best friend then?”

Bellamy tensed, noticing how Clarke looked over at him out of the corner of her eye. But when she answered, she said, “Raven Reyes.” And that kind of stung.

“Very good, Clarke,” Dr. Tsing praised. “You did well.”

“That wasn’t exactly the ACT exam,” Clarke pointed out. “Not too hard to pass.”

“No, but you didn’t seem to have any problems coming up with the answers. So that’s a very good sign,” Dr. Tsing said. She glanced at the clock on the wall and noted, “It’s getting late. I think I can leave you be for the night. But I’ll check in on you tomorrow. And we’ll go from there, okay?”

“Okay,” Clarke said. “Thank you.”
“Yes, thank you,” Abby said, giving her fellow doctor and former colleague an appreciative hug. She closed in at Clarke’s bedside after that, though, and started talking to her daughter. Bellamy decided it was the perfect chance to slip out of the room and follow Dr. Tsing, because he needed to talk to her about . . . about that thing they hadn’t talked to Clarke about. Or her parents.

“Dr. Tsing,” he called, scampering to catch up with her.

“Oh, Bellamy, isn’t this great?” she said excitedly. “See, I told you we had reason to be optimistic.”

“Yeah, it’s . . . a miracle,” he agreed, feeling like even that word didn’t really do this justice. That moment when Clarke had woken up and said his name had been the most incredible moment of his life. He actually felt ashamed that he’d been so close to giving up hope completely, but that had more to do with his past than anything else. He’d never really give up on her.

“Listen, Dr. Tsing,” he said, wrinkling his forehead in confusion, “I don’t think Clarke knows she’s pregnant.”

“I wondered the same thing,” Dr. Tsing admitted. “I think you’re probably right that she doesn’t know. And I don’t think it’s a wise idea to tell her tonight. She’s already coping with enough stress. We don’t need to overload her. She needs to be as calm as possible for these next few hours.”

“No, I know for sure she didn’t know then,” he said. “And I thought she might’ve found out on her own, but . . . I mean, if she did, wouldn’t she ask if the baby’s okay?”

“I wondered the same thing,” Dr. Tsing admitted. “I think you’re probably right that she doesn’t know. And I don’t think it’s a wise idea to tell her tonight. She’s already coping with enough stress. We don’t need to overload her. She needs to be as calm as possible for these next few hours.”

“Okay,” Bellamy agreed. “It can wait.” He knew a thing or two about stress. In fact, stress had been his constant companion these past few days. It was better if Clarke didn’t have to deal with everything at once right now. He didn’t want to overwhelm her or get her worked up; he just wanted to be there for her.

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“Are you sure I can live without a spleen?” Clarke asked her mother for the fifth or sixth time. She didn’t even know what her spleen did, or if it did anything at all. It just seemed weird to no longer have one.

“I’m sure,” her mom said, smiling at her. “It is part of your immune system, though, so there’s some medication I wanna make sure they get you on. But no, you don’t need a spleen, honey. You’ll do just fine without one.”

“Okay, if you say so.” Clarke touched the left side of her upper abdomen, knowing she’d probably see a gross-looking scar once she lifted up her hospital gown. By all accounts, she’d been lucky, though, and she wasn’t taking that for granted. Based on the crash the doctor had described and the reported condition of her car . . . yeah, it could’ve been a lot worse.

“The type of surgery they did on you isn’t as invasive, either,” her mother informed her. “So your recovery time won’t take as long. You’ll be good as new in no time.”

*Good as new*, Clarke thought, picking at the bandaging on her left forearm. God, it was itchy and annoying, but hopefully she could take it off soon. All in all, it beat the hell out of a cast or a sling. Nothing was broken or fractured or dislocated. She had cuts and scrapes and bruises. She was sore, but she was . . . fine. So she was grateful.
“I’m sorry you guys had to cut your vacation short for me,” she apologized. They probably could have just stayed in Aruba and checked in on her when they came back.

“Oh, honey, don’t be sorry,” her mom said, cupping her cheek lovingly. “You are so much more important than anything else.”

“We hated not being able to get here sooner,” her stepfather added. “But Bellamy was with you the whole time.”

Bellamy. She looked at the door he’d just walked out of, wondering where he’d gone. To tell Raven and everyone else that her brain wasn’t wonky, probably. “Was he really here the whole time?” she asked.

Her mother nodded. “They told me he’s listed as your emergency contact.”

Huh. Even though she hadn’t anticipated him actually getting contacted about anything, she vividly remembered writing that in a couple nights ago. Along with the word boyfriend, which hadn’t applied then and definitely didn’t apply now. But of course he’d been the first one to know, the first one there. And he was still there.

He hadn’t left her.

“Can I see my friends?” she asked, needing to get her mind off of Bellamy.

“Tomorrow,” her mom said. “I just want you to take it easy tonight.”

“But I’ve been taking it easy for two days,” Clarke pointed out.

“Sleep and unconsciousness are not the same thing. You need to rest.”

Clarke shifted around a bit, feeling stiff and uncomfortable in this bed that she wasn’t used to. But she did feel tired, too, she had to admit. She wanted to see her friends, thank them all for being there for her, but . . . her mom probably knew what was best.

She nodded, reluctantly accepting the wait-and-rest plan. It’d probably be better if her friends didn’t see her until tomorrow anyway. She’d seen herself in a handheld mirror, and it wasn’t a pretty sight right now. No makeup, hair a mess, and a nice little bruise around her right eye. She’d probably scare them if they saw her. Although . . . they’d all already seen her, she supposed. According to her mom, she had “quite the fan club” out there, and they’d all sat down and talked to her these past couple days.

She sort of wished she knew what they’d said.

“You guys are gonna be here tonight, though. Right?” Clarke asked them. As resilient as she was trying to be, she was still pretty shaken by all of this. It was a small comfort to know that they were there.

“We’ll be here,” her mother promised.

Clarke looked down at the thin blankets on her lap, embarrassed to even ask her next question.

“What about Bellamy?”

Almost as if on cue, the door to the room opened, and he came back inside.

“I’m sure he’ll be right here,” her mom replied quietly. She smiled at her again, bent forward, and
gave her forehead a kiss, the way she used to do when she was putting Clarke to bed when she was younger. “Goodnight, sweetheart,” she said. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Clarke told her. She probably didn’t say it enough.

Her stepfather gave her hand a squeeze and told her, “We’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Oh okay.” Hopefully she’d be . . . livelier. Maybe less confined to this bed.

For some reason, it didn’t dawn on her that her parents were leaving her and Bellamy alone until they actually were left alone. Her mom and Marcus walked out that door, and Bellamy remained behind. He shuffled towards her bed, hands in his pockets, and gazed down at her wordlessly. She had to look away, just because . . . it was undeniably awkward. He was there, and he was Bellamy, but . . . he wasn’t the same guy she’d listed as her emergency contact the other night. And they weren’t the same pair.

“You had me worried,” he mumbled.

Oh god, she could only imagine. Not that she thought she could compare to Roma or Gina, but . . . she knew he must have been so scared after everything he’d already been through. “I’m sorry,” she apologized, looking up at him. He was . . . pretty disheveled. His hair was everywhere, his eyes had bags under them, and he looked like he hadn’t shaved in days.

“Did you . . .” He started to ask a question, but then he trailed off. “Never mind.”

“What?” she prompted. For the first time in days, they could actually have a conversation; so now definitely wasn’t the time for him to go silent on her.

“I just wondered if . . . if you could hear me,” he said softly. “Any of us. We were talking to you.”

Of all the words people had said to her these past few days, his were definitely the ones she was most curious about. But trying to recall anything from the past forty-eight hours was like . . . like looking into a giant black hole in her memory. There was just nothing there. “No,” she replied. “I didn’t hear anything.”

He let out a heavy sigh and looked down at the ground. “Right.”

She glanced to her left at the tray connected to her bed and saw one of her cheesy romance novels lying there face down, opened about a fourth of the way. She had a feeling he’d sat there and read to her. Probably for hours.

He was still a really good guy.

Now was totally not the time to be contemplating her very complex relationship with Bellamy Blake, though, and she knew that. So she pulled the blankets up over her chest and said, “I’m supposed to get some sleep.”

“Oh.” He sounded . . . almost disappointed to hear that. “Okay.” Sitting down on the chair beside her bed, he grabbed the book off the tray, acting like he was going to sit there and read. But Clarke knew him better than that. He’d sit there and watch her sleep, probably all night. He’d breathe in when she did and breathe out when she did. Knowing that he was being so vigilant with her would make it impossible for her to fall asleep. So as much as she hated to do it, she suggested, “Maybe you should leave.”

He frowned, like that hurt his feelings. “You sure?” he asked, probably wanting her to change her
“Yeah.” If things were different, if they were still together . . . well, then he would have crawled into that hospital bed with her and held her throughout the night. And she would have let him. She would have loved it.

He set the book down, slowly rose to his feet, and stood there unsurely for a moment, almost like he couldn’t leave even though she’d asked him to.

“I’m okay,” she assured him. She’d open her eyes again after closing them. She’d see him tomorrow and talk to him more then. She’d thank him for being there for her and tell him to make himself a priority, too. He had a job, and now he had a class, both of which he’d probably missed out on just to sit at her bedside.

“Alright, I’ll let you . . . sleep then,” he said, slowly stumbling towards the door. It was like he took the longest time possible to get there, and when he did, he turned back around and asked, “You got everything you need? Are you comfortable?”

“Yeah,” she said, snuggling a bit deeper in the bed. “Could you shut off the lights?”

“Yeah.” He reached for the light switch, but when he flipped it, it didn’t get completely dark in there. Just really, really dim. “Goodnight,” he said.

“Night.” She watched him leave the room, wondering how many hours he’d sat in there with her, waiting and hoping she would wake up. And now that she had, she’d basically just kicked him out. Great.

It had to be done, though. Had to be done.

Falling asleep turned out to be easy. Her body was still very tired, so she drifted off in no time. Her dreams weren’t particularly pleasant, what with thoughts of a car crash and surgery flying through her mind. So it was actually kind of a relief to wake back up again in the middle of the night.

It happened when her doorway opened, letting a sliver of light from the hallway inside. That little sliver of light was enough to wake her up, though she didn’t move and barely opened her eyes.

Through half-closed lids, she saw Bellamy’s familiar form silhouetted in the doorway before he quickly shut it again. He came into the room and muttered a swear under his breath when he stubbed his toe on something. She watched as he limped over to the cot set up underneath the TV on the wall and lay down, not even bothering to grab a spare pillow or a blanket to make himself comfortable.

She closed her eyes again, keeping them shut until she heard him start . . . not snoring, exactly, but like one step down from that. Bellamy tended to breathe pretty loudly when he slept. She recognized the sound well.

Opening her eyes again, letting them adjust to the nearly dark room, she watched him, getting an idea of what it must have been like for him to sit there and watch her these past two days. Except this was different, because she knew he’d wake up. When it came to watching over her, he hadn’t had that luxury.

His devotion was . . . heartwarming. Not surprising, but heartwarming nonetheless. And maybe a little misleading. He hadn’t snuck back in there because he was all of a sudden in love with her now; it was because he loved her. As a best friend.

*Oh, well,* she thought. For tonight, that was good enough. She closed her eyes, taking comfort in his
nearness, in the fact that he was right there if she needed him. And then she drifted back to sleep.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

The bed was so small and so not soft that Clarke didn’t sleep particularly well that night. From the second she awoke in the morning, she felt like she needed more rest. Both her mom and the doctor had told her that she should expect to feel lethargic for the next few days, but she wasn’t looking forward to having such little energy.

Being in that hospital room was so weird, because in a way, it was completely unfamiliar. But clearly her friends had done their best to make it homey. She saw some of her clothes hanging up in the closet, and some of her pictures were set out, including one of her and her dad on her first day of high school. During the night, someone—either Bellamy or someone who worked there—had covered her up with a Redskins blanket that wasn’t actually hers; it was Bellamy’s. But she’d cuddled under it at his house enough that it felt like hers, too.

Once her eyes had adjusted to the morning brightness, she cast a glance at the cot. Bellamy had settled in on it last night and was still lying there now, still sleeping.

She could probably count on one hand the number of times she’d woken up earlier than Bellamy Blake.

Oh, gotta pee, she thought suddenly, figuring that was the reason why she’d woken up. She gauged the distance between herself and the bathroom, feeling like it wasn’t too far. She could make it.

Since she wasn’t hooked up to a dozen annoying monitoring machines anymore, she sat up slowly, pushing the blankets aside. The left side of her abdomen was definitely a little sore because of the surgery she’d had, but she ignored the slight ache and swung her legs over the side of the bed. Well, as much as she could swing them right now. She hadn’t used them for days, so she was very stiff.

When she stepped down onto the floor, her knees nearly buckled, and she had to hold onto the bed for support. As if he had some sort of Protect Princess Mode that alerted him to her potential distress, Bellamy began to stir, and she cringed inwardly at the thought of waking him up. She took a few slow, unsure, quiet steps, feeling as wobbly as a baby colt. She bumped into one of the chairs, and the noise from that startled Bellamy awake.

“Clarke,” he said, immediately shooting to his feet. He was at her side in a second, one hand coming up to wrap around her waist, the other holding her arm. “What’re you doin’?” he asked her.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” she said, holding onto him like a crutch as she walked. This was sort of . . . embarrassing. But she remembered having a hernia removed back in the first grade and having to walk all bent over with a pillow pressed to her stomach for over a week. At least this didn’t feel as bad as that, but it did feel similar.

“You want me to just carry you?” he offered.

“No, I got this.” She wasn’t an invalid. Besides, she was already halfway there.

It was slow-going, but with his help, she made it to the bathroom. He probably would have gone in there with her if she hadn’t said, “I can do this part myself,” and shut the door on him.

Once she was through doing what she needed to do, she stood at the sink, washing her hands, groaning unhappily at her reflection. Oh god, this hospital gown did nothing for her figure. And her hair looked like a dead cat on her head, so she combed her fingers through it in an attempt to make herself look better. At least the bruise around her eye was yellowing out and subsiding. And she’d
chanced a peek at her splenectomy scars, which were a lot smaller than she’d anticipated they would be.

When she came out of the bathroom, Bellamy was right there waiting. He held out his arm for her to grab onto, but she just whimpered, suddenly feeling like that bed was too far away.

“Can you just carry me?” she relented, deciding to take him up on his offer.

“Sure.” He moved in close, bent down, and hooked one arm under her knees, securing the other around her back. Like she weighed nothing, he lifted her off her feet and carried her over to the bed, laying her down carefully.

“Thanks,” she said, getting back under the covers. As ridiculous as it sounded . . . her legs weren’t shaved, and she didn’t want Bellamy seeing that. Not that he really cared. He’d even shaved her legs for her one time when they’d taken a bath together, but . . . well, they weren’t taking any baths together anymore, were they?

“You alright?” he asked her.

“Yeah,” she said. “Just sore.”

“What hurts?”

“Stomach.”

“Stomach, huh?” He frowned.

“It’s fine, though.” If she was able to walk around a little bit throughout the day, she was sure she’d get to feeling better.

“Do you want some, uh . . . some food or anything?” he asked her. “I’m sure they can get you some breakfast.”

Before she could respond, the door opened, and in came her mom and her stepdad, both of whom looked thrilled to see that she was already awake. And very tan. She supposed they had Aruba to thank for that.

“Good morning, sweetie,” her mother practically cooed. She came to Clarke’s bedside and gave her a big kiss on the cheek.

Clarke could barely recall the last time her mother had been so affectionate. “Did you sleep well?” she inquired.

“Kind of,” she replied with a shrug.

“How about you?” Marcus asked Bellamy.

“He slept on a cot,” Clarke answered for him.

“Ah, I’ve slept on worse,” he claimed. And Clarke knew he was talking about the trailer he and his mom and Octavia had lived in for a while when he’d been young. He’d slept on the floor in a sleeping bag there. He and his mother both had.

Abby started trying to fix up Clarke’s hair for her, which Clarke was actually quite grateful for, and revealed, “Well, guess what? We got to know all your new friends this morning. They took us out for breakfast.”

“Can I see them?” Clarke asked eagerly. She’d gotten some rest, and now she just wanted to spend
some time with the people who had become her family this year.

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Clarke had to have the most packed hospital room in the entire building. Everyone was there. Wells and his girlfriend had even driven in from Delaware to come visit her. Everyone wanted to talk to her and tell her what a relief it was to hear her talk back.

It wasn’t that different from when they all hung out at his place on Saturday nights, except this was a Friday morning. And it wasn’t Bellamy’s place. And rather than sitting next to Clarke with his arm around her, he had his arms folded over his chest and was standing feet away from her by the window.

Okay, so maybe it was different after all.

“I think no spleen suits you,” Raven teased. She’d cuddled up next to Clarke in the bed and was now fiddling with the adjustable buttons that raised and lowered it.

“It was just holding me back,” Clarke agreed, managing to be remarkably good-spirited about the whole ordeal.

“Yeah,” Harper agreed, snuggling one of the ‘Get Well Soon’ teddy bears someone had purchased for Clarke in the gift shop. “Next time we go out to TonDC, you can let loose. No pesky spleen getting in the way.”

“Yeah, I’m sure I’ll be a world class dancer now,” Clarke joked, and that got a knowing laugh out of everyone.

“Is your scar gnarly?” Jasper asked almost excitedly.

“It’s not that bad,” Clarke told him. He pouted.

“Sorry to disappoint!” she huffed.

“Ugh, scars suck,” Emori lamented. “I have one right by my ass.”

“Is that from having your tail removed?” Miller taunted.

“Shut up!” she yelped, seizing the bear from Harper. She threw it at him, but he ducked out of the way, and she ended up hitting Murphy instead.

Bellamy just stood there, halfway listening to the conversation that ebbed and flowed around him, but mostly just watching Clarke. It was so good to see the life in her eyes, to see her smile and laugh with all their friends. She verbalized and vocalized, chattered and babbled. She interacted and reacted, and all in all, it was a beautiful sight to see.

He must have seemed tense or something, though, because his sister came to his side when Murphy launched into a tirade about how horrible hospital food was. “You okay?” she quietly asked him.

“Yeah,” he replied. He was . . . better than he’d been in days.

“She looks good,” Octavia remarked, “all things considered.” She grimaced a bit, holding her back, and Bellamy knew she had to be feeling uncomfortable as hell. She was a very pregnant woman who’d slept in a hospital waiting room for three nights straight. She needed to go home and sleep in
her own bed tonight. He was going to make her.

“So what about the . . . you know?” Octavia mumbled. “Any word on that?”

“No.” He studied Clarke closely, thinking that she looked so . . . so innocent. When she found out about the baby, she’d be shocked. And so scared.

“Has she . . . has she even mentioned it?” Octavia asked.

He shook his head subtly.

“Does she know?”

“I don’t think so.” Not talking to her about it was torture, though, for him. It felt like he was keeping some huge secret from her.

“Oh my god,” Octavia said. “When are they gonna tell her?”

_They?_ he thought. Who was _they_? The doctors? Dr. Tsing? She was a nice woman and all, but . . . he couldn’t picture himself just standing there like a wordless idiot when she dropped that bombshell on Clarke. No. It had to be something _he_ did. It was _their_ baby.

“Bellamy?” Octavia prompted.

“I’ll be back,” he said, slinking off behind the backs and shoulders of his friends, exiting the room. They could have their time with Clarke, and once they all dispersed . . . then he’d tell her. And then she wouldn’t be laughing and smiling as much as she was right now.

He found Dr. Tsing in the hallway, coming out of the room of another patient. She smiled at him right away and asked, “You get some sleep?”

“Yeah.” He’d woken up every few hours to check on Clarke, though, just because . . . he couldn’t not.

“It seems like she’s doing great,” Dr. Tsing remarked, motioning for him to follow her as she traipsed down the hall. “I don’t want her to overdo it, but it is good for her to get up and move around a bit. Maybe you could help her with that?”

“Yeah.” He definitely could.

“She’s gonna need to take it easy when she goes home, though. Does she live with you?”

“Uh . . .” A week ago, she basically had, but now, everything was different. “Not exactly.”

“She doesn’t?” Dr. Tsing sounded genuinely surprised.

“We’re not really . . .” He trailed off, deciding not to get to far into their whole breakup saga. They could figure out plans for Clarke later, before she left the hospital. Right now, there was a far more urgent matter to deal with.

“Can we tell her today?” Bellamy asked, stopping in the middle of the hallway. “Can I tell her?”

Dr. Tsing grabbed his arm, gently pulling him out of the way as another doctor hurried past. “About the baby?” she asked.

“Yeah.” The knowledge that there even _was_ a baby to tell her about still made his head spin, but
gradually, it was becoming less and less surreal. “I feel like . . . it should be me,” he said.

Dr. Tsing nodded slowly in agreement. “You’re right,” she said. “It should be.”

“So I can . . . I can tell her?” he stammered.

“Sure. You have that conversation, and I’ll talk to her afterwards.”

He exhaled heavily, feeling nervous. “Okay.” Already, his palms were sweating, and he didn’t usually get sweaty palms. “What do I say?”

Dr. Tsing smiled sympathetically. “There’s no script I can give you,” she said. “You just . . . you just tell her. And support her. The way you felt when you found out? She’s gonna feel the exact same way, maybe even more so. She’s gonna need you.”

Bellamy gulped, nodding. As crazy as this all had been for him, Clarke was the one who was actually carrying a baby. Or . . . hopefully she was still carrying it. She was going to have so many thoughts racing through her mind when she found out, and she was going to feel so many fears.

He was gonna be there for her. She didn’t have to do this alone.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Clarke didn’t know if what she was eating was supposed to be pudding or Jell-O. It was pretty bad when you couldn’t tell the difference. “This stuff’s disgusting,” she told her mom, forcing another spoonful into her mouth.

“Yeah, hospital food’s always a little bland,” her mother empathized. She was getting to enjoy a chicken sandwich, but the doctors didn’t want Clarke eating anything too hearty. Squishy, liquidy food was what they wanted her to eat right now, because they warned her that her stomach might be a little touchy in the aftermath of her surgery.

“I can’t believe you eat this stuff every day,” Clarke said, scooping up the last spoonful in her bowl.

“Well, not every day,” her mother said. “Sometimes I work through lunch. And our cafeteria’s not bad. It’s a bigger hospital, so we have more . . . variety, I guess you could say.”

“So size matters?” Clarke joked.

Her mother laughed. “In this case, it does.”

“Hmm.” She glanced towards the door, halfway expecting Bellamy to come back in, just because . . . well, when they were talking about size, that’d be appropriate.

The room had cleared out half an hour ago. If it was up to her friends, they probably would have hung out and kept her company all day. But they obeyed her mother’s orders just like they obeyed Dr. Tsing’s orders, and when Abby told them they needed to give her a little time to relax, they left. They were all coming back later, though, they assured her, to hang out tonight. She wasn’t sure how lively or energetic she’d be by then, but she’d try her best.

Marcus was still mulling about the hospital somewhere, she assumed, as was Bellamy—she had a hard time picturing him leaving without saying goodbye—but it was her mom who insisted on being the one to have lunch with her today. A ‘mother-daughter lunch,’ she called it. Clarke couldn’t even remember the last time they’d had one of those, but despite the fact that she was still confined to a hospital room, it was kind of nice.
“So what do you think of my friends?” she asked, eager to find out what kind of impression they’d made.

“I think . . .” Abby paused, swallowing what was in her mouth, and wiped her lips off with a napkin. “I think you all seem very close-knit,” she said. “And they seem like a good group of people.”

Clarke smiled, happy to hear that. Perhaps her opinion would be different if she knew that Miller and Jackson were gay, or if she knew that Jasper was a stoner, but . . . hey, she wasn’t about to tell her any of that.

“So you got to know them all through Bellamy?” her mother asked.

“Mmm-hmm.” She looked down at her lap, wishing it didn’t hurt just to hear his freakin’ name.

“His sister . . . goodness, she’s beautiful,” Abby remarked.

“Yeah.” As if she wasn’t pretty enough, she had the whole pregnancy glow happening, too. “It’s the genetic jackpot.”

“And I hear you get to be her baby’s godmother. That’s exciting.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said, hoping that was still the plan. As awkward as it would be for her and Bellamy to stand up there together at that little boy’s baptism . . . they could do it. For Octavia. For Lincoln. For the baby.

“She looks like she’s about to have that baby any day,” Clarke’s mother remarked. “Is she?”

“Uh, she’s got about a month left,” Clarke replied. “So . . . yeah, I guess we’ll be back in this hospital in a couple of weeks. For a different reason.”

“Yeah.” Her mom set her lunch tray aside and scooted her chair forward, clasping both her hands around Clarke’s. “I’m sorry you’ve had to go through this,” she said.

“At least I’m okay,” Clarke said. Miller, upon her request, had showed her a picture of what her car now looked like, as photographed by the local news station and posted on their website. It was . . . legitimately scary.

“I knew you’d be okay,” her mother said. “You’re strong, you’re brave.”

Clarke grunted, feeling like she hadn’t been either of those things lately. She’d spent the majority of her time these past few days crying about Bellamy. That wasn’t strong at all; it was the opposite.

“It’ll take a little time to fully recover,” her mom said, gently squeezing her hand. “Actually, I . . . I wanted to talk to you about that.”

“You did?”

“Yeah.” Her mom smiled hopefully and said, “I was thinking that, when you leave, maybe you could come home, stay with your stepfather and me for a while.”

Home? Clarke thought, frowning. That wasn’t home. But then again . . . neither was her apartment. Not really.

“Shouldn’t I stay here, though?” she asked. “Dr. Tsing’s gonna wanna check up on me. I’m closer to her here.”
“Well, I’m a doctor, too,” her mother pointed out. “I could take care of you.”

Oh, Clarke was sure she could. Her mom was a great doctor, and she and Marcus would probably hire somebody to help out whenever they were at work. If Clarke went home with them, she wouldn’t have to lift a finger during her recovery. There would be somewhere twenty-four seven at her beck and call to get her whatever she needed.

“Maybe you could just stay with us this summer,” her mother proposed. “That’d give you some time to . . . figure out what you wanna do next.”

A.k.a. figure out my whole future, Clarke thought. That wasn’t exactly something she wanted to think about right now.

“I just don’t want you to be alone right now,” her mother said, obviously just trying to be helpful.

“I’m not,” Clarke said. “I’ll have Raven and Niylah and . . . all my friends,” she said. “They can help out.” Surely Raven wouldn’t mind letting her stay over for a couple of days. And then, once she’d recuperated a bit more from this surgery, she could go back to her apartment and take care of herself. She’d be fine. She didn’t need a babysitter.

“Oh, Clarke . . .” Her mother sat back, sighing. “I’d feel better about leaving you here if you and . . .” She trailed off, hesitating for a few seconds. “Well, if you and Bellamy . . .”

Clarke tensed. Her mom knew about her and Bellamy?

“He told me you two broke up,” her mother explained.

He had? God, she could only imagine what that conversation had been like.

“I’m sorry, Clarke,” her mother said sympathetically. “I know how you felt about him.”

She looked away from her mom, her frown intensifying. Had Bellamy agreed to this? Did he think it was a good idea for her to go spend the summer—or at the very least, a few weeks—with her mom and stepdad in their home? Even though she hadn’t mentioned him as one of the people who could help her out, she’d sort of imagined that . . . that he would want to. Regardless of whether they were together anymore or not, she’d assumed he would come visit her and check up on her and . . . just make sure she was doing alright.

“He still loves you, you know,” her mother said. “I don’t know what brought about this whole break-up, but . . . I watched him with you, Clarke, and he still loves you very much.”

Maybe that was meant to be comforting or reassuring, but . . . she almost wished her mom wouldn’t have even said that. Because it got her hopes up. It made her believe that there could still be something more between them. Maybe there could be, but . . . she really couldn’t think about any of that right now. Her desperation to be with the guy was ultimately the reason why she’d gotten in a car crash. Now she just had to focus on getting better; she couldn’t deal with anything else right now.

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How am I gonna do this? Bellamy wondered as he stared in at the babies in the hospital nursery again. There was one fewer than there had been yesterday, so her parents must have taken her home already.

This was so backwards. It was usually the girls who told the guys they were pregnant. He couldn’t help but imagine how Clarke would have told him. In person, probably. Maybe she would have
taken a home test with Raven at her side for support. Or maybe she would have brought a test over to his place and taken it there with him. He could’ve waited with her for the results; he could have spent that time comforting her and assuring her everything was gonna be alright.

A young couple walked into the nursery together, approaching the crib of one of the baby boys. They lifted him out of it, and the mother held him close to her breast, rocking him and snuggling him while the father touched his fingertip to the baby’s tiny palms, looking at him in amazement. They looked so happy. They looked like a family.

Clarke was his family now. Whether the baby survived or not, he’d already decided that.

*You gotta do this,* he thought, reminding himself that he had actually volunteered himself for the job. Even though Clarke couldn’t reveal the news to him, he could still be the one to tell her. Their circumstances definitely weren’t ideal, but at least it could still be more . . . intimate this way. Special. Meaningful.

He turned and headed back to her room, trekking through the now familiar hallways. He knocked on her door and heard her say, “Come in,” so he slowly opened it and stepped inside.

She was alone for the first time all day, sitting up in bed, drawing something on the small notepad of paper that sat on the bedside table.

“Hey,” she said, barely glancing up from her sketch.

“Hey.” He closed the door and walked forward, squinting to get a closer look at the drawing. It definitely wasn’t of him. Not this time. “What is that?” he asked.

“‘It’s a tree,” she replied, holding it up for him to see. “It’s not very good.”

“No, it’s nice.” He stood between the side of the bed and the chair, not sure if he should sit down or stay standing, if he should just blurt it out or ease her into it.

“I finally had to tell my mom to leave,” she said, shading in some of the tree’s leaves. “I needed a little me time.”

“Oh.” And here he was interrupting that. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” she said, setting both the paper and pencil aside. She looked up at him expectantly, but he just stood there like a moron, not saying anything. His mouth felt dry, and his heart was pounding.

“This is awkward,” she said.

Yeah, it was. He couldn’t help it. He was so nervous, it was as if he’d suddenly forgotten how to use his words.

“Look, Bellamy . . .” She sighed, looking down at her lap. “I don’t remember much about the crash, but I do remember calling you before it happened. And I’m sure my voicemail was sort of . . . spastic, but . . .”

“I didn’t . . .” He felt bad admitting it, but he couldn’t lie to her and let her think he’d heard that voicemail. “I didn’t listen to it.”

“Oh.” She frowned slightly. “You didn’t?’”

“No.” God, he felt like such an ass. “I deleted it.”
For a second or two, tears sprung up into her eyes; but she blinked them away just as quickly as they’d appeared. “Of course you did,” she muttered dejectedly. “Why am I even surprised?”

“I just thought . . .” He trailed off, not even attempting to explain. What he’d been thinking in that moment and what he was thinking in this one were very different things.

“Clarke, I need to tell you something,” he blurted, deciding it was best to cut to the chase before he said anything to upset her even more.

“Bellamy, I’m tired,” she said. “Can we not delve into our relationship right now?”

“No, it’s not that.” That was another conversation, probably multiple ones, that they could have later. Once she’d had time to process all of this.

“Can you just leave?” she asked him. The way she said it . . . it sounded like she was pleading with him.

“Sure,” he said, taking a few dazed steps away from the bed. But he quickly came to his senses again and turned back around. “No, I can’t,” he said, knowing he had to do this. If he didn’t, then she found out from a doctor, just like he had. And that wasn’t the way to find out. “Clarke . . .”

“What?”

He gulped, wishing he was better at this, wishing he was brave enough to reach down and grab her hand, even if she didn’t want him to, because it’d been so easy to hold her hand and talk to her when she’d been unconscious.

Just do it, he told himself. Tell her.

So he did. “You’re pregnant.”

She stilled completely and just stared at him, her expression an unchanging mask for at least a few seconds. Then she snorted out a laugh, almost rolling her eyes, even, as though she thought he were joking or making that up. But she looked away, and it didn’t take very long for that look on her face to change. He watched it happen, watched it go from a slightly annoyed one to slightly fearful. The furrow of her brow deepened, and her bottom lip began to quiver. He could see the wheels of her mind spinning as those two fateful words of his truly registered.

You’re pregnant.

She looked like she was deep in thought, asking herself if it was even possible, probably thinking about the last time she’d gotten her period or . . . thinking about any other potential symptoms she might have had.

He swallowed the lump in his throat, expecting to feel like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders now that he’d told her. But he didn’t. If anything, he almost felt worse, because the longer she sat there thinking about it, the more scared she seemed. Her eyes got wide with panic and shimmered with tears. And when she concernedly touched her stomach, it almost broke his heart.

“Am I still?” she finally asked, her voice barely louder than a whisper. She couldn’t even look at him.

Yes, he wanted to tell her. Because that was what he wanted; he wanted her to still be pregnant. But he had to be honest with her. He owed her that much.
“I don’t know,” he confessed quietly.

She inhaled loudly, shakily, obviously terrified, and she still didn’t look him in the eye. A few of her tears spilled over onto her cheeks, but she didn’t bother to wipe them away.

He stood there by her bedside, feeling the same fears as much as he could. Being a pregnant woman was different, he knew. Try as he might, he’d probably never really be able to understand everything that she was feeling right now.

He didn’t say anything, didn’t try to get her to talk, either. Instead, he just gazed down at her stomach, praying to God their little baby was still in there.
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

What a pleasant and flattering surprise it was to find out that a reader had made a trailer for this fanfic, which you can watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoXn5WD5J1w It's so much better than anything I could have made myself, so go show it (and the vid-maker) some love!

Chapter 56

It felt like it’d been an hour since Bellamy had told her the big news. But it’d probably been more like fifteen minutes. Clarke was still reeling. She’d barely moved since he’d told her, hadn’t said anything. She couldn’t. Each time she opened her mouth, she just ended up closing it again, because . . . it wasn’t like Bellamy knew much more than she did. All he knew was what she now knew, that she was pregnant. Or . . . that she might be.

God. Finding out about a pregnancy would have been life-altering even if she and Bellamy had been . . . trying. But they hadn’t been, and it had happened anyway. And she didn’t feel ready for it, because she was only twenty-two years old, and she’d just graduated college a couple days ago and still had no idea what she was going to do with her life. How was she supposed to be someone’s mother when she wasn’t even all that good at being an adult yet?

Not to mention the fact that there was her and Bellamy’s current relationship status to consider. To say that they were in a state of complete disarray definitely wasn’t an exaggeration. Even if they had still been together, this development would have thrown them both for a loop. But it was even worse now that they’d . . . broken up or whatever. That wasn’t even technically the right term for it, but she didn’t know what else to call it. They weren’t together, but they’d still made a baby together. So now she was pregnant.

Potentially. And that was really the darkest cloud hanging over this whole thing, the one part of it she was trying her hardest not to think about. Because she could let herself freak out over the fact that she was young and unprepared, and she could worry about how she and Bellamy were going to cope with this when they weren’t even an actual couple. That stuff was normal. But she couldn’t allow herself to sit there and dwell on the possibility that their child had died in that car crash, because that just wasn’t normal. And when she let herself fear that, she imagined how afraid Bellamy must have felt given what he’d gone through and what he’d lost with Gina. And that was too much.

He stood at her bedside, as silent as she was. For some reason, she found it hard to even look at him right now, but she knew that, if she did, he’d either look like he was lost in thought or like he was just thinking and worrying about her. Seeing him either way would be utterly heartbreaking, so she just didn’t look.

“How did you find out?” she finally asked, startled that she could actually hear the tears in her own voice.

It took him a few seconds to respond. “Oh, uh . . . they told me. Dr. Tsing told me,” he said. “Right after you got out of surgery.”
Surgery, she thought dismally. The word sank like a stone to the pit of her stomach, and she placed her hand over one of the small scars on the left side of her abdomen, feeling pangs of concern. She’d had a surgery, and she was pregnant.

“They did a blood test,” he explained. “The other night when we came in after you fainted . . . one of the tests they ended up running was a pregnancy test, and it came back positive, so . . .”

Oh my god, she thought as a whole new worry flooded her mind. Even if this car crash wasn’t fatal to the baby, what if something else was still wrong? Because she hadn’t fainted in years, yet one week ago . . . she had. That wasn’t exactly a comforting thought.

She wasn’t about to voice her concern over that, but she knew Bellamy had to be worried about it, too. He just wasn’t saying anything.

All of a sudden, the door swung open, and in came Dr. Tsing. “Hi, Clarke,” she greeted almost cheerfully. “How are you?”

Clarke brought her hand up to her trembling lips and barely managed to shake her head.

“I told her,” Bellamy revealed.

Dr. Tsing’s chipper expression instantly changed into a more serious one. “Okay,” she said calmly. “Then Clarke, you know that I can’t give you any definite answers yet, right? I wish I could, but . . .” She trailed off and sighed. “Well, we’re gonna hope for the best.”

It almost seemed weird to hear a doctor say that. Hope was such an abstract concept. Weren’t doctors supposed to rely on logic and facts and science? If Dr. Tsing was relying on hope, then maybe things were already looking really grim.

“I’ll tell you what, though: You’re so lucky to have this guy right here,” Dr. Tsing said, motioning to Bellamy. “He’s hardly left your side, and he’s been so strong through all of this.”

Clarke finally glanced over at Bellamy, but he met her eyes for only a second before looking down at his feet. I don’t have him, she thought. But it wasn’t Dr. Tsing’s fault that she didn’t know that.

“When can we find out if the baby’s . . . okay?” Clarke asked fearfully. Sooner rather than later, she needed to know.

“We’ll talk about that,” Dr. Tsing said. She stood at the foot of Clarke’s hospital bed and said, “First, I need to ask you a few questions. And I apologize in advance, because some of them are a little invasive, okay?”

Clarke nodded, figuring she had nothing to hide. For all she knew, she and Bellamy may have conceived this baby in public, so . . . to hell with being shy.

“Did you have any inclination you might be pregnant?” Dr. Tsing started in.

“No,” she replied. She hadn’t suspected anything. Although, looking back, there had definitely been some signs.

“Do you have any idea when this may have happened?” Dr. Tsing inquired.

Clarke shot a look a Bellamy, who just shrugged cluelessly. Trying to pinpoint the exact date of their conception was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. “I don’t know,” she answered. “We kinda . . . had sex a lot.”
“Well, when was your last period?” Dr. Tsing asked. “Do you remember?”

She did, mostly because Bellamy had finally convinced her that it was okay to have period sex. “Probably about a month ago,” she replied. “Maybe a little more.”

“How much more?”

“Like five weeks?” That seemed like a reasonable estimation. It was hard to say for sure, though, especially when she’d been unconscious for two days and was still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that it was Friday.

“Okay,” Dr. Tsing said. “And were you two using protection of any kind?”

Clarke cast another sideways glance at Bellamy, a bit embarrassed that they hadn’t been more careful. “Well, I’m on the pill,” she said, “but I mean, I . . . I miss days once in a while. Just here and there.” Just to clarify, she told him, “I didn’t miss any on purpose. I wasn’t trying to trap you, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“That’s not what I was thinking,” he assured her quietly.

“And what about condoms?” Dr. Tsing asked, mostly to Bellamy.

“Sporadic,” he responded.

“Non-existent,” Clarke corrected, giving him a look. It wasn’t his fault; if she’d insisted he wear them, then he would have. But somewhere along the way, they’d just gotten so caught up in each other that condoms hadn’t really been a priority anymore.

“Okay, Clarke, have you had any other symptoms then?” Dr. Tsing questioned. “Nausea, fatigue, changes in appetite?”

“Well . . .” Clarke thought back to Sunday night after her graduation, suddenly wondering if that had been more than she’d thought it was. “Last week, I got sick,” she admitted.

“What about when she fainted?” Bellamy jumped in. “Is that a symptom?”

“Not typically,” Dr. Tsing said. “And I don’t think that’s cause for alarm, either. Of course I’d rather not have an expectant mother be fainting, especially during the first trimester, but her body’s had to support two people instead of just one lately. That coupled with not eating and drinking much that day . . . I think that explains it.”

“I’ve been feeling hungry lately,” Clarke blurted. No cravings yet, but she thought of her barren refrigerator and kitchen cabinets and knew she might have to ask Raven to go pick her up some groceries before she got home from the hospital.
“Well, you’ve been eating for two, Clarke,” Dr. Tsing said, smiling. “So that’s normal.”

Is anything about this normal? Clarke wondered. Nothing felt that way.

“Okay, just a few more questions,” Dr. Tsing told her. “Please be honest here, okay? We need to know.”

“Okay.” She’d been nothing but honest so far, but she understood why the doctor prefaced her question with that once she actually asked it.

“How many sexual partners have you had in the past two months?”

“One,” Clarke said, motioning to Bellamy. “Just him. For eight months.”

“That’s good,” Dr. Tsing said. “And have you ever been pregnant before?”

“No.” This was definitely a first for her. Though not a first for Bellamy.

“Alright. Thank you for answering all those questions,” Dr. Tsing said kindly. “It just helps me further understand what we’re dealing with here.”

Now that she’d answered all the doctor’s questions so obediently, Clarke again brought up the vitally important one she’d asked at the start of the conversation. “When can we find out if I’m still . . .” She didn’t want to finish the sentence, and it wasn’t necessary to.

“We’re in a bit of a tough spot here,” Dr. Tsing informed her. “We don’t know quite how far along you are. It could be five weeks; it could be less than that. And it’s hard to see a baby on an ultrasound, especially during a first pregnancy like this one, until the six-week point, if even then. So I would hate for us to do one, not see anything because it’s too early, which I believe would be the case, and for you to feel anxiety over that. Or depressive thoughts. That kind of stress isn’t good for you or the baby when you’re in a recovery period. Ultimately, your own well-being comes first.”

“So you wanna wait?” Clarke surmised.

“Yes.”

“Well, that makes me anxious, too.”

“I know,” Dr. Tsing said. “It’s stressful either way.”

“Couldn’t we just do another pregnancy test?” Bellamy asked.

“It could very easily give you a false positive right now, so I wouldn’t recommend it,” Dr. Tsing advised. “I think we should wait a week, give you some time at home to recover, and then bring you back in for an ultrasound. Okay?”

Clarke sighed, figuring she didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. “Okay,” she said, resigning herself to a week of worry. It’d be the longest, hardest week of her life. And of Bellamy’s.

“Thank you,” he said to the doctor.

“I wish there was more I could do,” she said. “I want you to take it easy and get some rest and relaxation, Clarke. That’s the best thing you can be doing right now.”

“Okay.” That shouldn’t have been too hard, not when she was basically confined to this one room and this one adjustable bed. Even if they released her tomorrow, like she was hoping, it wasn’t like
she had any classes or a job to get back to. She’d have plenty of time to rest. But she doubted she’d be able to relax at all.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Dr. Tsing said, taking a few steps backward. “Just let me know if you need anything.”

“Thanks,” Clarke said. She managed to keep the tears at bay until the doctor left the room and shut the door. That was when they slipped out of the corners of her eyes, and she had to wipe them away.

“You okay?” Bellamy asked her.

“No.” There was no point in lying. Of course she wasn’t okay. She’d just found out she might or might not be pregnant, and she wasn’t going to know for certain for at least another week. If she and Bellamy had a baby in her belly, then that was terrifying, but if they didn’t . . . then that was devastating.

“Why didn’t you tell me right when I woke up?” she demanded, unable to keep the accusation out of her voice. She’d been sitting there all morning talking and laughing with her friends, eating lunch with her mom, and she’d had no idea.

“Doctor told me not to,” Bellamy replied. “Besides, at first I thought you already knew.”

“Of course I didn’t know!” she snapped. “I would’ve told you.”

“Well, I didn’t wanna overwhelm you, either,” he explained.

“I’m overwhelmed.” Even if he’d waited and told her days from now, she still would have felt the same.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I just . . . did what I thought was right. I don’t know what I’m doin’, Clarke.” He looked away, rubbing his forehead as if he had a headache.

He seemed so tired, so stressed out in that moment, that she regretted lashing out at him. This was his baby, too, and it was just as hard for him to deal with this as it was for her.

“Who else knows?” she asked.

“No one,” he replied. “Except Octavia. I told her. She probably told Lincoln.”

Octavia? He’d told Octavia? Well, that was . . . good, she supposed. He’d managed to tell his sister. She actually felt quite proud of him for that, and it was a relief to know that he hadn’t shouldered the burden of this knowledge entirely by himself for the past few days.

“Do you wanna tell everyone else?” he asked her. “Or should we wait until we know for sure . . .”

She thought of his baby with Gina and how he’d kept that a secret for such a long time. That hadn’t been good for him to bottle everything up like that, to keep it all inside. Granted, being in this position herself now, she understood why he’d done it. But that didn’t mean it was a healthy thing to do.

“I think we should tell them,” she said. Right now, for the sake of this baby—if there even was one she needed to do everything in her power to be as healthy as she could be.

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When he sensed that Clarke needed a moment alone, Bellamy left the room. Truth be told, as much
as he wanted to be there for her right now, be that shoulder she could lean on, he probably needed to go outside and get some air.

Before he’d made it outside, though, he collided with none other than his mom as he rounded the corner.

“Oh, Bellamy,” she said.

“Mom? What’re you doing here?”

“I took the afternoon off,” she explained.

His eyebrows shot upward in surprise, because he couldn’t remember the last time she’d done that.

“Well, I wanted to come check on you and Clarke,” she said. “Is she up to having visitors now?”

“Uh . . .” He glanced back over his shoulder, down the hallway at the closed door to her hospital room. “I’m not sure.”

“She’s probably tired,” his mother said. “I’m betting you are, too.”

“Ah, I’m alright.” He continued walking down the hall, and she followed him.

“So are you sleeping here again tonight?” she asked. “Or are you going home?”

“No, I’ll sleep here,” he decided, unable to suppress a yawn.

“And are they releasing her tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.” He and his mother walked outside, and he was disappointed to see that it was gloomy, clouds all over the sky. He needed a good omen right now, some sunshine or something. At least the temperature was comfortable, though, so if she was willing to stand out there with him, he’d stand out there for a while.

He exhaled heavily, standing there with his hands on his hips, and debated whether or not to tell her. Clarke had told him she planned on telling her parents today, so . . . yeah, maybe he should do the same with his mom. It was just hard for him, though. Revealing something so huge and so uncertain . . . it was the exact opposite of what he’d done with the secret about his and Gina’s baby. So it felt unnatural.

He’d told Clarke, though. And nothing could be harder than that. So maybe this wouldn’t be so bad.

“Mom, I gotta tell you something,” he started in. It wasn’t like she’d be disappointed or anything. He was a grown man who did grown man things. Besides, Octavia was three years younger than him, and their mother hadn’t jumped down her throat about getting pregnant.

“What is it, Bellamy?” she asked, sounding concerned. “Oh, you look so tired.”

“I am,” he admitted. “But listen . . .” It really didn’t matter if he was tired or if he was stressed, because there was a girl in that hospital who needed him to be strong right now.

“Clarke’s pregnant,” he finally just blurted out. That was gonna be the way he told everyone, he decided, to just say it and let them react.

“She’s . . .” His mom dissolved into excited, happy squeals and overjoyed laughter after that. She pulled him in for a hug and congratulated him and told him what amazing news this was . . . and then
he had to crush her spirit.

“Well, she was,” he amended. “We don’t know if she is anymore.”

His mother’s happy smile immediately vanished, and she gasped. “Oh, no,” she said. “Because of the accident?”

He nodded mutely.

“Oh, Bellamy . . .” She put one hand on his shoulder, rubbing it gently. “It’ll all work out,” she assured him.

“I don’t know.” He was trying to hope for the best, but . . . damn, it was hard.

“Well, Clarke woke up. That’s the first step,” she pointed out. “Now when will you know—”

“A week, maybe,” he cut in. “Anyway . . .” He shrugged sadly. “I don’t want you to stress out about it, but I wanted to tell you. And O already knows, so make sure she doesn’t stress about it, either.”

“Oh, she will,” his mother said. “So will I. And I can’t even begin to imagine what you and Clarke are feeling right now. But Bellamy . . . regardless of how anything turns out, you’re a father.” She smiled at him tearfully, getting choked up. “My baby girl’s a mother, and my baby boy’s a father.” She reached up and stroked his cheek lovingly. “I couldn’t be more proud.”

He closed his eyes and hugged her again, feeling a familiar sense of comfort in her embrace. This woman had given birth to him at eighteen. She’d raised him all on her own, no help from anyone. She’d struggled and toiled for countless hours every day of his childhood, just to put food on the table. If she could be that strong of a mother to him, then he could be that strong of a father to his child.

For nearly twenty minutes, he sat outside with his mom, listening to her recall funny moments from when he and Octavia were babies. She told him about how someone had once mistake him for a girl because she’d dressed him in lavender and about how Octavia had chewed up the first stuffed animal toy anyone had ever given her. He sat there and listened, occasionally laughing, but often thinking about what kinds of memories he might be able to amass if he was allowed the chance to raise a son or daughter. He wanted to be . . . like a scrapbooking dad or something. Just taking tons of pictures and collecting them all in a book. And Clarke would probably draw and paint a lot of pictures of the baby. He wouldn’t be her primary subject anymore. Not if they . . .

. . . not if they just had the chance.

When it started to rain, Bellamy and his mom went back inside, and he took her to see Clarke. Clarke managed to smile when she saw Aurora and hugged her as best she could from her hospital bed.

“I’m so glad you’re gonna be alright,” his mother said. “Please don’t worry us like that again.”

“I’ll try not to,” Clarke said. She glanced quickly at Bellamy, and he nodded, silently communicating that he’d done it. He’d told her.

“So . . . what do you think?” Clarke asked his mom.

“Oh, about . . .?” His mother trailed off and made a pregnant Bellamy motion with her hand. “I’m excited for you,” she said. “And very hopeful.”

“Really?”
“Really.” Aurora smiled. “Some things are just meant to be, Clarke,” she said. “And I think this is one of them.”

*Oh, god, please let that be true*, Bellamy thought desperately. As sad as it was to think about, maybe he and Roma hadn’t been meant to be, and maybe he and Gina and their baby hadn’t been, either. But maybe he and Clarke and *this* baby . . . maybe they were.

Unfortunately, Clarke started to look like she wasn’t feeling well about five minutes into Bellamy’s mom’s visit. She started to shift around on the bed, looking uncomfortable and a bit queasy, but she didn’t say anything. Bellamy suggested that his mom leave, though, and she took the hint and did so.

“What’s wrong?” he asked Clarke, helping her sit up.

“Ugh, I feel sick,” she groaned, swinging her legs over the side of the bed. She looked like she wanted to get up and go to the bathroom, but it didn’t seem like she was going to make it when she clasped one hand over her mouth. So he ran and got a trash can and brought it over to her, barely making it in time as she lurched forward and vomited. Not a lot, but enough that it kind of grossed him out.

“That’s disgusting,” she said, handing the trash can back to him.

“That’s a good sign, though, don’t you think?” he pointed out. “You’re nauseous.”

“I had surgery,” she reminded him as she reached for her glass of water and took a drink. “My mom said I could be nauseous for days.”

*Or you could be nauseous because you’re pregnant*, he thought. *Because you’re still pregnant.*

“Not trying to be a downer,” she said, settling back into the bed. “I just . . . I don’t think we should automatically assume . . .”

“No, I get it.” She was just being rational. Realistic.

Clarke groaned again when the door opened and her mom and stepdad came into the room.

“Oh, someone looks cranky,” her mother remarked.

“She just got sick,” Bellamy informed them. He made the mistake of looking down into that trash can and immediately wished he hadn’t.

“I’m fine,” Clarke insisted. “It’s just kind of hard to get any rest when people are constantly coming in here.”

“Well, we can leave,” her stepfather offered, “if you wanna get some sleep.”

“No, I wanna talk to you,” she said, shooting Bellamy a quick look. Brief as it was, he knew what it meant: She was going to tell them the big news, just like he’d told his mom.

He knew Abby and Marcus were still pretty keen on him, even though he had broken up with Clarke, but that didn’t mean he wanted to be around when she revealed to them that he’d gotten her pregnant. So he said, “I’ll give you guys some space,” and left the room with the trash can in hand. He ended up handing it off to one of the janitors, who said he’d take care of it.

He thought about wandering back over to the nursery, or perhaps finding his mom and sitting down to talk to her some more. But then he heard a chorus of familiar voices chiming out as they came...
down the hall, and he realized that his friends were back for the evening, just like they’d promised they would be.

“Bellagio!” Raven exclaimed, leading the pack of them. “How’s our brave princess?”

“She’s, uh . . .” Telling her mom she’s pregnant, he filled in mentally. No way could he let any of their friends interrupt that.

“I got her something in the gift shop,” Jasper said, holding up a small princess doll with curly blonde hair. “You think she’ll like it?”

“Yes, she’ll love it,” Bellamy said. “Uh . . .” He motioned for his friends to follow him as he walked away from Clarke’s room. “She’s with her mom,” he said, “so let’s go get somethin’ to eat.”

“Five star dining here we come,” Murphy muttered sarcastically under his breath.

“Stop it,” Emori said, nudging his ribs. “It could be worse.”

As it turned out, according to Jackson, it couldn’t be. Because the cafeteria was serving its excuse for chicken noodle soup that night, and Jackson told them straight up that it was the worst meal. Miller suggested that they go out and get some Chinese food instead, but Bellamy said he didn’t want to leave the hospital. What he failed to mention was that he didn’t want to leave specifically in case Abby and Marcus wanted to talk to him or grill him about the fact that he’d knocked their daughter up.

_Everyone_ had so many questions for him. Harper wanted to know if Clarke had walked around much that day. Niylah asked if she was in good spirits. Jasper was still interested in finding out if her scar was gnarly. And Octavia didn’t ask it, but he saw the look of questioning in her eyes: Had he told her she was pregnant yet? He figured one way of answering that question was to tell everyone else. It was the perfect opportunity, after all, since they were all there. He could say it once, to everyone, and spare Clarke having to do it.

“I still think we should do something for her once she comes home,” Emori was saying when he decided to interrupt.

He cleared his throat and announced, “Uh, guys, there’s . . . there’s something I have to tell you.”

“Sex change?” Murphy guessed.

He made a face. “No.”

“Is Clarke moving back in with us?” Emori asked hopefully.

“I don’t . . . I don’t know.” That was a conversation for tomorrow. Probably.

Harper gasped loudly and squealed, “Are you gonna marry her?”

“Harper!” Monty hissed, shooting his girlfriend a look. “They’re not even together right now.”

“Oh, please,” she scoffed. “He hasn’t left this hospital in three days.”

“We’re not . . . we’re not getting married,” Bellamy informed her. _Not yet, anyway._

“Then what is it?” Raven asked from down at the other end of the table. “Is she pregnant or something?” She said it almost flippantly, and beside her, Roan smirked. But Bellamy just sat there, figuring he could say everything he needed to without saying anything at all.
His friends were unusually quiet for a few seconds until the realization dawned on all of them. Once Raven yelled, “Oh my god!” they all erupted into chaos. There were whoops and screams and shouts and squeals. Murphy spilled his soup and said, “Holy shit,” and Jasper leapt up and started doing a celebratory happy dance. Maya began to cry, and Miller just stared at him in stunned amazement and shook his head. Bellamy heard them say everything from “I knew it,” to “Congratulations, Big Papa!” And at one point, Emori boasted something about how she’d won the bet. Because apparently some of his friends had bet money on how long it would take for him to get Clarke pregnant.

Throughout it all, Octavia sat beside him, giving his hand a supportive and understanding squeeze beneath the table. The elation they were all currently feeling . . . she’d felt it for him, too, but it was mixed in with a cautious optimism now. Bellamy just sat there with her and waited for the gravity of the situation to sink in with everyone else.

Gradually, they calmed and quieted down, each one of them going from purely happy to majorly unsure in their own time. It took Jasper the longest, but when he noticed that he was celebrating by himself, he sat down slowly, his expression shifting into one of concern. Nobody said anything, but they all stared at him curiously and at each other unsurely. No one seemed to want to voice the obvious question, but finally, Miller assumed the role of mouthpiece of the group.

“Baby’s gonna be alright,” he said, “right?”

Bellamy heard several of the girls, in particular, inhale sharply, as though they were holding their breath while they waited for his answer.

“We don’t know,” he told them. “We’ll see.”

“You’ll see?” Niyalah echoed. “What does that mean?”

“We have to wait at least a week and then have an ultrasound,” he said, shrugging dejectedly. “So we don’t know.”

All his friends suddenly looked . . . just slumped over with sadness. They stared down at their soup, eyes glazed over, and Bellamy felt the sympathy rolling off of them in waves.

“We didn’t know until . . . all of this,” he informed them, “so we broke up before we . . .” He trailed off, sighing. Yeah, everything was sort of a mess right now, and ultimately, he was the one responsible for making it that way.

“I don’t know what’s gonna happen,” he admitted, looking around at all the happy faces that were now so sad.

You gotta be born, Bellamy thought, silently talking to his unborn son or daughter. It wasn’t just Clarke and him who looked forward to meeting that child. It was all of them. That baby was gonna have so many aunts and uncles who would love it so much.

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The news of this baby seemed to be getting a lot of different reactions. And Clarke managed all those reactions within the span of a couple hours.

Her mom cried a lot. She wasn’t mad, she assured her. It just made her emotional to think that she could be a grandmother.

Her stepdad put a smile on his face and acted happy for her, but she knew that he was already
fretting about what an unwed, pregnant stepdaughter would do to his political image.

Raven was upbeat and excited about the whole thing. She said she was going to be the cool aunt but that she would never take the kid to Uncle Roan’s workplace.

Niylah joked around and claimed that she’d make an excellent godmother if neither Raven nor Octavia was up for the job.

Murphy and Emori already volunteered themselves for babysitting duty, though Murphy warned her he wasn’t great with kids.

Harper suggested a litany of names, each one weirder than the last. Monty finally told her to stop talking.

Jasper cried profusely while Maya comforted him. He was blubbering so much that Clarke couldn’t understand a word he was saying.

Miller and Jackson’s congratulations touched her heart, because they told her that, even though it was scary, she should be grateful that she had the chance to have a child with someone she loved. They wished they had that opportunity with each other.

Octavia didn’t come visit her, and Clarke suspected it was because she felt guilty about walking in there with such an obvious pregnant belly. But she hoped she and Lincoln would come visit tomorrow. She really wanted to know if they still wanted her to be their son’s godmother.

Bellamy kind of stood at the door, letting one person in after another, and after visiting with every single one of her friends, Clarke felt exhausted. She managed to smile and thank them all for coming back up to see her tonight, managed to hold herself together even though she knew they were all worried and just trying to hide it.

Bellamy left the room when her mom came back in to say goodnight, but it wasn’t a quick goodnight. Her departure was a long, drawn-out one that started with, “I just can’t believe my baby’s having a baby,” and then transitioned to, “The human body has miraculous ways of protecting a child, you know, even after trauma.” She started explaining the features of the womb in more detail than Clarke could even comprehend, and eventually it got to the point where Clarke had to cut her off and tell her to leave. “Mom?” she said. “No offense or anything, but . . . I kinda just need to be with Bellamy right now.”

Disappointment flashed in her mother’s eyes, but only for a second. “Of course,” she said, leaning in to kiss Clarke’s forehead. “Everything’s gonna be fine, sweetie,” she said. “I promise.”

The words were meant to reassure her, but Clarke knew better than to blindly believe them. There was no guarantee. Her mom could make as many promises as she wanted to, but nothing about this was certain.

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Bellamy sat out in the waiting room with Clarke’s stepfather, waiting for Abby to come out. Once she left, he’d go back in, help Clarke get settled down and clear her mind for the night. It was getting late, and it seemed like she was getting tired. There had been someone in that room with her nearly all afternoon, whether it was a doctor or a family member or a friend. She probably needed a break. Maybe she even needed a break from him.

He supposed he’d find out.
“You know,” Marcus said, clearing his throat, “I never had a child of my own. But I do think of Clarke as a daughter, and . . . well . . . I’d love to give my daughter away someday.”

Bellamy smirked. That definitely wasn’t a subtle hint. “I’d love to marry her,” he said. Now that Clarke was awake again and he was no longer in denial about his own feelings, it was hard not to picture a future with her. “One step at a time, though,” he said, trying not to get ahead of himself. “We’re not even together anymore.” For all he knew, Clarke no longer wanted him.

“Oh, you are,” Marcus said. “You might not be dating, but you’re still together. And I’m thankful for that. I know Abby is, too.”

“She is?”

“Yes.” Marcus sighed and said, “It’s a wonderful thing to see Clarke loved, you know. And we know you’ll love your child the same way.”

Bellamy nodded, determined to be the best damn father he could be. If he just got the opportunity. “My dad . . . he was . . . he was never around,” he admitted, still a tad resentful over that fact. “I don’t know who he is; I don’t know anything about him. So I don’t wanna be like that. I wanna be . . . better.”

Marcus smiled at him encouragingly and said, “You already are.”

Am I? Bellamy wondered, not so sure. If that baby didn’t come into the world, would he ever really get the chance to prove what kind of a father he could be? He’d been a lousy boyfriend, that was for sure. He had to redeem himself somehow, by being there for Clarke and the baby now.

Abby sighed dramatically as she joined them in the waiting room. “Oh, what a day,” she said, digging her fingers through her hair.

“Are we heading home?” her husband asked her.

“Yes.” She came to stand in front of Bellamy, and feeling like she expected him to stand, too, he rose to his feet.

Much to his surprise, she hugged him and whispered, “Congratulations.” It was the first time she’d really gotten to address him since Clarke had dropped the baby bombshell, and . . . God, it was such a relief that she wasn’t mad.

“Take care of her tonight,” Abby told him, releasing him from the hug. “Please.”

Bellamy nodded as she and Marcus left hand in hand. I will, he thought, sensing how hard it was for her to let go of her daughter like this. He’d take care of her every night from here on out. If she let him.

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Turning to the side, Clarke examined her reflection in the bathroom mirror. She pulled the hospital gown tighter against her stomach, squinting to see if she could notice any kind of telltale roundness or maybe even just a little extra weight.

She didn’t. Not yet. And maybe she never would.

The mere thought made her feel like throwing up again.
When she padded out of the bathroom, she found Bellamy in her room again, standing with his back to her, looking out the window as it rained outside. He was so lost in thought, he didn’t even hear her come out. Not until she took too large of a step and whimpered when she felt a small ache in her left side.

“Clarke?” he said, at her side in seconds. “Here, I got you.” He bent down like he was about to lift her up and carry her again, but she pushed him away slightly, determined to do it herself. Physically, she could be a lot worse; she didn’t really hurt that much. Emotionally . . . well, that was a whole different story.

Hunched over and holding her left side, she hobbled towards the bed, barely making it back into it before her knees buckled underneath her. She got back under the covers, concealing her flat stomach, trying to think about something other than the tiny, microscopic little person that might or might not still be forming in there. There were other things she could have thought about—how amazing her friends were, how unbelievably encouraging her mom was being, how lucky she was to even be alive—but how could she think about any of those things when there was this huge, life-changing other thing to think about? No matter how it turned out, it’d stay with her for the rest of her life.

She turned away from Bellamy and started to cry. She couldn’t help it. With every single one of their friends and his mom and her mom, she’d tried so hard to hold herself together. But now that it was just him . . . she broke.

“Hey, hey, hey,” he said, scrambling around to the other side of the bed. “What’s wrong?”

Did he really have to ask that? She swung her head to the other side, looking away again.

“Clarke, please,” he begged. “Talk to me.”

The strangled sob that rose up from low in her throat was the only sound she could muster. A couple months ago, she’d begged him to talk to her about why he’d started shaking uncontrollably at night. And he had.

“Hey, look at me.” He cupped her face in his hands, forcing her to turn and face him. “I’m right here,” he said. “I’m not goin’ anywhere.”

Oh, she knew that. He was definitely there, and regardless of what he may have said or done last week, regardless of how much his rejection had hurt, he was still very much the same man she’d fallen so madly in love with. It didn’t matter if he felt the same about her or not, because he would be there for her throughout this pregnancy and beyond. That wasn’t in question.

Whether or not there would even be a pregnancy . . . that was.

“What if I’m not strong enough?” she fretted as the tears continued to pour from her eyes.

“You are,” he said, smoothing his hand over her hair. “You’re so strong.”

“I don’t feel strong; I feel weak,” she cried. “I don’t wanna be the reason why you lose another baby.” She almost couldn’t even fathom what that would do to herself, because she was so worried about what it would do to him.

“Clarke . . .” He frowned sadly, sitting down on the side of the bed. She scooted over a bit, making room for him as he lay down next to her; and when she felt his arms around her, she just started to cry harder. Because it’d been a week since he’d held her close like this, and in that moment, she was so grateful for it. Grateful for him. For the way that she could clutch at his arms and shoulders
desperately without feeling totally pathetic. For the way her tears could soak through his shirt and he wouldn’t complain.

She wasn’t sure when she stopped crying that night, or if she even did, but eventually, she fell asleep, comforted by the knowledge that, while the storm continued to build and rage outside, she could spend all night in his warm arms. She’d held him like this once, during a night when he really needed her. And now he was holding her.
Chapter 57

It was a rare thing when Bellamy slept in. Even when he tried, it was just as if his body had a natural alarm clock that went off at 7:00 in the morning almost every morning.

But not this morning. When he felt himself starting to come to, he made sure to keep his eyes closed, and somehow, he kept sleeping. He was faintly aware that he wasn’t even in his own bed and that he was lying next to Clarke, so . . . maybe the latter was what kept him asleep.

Unfortunately, nothing could keep him asleep when he heard a knock on the door. Curiosity got the best of him, and he opened his eyes. Dr. Tsing stood in the doorway to the hospital room, silently motioning for him to follow her out into the hallway.

Beside him, Clarke still slept soundly, curled against his side, her head on his shoulder, hand on his chest. He knew it took a lot to wake her up, so he wasn’t too concerned about it as he slid out from underneath her and quietly crawled out of bed.

“Sleep well?” she asked him.

“Better.” Clarke had cried for a while, but once she’d nodded off, he’d managed to do the same.

“Well, I wanted to talk to you,” Dr. Tsing said. “I think Clarke’s ready to go home today.”

“Oh.” That word . . . home . . . he wasn’t even sure what that was for Clarke anymore.

“She’ll still need to take it easy,” the doctor said, “and definitely no heavily lifting or anything strenuous. But I think she’ll heal even faster in a familiar environment.”

_Familiar?_ If that was the criteria for a home then . . . that was his place. No question. Up until last week, she’d spent most of her time there.

“You said she doesn’t live with you,” Dr. Tsing recalled. “Does she live with a roommate? Her parents?”

“No, she . . .” He rubbed his forehead, between his eyes. “It’s hard to explain,” he said. “She stayed with me a lot, but we kinda . . .” He trailed off and sighed, not in the mood to rehash. “She has an apartment by herself,” he told the doctor.

“Well, it’d be helpful if she wasn’t alone these next few days. Maybe she could go stay with someone or someone could stay with her.”
“Yeah, I’ll talk to her,” he said, wanting to be that someone.

“Okay. You let me know when you have a plan worked out,” she said, “and then I’m gonna do one more exam before she leaves. I’m encouraged that she hasn’t been bleeding, but . . . sometimes that happens later than we’d expect in a miscarriage situation.”

He winced at that word.

“I’m still hopeful we’ll do an ultrasound next week and detect a happy, healthy heartbeat, though,” she quickly added on.

Yeah. So was he. “Alright,” he said. “Thanks.” He turned and headed back into the room, already making a mental list of living arrangement options. Obviously it’d be best if she came and stayed with him, but if she didn’t wanna do that, then he could go stay with her. He was less enthused about the possibility of not staying with her at all. He knew she had her mom and Raven, but . . . he just felt like it should be him now, like he should be the one to take care of her.

Although he hated having to wake her up, they definitely needed to work out a plan before she was discharged, so he leaned over her and gently shook her awake. “Clarke?” he said as she struggled to open her eyes.

Squinting against the sunlight coming in through the window, she rolled over onto her back. “What time is it?” she groaned.

He had no idea, so he checked the clock on the wall. “8:30.”

She yawned and complained, “It’s too early.”

He smiled and laughed a little. Now that sounded like the Clarke Griffin he knew so well. “Sorry to wake you up,” he apologized. “I got good news, though.”

Her eyes immediately widened with eagerness. “What?”

Oh, crap. He regretted phrasing it like that, because she probably though it had something to do with the baby. He’d gotten her hopes up. “They’re sending you home today,” he told her. “No more hospital food, no more hospital bed.”

“Hospital gown,” she muttered, plucking at the one she was wearing. “Good.”

“Yeah.” It was good, very good, that she was getting out of there. He was grateful to that place and to the people who worked there, but he’d spent way too many days in that hospital. Doctors and nurses who weren’t even treating Clarke knew him by name now, and they even joked with him that he should just have his mail forwarded there from now on. He needed to go home, too.

“So I guess I should . . . talk to Raven then,” she said. “Maybe I can stay with her for a couple days.”

“Yeah.” He didn’t want to completely shut down the idea, even though it wasn’t what he wanted, but . . . he pulled the chair up next to her bed and sat down, prepared to say whatever he had to in order to convince her that by his side was the best, safest place for her to be. “Or . . . you could stay with me,” he proposed, hoping it wouldn’t take too much work to convince her.

“But we just moved everything of mine out of there,” she protested.

“So we can move it back in then. Or at least some of it. Enough to make you feel at home, at least.” He doubted she’d unpacked everything, and even if she had . . . oh, well, it wasn’t that much of a
chore to pack it all back up again.

“I always feel at home there,” she whispered, looking away.

“Then see? That’s where you need to be.”

“Yeah, but . . .” She met his eyes questioningly, reminding him, “It’s not the same.”

No, he supposed it wasn’t. But if they ever got the chance to just sit down and talk through some things, then maybe it could go back to the way it was. Or maybe it could even be better.

“Murphy and Emori will be there to help out,” he reasoned. “And I’m there, Clarke. I can—I can take care of you.”

“I can take care of myself,” she mumbled stubbornly.

“I know, but you’re recovering, so you’re gonna need some help,” he pointed out. “And Clarke . . .” He gulped, hoping he was getting through to her, because the thought of not being with her right now . . . that just killed him. “I wanna be there for you with—with everything that’s goin’ on,” he stuttered. “Please don’t shut me out.” The girl was carrying his child; he couldn’t let her fend for herself and rely on other people right now. He wanted to be the one she relied on.

After she’d thought about it for a moment, she hesitantly agreed to it. “Okay,” she said. “I’ll come stay with you.”

He breathed a small sigh of relief. No, she wasn’t saying she’d move back in with him or stay there forever or anything, but . . . for now, it was a start.

~*~*~*~*~*~*

Clarke was none too pleased that the hospital staff was making her leave in a wheelchair, but Murphy and Emori were having a hell of a good time with it. Emori pushed Clarke around, chasing him, and Murphy continued to duck and dodge out of the way. “You can’t catch me! I’m the gingerbread man!” he yelled as Clarke reached for him and missed. “Gotta be faster than that.”

“Let’s kill him,” Emori said, charging Clarke’s wheelchair down the hall as he fled.

Bellamy couldn’t pay much attention to his friends, not when Dr. Tsing was recapping all the rules of Clarke’s recovery with him for the third or fourth time. “No strenuous lifting, no driving, no heavy meals,” she said. “No physically demanding activities, and Bellamy, what does that include?”

“Sex,” he answered obediently. She’d really emphasized that with him. Not that it was an issue since there was no chance of him and Clarke doing that right now.

“She should take showers instead of baths for the next two weeks,” Dr. Tsing said. “And she needs to drink plenty of fluids. Make sure she’s not around anyone who’s sick and that she’s washing her hands often. And if she develops a fever or starts getting sick, you bring her in right away.”

“Oh, trust me, I will,” he promised.

“I know you will,” Dr. Tsing said. “Let’s see, what else? Uh . . . medications.”

He held up the sack with the antibiotics and painkillers she’d been prescribed. “Got it.”

“Make sure she does the full course of antibiotics,” Dr. Tsing said, “even if she starts to feel better. And she has to take those painkillers--”
“With food,” he cut in. “I know.” He really did have this under control. He was going to take good care of Clarke, and Murphy and Emori, despite how childish they were acting with the wheelchair, had offered to help him as much as they could.

“Okay. I think you’re ready then,” Dr. Tsing said. “She’s lucky to have you, Bellamy.”

“Pretty sure I’m the lucky one,” he mumbled as Marcus and Abby strode down the hall from the direction of Clarke’s room.

“We did one last sweep,” Abby said, “found this.” She held up Clarke’s broken bracelet, and Bellamy took it and pocketed it, promising, “I’ll fix it.” He’d never actually fixed jewelry before, but . . . well, first time for everything.

“Well, Bellamy’s ready to go,” Dr. Tsing said, a trace of pride in her voice. “I’d say Clarke’s gonna be in good hands.”

“That she is,” Abby agreed, smiling at him appreciatively.

God, this woman actually respects me, Bellamy thought. How that was possible after he’d literally done her daughter in public and gotten them both arrested for it was still a fucking mystery.

“Hey, Big Papa! Let’s go!” Murphy hollered impatiently. “Wheelchair game’s gettin’ old.”

Bellamy shook his head in mock annoyance, resigning himself to that new nickname. At least it made more sense than Bellagio.

Leaving the hospital, even once they’d wheeled Clarke into the parking lot and helped her into the truck, turned out to be a long ordeal. Because Abby just could not say goodbye. Bellamy understood it must be hard, because Clarke was her only child, and she’d probably had it in her head at the start of this that she’d be the one helping her through her recovery. But at this rate, they weren’t even gonna get home until 3:30, and he was hoping to have some time that afternoon to unpack some of her things and get her all situated over there again. So it was really time to go.

It took a while, but finally, Abby and Marcus got in their car—their insanely nice car—and drove off, and Murphy and Emori got in theirs. Bellamy started up the truck and followed them home, going at a slower than normal pace when he noticed Clarke’s subtle anxiety to be back on the road again. At every intersection, she squeezed her eyes shut and held onto the door handle tightly as they drove through.

“It’s alright,” he assured her. For a while, she’d be freaked out. He had been, too, after his accident, hadn’t driven anywhere for at least a month. But gradually, the trauma of the accident would fade, and she’d get back to normal.

He practically lifted her out of the truck when they got home, because it was a long hop down from the foothold to the pavement. Murphy and Emori led the way inside, and Emori chimed, “Ta-da!” when they opened the front door.

Bellamy helped Clarke inside, surprised to see a hand-drawn Welcome Home banner hanging in his kitchen, along with some streamers and balloons.

“Wow!” Clarke exclaimed, her face lighting up in amazement. “You guys did this?”

“We did it this morning,” Emori said. “That’s why it’s not very good.”

“I also made another cake,” Murphy boasted, “and that is good.”
“This is cool,” Bellamy said, glad they’d done this for her. And maybe a little for him, too, he supposed, since he hadn’t been home in four days now.

Clarke promised she’d try the cake later, but for now, she needed to sit down. Murphy offered up his beanbag, but Bellamy helped her over to the couch, getting her comfortable on it. He propped her up with pillows, put her legs up, and draped a blanket over her lap. “I feel spoiled,” she remarked, and he just smirked. It was good if she felt that way. That was the goal.

“You wanna see what’s on TV?” Murphy asked, flopping down on his beanbag. “Or we could watch The View. I recorded it for you.”

“Ooh, yes, please,” Clarke replied.

Emori curled up in Miller’s old recliner, shaking her head. “You two and your obsession with that show,” she said. “I don’t get it.”

Bellamy didn’t, either, but if Clarke was occupied, then that gave him some time to go unpack shit. “Alright,” he said, “I’m just gonna be upstairs. Let me know if you need anything.”

“I think I’m good,” she said, but she did tack on a, “Thanks,” at the end.

He nodded, trekking up the stairs. Stuff to do, stuff to do . . .

The first thought that crossed his mind when he set foot in his bedroom and saw his bed was that he wanted to just lie down and crash for a few hours. But there was a suitcase full of clothes and a box full of toiletries and other items that Raven and Miller and brought over that morning per his request. When Clarke came upstairs to go to bed tonight, he wanted her to feel, as much as possible, like she’d never even left.

So he kicked off his shoes and got to work, starting with her clothing. He hung up some of her nicer things in his closet, then rearranged the clothes in his drawers so that there was room for all her casual shirts and shorts. And her bras and underwear, too. He probably spent a little longer than necessary putting away her bras and underwear.

After he’d hooked up her computer on his desk and stuck her iPad into the charger plugged into the wall, he got to work on the bathroom, littering the counter with her perfumes and lotions and hair products. He placed her toothbrush in a cup, right along with his, and draped her favorite towel over the side of the shower. When he was done, he took a step back, smiling. Oh, yeah, this definitely looked a lot more like the bathroom he was used to. Or rather, the one he’d gotten used to. And when he walked into that bedroom and noticed her clothes hanging next to his in the closet . . . yeah, that just looked right.

He took her broken bracelet out of his pocket and pulled open his nightstand drawer, taking out the small tin box with so many of the memories of his and his family’s life in it. He dropped the bracelet in there, figuring that was a safe place for it. For now. Until he fixed it.

When he heard laughter from downstairs, the decided to rejoin his roommates. He brought his Twentieth Century Europe textbook with him, figuring he could get a little reading done while they watched whatever crap they were watching. He didn’t really feel like studying right now, but . . . Clarke would be happy to see him doing it.

They weren’t watching The View anymore when he treaded back downstairs, but they were watching whatever dumbass show came on after The View. Bellamy knew he would hate it, so when Clarke offered to make room for him to sit, he just said, “That’s okay,” and veered into the kitchen.
He sat down at the counter, on the side where he could see her, of course, and opened his book to a random chapter. If they hadn’t read it already, they’d probably be assigned to read it at some point soon. So he’d just read it now and be ahead.

To say that he was distracted would have been an understatement. Not that World War I wasn’t fascinating, because it was. But he found himself glancing up at Clarke after every paragraph he read, and it could never just be a quick glance. He tried to be subtle about it, but it was so easy to get lost in the mere sight of her, especially when she laughed at something the talk show hosts said or when she joked around with Murphy and Emori. She looked happy to be back there. She looked at home.

When the second talk show ended and Murphy began to channel surf, Clarke got up and said, “I think I need to go take a nap.” She started for the stairs, and Bellamy tensed, nervous about her climbing those on her own since she was supposed to be taking it easy. She held one hand to her side, pressed the other against the wall, and only climbed up one step before shooting him a look for help. He sprang up from his stool and rushed to her side. “I got ya,” he said, lifting her up. He carried her up the stairs with ease, but she told him to set her down at the top of them.

“I need to do it,” she said as he reluctantly put her on her own two feet. Slowly, she walked to the bedroom, and he followed along behind her, giving her some space, but not too much just in case she fell or something. He’d catch her.

For a moment, she paused in the doorway, and he wondered if her mind was flooding with memories. Memories of all the nights they’d spent tangled up in those sheets and tangled up in each other. Him on top of her, her on top of him . . . hands all over, mouths crushing together . . . He sort of wondered if they’d made their baby in that bed. It seemed like a reasonable assumption.

“Uh, I put a lot of your stuff away,” he told her.

“Thanks,” she said, padding further into the room. She first sat down on the bed, then curled up on her side.

“You wanna get under the blankets?” he asked.

“No, I’m good,” she said. “Just need to rest for a while.”

“Okay.” He really wanted to lie down with her and hold her like he had last night, but . . . maybe that had been a one-time thing.

He knelt down next to the side of the bed instead of crawling in there with her and said softly, “You know, now that Miller moved out, I was thinking . . . maybe we could make his old room into . . . you know, a nursery.”

“A nursery?” she echoed.

“Yeah.” He’d had a lot of time at the hospital to think about it, and he had plenty of ideas, but . . . well, maybe she could sketch out a design, and then he could build it. He could definitely build a crib, and a rocking chair and changing table couldn’t be too hard.

“Maybe we should wait and do this ultrasound first,” she suggested. “Just in case . . . you know.”

Yeah, he knew. Before leaving, he’d asked Dr. Tsing to be blunt with him and tell him what the
chances were that this baby would survive. She said it was probably fifty/fifty. But he couldn’t tell Clarke that. “Sure,” he said, in agreement that they should probably wait. No point in getting a whole room ready if there wasn’t going to be anyone to use it.

“But maybe after that,” she said.

He nodded, glad that she was at least open to the idea. He wanted that room to be his child’s room. Period. And by the time it was born, he wanted her Polaris apartment to be rented out to someone else. A nursery would be a step in the right direction, surely. And he’d load that thing up with so many damn toys . . . oh, man, his kid would have the coolest nursery ever.

“Get some rest,” he said, getting to his feet. He pulled the curtains closed, darkening the room on his way out. He shut the door quietly, not all the way, though. He wanted to leave it propped open in case she had to call downstairs for him.

Clarke’s late afternoon nap extended into the early evening—it was just so nice to be back in that room and back in that bed. She might have kept on sleeping, too, had Bellamy, Murphy, and Emori not come upstairs with four slices of the cake Murphy had made for her.

“Brace yourself,” Murphy said. “This is gonna be the best thing you’ve ever had in your mouth.”

She and Bellamy exchanged a brief look and then hastily looked away from each other.

They all sat down on the bed with her and ate dessert for dinner, and she had to admit . . . it did taste pretty good. Murphy was a decent cook. Maybe if they had time this summer, he could give her some lessons.

“I hope I don’t catch anything in here,” he said, making a face of disgust. “God only knows how much sex has been had in this bed.”

“A lot more than what’s been had in yours,” Bellamy retorted.

“Oh, burn,” Emori said. “And probably true.”

Clarke laughed. God, it felt good to sit her and laugh with her friends. And Bellamy. Who wasn’t exactly a friend anymore, but . . . well, he’d fathered a child with her, so he was something. It wasn’t entirely awkward sitting on that bed next to him, and that was a relief.

The cake, good as it was, was all she could eat in one sitting. Dr. Tsing had instructed her to eat small meals and gradually work her way back up to bigger portions. So Murphy and Emori headed downstairs to cook up something more for dinner, and Bellamy stuck around to give her her medication. (She was glad he knew what she was supposed to be taking and when she was supposed to be taking it, because she didn’t have a clue.) Then he took her cake plate from her and asked if she was hungry for anything else. She told him she wasn’t but that he should go get himself something. He seemed hesitant to leave the room. But eventually, he did.

When she was by herself again, she decided to get in the shower and get ready for bed. Sure, it was only 8:30, and she’d just napped for a few hours, but she was still tired. Dr. Tsing had warned her that she could expect to feel drowsy for days, maybe even weeks.

Flipping on the bathroom light, she was amazed by how much of her stuff was in there. It was almost like she’d never left, like those things had never been packed up and brought over to her apartment. Bellamy must have been up here earlier unpacking everything for her.
He was being really sweet.

She got in the shower and stood under the steady stream of water for a long time, letting it relax her and mellow her out. She washed her hair with her own shampoo and lathered herself up with her own body wash. It was so much nicer than being at the hospital, so much more familiar than being in her own apartment. She was really glad she’d let Bellamy convince her to come stay here and that he wanted her there. Maybe he would have invited her to stay with him even without the baby.

Maybe.

When she got out of the shower, she wasn’t surprised to find her clothes already back in the drawers. Bellamy must have had a bit of a photographic memory or something, because almost every t-shirt and sweatshirt and pair of shorts was in the exact same drawer it had been in when she’d practically been living there.

She dropped her towel to the floor and pulled on a pair of underwear, then took out . . . not one of her shirts, but his. Just a plain navy blue one that he always looked so damn good in, and she knew from prior experience wearing it that it was comfy as hell.

In the middle of debating whether or not to put on that shirt or one of her own, the bedroom door swung open, and in came Bellamy. While she was topless.

“Oh, sorry,” he said, staring at her, dumbfounded, while she covered herself up.

“Can you . . . turn around?” she asked him, feeling like she needed a little more privacy.

He did, wordlessly.

Oh god, this was so weird, covering up her body from someone who probably knew it even better than she did. But this living arrangement they’d conjured up today obviously came with some unspoken boundaries attached, so she quickly put on the shirt.

“You good?” he asked.

“Yeah.” She smoothed out the wrinkles as he turned around and said, “I hope it’s okay if I wear this.” Maybe she should have asked first.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” he said. “Looks better on you anyway.”

_Oh, don’t blush, don’t blush_, she told herself, but she couldn’t help it. She was blushing.

“Are you goin’ to bed?” he asked her.

“Yes.” She’d been feeling tired, but now that he was in there . . . not so tired anymore.

“I’m gonna sleep downstairs on the couch,” he said.

She felt kind of bad, like she was kicking him out of his own bedroom or something. “Okay.” It was probably for the best.

“Oh, okay,” he echoed, staring at her intently. Not just at her face, though. His eyes kept lowering, fixating on her stomach even though it was covered up by a big blue t-shirt. Moving in closer, he hesitantly asked, “Can I see your scar?”

She was so—so _thrown_ by having him so close that it took her a few seconds to respond. “Um . . . sure,” she said, reaching for the hem of the shirt. “It’s actually more like four little scars.” She lifted
up her shirt, feeling oddly self-conscious. It shouldn’t have been a big deal, not when Bellamy had seen her naked countless times before. They were just scars. Everybody had them.

But when his fingertips grazed the little incision on her upper left abdomen, she couldn’t help but close her eyes, and when they traced the scar near her bellybutton, she inhaled shudderingly. It was a big reaction to a tiny touch, but she knew he noticed it.

It became clear, however, that she wasn’t touching her to turn her on when he dropped down to his knees and splayed his whole hand against her stomach. She watched as he gazed at it in awe, rubbing his calloused palm against it almost . . . reverently. Tears stung her eyes when he allowed himself a hopeful smile.

For those few moments, it was like he was in this whole other world, and she let herself go there with him. She let herself believe with certainty that there was still a baby in there, a part of him and her. But reality sunk back in when he stood up, cleared his throat, and pulled her t-shirt—his t-shirt—back down for her.

“Goodnight,” he said, making a rather hasty exit from the room. He didn’t go far, though, before poking his head back into the room and reminding her, “I’m right downstairs if you need me.”

She nodded, in a bit of a stupor, and waited until he left again to let out the breath she hadn’t even known she’d been holding. His hands, regardless of how or why they were touching her . . . it was like they had power over her.

Touching her stomach, she looked downward. “Your dad is something else,” she told the baby. If there was one.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Normally, Bellamy thought his couch was pretty comfortable. He’d gotten it at the thrift shop years ago and firmly believed it was one of the best purchases he’d ever made. If nothing else, it was a hell of a lot comfier than that hospital cot had been. But for some reason, although he was tired, he couldn’t fall asleep that first night home with Clarke. He lay there with his feet dangling off the end, trying to block out the sounds of Murphy and Emori banging just down the hall. They were being quiet about it, thankfully, but he could still hear the mattress squeaking and the headboard occasionally hitting the wall. Luckily, it didn’t last long. (It never did.)

Around midnight, he got up, shuffled into the kitchen, and ate another piece of that inexplicably good cake Murphy had made. Then he lumbered upstairs, yawning, and peeked in at Clarke. He just wanted to check on her.

She was curled up on her side, fast asleep when he looked in. But she’d kicked off all the covers except the sheet, as she often did, and she looked cold. Quietly as he could, he crept into the room and covered her up further. He used to cover her up almost every night in the middle of the night. Either that or he’d just pull her closer and use his body to warm hers. But he couldn’t do that right now, so . . .

Unable to resist, he reached down and brushed her hair away from her face. She purred, and it seemed to him that she instinctively turned her cheek towards the palm of his hand. But maybe he was just imagining things.

Reminding himself that he was supposed to be sleeping on the couch, he forced himself to leave the room and go back downstairs for the night.
Clarke was surprised how soundly she’d slept. She’d expected there to be some kind of initial awkwardness about being back in Bellamy’s bed, maybe an uncertainty. But it just felt familiar more than anything else. Even without him in it next to her, it felt like home.

Everything felt like home here. Seemed like it always had.

She brushed her teeth and ran a comb through her hair before venturing downstairs that morning. Walking down them was a lot easier than climbing up them, but she still took it extra slowly and carefully. The last thing she needed to do was fall.

Halfway down the steps, she stopped when she overheard Bellamy talking. It sounded like he was on the phone with someone, and when she peered over the stair railing, she found him sitting shirtless on the couch, phone pressed tightly against his ear.

“No, I can come fix that today,” he was saying. “Yeah, I’m sorry, it’s taken me so long to get around to it, but . . . I was kinda having an emergency. My girlfriend was in the hospital, so . . .”

Clarke’s breath caught. Girlfriend? He was probably just using it as convenient terminology, but still . . .

“Oh, you don’t think that’s an emergency?” Bellamy bellowed suddenly, his deep voice rising in volume. Very quickly, he’d become very angry. “You know what? Screw you then. Fix your own damn shower rod.” He ended the call and chucked his phone across the living room.

Oh, not good, Clarke thought. That client definitely wasn’t a client anymore.

“You okay?” she asked, walking down the last few steps.

He looked surprised to see that she’d gotten downstairs all on her own. “Yeah,” he said. “Just tryin’ to get back to work, get back in the swing of things.” He got up and crossed the living room to retrieve his phone, sticking it into the pocket of his sweatpants. Then he came back over to the couch, grabbed his t-shirt off the back of it, and put it on. Which was good. As much as she was a fan of his bronzed, sculpted chest, it’d be a lot easier to concentrate on talking to him if she couldn’t see it.

“Did you miss a lot of work these past couple days?” she asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, deflecting the question completely.

That was a yes then. Great. “What about class?” she inquired.

“It’s fine,” he said. “I was ahead on the reading. Besides . . .” He flapped his arms against his sides, mumbling, “I don’t know if I’m gonna stick with it anyway.”

“With . . . your class?” she asked, horrified to hear that.

“There’s just a lot of other stuff goin’ on,” he said.

“Yeah, but . . . it’s important,” she insisted, moving closer to him. “You can’t just give up on it, Bellamy.”

“Well, what’s more important, huh? Twentieth Century Europe or my kid?” he countered. “I shouldn’t be wasting time with college right now. I should be working, making money, not spending
He’d earn more money in the long run, though. And he knew that. More importantly, he’d be able to do a job he actually enjoyed. Not that he didn’t enjoy helping people the way he did now. It was just . . . there was so much more out there for him if he set his mind to it. “Bellamy--”

But he wouldn’t let her jump in. “If I’m gonna be a father, I gotta provide. I shouldn’t be doin’ stuff just for myself. I don’t know why I ever thought college was a good idea.”

“Because it is,” she said. “You don’t have to set aside your hopes and dreams just because I might be . . .” She trailed off, moaning in distress, hating the thought of him dropping out when he’d only just begun. “You already put off college once when you and Roma were in a car accident,” she pointed out. “Please don’t put it off again now that I was in one.”

“No, please,” she cut back in adamantly. If he could interrupt her, she could interrupt him, too. “Come on, Bellamy, if we do have a baby, you’re not doing it any favors by throwing away your chance at an education.”

He put his hands on his hips and lowered his head. It sort of seemed like she was getting through to him, but she couldn’t be sure.

“I don’t want you to stop going to college, Bellamy,” she told him tearfully. “Not for me, not for . . .” She touched her stomach, frowning. “I’ll be able to work, too, once I get better. You don’t have to do everything alone. I can—I can help you, and we can make this work, and . . . you don’t have to give up anything.”

“Okay,” he said, reaching out to touch her cheek, using his thumb to wipe away tears she hadn’t even realized had slipped out. “I’ll keep going. I won’t drop out.”

She sniffled, hoping he wasn’t just saying that to make her feel better. “You promise?”

“I promise. Don’t worry, okay?”

She nodded, believing that promise. It would be a lot of work, but Bellamy could do it. She had faith in him.

A few seconds later, the door to Murphy and Emori’s bedroom opened, and out Murphy came wearing the most hideous orange and white striped shirt Clarke had ever seen. And orange pants that looked like they belonged in a prison and nowhere else. She recognized the uniform immediately. It was for Burger Hut, Arkadia’s very own knockoff version of Burger King.

“What the hell?” Bellamy said in astonishment.

“I got a job,” he said nonchalantly, “figured I should help out around here now that you guys are . . . you know.”

Clarke could barely believe her eyes. John Murphy, employed? She never thought she’d see the day that he stopped freeloding off of Bellamy, but . . . here they were. Wonders never ceased.

“I get to cook at least,” he mumbled, putting on an ugly orange visor on his way out the front door. “Whatever.”

Clarke looked at Bellamy wordlessly, sensing that he was just as shocked as he was. But maybe he
was sort of relieved, too. He wouldn’t admit it out loud, but money stuff worried him. If Murphy was contributing to their household income, that lessened the pressure on him. Somewhat.

She smiled at him, snorting out a laugh, and he did the same. For a few seconds, it seemed as if the stress of their morning was forgotten.

Bellamy didn’t want to spend his entire Sunday working, especially since there was no one home with Clarke. But he did it because he had to, and he made sure to call or text her every hour or so, just to check in. At 1:00, she told him she was lying down for a nap and he needed to quit calling, otherwise he’d wake her up. So he did. Reluctantly.

He spent his day fixing broken windows and broken faucets, and he tried to work as efficiently as possible to make up for the four days he’d missed. That wasn’t easy to do, however, when most of the people he was working for made it a point to ask how Clarke was doing. Some of them knew her by name, others just knew her as his girlfriend. Whether they’d met her in person, seen her around the neighborhood, or just heard about her via the news of the accident, nearly everyone wanted to know if she was doing okay. And they were happy when he told them that she was home from the hospital and on the mend.

Around 5:00, he’d wrapped pretty much everything up for the day, and he drove past Diana’s house, seriously contemplating marching up to her front door and begging her to let him work for her again. Humiliating as it would be . . . it was a surefire way to bring in some cash. Had he known that he might have a baby on the way, he never would have quit. He would’ve toughed it out, because, regardless of how much the woman annoyed him and objectified him, she’d always paid him well.

For now, he decided he’d hold off. Murphy’s new job as a fast food cook wouldn’t exactly mean they were swimming in cash, but it would help. And maybe people would tip him a little better once they found out his girlfriend was pregnant.

Well . . . if she was pregnant. He had to keep reminding himself to think realistically like that.

With no work left on his schedule, he drove home, thinking about what he could whip up for dinner tonight. Clarke had mentioned earlier on the phone that she felt a little queasy, which could have been a side effect of her medication or could have been . . . something else. Either way, she didn’t want to overload her stomach, so he’d have to make something light.

He’d expected to find her planted on the couch when he got home, but when he walked in the front door, the living room was quiet. The blankets and pillows were undisturbed on the couch, and the TV wasn’t even on.

“Clarke?” he called upstairs, figuring she may have still been taking her nap. He took the steps two at a time and didn’t even bother being quiet as he opened the door to his room. Something told him she wasn’t in there, though. And indeed, she wasn’t.

“Clarke?” he asked again, swinging his head towards the bathroom. Door open, lights off. She wasn’t in there.

His heartrate started to pick up until he heard the front door open and Clarke say goodbye to someone as she came inside. Breathing a sigh of relief, he rushed back downstairs, trying to look less worried than he actually had been.

“Hey,” he said, noting the purse in her hand. “Where were you?”
She set her purse down by the door and kicked off her sandals. “Raven took me out for a late lunch,” she explained.

“You went out?”

“Yeah.” She gave him a strangely curious look. “It’s not like I’m trapped here.”

“No, of course not.” Sure, Clarke couldn’t drive for a couple weeks—and probably wouldn’t want to—and she didn’t have a car anymore since hers was pretty much totaled. But that didn’t mean people couldn’t drive her places. “I just thought you might let me know if you were going out,” he said. “That’s all.”

She grunted and mumbled, “Didn’t realize I had to get your permission first.”

“No, I just . . .” He wasn’t trying to upset her, and he sensed that was what he was doing. “I was worried when I got home and you weren’t here,” he tried to convey. Yeah, he could be overprotective as hell sometimes; he was aware of that. But that was better than not being protective enough.

“Bellamy, you are not my father,” she pointed out. “You’re not my husband; you’re not even my boyfriend. So I don’t have to call and tell you if I’m gonna go hang out with my friend.”

No, he supposed she didn’t. He wasn’t looking to start an argument about it, so he said, “Okay, it’s fine. You do what you want,” and decided to just let it go. Shoulders slumped, he lumbered into the kitchen, feeling like he’d pissed her off just by caring. He opened the refrigerator, pissed at himself when he saw how little food they had in there. But maybe Murphy or Emori could stop and pick up some stuff. Either that or he could run out to the store later and stock up.

“If I wasn’t pregnant, would you even give a damn about what I’m up to?” she muttered suddenly, still standing near the door.

He shut the fridge firmly, struggling not to take offense at that. Was she insinuating that he only cared about her when he thought she might be carrying his child? Because that couldn’t have been further from the truth. “I care about you,” he insisted. “I wanna help you recover. I don’t want you to overdo it. That’s why I got worried.”

“And the possibility of me being pregnant has nothing to do with it?” she challenged.

“No.”

She snorted angrily. “Funny, you weren’t so concerned about my whereabouts when I was driving over here to see you the day of the car crash.”

He winced, absorbing that shot. “Clarke . . .”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I don’t mean to . . .” She let out a heavy sigh of frustration and started over. “I’m not saying you don’t care about me, because I know you do,” she acknowledged. “But I also know a lot of this has to do with . . . with the baby, and I know that if there wasn’t one . . .”

“He forced back his own tears, remembering how terrified he’d been on the way to the hospital, even before he’d learned there was a baby. That phone call telling him she’d been in an accident had been the worst one of his life. And for the record, he’d had his epiphany about how he felt about her before Dr. Tsing had mentioned anything about a kid.
“It’s okay,” she assured him. “I know how much you wanna be a father, so . . . I get it.”

No, she didn’t. She didn’t understand how deep his feelings went, because the one and only time he’d owned up to it, she’d been unconscious. “Clarke, you’re still my best friend,” he told her. “And I still love--”

“No, don’t tell me you love me,” she cut in sharply, giving him a stern look. “Don’t tell me you’re in love with me. Don’t stand here and claim that I’m suddenly now the love of your life. Because if you do, then for the rest of my life, I’ll wonder if you only said that because of the baby.” Eyes shimmering with tears, lips trembling as she held them tightly together, she shook her head. “And I don’t wanna do that.”

She didn’t want . . . she didn’t want him to tell her?

He stared at her sadly, feeling . . . at a loss. Everything he wanted to say was something she no longer wanted to hear. He’d really missed his shot then, hadn’t he? Maybe that rainy day in this exact same room had been his only chance, and he’d blown it.

“Oh, okay,” he said, respecting her wishes. If she didn’t want him to say it, then he wouldn’t. He’d bottle it all up, just like he’d bottled up so much of his past. He was good at keeping things locked away inside, even if they were screaming at him to be let out.

“Okay,” she echoed, nodding affirmatively before starting for the stairs.

“You want some help?” he offered, willing to . . . carry her some more. Or something.

“I got it.” She took the stairs slowly, but . . . yeah, it didn’t really look like she needed his help tonight.

Dammit, he thought, exhaling in dejectedly when he heard the bedroom door shut. Who knew if he’d even see her the rest of the night? He had another night on the couch to look forward to. Another night of restlessness. Another night of not telling her he loved her.

He couldn’t do it. Not without her doubting him. Not without potentially upsetting her even more. He couldn’t tell her he loved her, even though he loved her more than anything in the world.

Well. He’d just have to show her then.
Thank God for Emori. Not only was she quickly becoming one of Clarke’s closest friends, but she didn’t seem to mind spending her entire day off keeping Clarke company, either. When Bellamy went to class and Murphy went to work—still a shocking concept—that left the two girls on their own. Emori watched all the daytime talk shows with Clarke and made them both sandwiches for lunch, and she didn’t mention Bellamy once. She didn’t question why Clarke had spent all night upstairs alone or why she and Bellamy had barely said two words to each other this morning. She didn’t ask what was going on or if they’d had an argument. So she looked extra surprised when Clarke brought him up all on her own.

“Bellamy almost told me he loves me last night,” she blurted as she pulled the crust off her cheese sandwich.

Emori froze with a bite of her own sandwich already in her mouth. Then she swallowed it down before inquiring, “Has he ever told you that before?”

“Yeah,” Clarke said, peeling back one slice of bread to check and see if Emori had put on a lot of butter, as she’d requested.

“When?”

“When we broke up,” Clarke recalled grimly. That hadn’t exactly been the ideal time to hear those words. “It’s confusing, though, because . . . I don’t know if it’s the same kind of love that I--” She ended abruptly as Emori’s phone rang.

“Sorry,” her friend apologized, setting her lunch aside as she took the call. “Yeah?”

Clarke sat patiently, waiting and listening to Emori’s side of the conversation. It didn’t take long for her to gather that, on her day off, Emori was being called in to work. Probably to fill in for someone else. There was a lot of eye-rolling and some exaggerated groans of disappointment as she asked, “Are you sure?” and “Did you call everyone else?” Eventually, she sighed in resignation, rubbed her forehead, and reluctantly said, “Yeah, I can be there in fifteen minutes.”

Clarke lowered her head, a little bummed out that she was losing her companion for the day. Lincoln and Octavia were coming over later tonight, but . . . Bellamy and Murphy were both working all afternoon. And now so was Emori. So unless one of her other friends stopped by, she’d be spending the rest of the day all alone. For some reason, the prospect was daunting.

Emori apologized profusely before leaving, but Clarke assured her that it was no big deal. And it really wasn’t. She could find something on TV or pull out her sketchbook and do a little doodling. Maybe she could look up some cooking videos on Youtube, and then she could see if they had enough ingredients in the kitchen to pull together a meal. If Bellamy and Murphy came home and saw that she’d actually made dinner, they’d be so surprised.

As she went upstairs, she told herself she was just going to grab her sketchbook and her iPad out of the bedroom and head right back downstairs to while away the hours. But her feet took her elsewhere, on a detour. She slowly treaded towards the closed door of Miller’s old bedroom and reached for the doorknob. Don’t do this, she told herself, but she did it anyway. She twisted the nob and opened the door, peering inside at the empty space.
Any room looked bigger without furniture in it, but she knew this room was slightly smaller than Bellamy’s. Right now, the walls were painted a dark blue, which was very Miller and very masculine, but a lighter shade of the color might look nice. Or maybe like a pale, pastel green. Something gender-neutral.

It was a bad idea to look around that room and envision what it might be, to entertain the idea of transforming it into a nursery like Bellamy had suggested. But it sort of seemed like the perfect space for it, so . . . how could she not imagine?

She didn’t end up bringing her iPad downstairs, just her sketchbook and some colored pencils that were slightly more precise than the regular Crayola kind. She told herself she was going to draw some sort of landscape, but she knew that wasn’t true. Even before she sat down on the couch and started to draw with the sounds of General Hospital in the background, she knew what the sketch would turn out to be.

There were several early versions that didn’t turn out right, so she crumpled them up and started over again. She wasn’t an interior designer, so this wasn’t her area of expertise. It took some time and a lot of deliberate, precise pencil markings to get the picture in her head down on the paper. But once it started to appear, it appeared exactly the way she wanted it to. The cozy crib and the big, plush chair right next to it . . . the shelves stocked full of books and toys and stuffed animals, and all the little clothes hanging up on equally little hangers . . . it looked like the perfect space for a little princess. Or a prince.

She took a great deal of time to color everything in, using some pinks, some blues. Then at the last minute, she added in a framed photo of her and Bellamy on the wall above the crib, holding the baby, looking down at it adoringly. She put two pillows in the crib, one that said Mommy and one that said Daddy. She started to add all sorts of small, personal touches that made her sketch seem all the more lifelike and real.

Drawing occupied her time for hours that afternoon. In fact, the only time she paused was to respond to a couple texts from Raven and Niylah. She hadn’t even realized how long she’d been at it until Bellamy walked in the front door, looking tired and a bit disheveled. He wasn’t shaving as regularly these days, it seemed, so he had some scruff growing out. He looked good. But he also looked like the day had worn him out.

“Hey,” he said, dropping his backpack on the floor.

“No, it’s really stupid,” she acknowledged.
“It’s not stupid.”

“No, it is.” She sighed, looking down at her lap. “I shouldn’t draw that until we know if . . .” She let her sentence fade. There was no need to say the word anymore. They both knew she might be pregnant. And they both knew she might not be.

“I could build that crib,” Bellamy offered. “And the shelves, too. I could build the shelves.”

“Hmm.” She was sure he could build most everything in her drawing. And if they did have a baby, he’d spend so much time in that room. He’d probably be the type of dad who woke up and went to check on the child upon hearing even the slightest of gurgles on the baby monitor. He’d have so many sleepless nights, and he wouldn’t even care. Trying to put a crying baby back to bed at 2:00 in the morning wouldn’t be a chore to him; it’d be a privilege.

“I like the picture of us up here,” he said, noting the framed photo she’d added in at the end of her sketching process. “That’s a nice touch.”

“It’s all nice,” she said, unable to keep the wistfulness out of her voice. Bellamy wasn’t saying anything, but she knew there was a very strong possibility that this nursery would never be anything more than just a sketch. And that bedroom upstairs would become something else. A guest room, maybe. Somewhere his nephew could sleep once he was old enough to spend the night.

“You know,” he said, handing the drawing back to her, “if this doesn’t work out, if we lose the baby . . .” He turned to gaze at her with this desperately longing look in his eyes. “We could always try for another one.”

Her breath felt like it got stuck in her chest as she tried to haul it in. Was he . . . was he really suggesting that? Did he really want to try again if the worst happened?

They’d never been trying, though. It had just happened. To intentionally give it another go would be a really big deal, especially for two people who couldn’t even define their relationship and technically weren’t even together anymore.

He seemed to have surprised himself by saying such a thing, because rather than elaborating on it, he got up and headed into the kitchen, opening the cabinets and mulling about them as if he were going to cook up something for dinner.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

“So wait a minute, let me get this straight: You still haven’t told Clarke you love her?” Octavia asked incredulously as she and Bellamy lay outside on the trampoline that night.

“No, I’ve told her. I just haven’t told her I’m in love with her,” Bellamy corrected.

“Well, why the hell not?” Octavia demanded shrilly. “The girl gets in a traumatic car accident, leading you to have this huge epiphany about your feelings for her, and she still doesn’t know?”
He sighed, staring up at the stars while the annoying sound of cicadas shrieked all around them. “I tried telling her,” he said. “She didn’t wanna hear it.”

“What do you mean?”

“She cut me off.” He looked over at his sister’s protruding belly, amazed by how greatly it had expanded in this past month. “She thinks it’s just ‘cause of the baby,” he revealed, “that I only care about her right now just ‘cause she might be—”

“Oh, bull-crap,” Octavia muttered. “She doesn’t really think that, does she?”

“I don’t know.” That was the impression he’d gotten last night. And after everything he’d done . . . honestly, Clarke was entitled to think whatever she wanted to think. Maybe she’d lost some trust in him. He probably deserved that after breaking her heart.

“Well, then you need to tell her the truth,” Octavia suggested, as though it were such a simple thing to do. “Tell her you’re madly, hopelessly in love with her. Because you are.”

“I don’t know if she’d believe me,” he confessed.

“Well, would she believe me? Because I could tell her,” his sister offered.

“No,” he said, shooting that idea down right away. “Thanks, but . . . no.” Octavia would probably deliver that revelation with all the finesse of a Mack truck. No, when Clarke found out how he felt, she was gonna hear it from him. Nobody else.

“Oh, I guess I’ll just back off and let you two crazy kids figure it out yourselves then,” Octavia said, groaning impatiently. “I gotta go anyway. I’m tired.” She tried to sit up, but she couldn’t. (It was hilarious.)

“Need some help?” he asked, sitting up with ease.

“No, I got it,” she insisted. But she sort of looked like a turtle on its back.

He could only sit there and watch her struggle for a few seconds before lending her a helping hand—literally—and pulling her up into a sitting position. He had to hop off the trampoline first and use both hands to pull her to her feet. She was still a small girl, technically, but her belly had really ballooned out as of late.

“Thanks,” she said, trying to give him a hug. But her stomach made that difficult, too.

They headed back inside for a few minutes, where Lincoln was showing Clarke some of the gallery’s new paintings on his phone. Octavia said goodbye to Clarke, and Bellamy even said goodbye to Lincoln. They didn’t hug or anything—probably never would—but hey . . . they said goodbye. A couple months ago, Bellamy would have just as nearly said good riddance.

With Murphy and Emori out at Dropship for the night, that left him and Clarke alone once their guests were gone. It was so weird, because not all that long ago, time alone had basically meant an excuse for clothes to come off. He still wasn’t used to this awkwardness between them, but it was, he supposed, to be expected.

He brought her into the kitchen and asked her what she wanted to eat. He’d made spaghetti for Lincoln and O, but she still had to take her evening medication, and she had to take it with food.

“Ice cream?” she replied questioningly.
He smirked, glad that he’d stock-piled her favorite kind of ice cream, chocolate fudge brownie, a while ago. “Sit down,” he told her, taking the full carton out of the freezer. He grabbed a bowl and the ice cream scooper and put some muscle into it as he chipped into the frozen food. Damn, either he was weak, or that was just fucking solid.

“You could put it in the microwave to melt it a bit,” she suggested.

“No, I got this.” Putting all his might into it, he managed to dislodge a hefty scoop and drop it into the bowl. “Two scoops or three?” he asked.

“Two’s fine.”

*Oh, thank God,* he thought. If he’d had to get three scoops out of there, his arm may have fallen off.

He made her ice cream just the way she liked it: doused in chocolate sauce and sprinkled with chocolate chips. Then he slid the bowl across the counter to her, along with her two pills, and she said, “Thanks.”

“No problem.” This was what he’d promised her mother he would do: take care of her. It wasn’t really all that hard, especially because she seemed to be healing well. She didn’t need his help walking anymore, not even on the stairs, and she hadn’t mentioned anything about feeling nauseous today. Although . . . that actually concerned him more than anything.

“Mmm, this is good,” she said upon taking her first bite. “You want some?”

Did he want some of that chocolate monstrosity? No, not really. But he *did* want an excuse to sit there with Clarke; so he opened up the silverware drawer, took out a spoon, and leaned across the counter, scooping up a small bite. “Mmm,” he agreed, even though he almost would have rather tried avocado ice cream again.

They sat there together for a few minutes, neither talking but both eating, and Bellamy wondered if he should say something to clarify what he’d said earlier. The thing about trying for another baby. He felt like it may have freaked her out. He wasn’t trying to insinuate that they should just have another roll in the hay if they lost this baby. He knew they had issues to work out, challenges of their own making to overcome. But he also knew that he was committed to working on things if she was, and he wanted to be with her, regardless of how this turned out.

He could tell her that, right? It wasn’t the same as telling her he loved her, so maybe she wouldn’t be so skeptical about it.

“Lincoln offered me a job,” she blurted suddenly, totally disrupting his train of thought.

“Oh, yeah?” he asked.

“Yeah, while you and Octavia were outside. He told me there’s a job waiting for me at Trikru if I want it.”

“Oh.” Bellamy had never really encouraged Clarke to start working there, only because he’d had his issues with Lincoln once upon a time. But those were in the past now, and . . . it was good, the possibility of her having somewhere to work now that she was no longer working at the on-campus art museum. Especially because she’d given up her chance to co-own a gallery in Philadelphia just so she could stay in Arkadia with him.

“I told him I’d take it,” she said, “you know, once I’m able to work again and stuff.”
“Yeah.” Stereotypical as it may have been, he would have loved to make enough money that she wouldn’t have to work. But that just wasn’t feasible. And it wasn’t something she wanted, either. She wasn’t some housewife. She had goals and aspirations of her own, and being pregnant wasn’t going to hold her back from them.

“That’s great, Clarke,” he said.

“Yeah, and he said I can work there whether I have a baby or not, so . . . it’s not like he’s just totally taking pity on me.”

“No, I’m sure it has nothing to do with pity,” Bellamy said. He dug a piece of the brownie out of the ice cream and moved it around to her side of the bowl. Because he knew that was her favorite part of this particular flavor.

She smiled at him when he did that. Not a big smile, just a small one, but . . . he noticed it.

Not long after the ice cream, Clarke headed upstairs to go to bed. They awkwardly said goodnight as she ascended the steps, and then he sat down on the couch to halfheartedly watch the evening news. He lay down to watch Jimmy Fallon’s monologue on The Tonight Show, but he had no interest in watching him interview Ryan Reynolds or Ryan Gosling or . . . whichever the hell famous Ryan it was. So he shut the TV off after the first few minutes of the show, effectively darkening the living room. Struggling to get comfortable, first on his side and then on his back, he tried to take some deep breaths to clear his mind so he could nod off. But his mind was busy thinking about everything he had to do tomorrow: class, work, more work, come home and write out bills, start writing a paper that was due at the end of the week . . .

Murphy and Emori stumbled in the door while his mind was racing. He heard them more than he saw them, heard their lips smacking, and disturbingly, Murphy’s zipper sliding down.

“It’s alright,” Murphy whispered, “he’s asleep.”

“I’m not asleep,” Bellamy informed them.

“Oh, we’ll just go out to the hammock then,” Murphy said, grabbing his girlfriend’s hand.

“Night, Bellamy!” Emori called as Murphy dragged her through the living room.

“Night,” he muttered, relieved when they tumbled out the back door. At least if they did it outside, he wouldn’t have to hear it.

Still . . . the knowledge that his friends were having sex and he wasn’t . . . it was kind of weird, especially considering how . . . active he and Clarke had been. It’d been well over a week since he’d really even let himself think about sex, but now that he’d started . . . it was hard to stop.

He felt a little bit like a jackass as he snaked his hand down beneath the blanket, rubbing his crotch through his boxers. He wasn’t hard, but he could very easily get hard if he thought about how smooth Clarke’s skin was, how soft her lips were. When he thought of the sounds she made and the way she said his name when he was inside her . . . he had to rub himself harder, allowing himself not to care if jacking off was a jerk move when the very object of his desire was right upstairs.

“Bellamy?”

He immediately withdrew his hand, afraid that she’d come downstairs and caught him. But his fears were quickly put to rest when he registered that her voice was coming from the second floor.
“What’s wrong?” he asked, springing up off the couch. He paused for only a split-second at the bottom before racing up the steps. “Is everything okay?” he asked, concerned as to why she’d be up out of bed, just standing at the top of the stairs calling down for him.

“Yeah, everything’s fine,” she assured him. “I just . . .” She trailed off, and the moonlight streaming in through the windows illuminated her enough that he could see her shrug. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Me, neither,” he admitted. He did a quick groin check, just to ensure that he wasn’t hard. A slight bulge, but nothing noticeably more than his natural bulge, nothing that would give away what he’d been up to downstairs.

“Do you wanna . . .” She hesitated a moment, her voice very quiet and very unsure when she finally asked, “Do you maybe wanna . . . come lay with me tonight?”

He was so floored by the invitation that he at first assumed he hadn’t heard her right, that his mind was playing tricks on him. Maybe she meant lay as in lay on the floor? He could do that. He could sleep on the floor.

But somewhere deep inside, he knew he’d heard her perfectly. She wanted to share a bed with him again, and that felt like a really big deal.

“Sure,” he said, trying to appear calm and relaxed, even though he was anything but. Anything but.

He slowly lay down in bed next to Clarke a minute or so later, well aware that this was all it would be. He had no notion of hope that he would be able to wrap his arms around her tonight or that she would lean over and kiss him. This was sleeping together in the literal sense only. And he was okay with that.

In fact, he was more than okay. His heart beat fast as he settled in on his back, pulling the covers up to his waist. Next to him, she lay still on her side, back towards him. The way she didn’t move and didn’t say anything led him to suspect this was intense for her, too.

How am I supposed to sleep? he wondered. Sure, he’d slept while holding Clarke in his arms one night at the hospital, but that had been different. She’d been bawling then, and it’d been a comfort thing. But this was just . . . just her and him, together in one bed. One bed they’d fooled around in a lot these past eight months. One bed they’d probably made a baby in.

“Hey, Clarke?” he said quietly, reaching out to her with his voice instead of his hands.

“Hmm?”

Maybe I shouldn’t say anything, he pondered. Maybe it was best to just stay silent and let her fall asleep. But he’d already started, so . . . it was too late to backtrack now. “I liked your drawing,” he told her simply, trying not to make too big of a deal out of it.

“Me, too,” she said softly.

It’d really blown his mind to see that sketch, to be honest. Because he hadn’t excepted that from her. She wasn’t talking about the baby much, at least not to him, but clearly she was thinking about it. “I didn’t realize you wanted to have a baby so bad,” he admitted, hoping that wouldn’t offend her somehow.

“Well, I don’t wanna lose it,” she said.

As someone who’d already been through that once, he didn’t wish it on his worst enemy. “Maybe
we won’t,” he said, holding onto hope, unwilling to let it go.

“Maybe,” she agreed.

He lay there with her, not sure what else to say but wishing he could say more. It was a tricky conversation to have, though. Talking about it too much almost felt like they were jinxing it, but not talking about it enough didn’t feel right, either.

“Goodnight, Bellamy,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Regardless of the stress they were both under right now, he felt fortunate to be able to lie there with her, even if she kept her back to him the whole night. So he said, “Night, Princess,” and hoped it brought a smile to her face as she fell asleep.

Murphy gave Bellamy a curious look when he came downstairs for breakfast in the morning. Surely he’d noticed that Bellamy wasn’t on the couch when he and Emori had come inside last night, and he wasn’t there this morning, either, so . . .

“Funny,” Murphy said, “I didn’t hear any beds break.”

“Because I only slept with her,” Bellamy tried to explain. “I didn’t sleep with her.”

Murphy’s whole face scrunched up in confusion. “Whatever,” he said. “Do what you wanna do. I really don’t see a problem with it.”

What he wanted to do, ultimately, was to just kiss the girl again. They didn’t have to have sex; in fact, they couldn’t while she was still recovering. He could make do with his hand while she learned to trust him again, while he did everything he could to prove himself to her. And even if they did start things up again, he wasn’t expecting to go back to the way it was before. Everything was different now. They were different.

Murphy went to work first, and Bellamy went to class soon after. But not before making a pit-stop upstairs, where Clarke was still in bed, still asleep. She’d kicked all the covers off, unsurprisingly, so he draped the sheet over her again, bent down, and kissed her forehead before leaving. It was what he used to do every morning, so he just figured . . . why not do it now?

He managed to squeeze in a quick clogged toilet job down the street before heading to class, and in class, he actually raised his hand and participated today, asked and answered questions to make his presence known. He had to make up for the three days he’d missed, had to prove to the professor that he actually could be a good reliable student. If he took a couple classes and did well, maybe he could get more scholarships. If he got more scholarships, he could continue to afford college and continue to attend, just like Clarke wanted him to. Just like he wanted to.

Class was interesting, but work was work—routine and predictable. The only thing slightly unpredictable was that he caught a mouse at his favorite elderly couple’s house. And they gave him three extra dollars as a tip for that.

He worked quickly so he could get home early. Emori would be there in the morning, but she had a job of her own in the afternoon, and he hated the thought of Clarke being by herself. She wasn’t supposed to be stressed, but he imagined that sitting home alone with nothing to do but think about things could be pretty stressful.

When he got home, he kept it pretty quiet in case Clarke was resting. If she was, she was doing it
upstairs, though, because the couch was empty. He just hoped she hadn’t gone out with Raven or Niyah or anyone because . . . well, he really just wanted to spend some time with her.

The door to the bedroom was open just a crack, so he peeked inside, opening it slightly more. What he saw completely captivated him: Clarke was standing in front of the mirror, examining her reflection from the side. But she’d stuffed a small pillow beneath the oversized t-shirt of his she was wearing, and . . .

. . . and the sight made a lump form in the back of his throat. Because . . . good God.

She wanted to see what she would look like pregnant, wanted to get a feel for it. And not just a little pregnant, either, but like the point Octavia was at. Hence the pillow. He knew it wasn’t really her stomach making her look that way, but still . . . she just looked so beautiful. He could only imagine how beautiful she’d look if she really got that big, if she really got the chance to carry their child.

He must have stared a little too long or a little too hard or something, because he leaned against the door more than he should have, and it opened further with a loud creak.

Clarke startled, looked over at him, and gasped, “Oh, Bellamy!” as she quickly removed the pillow from underneath her shirt and threw it on the floor.

“Hey,” he said, coming into the room. “Sorry.”

“No, it’s okay,” she said quickly. “I wasn’t doing anything.”

He glanced between her and the pillow wordlessly, thinking that she’d definitely been doing something. But he wasn’t going to ask her about it.

“You’re home early,” she remarked.

“Yeah, I worked fast.” His days went a lot faster when he didn’t have Diana constantly finding new problems for him to fix.

“I got something for you,” he revealed.

“Like a gift?” she asked, sitting down on the foot of the bed.

“Sorta.” It had been a gift once; now, he was just excited to give it back to her. So excited that he couldn’t even draw out the suspense of try to make it dramatic as he whipped her gold bracelet out of his pocket and held it out for her.

“My bracelet!” she exclaimed, reaching for it. She held it in her hands, looking it over gratefully and happily.

“Good as new,” he proclaimed.

“Yes, but . . . but it was broken,” she said. “They had to cut it off at the hospital.”

“I know. I fixed it for you.”

“How?”

“Ah, you can fix anything with a good pair of pliers.” He was just lucky only the chain had been cut and not the part with her father’s handwriting. A chain was an easy fix, hadn’t even taken him his whole lunch break to put back together.

Smiling happily, she put the bracelet back on her wrist and sat there admiring and appreciating it for a moment before looking up at him and saying, “Thank you.”
“You’re welcome.” That bracelet was one of a kind; he knew how much it meant to her, and he wasn’t going to just sit back and let it stay broken. Unlike the other broken things in his life, that bracelet had been easy to put back together.

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Although Bellamy had caught her off guard by coming home so early in the afternoon—and it’d been sort of embarrassing to have him catch her with a pillow underneath her shirt—Clarke liked having him home. They didn’t even really have to do anything together, and they didn’t while he sat in the kitchen working on a paper for his class and she sat on the living room couch, watching first Ellen and then Jeopardy. It was just nice having his company, being in the same space as him even if they were doing their own things.

He acted like he wasn’t paying attention to what was on TV, but he couldn’t resist when it came to Jeopardy. When the host read the clue as “The ship that rescued Titanic’s survivors from their lifeboats,” she mistakenly blurted out, “Californian,” but he answered, “Carpathian,” before the show’s contestants did. And the next question was “The inventor of the steamboat,” to which she answered, “Eli Whitney,” because he was the only inventor coming to mind. But Bellamy answered correctly when none of the contestants did when he said, “Robert Fulton.”

“What did Eli Whitney invent?” she inquired. “He invented something, right?”

“The cotton gin,” Bellamy informed her.

Well, at least she hadn’t tossed out a completely irrelevant name. “You should go on this show,” she suggested. “You’d kill it.”

“Ah, you have to be like a genius to get on Jeopardy,” he said.

“Well, I think you’re a genius.” He had so much random knowledge crammed into that head of his, it amazed her.

“Thanks for saying that,” he said, smiling at her slightly. He got up from the kitchen counter with her laptop in hand and brought it over to her on the couch. “Can you read this?” he asked, sitting down beside her. “Tell me if it’s any good.”

“I’m sure it’s exemplary work.”

He smirked.

She read through his essay, trying to take her time with it despite the fact that the subject matter was of absolutely no interest to her and she had no idea what some of the words he’d used even meant. “Looks good,” she declared when she was done. “Way better than anything I ever wrote.”

“I don’t really think it’s that good,” Bellamy said with a shrug, “but I guess it’s good enough.”

“Yeah, you’ll get a good grade,” she assured him. It was so nice to see Bellamy doing this, really doing it, taking a class and studying and writing papers and doing all the things he’d wanted to do back when he’d been eighteen. She hoped it would continue, that nothing would derail him.

Early that evening, Murphy and Emori got home around the same time, and Murphy brought home food from Burger Hut. It smelt pretty unappetizing to Clarke, but he seemed so proud that he’d made it himself, so she figured she could stomach it.

After dinner, Monty and Harper came over for a movie night, and Harper explained their roommates’
absence. “Jasper has the flu or something,” she said, “so Maya’s at home taking care of him. He says to tell you guys he’s given up getting high, though.”

“Seriously?” Emori said.

“Yeah, he’s on this whole Uncle Jasper kick,” Monty explained. “He wants to set a good example for Octavia’s son and . . .” He trailed off, motioning wordlessly to Bellamy and Clarke. “You know.”

Clarke touched her stomach, longing for some kind of verification on whether she was or was not pregnant anymore. Her poor friends . . . it was like they had to walk around on eggshells around them, never saying too much just in case the worst scenario happened. Even last night, when Lincoln had been showing her photos of all of Trikru’s new artwork on his phone, he’d swiped past two paintings of babies very quickly. Like just seeing one was going to make her break or something.

It wasn’t the full crew over there that night, but it was still enough to have a decent time. Murphy and Emori cuddled up on the floor, Monty and Harper settled into Miller’s old recliner—it didn’t matter if he didn’t live there anymore, it would always be his recliner—and that left Clarke on the couch with Bellamy. Like normal. Except it wasn’t normal, because he sat on one cushion, her on the other. There was plenty of space between them, and even if he’d wanted to put his arm around her, he wouldn’t have been close enough. She couldn’t snuggle up with him or lay her head in his lap. She just had to be content with sitting on one side of the couch while he sat on the other.

Murphy picked the movie, some piece of crap called Explosion that he seemed to think was going to be a disaster flick. But thirty minutes into the movie, it became glaringly apparent that it wasn’t at all what he thought it was going to be. The two main characters, who were portrayed by impossibly bad but super hot actors, were totally into each other and started getting into each other. Literally. There was topless-ness and some backside shots that Clarke hadn’t really been expecting, although she probably should have since the movie was on HBO.

There were numerous small sex scenes, but one particularly lengthy one around the forty-five minute mark. Sitting there next to Bellamy—not close to him but still next to him—while one of those scenes played out was incredibly awkward. She found herself feeling very aware of him and very alert to the tenseness in her own body. She wondered if it felt as weird for him as it did for her. He wasn’t saying anything, just sat there with his eyes glued to the screen, so she tried to do the same.

It seemed to be just as awkward for her friends as it was for her, because, on the commercial break, Murphy said, “Well, I just saw that this was called Explosion, so . . . I thought it was gonna be about volcanoes or something.”

“Different kind of explosion,” Emori mumbled.

“Yep, different kind,” he agreed. “Hmm.”

“Maybe we should watch something else,” Harper suggested.

“Good idea,” Monty agreed.

Clarke saw her escape, so she took it. Not that she didn’t enjoy spending time with them, but it was getting later, and she really couldn’t risk watching any more movies with sex scenes with Bellamy. It wasn’t like they were turning her on or anything, but . . . these particular scenes had basically been softcore pornography and . . . okay, maybe it turned her on a little bit.

“You guys go ahead,” she said, getting to her feet. “I think I’m gonna call it a night.”
“Yeah, me, too,” Bellamy said, standing and stretching. “Uh, can I . . .” He motioned upstairs.

“Yeah,” she said. Sharing a bed with him last night had been . . . fine. Better than fine, actually. She’d slept pretty well, and she liked knowing that she wasn’t relegating him to the couch. It was still technically his bed, his room, and he deserved to sleep there as much as she did.

They traipsed upstairs after saying goodnight to their friends, and she saw the look Harper was giving her, the slightly shocked, open-mouthed Are-you-gonna-go-explose type of look. She shook her head, rolling her eyes as she suppressed a smile. No, there would be no “explosions” in her and Bellamy’s future tonight. Just . . . sharing a bed. It was intimate without being too intimate, so it was nice.

Bellamy had to shower, so that left her alone in the bed for a good fifteen minutes. She curled up on her side, the same one she’d slept on all night last night, and listened as the water ran in the bathroom. She tried so hard not to imagine his naked body getting all wet, but . . . she was only human, and despite the heartbreak he’d handed her, she still had the thirst. She put a pillow between her legs, hoping to create a little friction, but she abandoned the idea when the water stopped running and kicked the pillow onto the floor instead.

When he came out of the bathroom, she closed her eyes, breathing in the familiar, masculine scent of his shampoo and his shower gel. It was so different than the floral scents she tended to use.

The bed shifted as he lay down beside her, on his back just like last night. She didn’t say anything and didn’t move, not sure if he would, either, until he asked, “You still awake?”

“Yeah,” she replied, wishing she wasn’t. Her heart would be pounding a lot less if she’d already fallen asleep.

“Thinking?” he guessed.

“Constantly.” It was so hard to get her mind to shut off sometimes. In fact, the only times she felt like her mind had been truly free were the times she was with him. Like . . . with him with him.

“What’re you thinking about?” he asked.

“Oh, just everything.” She wasn’t about to own up to thinking about his naked, water-covered body, so she turned over onto her back and said, “Sometimes I just think about how we first met,” she admitted.

“Thank you, Walmart.”

She laughed a little. “Yeah, it’s kinda crazy that we met there and . . . now we’re here.” She touched her stomach, shaking her head in dismay. “How did we end up here?”

“Wasn’t exactly what we planned on,” he said.

“We didn’t plan much of anything,” she pointed out. Their whole relationship had been pretty damn spontaneous, from their first hookup onward. Things had just sort of happened, and she hadn’t questioned it at the time. She hadn’t questioned any of it.

“What did you think when you first met me?” she asked, curious to know.

“When I first met you?” he echoed. Even in the dark, she could practically hear him smiling. “I thought you were really pretty. And . . . kinda forward, ‘cause you just asked me if I wanted to hang out, and most girls don’t do that.”
“I didn’t do that,” she said. “Not usually. But . . .” She still didn’t know what had gotten into her that day, what had made her be so forward with him when she was used to being reserved with her other partners. Finn and Lexa had both made the first move on her, not the other way around.

“What did you think of me?” he asked.

“Oh . . .” She thought about joking around and saying she’d just thought he was okay, but clearly that wasn’t the case. “I thought you were so hot,” she confessed.

He laughed lightly.

“Like so hot,” she emphasized. “It was ridiculous.”

“So that’s why you wanted to hang out, huh?”

“Well, obviously. But then I had a really good time with you at Dropship, and then . . .” She trailed off, because . . . and then . . .

“And then you had a really good time in my truck,” he filled in.

“Oh my god.” She was so happy he couldn’t see her blush in this dark room. “I still can’t believe I did that. I never hooked up like that with anyone before.”

“You couldn’t resist,” he teased.

“I really couldn’t.” Whatever had made her so spontaneous that night, she was grateful for it, because without that spontaneity, she and Bellamy never would have . . . gotten to know each other. Physically or emotionally. “I was supposed to be a one-night stand for you, though, wasn’t I?”

“Uh . . .” He hesitated, neither confirming or denying that. “Maybe.”

“Maybe.” Yeah, she knew. And it didn’t hurt her feelings in the slightest.

“Well, you gotta remember, at that point in my life, I was pretty used to one-night stands,” he pointed out. “I liked you, though. I mean, I wasn’t upset when you showed up at the bar a week later.”

“Yeah, I didn’t have your number, so I just sat in there waiting for you. Like a spaz.”

“Well, you wanted another piece of me. Can’t say I blame you,” he joked.

“That was the first night I slept over,” she pointed out.

“Yeah. And you left your phone number on a condom wrapper.”

“Yeah, ’cause you actually wore condoms back then.”

He laughed.

“And then you texted me and asked if I wanted to come suck your cock.”

“Yeah,” he said, laughing. “And you did.”

“I did.” She didn’t regret that, either, but it definitely didn’t sound very romantic in retrospect. “God, this is our history, Bellamy.”

“I think it’s kinda cool,” he said.
“Yeah, but when our grandchildren ask us how we met someday . . .”

“We’ll leave it at Walmart. They don’t need to know anything else,” he said decisively.

“Okay.” She laughed a little before she realized that . . . she’d just referenced grandchildren. Which would be pretty far down the line, if ever. Here they were talking about their past, but she’d also just inadvertently brought up the future. And while their past was what it was, their future was still so uncertain.

“I can’t believe we’ve only known each other for eight months,” he said, sounding sort of . . . nostalgic.

“I know,” she agreed. It felt like it’d been longer. Her life, it seemed, was now divided into two very separate parts: pre-Bellamy and post-Bellamy. Post-Bellamy, nothing had been the same. She’d changed, become more in touch with who she was and what she wanted than she ever had been before. It was sort of like he’d just . . . like he’d awoken something in her without even trying. And maybe, on some level, she’d managed to do the same for him. Surely she’d affected him in some way, too. Two people couldn’t be as close as they were without having some sort of profound impact on each other.

“I never knew you’d end up being so special to me,” he mumbled. His voice was quiet as he said those words, but she heard every one of them. Special? she thought, wondering what that meant. Because he was special to her, too, but . . . it probably wasn’t the same.

As she lay there, struggling to keep her breathing normal and not let her heart start beating out of control, she felt the back of his hand brush against hers, where their arms rested in between them on the bed. It was barely even a touch, but it was enough to send a surge of electricity up her spine. And she didn’t pull her hand away. She let it stay next to his, let it keep the contact between them, and he did the same. They weren’t holding hands, weren’t holding each other, but still, in that moment . . . she felt close to him again.
Bellamy knew he wasn’t cut out for the medical field when Jackson came over to remove Clarke’s stitches and he could barely stand the sight of it. There weren’t even that many of them, but it still made his skin crawl. Clarke had no problem with it; maybe growing up with a doctor for a mother had desensitized her to it. She kept her shirt up and looked down and watched as he took them out, but Bellamy made some excuse about needing to brush his teeth just so he could get away. He waited until he heard Jackson say, “All done,” to poke his head out of the bathroom again.

“Nice,” Miller said. “My boyfriend’s gonna make a great doctor, don’t you think?”


“Uh-huh,” he fibbed, still brushing his teeth. He heard the doorbell ring and, doubting Murphy or Emori would bother to answer it, he headed downstairs, confused as to who it would be. Probably just a door-to-door salesman or something. Everyone he gave a damn about either lived there or strolled right in.

When he opened the door, toothbrush still dangling from his mouth, he revealed Clarke’s mom and stepdad on the other side. And boy did he feel like an idiot, because here he was in the same dingy t-shirt and boxers he’d worn to bed, probably looked like a bum.

“Hi, Bellamy,” Abby greeted. “Sorry to stop in unannounced. I had the day off, and Marcus has a business lunch with a friend here in town, so we just thought—”

“No, it’s fine. Come in,” Bellamy said. He took his toothbrush out of his mouth and went into the kitchen to spit and rinse in the sink. He inconspicuously checked the trash can while he was in there, just to make sure it wasn’t overflowing, and then came back into the living room and rearranged the throw pillows on the couch. Maybe if everything looked nice and put together, he could disguise the fact that a lot of this furniture was thrift store crap. And he needed to clean.

“So this is your house,” Abby said as she stood in the middle of the living room.

“Yes,” Didn’t hold a candle to hers, but . . . this was it.

“It’s nice,” she said. “More spacious than I thought it would be.”

He wondered if she’d pictured something small and cramped like a trailer. That was one benefit of owning an old house: lots of room.

“We got your address from Raven,” Marcus explained.

“Oh, I see.” Nice of you to text me and warn me, Raven, he thought sarcastically. Although maybe she had. He hadn’t checked his phone yet this morning.

“What’s that out back?” Abby asked, pointing out the kitchen window.

“Oh, that’s, uh . . . a trampoline,” he replied, cringing inwardly. Because it was such a juvenile thing to have, but dammit, he loved that thing. “My roommate Murphy really wanted one, so . . . he got
“Well, I’m sure you’ve had plenty of fun on it,” Abby said.

He couldn’t help but think back to the fucking incredible blow-job Clarke had given him on that very trampoline, so he just said, “You could say that,” and tried not to think about it too much more.

Heavy footsteps on the stairs alerted him to Jackson and Miller’s presence, but neither one of them seemed to be aware of Marcus and Abby as they came downstairs. They were talking about sixty-nine, which wasn’t exactly a great conversation for Clarke’s parents to catch the tail end of. Bellamy watched both Marcus and Abby’s eyes flare wide, and he knew this was how they were finding out that two of the new friends Clarke had made this year were very, very gay.

“Oh, shit,” Miller said when he finally noticed their visitors. “I mean, hi.”

“Hello,” Abby said. “Miller and Jackson, right?”

“Right.” Miller extended his hand to her and said, “Good to see you again.” Then he did the same with Marcus, and Jackson followed suit.

“And which one of you is studying to be a doctor?” Abby asked.

“That’d be me,” Jackson said. “Actually, I just got done taking your daughter’s stitches out.”

“Speaking of your daughter, I’ll go get her,” Bellamy said, scurrying up the stairs. He’d put on some jeans and a nicer shirt while he was up there, make himself look like less of a hobo.

Clarke was in the bathroom when he got upstairs, so he waited until she came out to tell her, “Your parents are here.”

“What?” she shrieked, freezing in place.

“Are you kidding me?”

“No, they’re downstairs.”

“Oh my god,” she groaned, grabbing at her hair, which, admittedly, was . . . interesting. She’d slept with it in a ponytail, so it was sort of winging out all over the place.

She started with her clothes and seemed to have abandoned any idea of not changing in front of him. Because she pushed her shorts right down and put on a pair of denim ones, and she tossed her t-shirt onto the floor and said, “Can you get me a bra?” as she raced over to the closet to find a nicer top.

“Oh . . .” He was struggling to form thoughts, let alone actually do anything—seeing Clarke half-naked was a great throwback to simpler times—but he managed a distracted, “Sure,” in response. When he pulled open the drawer and looked around, he located his favorite bra of hers, this lacy burgundy one that looked like it was straight out of Victoria’s Secret. He held it up, questioning, “This one?”

She glanced back over her shoulder and shook her head. “No. Something comfier.”

He made a face, not sure how the hell he was supposed to know which of her bras were comfy or not. So he tried his luck with a white one that had elastic instead of those wires underneath. “This?” he asked, bringing it over to her.

“That’ll do.” She put the bra on over her head, mumbling, “Thank God for supportive sports bras,” before she resumed her frantic search through the closet.
Supportive sports bra indeed, he thought, trying not to stare at that ridiculously amazing cleavage she had. Damn.

Clarke finally just grunted, “Whatever,” and grabbed a blue tank top. She threw it on and asked, “How do I look?”

So fucking good, he wanted to say, but he just stood there, slack-jawed.

“He took her hair out of its ponytail, and it went everywhere. (She sort of looked like she’d just stuck her fingers in an electrical socket.) She grabbed her brush out of the bathroom and came back out, combing it furiously. “This is so like them,” she ranted. “They always just show up and assume that their day off is gonna be a day off for everyone else. I mean, you would remember. That time they walked in on us . . .”

“Hard to forget.” He closed the distance between them and said, “Hey, hey, hey, calm down,” as he took the brush out of her hands. “They’re not gonna judge you for how you look right now. But for the record, you do look pretty good.”

“You’re just saying that,” she mumbled.

“No, I mean it.” He moved in behind her, standing a little closer than he probably needed to, and ran the brush through her long, blonde hair. She had gorgeous hair. A gorgeous body. Gorgeous face. Gorgeous everything.

“What are you doing?” she asked him.

He honestly wasn’t sure. But it felt nice. “Just relax,” he told her, even though he definitely wasn’t relaxing himself. Part of him was very aware of how close his body was to hers, how close she was to him. He set the brush aside on his desk and threaded his fingers through her hair instead, gently and slowly working out some of the tangles that had formed overnight. The very small touch elicited a very soft moan from her, and when he tilted his head to the side to get a better look at her face, he noticed her eyes had fallen shut.

He kept combing his fingers through her hair, wondering how she would react if he put his hands on her shoulders or arms. Her waist.

Right now, he wasn’t brazen enough to find out, nor did he have the chance when the bedroom door swung open, and in came Miller with both of Clarke’s parents.

“Oh, sorry,” Miller apologized.

Bellamy took a step away from Clarke, and her eyes fluttered open.

“I was just giving them a tour of the house,” Miller explained. He turned back to Abby and Marcus and said, “This is their room. Or . . . Bellamy’s room?” He sent them both a questioningly look.

“Clarke’s room? I don’t . . .” He smiled cheesily at Abby and Marcus and declared, “This is a room.” Then he reached for the doorknob and pulled the door shut again.

Bellamy didn’t go back to combing Clarke’s hair for her. The moment was gone. Instead, he gathered up some clothes and took them into the bathroom to change while she finished getting herself ready. When he emerged, she’d already gone downstairs.

He offered to make Clarke’s parents some breakfast, but they’d already eaten and politely declined. Which was fine, because he was running late for class and really couldn’t stick around anyway. He apologized for having to leave, but Marcus and Abby both seemed to understand. Besides, he wasn’t
the one they’d come to see.

On his way out to the truck, he heard the front door open after him, and Marcus came outside. “Bellamy, wait.”

Bellamy spun back around, struck by how out of place Clarke’s stepfather looked in this neighborhood. He was wearing a three-piece suit. Most of the guys around here didn’t even own a button-down shirt.

“I don’t mean to delay you,” Marcus said. “I just wanted to let you know . . .” He motioned to the house, smiling. “You’ve done very well for yourself, Bellamy. You should be proud.”

I should be? Bellamy thought. He was, sometimes. He liked his house well enough, but he was a little surprised a senator liked it, too. “Thanks,” he said, knowing his place was nowhere near as nice as any of the homes Clarke had grown up in, or as nice as her apartment. But her stepfather seemed to approve, and that really meant something.

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Clarke decided to take her mom to Trikru that day while Marcus went and had his business lunch with his friend. She told her about the job and wanted her to see where she’d be working. Of course, Abby had to drive, and the vehicle she had to drive was a crappy little rental one Clarke had been given until all the insurance stuff from the accident was sorted out. But it was better than nothing, and Clarke noticed herself feeling less nervous at intersections this time.

They walked around the gallery together, but her mom kept wanting her to sit down and take breaks. Clarke insisted that she felt fine and kept browsing all the new artwork on display. Lincoln had already shown her pictures of most of it on his phone, but seeing something in person was always the best way to really appreciate artwork.

One of the exhibits on display was a photography one, and it included several pictures of a baby. Black and white pictures that looked like they belonged on a World’s Cutest Babies calendar or something. Clarke tried not to linger around them for too long, but . . . she couldn’t help it.

“Beautiful photo,” her mother remarked, sidling up beside her.

“Yep,” Clarke agreed. If things worked out, she and Bellamy were gonna have to go to a professional photographer to get their baby photos done. Because being a decent artist did not translate into being a decent photographer, especially not when her phone was her only camera.

“Have you been thinking about it a lot?” her mother asked. “Having a baby, I mean.”

Clarke sighed. “I don’t even know if I’m having a baby.”

“But you find out on Friday, right?”

“Maybe.” If that ultrasound showed nothing, then there was always the possibility that she just might not be far enough along to detect anything yet. She had no idea when she’d gotten pregnant on account of hitting the sheets with Bellamy so damn often, so it was possible that they’d have to wait some more and go back and have it all done again in another week.

“Well, I’ve been saying my prayers,” her mother said. “Oh, Clarke . . .” She reached out and stroked her hair lovingly. “I’m so sorry you have to worry about this.”

“I’ve been stuffing pillows under my shirt and drawing nurseries,” Clarke confessed quickly. “I’m
getting my hopes up.”

“No,” her mother said, “there’s nothing wrong with being hopeful.”

“Well, is there something wrong with being terrified?” Clarke asked. “Because I’m that, too.”

“Well, of course you are,” her mother said. “Either way, this is life-changing.”

Clarke gulped, nodding in agreement. “Are you disappointed in me?” she bravely asked.

“What?” Abby held her hand to her chest as though she were . . . taken aback by the question. “Now honey, why—”

“Because I got pregnant kinda young, and I’m not married. I mean, Bellamy and I aren’t even . . .”

She sighed in frustration.

“You and Bellamy would make the most amazing parents,” her mother declared confidently.

“He would,” Clarke agreed.

“And so would you. You’re kind and loving and all the things a mother should be. And Clarke . . .” Her mother blinked back tears, then had to wipe away the ones that spilled. “Your father would be proud of the woman you’ve become.”

Tears immediately sprang to Clarke’s eyes, too, and she touched the bracelet on her wrist, wishing her dad were here. He’d been her hero her whole life, the person who always solved the problem or saved the day. If he were here, he’d find a way to make her feel like everything would be alright, because that was just who he was.

But he wasn’t here anymore. But . . .

But at least Bellamy was.

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Clarke spent all day with her mom and didn’t get dropped off at home until that evening. Of course, she’d texted Bellamy during that time so he wouldn’t worry, and he’d texted back a simple have fun. Fun probably wasn’t the right word for the day she and her mom had had. There were a lot of serious conversations scattered across the hours.

When she walked in the front door, she found some of her friends in the kitchen, all crowded around the counter, chattering like crazy. Emori, Harper, and Maya all looked up when they saw her.

“Hey,” Emori said. “Heard your mom stopped by today.”

“Yeah.” Clarke slipped her shoes off and set her purse down on the couch.

“How was that?” Maya asked.

“Fine. Good, actually.” Clarke shuffled into the kitchen, taking a seat on the empty stool at the counter. “What’re you guys doing?” she asked, feeling like she was interrupting something.

“Oh, we’re, uh . . .” Harper exchanged a look with both of the other girls before answering, “We’re planning Octavia’s baby shower.”

Oh, Clarke thought. Oh.
“Yeah, we just figured we should have it soon in case she delivers early,” Maya explained.

“Makes sense.” They’d probably need to have it next week then. Octavia was starting to look like she could pop any day.

“You don’t have to help,” Emori said, “if you don’t want to.”

“No, I can help,” Clarke volunteered quickly. As one of Octavia’s bridesmaids and, more importantly, as the child’s godmother, she felt like she had an obligation to help out. She wasn’t some fragile, breakable thing who couldn’t talk about babies or think about them at all. She could do this.

“Are you sure?” Emori asked.

“Yeah.” She leaned across the counter and took a look at the notepad in front of Harper, where dozens of different ideas had been hastily scribbled down. “Can I see that?”

Bellamy’s eyes were so strained from all the reading he’d done that evening that he had to put his glasses on. He still had his textbook in hand as he trundled down the stairs, but he’d only made it halfway down when he heard Harper say, “I still think we should play Bobbing for Nipples, especially if some of the guys show up.”

Bellamy froze. “What the fuck?” It took Emori countering, “I still think Baby Sketch Artists is better,” for him to realize that they were brainstorming baby shower games and that the nipples Harper had mentioned weren’t . . . weren’t real nipples.

“I still think we should do the measurement guessing game,” Maya put in. “Because this is the one time in her life Octavia’s been bigger than me.”

Bellamy smirked, thinking that last game might piss his sister off more than anything else. He walked down the rest of the stairs, surprised to find Clarke sitting in the kitchen with the other three girls. He hadn’t even heard her come home.


“Hey.” He closed his textbook and set it down on the counter, then pretended to be all interested in searching through the freezer when, in reality, he kind of just wanted to hang around now and see how Clarke was doing with all of this. Because she was sitting there with them, but she looked a little . . . overwhelmed.

“Okay, which game do you think we should play at Octavia’s shower?” Emori asked. “Guess Her Measurement, Baby Sketch Artist, or Bobbing for Nipples?”

“Oh, nipples, definitely.” Was that even a question? He shut the freezer door without getting anything out of it and turned around to take a look at Clarke. She was oddly quiet as the other girls continued to debate their options. They were finally arriving at the conclusion that they could just play all three games when he interjected and asked Clarke, “You wanna go for a walk?”

She looked up at him and smiled, almost gratefully. “Yeah.”

“Yeah?” He could tell she needed to get out of there. She was putting on a brave front, but all that talk of a baby shower had to be a lot for her.
It made him feel good that he knew her well enough to know she needed a break from all that, that he could tell when she was feeling uncomfortable just by looking on her. He walked down the quiet streets with her that night, not saying anything. Instead, he waited for her to say something. Because he had a feeling she would.

“Thanks for getting me out of there,” she said when they’d gone a block and rounded the corner. “I thought I could sit there and help plan everything, but . . . it was harder than I thought.”

Well, at least she’d tried. He respected the hell out of her for that.

He wasn’t sure whether she’d like it not, but he reached down in between them and found her hand with his, holding it securely in his own, linking their fingers together. In the hospital, he’d held her hand so much, at least up until she’d woken up. And then suddenly it had become this thing that they just didn’t do anymore.

But they were doing it now. And it felt fine. It felt better than fine, actually; it almost felt like they were those same crazy kids they’d been two weeks ago, blissfully unaware of the challenges life had in store for them.

She didn’t pull her hand away from his, which was a relief. She held it firmly, smiling just a little bit, and together they walked along.

That night, things were different when they went to bed. She didn’t even start off with her back towards him. Instead, she lay on her side, facing him, and he did the same with her. She didn’t look tired. In fact, she looked like she wanted to stay awake and talk for a while. He’d stay awake all night if she wanted to.

They talked a little bit about his class and about what her job at Trikru was going to entail, but inevitably, the conversation ended up shifting to each other. And that was fine by him.

“What’s the most annoying thing about me?” she asked.

“Ah, nothing really annoys me about you,” he said easily.

“Nothing?”

“No. Well . . .” He cringed, figuring there was one thing he could mention, because it was more humorous than anything else. “Okay, when you chew gum . . .”

“When I chew gum?”

“Yes. It’s like a cow chewing its cud. It’s not human.”

She laughed, a real, genuine laugh. It felt so good to be able to get that out of her again.

“What about me?” he asked. “What do I do that annoys you?”

“Oh, so many things,” she said jokingly.

“Yeah, right.”

“But if I had to choose just one . . . probably your heavy breathing when you sleep. You practically snore,” she decided swiftly.

“I don’t snore,” he denied.
“Trust me, you do.”

“No, I don’t.”

“I would know, Bellamy, okay?” she snapped. “But it’s fine. I’ve gotten used to it.”

“Is it really that bad?”

“Sometimes.”

He groaned, hating that he’d become such an old man that he had a snoring problem.

“What’s the— the weirdest thing about me?” she went on to ask.

Well, that one was easy. “Your eating habits, obviously. I don’t know how you eat the way you do and look the way you look.”

“I do need to start eating healthier,” she admitted as one of her hands came to rest unconsciously on her stomach. “Okay, probably the weirdest thing about you is how you know everything about everything. Like everything that’s ever happened in the world. Your history thing.”

“My history thing?” he echoed.

“Your history passion. That’s weird,” she declared. “But also, like . . . endearing.”

“Well, good.” Maybe it was endearing enough to offset the snoring.

They talked for a few more minutes before she lifted her head to look over his shoulder at the bedside clock and said, “We should probably go to bed, huh? It’s getting late.”

“Yeah.” He wasn’t about to check the time, but he knew it had to be past 10:00. “I gotta go to class tomorrow, gotta go to work after that.”

“And tomorrow I’m gonna run a marathon,” she joked, “go scuba diving, climb Mount Everest.”

He chuckled, happy to be able to hear her sense of humor come out again. Seemed like he’d gone far too long without it.

“I had a really nice night,” she told him. Her eyes seemed to flicker in the moonlight when she said those words.

“Me, too,” he said. The walk around the block had been . . . peaceful. Nostalgic. And this was good, too.

She closed her eyes, and he thought about doing the same, because it seemed like she was trying to go to sleep. But he kept his eyes open, just watching her, wishing he could move in closer and put his arms around her. But there was still some unspoken boundary between them that he felt like he wasn’t allowed to cross. And he didn’t want to ruin this tentative re-building of their friendship by crossing it.

Surprisingly, her eyes fluttered back open, though, meeting his again. “I’m not tired,” she whispered.

Neither was he. Not right now. Not when things between them were actually flowing again. “I can stay up for a while,” he offered, willing to stay up all night if that was what she wanted.

“Okay,” she said, smiling softly.
God, that smile, the one she reserved just for him . . . he’d missed it so much. “Okay,” he echoed, smiling back. Beneath the covers, her feet rubbed against his the way they always did when they were cold. He doubted she even realized she was doing it, and she’d probably stop if he pointed it out to her. So he didn’t say a word.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Thursday was a rough day for Clarke. Mainly because, with it being the day before the ultrasound, she felt like she had a clock counting down in her head. Twenty-four hours. Twenty-three hours. Twenty-two hours until she found out if she was still carrying a baby or not.

She got online and looked up what else they might be able to do if the baby didn’t show up on the ultrasound. She could always just pee on a stick, or they could run another blood test to find out if she was still pregnant. It wasn’t like she would have to wait another week to do another ultrasound. But getting online was a mistake, in general, because everything sounded so horrible online. She found herself on a forum for expectant mothers and ended up reading all sorts of heartbreaking stories, both about false positives and false negatives related to routine pregnancy tests. It seemed the ultrasound was going to be the most reliable indicator of whether or not something was still . . . in there.

She had lunch with Raven and Niylah, and Emori and Murphy were both home that afternoon, so it wasn’t like she was lacking for companionship. Having people to spend the day with made her a little less anxious than she otherwise would have been. But even when she was hanging out with them, the countdown clock in the back of her mind never totally shut off. It kept ticking, gradually becoming louder and harder to ignore.

Around the fifteen hour mark, Bellamy returned home for the night, and she was so relieved to see him. Her friends were great, and spending time with them really did help her focus on other things instead of spending too much time looking stuff up on the internet. But Bellamy was really the main person she wanted to be around right now. Even if they weren’t together, they were in this together.

“Sorry I got home so late tonight,” he apologized as he followed her up to the bedroom.

“That’s okay,” she assured him, pushing open the door. She sat down on the bed and noticed the way he just stood there, almost like he was questioning whether or not he should sit down beside her or stay standing.

Even though she wasn’t upset with him for working late, he still seemed to feel the need to explain as he said, “I was just tryin’ to do as much today as I could.” He sat down beside her and revealed, “I cleared my schedule for tomorrow, took the whole day off for . . . you know.”

“Yeah.” Oh, she knew. In fact, she knew it was less than fifteen hours away now.

“So I’m gonna be with you the whole day,” he said, “no matter how it turns out.”

She nodded, so grateful for that. Whether she found out she was pregnant or not, she just didn’t want to be alone afterward. She’d either be devastated and need a shoulder to cry on, or she’d be . . . well, terrified and possibly still need a shoulder to cry on. But if she was terrified, she would at least be crying happy, thankful tears. So yeah, she was hoping to feel terrified. Not devastated.

“At least the appointment’s pretty early,” he said, “so we won’t have to wait around all day.”

“Yep.” If they got in right on time, they’d find out around 9:00 in the morning.

“I know you’re probably scared,” he said, reaching over to put his hand atop hers.
“I’m so scared,” she admitted. “Are you?”

He took in a deep breath and nodded. “Yeah.”

“I mean . . .” It was hard to explain how she felt, because it wasn’t like she’d ever been hoping to become a mother at the ripe old age of twenty-two. It wasn’t like she’d had fantasies of having babies with Bellamy, even though she had noticed on more than one occasion how good he was with kids and greatly admired how he’d been a father figure to Octavia in addition to being her big brother.

“What?” he asked, and she realized she’d gotten lost in thought.

“It’s not like I have baby fever now or something,” she said. “But . . . it’s ours—it’s part of you and me—and I just . . . I want it to make it.” She placed one hand atop her stomach, wishing she could just sense whether or not there was still a baby in there, wishing she was that intuitive that she wouldn’t even need an ultrasound; she’d just know.

“Who do you think it would look more like?” Bellamy asked. “Me or you?”

She let out a shaky exhale, trying not to think about that. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe a mix of our skin tones,” he said, holding his arm up beside hers. “Probably my dark hair. Maybe your blue eyes.”

“Maybe.” Truthfully, imagining what their child might look like only tempted her to sketch out what she imagined in her mind. And she’d already done enough sketching lately.

“God, I can’t believe we made a baby,” he said, shaking his head in astonishment. “How’d that happen?”

She gave him a look. Was he really gonna sit there and act like he didn’t know?

“Well, I know how,” he amended, “but just . . . it’s crazy. We didn’t even know each other, and then we . . . got to know each other.”

“That’s one way to put it.”

“Seriously, though, think about that, Clarke.” He angled his body towards hers, glancing down at her stomach before saying the words again. “We made a baby. However, this turns out, nothing’s ever gonna change that.”

She hung her head, nodding solemnly. He was right. Whether they had the opportunity to see the baby and know it and raise it, or whether they didn’t . . . for the rest of her life, she would know that she and Bellamy had created an actual human life together. To say that that was mind-blowing was probably an understatement.

“Bellamy?” she said, raising her eyes slowly to meet his. “I kinda just wanna be with you tonight. If that’s okay.”

His eyes stared into hers for a few seconds until he said, “Yeah. That’s fine.”

She breathed a small sigh of relief. “Okay.” They could talk some more about the good times they’d had these past eight months, maybe make each other laugh some more. Last night had been great. Even with the great unknown looming overheard, she’d actually managed to be lighthearted as she lay in bed with him. Maybe they could just stay up here all night, just the two of them.
“Just let me hop in the shower first,” he said, standing up. “I probably stink.”

Actually, even though he’d probably worked up a sweat today, he smelled pretty good. He was probably very dirty, but it’d always kind of turned her on. Not that she was in the mood to feel turned on right now. Not that she could, even if she’d wanted to.

He peeled his shirt off as he went into the bathroom, though, and she had to admit, the sight of those broad shoulders and the muscles of his back . . . yeah. It was good stuff.

She stood up, too, stretching out her back. She’d been doing a lot of sitting these past few days, and she was definitely more than a little stiff. Once she got the a-okay to start exercising again, she was getting a gym membership. Or something. Maybe doing some workout DVDs that didn’t require any rhythm or dancing ability whatsoever.

“Hey, did you ever find that really soft grey towel?” he asked from the bathroom.

“Oh, yeah, it was in the downstairs bathroom,” she replied. “Murphy must have . . .” She trailed off abruptly as her eyes caught sight of something on the bedspread. Something horrible.

“Oh, never mind, I found it,” he said.

Something red.

Blood.

“Bellamy!” she called.

When he came out of the bathroom and saw her staring down at the bed, he immediately did the same. She saw the look of panic on his face, the horror that he couldn’t disguise. She knew he was feeling the same fear that she was. But she didn’t know what to do about it.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Sitting in the examination room up on the patient’s table, waiting for Dr. Tsing to come in, Clarke felt such a strong sense of déjà vu. The last time she and Bellamy had driven to the emergency room together, he’d been so worried just like he was now. But she hadn’t been. That was the stark contrast between then and now: her fear.

It was a good thing Bellamy had come home when he did, that he’d been there for all of this, because it’d been too much for her to handle. She’d started crying and shaking right away upon seeing that blood on the bedspread, and her legs had nearly buckled underneath her. But he’d scooped her up and held her steady, and somehow, he’d managed to remain calm as he told her what they were going to do: They were going to the emergency room, and they were going to find out what was going on.

So now here they were. Murphy and Emori had offered to come with them after Bellamy had explained what was happening, but he’d told them to stay home. Clarke was pretty sure he’d told them to get the bedspread off the bed before she came back, but her mind was kind of in a fog at that point.

And it still was now. All her thoughts were racing so fast that they just blended together. One second, she was thinking about that blood and what it might mean, and then she was thinking about Bellamy, who wasn’t saying much of anything. Then she thought about the blood again, then about Dr. Tsing and how she was so considerate to stay late just to see them. And then . . . back to the blood. It always came back to that.
Bellamy was thinking about it, too. She could see the worry written all over his face. But he kept trying to reassure her, not out loud, but in other ways. Like when he rubbed her shoulders or gave her hand a gentle, supportive squeeze. She was so grateful he was there, that she was going through this alone; but she also felt like . . . like she was going to fail him if she lost this baby. He wanted it so bad, and now she did, too, and . . . it just seemed like they weren’t going to get to have it. Because between the accident and the surgery and now this . . . her body had been through a lot. She knew the female body had so many mechanisms in place to protect unborn babies, but what if this was all just too much? What if her body hadn’t been able to protect it?

They didn’t have to wait long, thankfully. Dr. Tsing came into the room about five minutes after the nurse had left, and Clarke could tell by the serious look on her face that she’d already been told why they were there.


He, at least, had the decency to shake her hand and say, “Hi, Dr. Tsing.” But Clarke couldn’t even muster that much. She didn’t mean to be rude, but she had to know . . .

“Did I have a miscarriage?” she blurted out.

Bellamy looked horrified to even hear her say that word.

“Can you tell me a bit more about what happened?” Dr. Tsing asked.

She didn’t really want to, but she knew she had to, so she mumbled, “I guess.”

And thus began the doctor’s very delicate but very deliberate questioning. “Are you still bleeding?”

“No,” Clarke replied. “It must’ve only lasted a couple minutes.”

“And how much blood was there?”

She made a circle with her hands, about the size of a tennis ball. “Maybe about that much?” She gave Bellamy a questioning look, and he nodded to confirm.

Dr. Tsing went on to ask Clarke if she’d felt nauseous today, fatigued, if she’d had any period-like cramping. She answered no to all of them and took that to mean she didn’t have any signs or symptoms. Except the bleeding. Really, why else would she be bleeding unless . . .

“We didn’t know what to do,” Bellamy said, “So I just brought her here.”

“You did the right thing,” Dr. Tsing told him. “A situation like this . . . is terrifying. But to automatically assume it’s a miscarriage might be a mistake.”

“Might be?” Clarke echoed.

“Well, this is the first trimester of your first pregnancy,” Dr. Tsing recapped, “so is there a higher risk of miscarriage around this time? Yes, naturally. And given the trauma you endured in the car accident . . . yes, there’s definitely a risk. But many women experience bleeding during pregnancy without having a miscarriage. Your body may be doing all sorts of things we can’t explain right now.”

“Like bleeding?” Clarke said, feeling a small spark of hope again.

“Yes. It could be nothing to worry about. Or it could be something. For all we know, Clarke, this
could be the start of your next menstrual cycle, which . . .” She let her sentence fade solemnly.

“Which would mean I’m not even pregnant,” Clarke filled in. Yeah, here they were, getting ahead of themselves again, talking about losing a baby when they still weren’t even sure if there was a baby left to lose.

“Can we just . . . can we just do the ultrasound now then?” Bellamy asked, his voice wavering with emotion. “We wanna know.”

“And you will,” Dr. Tsing said. “But our ultrasound technician won’t be here until tomorrow morning. You’re her first appointment.”

“Can’t you just do it?” Clarke asked desperately. It seemed like Dr. Tsing knew how to do everything.

“I can’t,” the doctor said apologetically. “Your only option would be to drive to a bigger hospital and have it performed as an emergency procedure, but that will be tremendously expensive, and given what you’ve described, I don’t think it’s necessary. If that’s what you need to do to put your mind at ease, then I won’t stop you, but if I were you . . .” She sighed sympathetically. “As painstaking as it is, I’d wait until your appointment tomorrow morning. You’re not currently bleeding or experiencing any other symptoms of a miscarriage, so there’s no immediate concern.”

It felt pretty immediate to Clarke, though. And ultimately, cost wasn’t a factor to her. Her stepdad was a freaking senator. He had more money than he knew what to do with.

“Clarke, I know you don’t like the sound of this,” Dr. Tsing said, “but I think the best thing you can do right now is to go home, rest, try to relax.”

Clarke grunted, feeling like that was impossible.

“You, too,” Dr. Tsing said to Bellamy.

He exhaled heavily, looking resigned. “So just go home and wait, huh?”

“Get some sleep,” she advised. “Or try to.”

*Not gonna happen*, Clarke thought. She’d get an hour or two, maybe, at the most. And it’d probably be even less for Bellamy. He’d only sleep if she slept. But he’d stay awake as long as she did.

There were about fourteen hours left to go now. So it was gonna be a long, long night.

Clarke wasn’t ready to go home yet, she said, so Bellamy drove around town, per her request. He drove past Dropship and TonDC, past her apartment complex and even past good old Walmart. She didn’t seem to have any destination in mind, so he just kept driving. Things were both relatively silent until they turned the radio on. But it was just one sad song after another, so they ended up turning it off.

He knew Clarke was lost in her thoughts, because he was, too. He kept thinking about tomorrow, wondering how the hell he was gonna hold himself together and be strong for her if they got bad news. And how he was going to tell his sister, his mother, their friends. Or if he’d even have to. There was still a chance they’d get that ultrasound and see a healthy, growing baby on it. There was still a chance.
He wished he knew what Clarke was thinking.

At long last, a little before 10:00 that night, she said, “We can go home now,” and he re-routed, getting onto the familiar streets that led back to his neighborhood. They coasted through the very same intersection where she’d had her car accident without problem, but he gripped the steering wheel tighter, so angry that that had ever happened. Maybe if it hadn’t, then none of this would be happening, either. Maybe they’d still be having an ultrasound done tomorrow, but maybe they’d be looking forward to it instead of feeling so anxious.

The house was pretty dark and quiet by the time they got home, so Murphy and Emori must have already gone to bed. Bellamy knocked on the door to their room, though, and they both got up to come talk to him in their pajamas. He told them what the doctor had said, and they informed him that they’d managed to get his bedspread clean. You couldn’t even tell there had been any blood there, they said. Good as new. He thanked them.

“How else can we help?” Murphy asked.

“I don’t think so,” Bellamy answered. He hated feeling so useless, so unable to help Clarke or do anything to fix the problem they were facing. But he knew she was glad she wasn’t doing this by herself. If nothing else, he could just be there for her.

“So you’re just gonna wait until tomorrow morning then?” Emori asked.

“I guess.” Dr. Tsing hadn’t seemed to think it was an emergency, so . . . waiting it was. “I’m just gonna try to keep her calm, so . . .”

“Yeah.” Emori sighed. “Well, let us know if you need anything.”

“Yeah, we’re right here, man,” Murphy added.

“Thanks.” Bellamy stepped back as they shut the door to their bedroom, and he headed out into the living room, where he’d left Clarke sitting on the couch. She was in the kitchen now, though, arms folded over her chest, brow furrowed as she stared out the window. She didn’t even seem to hear him or sense him at all as he walked up to her, so he put his hand on her shoulder and said, “Hey.”

She startled at his touch.

“Sorry,” he said, unsurely pulling his hand back. Did she not wanna be touched right now? Or did she just not want him to touch her? After all, it was his touching her and . . . doing other things to her that had gotten them into this mess.

“I was just spacing out,” she said, leaning against the center island. “We still have to wait eleven more hours.”

He glanced at the clock on the microwave, noting the time. 10:12. So yeah, eleven more hours. Just a little less.

“You alright?” he asked, immediately regretting the question. Because it was such a stupid one.

“No,” she answered honestly. “I hate this.”

“I know,” he sympathized.

“No, you don’t--” She spun to face him, clenching her hands into fists momentarily before she started over. “I don’t mean to sound insensitive, because I know all of this affects you, too,” she said. “But
whatever’s happening . . . it’s happening to me. It’s my body, and I just . . . I hate feeling like I have no control over it.”

He nodded slowly, understanding that. As much as he could, anyway. She was right, it was happening to her. Clarke was the one who might be having a baby or might be having a miscarriage. Either way, he couldn’t even pretend to know exactly what she was going through.

All of a sudden, it was like the dam burst, and tears started to pour from her eyes. “I just don’t wanna let you down,” she cried, not even bothering to wipe the tears away. “I know how bad you want this, and you would be such a good dad.”

“Clarke . . .” He reached out for her, wishing she wouldn’t worry about him.

But she backed away. “And it’s not like I wanted to be a mom right now. I mean, I always figured someday it would happen, but I didn’t know I’d be twenty-two. But I am and—and now I want it and . . . I just wanna be able to do this. I wanna be strong enough.”

“You are strong.”

“What if I’m not, though?” she fretted, tearing her hand away from his. “What if I can’t do this? What if I screw it up?”

“None of this is your fault, Clarke.”

“Hey, stop.” He managed to grab both her whirling arms and pull her closer. “I don’t wanna fail at this,” she said sadly. “Bellamy, I don’t . . . I don’t wanna let you down.”

It wasn’t the second time she’d said that tonight and the second time it’d broken his heart. “Come here,” he said, bringing her in close so he could put his arms around her. He hugged her, one hand on her back, the other tangled in her hair, his face pressed against the top of her head. “That’s never gonna happen, okay?” he murmured. However this turned out, he wouldn’t be disappointed in her or upset with her in any way. He might be sad, but it wouldn’t be her fault. She was amazing; she was so brave.

He held her close for a few moments, trying to calm her down. Her body stopped quivering so much as the crying started to let up, and she clutched at his t-shirt as she rested her forehead against his chest. It felt like . . . like she really did need him. More than that, for the first time in a long time, it felt like she really, truly trusted him again.

Slowly, she lifted her head, her eyes fluttering up to meet his. He gazed at her, his arms still around her, and he saw a look on her face that was probably mirrored on his own. It was one of total . . . uncertainty.

But one thing he was certain of was how he felt about her. He looked at her even now with tear tracks staining her cheeks, and he knew he was looking at the girl he loved, the girl he wanted to be with. So even though he wasn’t sure if it was a good idea to do so, and even though he knew it was probably the wrong time, he closed his eyes, leaned forward, and pressed a soft kiss to her lips.

She was so taken aback, so stunned, that for a moment, her lips were still beneath his. In fact, she just barely kissed him back. But her sharp intake of breath spurred him on, so he kissed her again. And this time, her lips parted ever so slightly, and he was able to kiss her more deeply. He wasn’t about to
push his luck and shove his tongue into her mouth or anything, but he gave her a *good* kiss. Quickly followed by another one, and then another, to the point where it wasn’t just a kiss anymore; they were kissing.

It was like the rest of the world fell away, and for a few seconds, there were no more worries, no more fears. There was just him and Clarke, doing what they’d always done. It made his whole body feel electric just to have his mouth on hers again, to have his hands on her back, pulling her closer as the kiss intensified.

But as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped. She broke away from it without warning and looked down at the ground, almost as if she were embarrassed.

*Look at me,* he wanted to say, but it wasn’t necessary. She slowly raised her head, and their eyes met. And all that worry that had miraculously faded away for a few seconds . . . it was back now, written all over her face.

*I shouldn’t have done that,* he thought. They’d been doing so good rebuilding their friendship these past few days, and now he’d probably just screwed that up. As if they didn’t already have enough going on, enough to stress over and think about, now he’d gone and done this, too.

Instead of saying anything, she let her actions do the talking as she slipped away from him and scurried upstairs. It seemed like she couldn’t get away fast enough.

_Dammit._ He sighed heavily, raking his hand through his hair, and shook his head. Why? Why had he done that? Clearly he’d freaked her out. Or something. Now she wouldn’t even wanna talk to him for the rest of the night, which meant he’d be down here on the couch, and she’d be up there facing these last eleven hours of waiting all alone.

Despite how pissed he was at himself for giving in to his impulses . . . he didn’t totally regret it. Couldn’t. He hadn’t just kissed Clarke; she’d kissed him, too. And it’d felt just as incredible as he remembered, just as natural. He hadn’t questioned it in the moment because . . . because there wasn’t anything to question. Kissing Clarke had always just felt *right.* Even now, it definitely didn’t feel wrong.

He licked his lips and closed his eyes for a second, trying to recall the last time his mind had felt so free. And he couldn’t. With everything going on, kissing this girl had *still* been enough to make him forget about all else. He knew it must have felt that way for her, too.

It was a good feeling.

*I love her,* he thought, starting to pace around the kitchen now. *I love her.* That was why he’d kissed her, because he loved the girl. And she knew that, but she didn’t _really_ know. Because the only time he’d told her, she’d been lying in a hospital bed, unconscious, unable to hear a word he said.

He paced faster.

Yeah, he’d promised not to say anything, not to tell her he loved her, because she’d told him not to. But what the hell kind of promise was that? She deserved to hear it. She deserved to hear it every day for the rest of her life, and he wanted to say it every day for the rest of his. He was tired of keeping it in, of _not* telling her. Everything he felt was just *right there,* begging to be let out, and he didn’t feel like he could keep it in any longer.

He raced through the living room and ran upstairs, heart pounding as he threw open the bedroom door. There she sat on the side of the bed, looking surprised to see him again already.
“I’m not sorry,” he blurted, standing in the doorway.

“What?” she said confusedly.

“For what happened down there. I’m not sorry,” he elaborated. “I don’t regret it.”

She kept her eye contact with him for a few seconds, staring at him almost suspiciously, then looked away, shifting a bit on the bed. “Bellamy—”

“I don’t regret anything, Clarke,” he cut in, needing her to know that. “Except pushing you away.”

She shook her head sadly, then groaned, “Do we have to talk about this right now?”

“Yes.” He wasn’t trying to overwhelm her; he just needed her to know. And he needed her to know before tomorrow’s ultrasound. It was important.

“I know I hurt you,” he said, shutting the door as he came into the bedroom. “I never meant to.”

She still wouldn’t look at him.

“I’m so sorry,” he apologized, feeling like it’d never be enough to make up for how badly he’d broken her heart. But it was all he had.

He sat down beside her, hating that she was angling her body away from him now, just slightly but enough for him to notice it. She kept her head turned, and he could tell that she really didn’t know what to think about this. She seemed . . . doubtful.

“Clarke, please look at me,” he begged.

She wouldn’t.

“Clarke.” He switched positions, kneeling down in front of her instead. And that got her attention. Her eyes widened as she took in the sight of him down on one knee, and he smiled a bit, imagining how good it would feel to do this again someday, only with a ring in his hand.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“What I should’ve done a long time ago,” he admitted. Loving Clarke was not a new development. Somewhere along the way, it’d become as natural as breathing. But telling her he loved her . . . yeah, that was new. But he wasn’t scared of it. Not anymore.

He took her hand in his, running his fingers over her knuckles, grazing them against her palm. Her paler skin was a stark contrast to his darker skin, and god, it just looked so right.

“I love you, Clarke,” he said, feeling a warmth spread through him as the words left his mouth. “I love everything about you.”

She just gazed at him, didn’t try to shut him down and get him to stop talking this time. So he went on.

“And it’s more than just loving you as a best friend. Because I love you . . .” He took a deep breath. “. . . in a way I’ve never loved anyone before.”

That look in her eyes became almost . . . alarmed.

“And I need you to know, this isn’t just ‘cause of the baby,” he quickly reassured her. “It’s ‘cause of
you.” He wet his lips, glancing down at their locked hands again, remembering how much he’d held her hand when she’d been at the hospital, and how talking to her then before she’d even woken up had felt a hell of a lot like this. “When they called me to the hospital and I didn’t even know if you were gonna make it . . .” He swallowed the lump in his throat. “Before I even knew about the baby, I figured it out, Clarke. I figured out . . . that you mean everything to me. Because you’re not just . . .” He trailed off and sighed, sort of feeling like he was beating around the bush when he could just say it.

So he did. At last.

“Clarke, you’re the love of my life.”

She froze as she gazed at him, mouth slightly agape, tears slipping out of the corners of her eyes. Her chest hardly rose or fell anymore; she was barely breathing.

“And I’m sorry it took a car accident for me to realize it,” he apologized. “I’m sorry it took me so long.”

She opened her mouth like she wanted to say something, but no words came out. She tried again. Same result.

“I needed to tell you tonight,” he said, caressing her fingers with his thumb, “because I don’t know what tomorrow’s gonna bring. But what I do know . . . is that I love you.” It felt so good to say, he had to say it again. “I love you. I’m in love with you. And no matter how this turns out for us, I wanna be with you no matter what.”

She finally started to breathe again. He saw the faint beginnings of a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. But just barely, because she still looked more shocked than anything else.

“And someday,” he said, looking down at her hand one more time before again meeting her eyes, “if you let me, I’ll get down on one knee like this again, and I’ll do this for real. I’ll pull out a ring and ask you if you wanna spend the rest of your life with me . . . because that’s what I wanna do with you.”

Tears started to spill over like raindrops onto her cheeks, but they weren’t the sad kind. She looked . . . blown away now. But touched. Moved. And still very speechless.

“Anyway . . .” He didn’t know how to wrap it up or what to do now, so he pushed himself to his feet, reluctantly letting go of her hand. He could give her a little time alone if that was what she needed. If she needed space to take all that in and process it, then he could give that to her.

He started for the door.

“Bellamy?” she called, stopping him in his tracks.

He turned back around, just waiting for her to say something. But she never did. Instead, she scooted up onto the bed, over to her side, making plenty of obvious space for him.

Slowly, giving her plenty of time to change her mind if she wanted to, he crawled onto that bed with her and lay down beside her, instinctively opening up his arms so she could settle into them. She curled up against his side, one hand on his chest, right over his heart, and he hoped she could feel it beating just for her. He’d never poured his heart out to someone quite like this before. Not even Roma or Gina.

He kissed the top of her head and held her close, feeling like he was falling in love with her all over
again. For the first time since he’d stupidly broken up with her, he felt like they were completely connected again. Maybe even more so now than they were before. Because now, he knew how he felt about her. And for the first time ever, so did she.
Chapter 60

How could one day, one moment, change your whole life? Clarke wasn’t sure, but she knew today was bound to be one of those days with one of those moments. There was no avoiding it.

She hadn’t actually had too many life-changing moments. The day her dad had died. The moment she’d met Bellamy. Getting in that car accident. But Bellamy had had plenty of life-changing things happen to him. If possible, this day right here, though . . . it had the potential to end up being the most life-changing one of all. For both of them. And they both knew that.

She woke up early, earlier than Bellamy woke up when he had to go to work, and she got up and started getting ready while he continued to sleep. He slept in a little later than he usually did, but she didn’t want to disturb him. Something told her he’d stayed awake for a long time last night after she’d nodded off. The poor guy. He looked exhausted.

Putting on a pair of jean shorts, she watched herself in the mirror as she dressed. Those shorts didn’t really feel any tighter, and if she turned to the side, there wasn’t some noticeable bump. Just her stomach being . . . well, her stomach.

Totally discarding any idea of looking through her own shirts, Clarke tossed on one of Bellamy’s, tying it on the side to make it less baggy and loose. She put her hair up in its signature half-ponytail and applied minimal makeup. Whichever way this went today, she was going to end up crying, so there was no need to bother which much more than a little lip gloss.

Bellamy woke up around 8:00, first noticing the time on the bedside clock, then her. He got right up and came to stand behind her as she looked at her reflection.

“I think I’m ready,” she announced, meeting his eyes in the mirror.

He put his hands on her shoulders and squeezed gently, then rubbed them up and down her arms. Gradually, he slid his hands underneath her arms and wrapped them around her waist, resting them on her stomach. He stood behind her, holding her with such strength and such utter adoration that she had to close her eyes, lean her head back against his shoulder, and just revel in it. Everything he’d told her last night . . . she felt it now. She felt how much he loved her and how much he would love their baby. If they had one.

Knowing that he wanted to be with her no matter what, though, whether they had one or not . . . knowing that she wouldn’t go back to being alone if she found out she’d lost this baby comforted her. Bellamy’s confession last night had floored her, but it’d also made her feel like, somehow, some way, everything was going to be okay.

She looked out the window as they drove to the hospital, watching the world pass her by. Most of these other people were probably on their way to work, or to class, as Bellamy otherwise would have been. They weren’t on their way to find out if they were gonna be parents or not. But she and Bellamy were, and no matter how hard she tried to relax, her stomach was still in knots about it. And the closer they got to the hospital, the more knotted up it became.

Once they were in the waiting room, Bellamy held her hand. She leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder, and listened to all the sounds around her, trying to distract herself by just noticing them: the sound of the door sliding open and shut when a new patient came in. The
receptionist’s fingers clicking away on her keyboard. Bellamy’s breathing, which was very quick and shallow.

Most notably, perhaps, was the repeated buzzing of her phone. She checked it the first few times and found texts from Raven, Niylah, and Emori. After that, it was Harper and Octavia. Then Maya, then Murphy, Miller, and eventually all the rest of the guys. Each text was hopeful and encouraging and wished her good luck today. Bellamy’s phone was vibrating, too, so he was probably getting similar messages. He didn’t bother to check, but Clarke always texted back a quick thanks. By the time her mother probably sent her one, though, she’d already shut her phone off. Because, as nice as it was that everyone was wishing her well today, responding to a massive flurry of texts wasn’t the best way to try to relax.

Going back into the ultrasound room made it very, very real. The woman doing it was someone Clarke didn’t know or even recognize, and she really wished it was Dr. Tsing. But this woman seemed nice enough. She asked Clarke if it was her first pregnancy, and she asked how far along she thought she might be. She talked to Bellamy, too, asking him how he felt about all of this, and when he said, “I just hope we see a baby on there today,” she said, “I hope so, too.”

*I hope so,* Clarke thought as she lay back on the table. *God, I hope so.*

The room, being as dimly-lit as it was, actually sort of had a nice ambiance about it. Like a spaz, Clarke asked why it was so dark, and the technician explained that it was so she could see the screen better.

“Will you be able to tell for sure if you see a baby or not?” Bellamy inquired.

“If she’s far enough along, yes,” the woman explained. She told Clarke to undo her shorts and lift her shirt up to reveal her whole stomach. And suddenly, this ultrasound was really happening.

Clarke’s hand reached out on its own accord, fluttering towards Bellamy when she felt the first sensation of the cold, gooey gel on her stomach. He clasped it within his own and held it tight while she squeezed her eyes shut and tried to let his strength flow into her. Because Bellamy was so strong. He’d gone through so much in his life already, more than most people ever endured. He’d lost two girls he loved and still managed to find the courage to love her. He’d grown up without a dad to guide him, yet he’d still become this amazing, incredible man. He’d helped raise Octavia, been half big brother and half father figure to her. And this past week, he’d done everything in his power to take care of her, even though no one was taking care of him.

He was the strongest person she knew.

At one point, he knelt beside her and told her she was doing so good, to which she promptly pointed out that she was literally just lying there. Their ultrasound expert smiled at them and squeezed more gel onto Clarke’s stomach.

*Maybe she’s not seeing anything,* Clarke thought, gripping Bellamy’s hand tighter. Maybe that was why she was using so much gel. Maybe there was nothing left to ultrasound. If she dared turn her head to the right, maybe she’d see something empty on that screen. Maybe if Bellamy lifted his head and looked away from her for one second, he’d see the same thing.

She was bracing herself for the worst. For the worst moment of her entire life. Because she’d been in a car accident. And had a splenectomy. And last night she’d been bleeding. And then . . .

“There it is.”
Both her and Bellamy’s heads snapped towards the screen. But Clarke couldn’t even tell what she was looking at. It was just a fuzzy blob of a picture. But to the woman performing this ultrasound, it was much more than that. Because she beamed a smile from ear to ear and happily proclaimed, “There’s your baby.”

*My . . . my baby?* Clarke thought, gasping in disbelief. Bellamy’s hand started to shake, and he stuttered, “W-What?” Clearly, he’d been preparing himself for bad news, too.

“This is the head, roughly,” the woman explained, pointing to one part of the blob. “And this flashing part right here . . . that’s the heartbeat.”

“The heartbeat,” Clarke whispered, shell-shocked. She saw it; she saw the flashing. She saw her baby’s heart beating.

Her baby. *Their* baby. They had a baby in there. And it was alive.

“Oh my god,” she heard Bellamy say in astonishment. But she couldn’t tear her eyes away from the screen long enough to look at him.

“I’m still pregnant?” she squeaked out.

“You’re still pregnant,” the technician said. “In fact, judging by these measurements, I’d say you’re about six weeks, five days along. But our measurements go five days either way.”

Clarke continued to stare at the screen, completely amazed. She stared to cry when Bellamy did. He didn’t hold back; he wept tears of joy and kept hold of her hand, then kissed the top of her head and her cheek. “Oh my god,” he murmured shakily against her hair. He sounded so grateful.

“Strong heartbeat,” the technician reported. “You two made one tough little baby.”

Clarke laughed a bit as more joyful tears continued to fall. They’d made a baby. Her and Bellamy. A tough one. And it was still in there.

“I’m so proud of you,” Bellamy said, kissing the back of her hand. “I’m so proud.”

She smiled at him blissfully and said, “You’re gonna be a dad.”

He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment, looking completely overcome and overjoyed. “And you’re gonna be a mom,” he said back.

*A mom.* She let the words sink in, let them marinate. She was going to be somebody’s mother. Technically, she already was.

“I love you,” he said before he kissed her lips. She couldn’t remember a happier kiss ever in her life.

He pressed his forehead to hers then, keeping her hand securely in his own, and they just laughed and smiled together. And the woman who’d given them this first image of their tough, *miraculous* child didn’t say anything to disrupt them. She just let them have their moment. Because like certain other moments in life, it changed everything.

Bellamy was happy. Actually, happy wasn’t a strong enough word for it. He was pretty sure there wasn’t a word in the English language that could accurately describe how he felt as he drove home from the hospital with his pregnant girlfriend next to him.
Clarke was pregnant.

“Clarke was pregnant.”

“This says it’s the size of a pea right now,” she told him as she read through a pamphlet the hospital had given her.

“A pea?” he echoed.

“Yep.”

God, that was so tiny.

“But in five weeks, it’s gonna be the size of a plum. And in eight weeks, it’s gonna be the size of a peach.”

“Wow.” That was head-spinning to think about. Inside Clarke right now was this little part of him and her, and it was going to be growing every day. Becoming a person. A son or a daughter. He didn’t care which one as long as it was healthy.

“Oh, and I should expect to feel some fatigue, nausea, perhaps some abdominal pain, and plenty of hormone changes,” she read on. “So in other words, you can expect lots of mood swings.”

“Great,” he said, although really . . . he wouldn’t mind. It was all part of the experience, and it was an experience he was glad to be having.

“And I might start to have food cravings, so you better be ready to cook.”

“Always am,” he mumbled.

“Oh my god, my phone keeps blowing up,” she said, setting the pamphlet aside. “Everyone’s texting me.”

“Yeah, me, too,” he said. His phone was starting to feel like a sex toy in his back pocket; it was vibrating that much.

“What do I tell them?” she asked.

“Tell ‘em we’re havin’ a baby,” he suggested. Her phone would really be blowing up after that, with texts and calls.

“Okay,” she said, already typing out a text. “I’ll send it in the group chat.”

“We’ll have to call our parents,” he said. He couldn’t tell his mom she was going to be a grandmother in a text message.

“Done,” she said, sending the message. In only a matter of seconds, people were already texting back. She laughed and told him, “Raven says, ‘OMG, baby Bellagio!’ And Murphy’s already suggesting we name the baby after him.”

Bellamy chuckled.

“Niylah says congratulations,” Clarke relayed, “and she wants to know what the ultrasound looked like.”

Well, they had pictures. They could show her at some point. “Tell her it looked like a gummy bear,”
he said.

“We made a gummy bear, Bellamy!” she exclaimed.

“Soon to be a plum,” he reminded her.

“And then a peach,” she added.

“And maybe eventually a runaway watermelon,” he joked.

She laughed, then said, “Oh my god, it is gonna be like carrying a watermelon around.”

“You’ll do fine,” he assured her, reaching over to grab her hand. And just like he had two weeks ago when he’d first taken her to the hospital, he held it all the way home.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Frequent urination was another thing Clarke had coming her way, and even though she wasn’t looking forward to it . . . at least it was another pregnancy symptom. Because she was pregnant. She could say that with absolute certainty now.

Upon arriving home, she’d had to pee so badly that she couldn’t even make it to the upstairs bathroom and had to use the downstairs one across from Murphy’s bedroom instead. “God, I’m gonna start peeing so much,” she halfheartedly complained as she walked out of the bathroom. She stopped abruptly, though, when she saw Bellamy sitting on the couch, the ultrasound picture in his hand. Even though there were no physical features to identify yet, he was just staring at it in awe.

So captivated was he that he didn’t even notice her come out of the bathroom until she stood in front of him and said his name. “Bellamy.”

He lifted his head up.

“I’m gonna get huge,” she warned him.

Grinning, he got to his feet. “Yeah.” He went into the kitchen and stuck the ultrasound image up on the fridge with a magnet. They’d probably have a collage of ultrasounds up there in a few months.

“Everything’s gonna be sore,” she said. “My back, my feet, my boobs.”

“Your boobs are gonna be massive,” he predicted, sauntering back into the living room. “I’m really looking forward to that.”

“I’m sure.” She couldn’t even fathom all the ways her body was going to adapt and change, and there was no guarantee it would ever return to looking the way it did now. Hopefully Bellamy would still be attracted to her when she had some unshed baby weight and stretch marks. “Just so you know,” she said, “it’s not gonna be like a perfect little Octavia bump. I’m gonna get big all over. Like a blimp.”

“You’ll be a beautiful blimp,” he promised her.

“You’re just saying that.”

“No, I seriously think you’re gonna look good,” he insisted. “I’m picturing it right now.”

“Really?”
“Yeah. You, carrying my child? I like it. I think it’s like a primal thing.”

She laughed, wishing she was looking forward to these physical changes as much as he was. But if this was what it took to bring their child into the world then . . . well, this was what it took. Totally worth it.

“I’m actually terrified,” she told him suddenly. “Not of getting big, but . . . just of everything. Of being a mom.”

He frowned curiously.

“I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m excited,” she assured him, “but I’m . . .” Exhaling heavily, she said the word again. “Terrified.”

He nodded mutely for a moment, then surprised her by admitting, “Me, too.”

She shook her head skeptically. “No, you’re not. You were, like, born for this.”

“But I don’t know what I’m doing any more than you do,” he pointed out, circling his arms around her waist. “We’ll figure it out as we go along, I guess.”

“I guess,” she agreed. At least they’d be able to learn some things from Lincoln and Octavia; they could babysit for them a lot. And surely their own parents had plenty of valuable wisdom and insight to offer.

“I still can’t believe any of this happened,” she said, draping her arms over his shoulders. “We’re gonna be parents.”

“Good parents,” he emphasized. “I’ll try to be like your dad, even though I never met him.”

She felt tears sting her eyes, and she wasn’t sure if it was just because he’d brought up her father or if it was the hormone craziness kicking in. “You already are a lot like him,” she told him, wishing her dad had known him. He would have been a huge Bellamy Blake fan.

Closing her eyes, she tilted her head back, awaiting a kiss, and soon, his lips were on hers, giving her another one of those sweet, unexpectedly chaste kisses like the ones last night. It felt so nice to be able to do this again, to no longer feel so awkward around him.

“I love you” she told him, well aware that she hadn’t said those words to him for a while now. Not since her hysterical voicemail. She needed to say it, though, needed him to know that, despite everything that had happened between them, her feelings hadn’t changed.

“I love you, too,” he said, tucking her hair behind her ear for her. Then, as an afterthought, he added on, “Princess,” and stroked her cheek.

“Mmm,” she purred, turning her face into his hand. “I love it when you call me that.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah.” She honestly didn’t even remember how the nickname had come about, but she responded to it as easily as she did to her actual name at this point. But only Bellamy was allowed to call her that.

And only Bellamy was allowed to move in so close that she could feel his warm breath on her forehead. Only Bellamy was allowed to make her see stars when he trailed his hand down her chest
to rest against her stomach. She suspected he’d be lavishing a lot of attention on that particular part of her body these next few months.

When he kissed her again, it was different. Open-mouthed this time, for starters, a way deeper kiss. The tip of his tongue slid against hers, and god, that alone was enough to start the desire swirling in her gut. She moaned into his mouth and arched her body against his, and his big, strong hands splayed against her back, holding her close as his mouth mated with hers. Bellamy was an amazing kisser. Ever since that night at Dropship when he’d first laid one on her in the hallway outside the bathroom, she’d known, deep down, that she couldn’t live without this, that he wasn’t just some guy she’d hook up with once and then get out of her system. Meeting him had changed her, changed her as a person and changed her whole life. And she didn’t regret anything.

Her hands started to act on their own intuition, scrambling for purchase on his t-shirt as she tried to yank it over his head.

“We really can’t do this yet,” he mumbled against her lips, pulling back only to raise his arms and help her get the shirt off of him.

“I know,” she said, tossing the garment aside before trailing her fingers over the sculpted lines of his torso. Good God, not only was he a great guy, but he was the most gorgeous guy she’d ever seen. How the hell had she gotten so lucky?

“I mean, we really can’t,” he said, even as his hands crept up underneath the back of her shirt. “Dr. Tsing gave me strict orders.”

“Okay.” They could follow those orders then. But that didn’t mean she still had to have all these clothes on.

She unfastened her jean shorts and hurriedly slid them down and stepped out of them, feeling like she just needed some skin-on-skin contact. Or something. The past few nights, she and Bellamy had been sharing a bed, but there were always clothes or space in between them. She didn’t want any space in between them right now, not when it seemed like they’d finally managed to close the gap.

“Damn,” he said, eyes dancing all over her as he took in the sight of her in his t-shirt. “You look so good.” And then he was practically picking her up in his arms, kissing her heatedly some more as he sat down on the couch and brought her down on top of him. She straddled his lap rolling her hips against the slight bulge in his jeans, and his hands started to scrunch up her shirt again.

“We really gotta stop,” he said, but he didn’t seem to know the meaning of the word as he lifted her shirt over her head.

Did they have to, though? She felt like she’d recovered from her surgery pretty well, and the pamphlet said that sex during the sixth week of pregnancy was okay.

“Don’t stop,” she whispered, cupping his face in between her hands. She smiled at him, and he smiled back, capturing her lips in a searing kiss before he trailed his mouth down her cheek to suck on her neck. She rolled her head to the side, moaning contentedly, tangling her hands in his unruly hair. God, no wonder they’d made a baby. This was intense.

“I’m seriously gonna stop,” he promised, words muffled against her skin as he sucked and licked at her pulse point. But he made no effort to do so as his hands came around and cupped her ass, squeezing greedily through her panties.

“Oh, Bellamy,” she gasped, snaking one hand down in between them to undo his jeans. With the
angle they were at, she couldn’t really reach inside or do much of anything else, but just knowing that she was so close to getting him naked was a rush.

“God, I missed this,” he said breathily as he hoisted her up a bit so that her breasts were at the level of his face. He pressed hot, sucking kisses to her cleavage, and she grinned dizzily, lost in the sensation until she heard his phone ring.

He groaned, not even bothering to answer it. He continued raining kisses on her breasts, even pulling one bra strap down so that they started to fall free.

“Are you gonna get that?” she asked as the phone continued to ring.

“No,” he decided.

“No?” Not that she wanted him to stop what he was doing and get wrapped up in some conversation, but it was distracting more than anything else. And for all they knew, it was one of their friends calling to congratulate them. “Let’s see . . .” she said, reaching into his pocket to pull his phone out. “Octavia,” she read from the caller ID. “You want me to answer it?”

“I don’t care,” he replied.

“You don’t care?” She knew he did, though, so she took the call. “Hello.”

It wasn’t Octavia who responded, though. Instead, it was Lincoln. He said something about leaving the house so fast that he’d left his phone at home, and then he started saying something about water.

“Wait, what?” Clarke asked. Between Bellamy ravaging her with the most magnificent make-out in human history and Lincoln’s unusually quick talking, she couldn’t make sense of what was going on. But when Lincoln repeated himself over again, she shifted her attention away from Bellamy. Because Lincoln wasn’t just talking about water. He was talking about Octavia. And about how her water had broken and they were at the hospital.

“Okay, we’ll be there,” Clarke said, ending the call. She literally had to grab Bellamy’s head and lift it away from her chest. “That was Lincoln,” she told him. “Octavia’s having the baby.”

That look of lust immediately vanished from Bellamy’s eyes, and they got wide with anticipation.

*Back to the hospital,* Clarke thought, smiling at him. Bellamy was about to be an uncle.
“Yeah, it’s kind of crazy,” Octavia was saying. Bellamy thought she seemed remarkably talkative and chipper for someone who was set to give birth soon, and she looked strangely comfortable in her hospital bed. “One minute I was just eating my breakfast, and then the next . . . whoosh goes the water.”

“Whoosh?” Clarke echoed.

“Yeah, it’s gross.”

“Don’t worry, I cleaned it up,” Lincoln assured her.

“You’re such a good husband,” she said, smiling up at him.

*He’d better be*, Bellamy thought. If he ever stopped being a good husband, he’d hunt the guy down and do physical harm to him.

“You sounded so worried on the phone,” Clarke told Lincoln.

“He did?” Octavia shot her husband a confused look. “Weird. He seemed so calm with me. He just grabbed our overnight bags and got me in the car, and off we went.”

“Well, I was trying to hold it together in front of you,” Lincoln said.

“So you’re freaking out inside?” Octavia asked him.

“A little bit, yeah.”

“I’ll be freaking out on the outside,” Bellamy warned Clarke. “Just so you know.”

“Oh my gosh, yes!” Octavia exclaimed. “You guys! I’m so . . . ugh, I feel so bad for doing this today. I didn’t mean to steal your thunder.”

“Oh, no, the thunder’s all yours,” Clarke assured her. “You’re giving birth. That’s bigger news than any of our stuff.”

“Are you kidding?” Octavia shrieked. “Clarke, you’re pregnant. You’re *actually* pregnant. This . . .” She motioned to herself. “This is gonna be you in a couple months.”

“Oh god, that’s scary,” Clarke said, so Bellamy put his arm around her.

“I’m actually pretty calm,” Octavia said. “I’ve got my birthing plan in place. I’ve got my husband. Mom’s gonna be here soon.”

“Is she gonna be in the room when the baby’s born?” Bellamy asked.

“Yeah. Her on one side, Lincoln on the other. I’ll have plenty of hands to squeeze when the real pain hits.”

“Real pain?” Clarke echoed.
“Yeah. I mean, so far it’s just these light contractions, and they’re really few and far in between. But it’s gonna get worse. My mom said it’s like the worst menstrual cramp you’ve ever had in your life, multiplied by about a thousand.”

“A thousand?” Clarke whimpered, shooting Bellamy a look. “What did you do to me?”

“Sorry,” he apologized, shrugging sheepishly.

“Oh, yeah. Pregnancy’s intense,” Octavia warned her. “But I’m sure you’ll find that out.” She smirked, almost as if she were enjoying the thought of someone else in their group going through and understanding what she’d been dealing with these past eight and half months.

“So how long do you think it’s gonna take?” Bellamy asked, looking around the room. It was a lot like the room Clarke had been in during her stay, except that there was already a crib set up in the corner with blue blankets inside of it.

“I’m not sure,” Octavia said. “Hopefully just a couple hours. But I heard it can take, like, a day.”

“A day?” Clarke gasped. Whimpering again, she held one hand to her stomach.

“At this point, I’m just ready to get this show on the road and get it out of me,” Octavia said. “No more nausea, feeling like I’m regurgitating my whole body. No more mood swings making me feel like I’m bipolar or something. No more walking out of the house with two different shoes on my feet, no more weird food cravings, no more swollen feet that they look like they belong in clown shoes.”

Bellamy cast a quick glance at Clarke, whose face was wrinkled with all sorts of worry now. He felt like it might be a good idea to get her out of there before his sister told any more horror stories, so he said, “Alright, well, we’re gonna go out there and wait, and I’ll come in and check on you later.”

“Sorry to scare you,” Octavia apologized to Clarke. “I really am happy for you guys, though. You deserve this.”

“Thanks,” Clarke said, bending down to give her a hug.

“Thanks, O,” Bellamy said, doing the same before they headed out. He gave Lincoln a nod, passing off that torch of responsibility once again. He felt pretty confident that, as long as she was in that room, Lincoln wouldn’t leave her side.

“Well, that was horrifying,” Clarke said as they walked down the hallway.

“You’ll do fine,” he assured her.

“No, that was literally horrifying, though.”

He put his arm around her again, pulling her into his side. “You already did the hard part,” he reminded her.

“I did?”

“Yeah. You got through a car crash and a splenectomy and kept this baby alive. That’s badass.”

She laughed a little, admitting, “That is pretty badass, huh?”

“Totally.”
“Well, when you put it like that . . .” She didn’t get to finish, because as they came upon the waiting room, the double doors slid open, and in came his mother, looking like she had an extra bounce in her step. The nurses at the front desk just smiled and waved at her. They recognized her, just like they’d recognized Bellamy.

“Hey, Mom,” he said, letting go of Clarke so he could hug her.

“Oh, hi,” she said. “How’s she doing?”

“She’s fine. They got her all set up in a room,” he replied. “Lincoln’s with her.”

“Good, good,” she said. She smiled at Clarke, too, hugged her, and said, “You look like you’re doing better.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said. “Lots.”

“We’re actually doing really well today,” Bellamy said, sensing a segue. “It’s a good day.”

“Very good,” Clarke agreed.

“Well, good,” his mother said, not seeming to connect the dots at first. But as Bellamy and Clarke just stood there smiling at her, she eventually did, and her face lit up. “You mean . . . you . . . that was today?”

“That was today,” Bellamy confirmed.

“And it’s . . .” She smiled hopefully, crossing her fingers.

“It’s good news,” Clarke said.

“Oh, thank God!” Bellamy’s mother clasped both her hands over her mouth, then hugged Clarke again, pulling him into her embrace, too, with one arm. “Congratulations,” she said.

“Thanks,” Clarke said.

“Couldn’t let O outdo me,” Bellamy joked. “My kid’s gonna be the favorite grandchild.”

“Oh, no, I won’t have favorites,” his mother said. “But I am gonna have . . . oh my. Two. Two grandchildren. I’m way too young for this.”

“Yeah, you’re a pretty young grandma,” he agreed. Such was to be expected, he supposed, since she’d had him when she’d been so young herself.

“Grandma,” she echoed, shaking her head in astonishment. “I don’t know about that. I might be Nana Blake. We’ll see.”

“Whatever you want.” He was just happy that there would at least be one grandparent on his side of the family.

“Okay, well, I’ll have to think about it,” she said. “But I’m so happy. I’m so happy for you two.”

“Yeah, so are we,” Clarke said, reaching out to squeeze Bellamy’s hand. “You should go see your daughter, though. We can celebrate or something later.”

“Okay.” Bellamy’s mother gave him a quick kiss on the cheek as she slipped around him, still grinning from ear to ear and mumbling something about how happy she was that all of this was
happening.

“That reminds me, I really need to tell my mom,” Clarke said, whipping out her phone. “I think she’s been texting me all day.”

“Put her on speaker,” he urged as they rounded the corner into the waiting room and took a seat. He really wanted to hear her reaction when she found out the big news.

Abby’s reaction, as it turned out, was an emotional one. She did a lot of crying, to the point where Bellamy couldn’t even make out a word of what she was saying. Clarke told him it was weird, that she was never so hysterical like that, and at one point, she even asked her mom if she was okay. Abby said she was just overjoyed and so relieved and so excited for them. She must have been at work, because he heard her start telling everyone else who was around. Someone named Nancy, someone named John, and even someone named Hilda all got an earful, starting with, “Guess what my daughter just found out.”

“Okay, well, Octavia’s having her baby, so we’re gonna let you go now,” Clarke finally said. “Say goodbye to Bellamy.”

“Oh, goodbye, Bellamy,” Abby said. “I just want you to know, I think of you like a son now. I love you.”

“Oh, wow.” That was a weird thing to hear and an even weirder thing to respond to. He didn’t know what to say, so he just awkwardly said, “Thank you?” and left it at that.

“Please marry my daughter,” Abby pleaded.

“I will,” he said, smiling at Clarke. “Bye, Abby.”

“Bye.”

“Bye, Mom,” Clarke put in.

“Oh, bye, sweetie.”

Clarke ended the call, dropping her phone back into her purse. “Oh, that is so typical of my mom,” she said. “She probably wants us to get married before the baby’s born.”

“Well, maybe we will,” he said, not at all opposed to the idea. If Clarke had his last name, then there’d be no questioning what last name the baby would have. Not that he thought she would question it. Not that that was his only motivation. He’d meant what he said last night about being with her for the rest of his life. So he would ask her to marry him someday.

“We haven’t even known each other a whole year yet,” she reminded him.

“Well, that didn’t stop us from making a baby together,” he pointed out.

“Yeah, I know.”

“So why not just get married then?” If that was the direction it was heading, then . . . hell, he’d go to the courthouse tonight if she wanted to. Although he’d prefer to be able to give her an actual wedding.

She didn’t completely shut down the idea of getting married sooner rather than later, which was something, he supposed, but she didn’t really get the chance to say much else about it, either.
Because their friends started showing up, a couple of them at a time. First it was Murphy and Emori, then Jackson and Miller. Eventually, the rest of the crew all flooded in, too, proclaiming, “We’re back!” and all the hospital staff got a good chuckle out of that. The mood was so much different than it had been when Clarke had been the one in the hospital. Everyone was excited, not only about Octavia and Lincoln’s kid, but about his and Clarke’s, too. They all congratulated them, and there were lots of hugs. Everyone wanted to see the ultrasound, but Bellamy told them it was at home. He’d be showing everyone once they came over, though. In fact, he was thinking about framing the thing and putting it up on the wall. The first ever image of his little gummy bear. Yeah, that deserved a frame.

They sat out in the waiting room for hours, each of them taking their turn with Octavia and Lincoln before the baby was born. Jasper went a little nuts in the gift shop and bought about ten stuffed animals, which he proceeded to play with while the hours ticked by. He gave Bellamy a purple Octopus and said, “That one’s for your kid. Let it be known, Uncle Jasper gave the first gift to baby Blake.”

“Well, Uncle Miller’s gonna be the favorite uncle,” Bellamy’s best friend boasted.

“Uncle Murphy lives in the same house,” Murphy promptly pointed out. “So I’m gonna be the favorite.”

“You’re gonna the creepy uncle!” Raven teased. “Oh, I’m gonna be the awesome aunt, by the way.”

“You’re all gonna be awesome aunts and uncles,” Clarke said.

“Yeah, I don’t know how we’re gonna choose godparents,” Bellamy said. Chances were, Octavia would be the godmother, but godfather was going to be trickier. Maybe Lincoln, just because Lincoln had agreed to give him that title with his son, but . . . Miller was Bellamy’s best friend. And Murphy, weird as he was, was probably going to be one of the people who spent the most time with the kid, along with Emori.

Their friends all started making their pitches about why they would be the best choice for godparents, and he and Clarke just sat there laughing, taking it all in. He held her hand, feeling like this was all a dream. Like the best dream he’d ever had in his entire life. Because he’d had some nightmares, the kind that really happened and didn’t let up for a while. Some of the hardest moments of his life were spent in hospitals. But the one today, seeing that blurry little image on the ultrasound, seeing its flashing heartbeat . . . it’d been the greatest, happiest moment of his life. Along with seeing Clarke open her eyes, of course.

The godmother/godfather pitches stopped when a shrill scream suddenly arose from Octavia’s room. They all fell silent and looked to Jackson for an explanation.

“Yeah, I think it’s gonna be a quick labor,” he said. “When I was in there, her contractions were already kinda . . .” He cringed, shaking his head. “It’s not gonna be pretty.”

“Yeah, my sister’s kinda intense,” Bellamy said, actually relieved that he didn’t have to be in the room with her.

“Kinda,” Clarke said. “Just a little.”

“Okay, a lot,” he admitted.

“Man, I wish I could be back there helping with the delivery,” Jackson said. “But Octavia said I’m not allowed anywhere near her ‘lady business.’”
“You can get near my lady business,” Clarke told him.

Everyone shot her a curious look.

“Okay, that came out wrong,” she acknowledged. “I mean . . . you can be one of the doctors for my delivery. Which is probably gonna be long. And excruciating. And—”

“And I’ll be right there with you the whole time,” Bellamy reassured her. He leaned over and kissed her, and all their friends sort of gasped or oohed or awed. He realized that they didn’t know he and Clarke were . . . back together again.

“Wait a minute,” Emori said, motioning in between the two of them. “Are you guys . . .”

“I don’t know, are we?” Clarke said, looking to Bellamy.

“Of course.” After everything he’d told her last night and everything they’d found out today, there was no way Clarke wasn’t his girlfriend.

“And it’s like for real this time?” Emori said. “None of that friends with benefits crap?”

“No, it’s for real,” Bellamy said, taking Clarke’s hand in his own, interlocking their fingers.

“Oh my god,” Emori said, sighing wistfully. “Best day ever.” She turned to her boyfriend and threw her arms around his neck. “Let’s have a baby,” she said.

“Excuse me,” Murphy said, quickly unhooking himself from Emori. “I need to go buy more condoms.” He started to get up, but she grabbed his arms and said, “Oh, stop!” as she pulled him back down beside her.

“Seriously, though,” Monty said, “babies are just popping out of the woodwork. Who’s next?”

Another scream came from Octavia’s room, this one even louder than the last, and all the girls’ eyes got wide with terror.

“Not me,” Harper said adamantly.

“Me, neither,” Maya said.

“Yeah, I think I can wait a few years,” Raven added.

“I’ll just adopt,” Niylah decided.

Somehow, Jasper ended up launching into some ‘Miracle of Life’ soliloquy after all that, and while all his friends tried to get him to shut up, Bellamy leaned over to Clarke and suggested, “We can have another one before any of them do.”

“How many kids do you want, Bellamy?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Like ten.”

“Ten?” she shrieked. “Are you trying to get us our own reality show?”

Okay, he’d been exaggerating. “Fine, like, two or three,” he modified. “Or four. Five.”

“Pick a number, Bell.”
“Like three,” he said. But then, quietly, he had to add, “Or four.”

“Oh my god,” she groaned, smiling, despite her attempt to roll her eyes and act all annoyed. “Let’s just have the one first and see how it goes, okay?” she suggested.

“Okay.” He could handle that. Besides, this one baby . . . it was the best thing he’d ever done in his life. And it was a miracle.

About six hours into Octavia’s . . . ordeal, she asked to see Bellamy. He didn’t seem to know why, and Lincoln and his mother didn’t have an explanation, either. But he went into her room and sat with her a while, and when he came back out, Lincoln and Aurora went right back in.

“How’d that go?” Clarke asked him.

“It was something,” he said, shaking his hand and stretching out his fingers as if to regain feeling. “Contractions are worse now. She squeezed my hand. I can’t feel anything.”

“Aww.” It was so good of him to go sit with her, though. And even though Clarke knew that anything they talked about was really none of her business, she couldn’t help but be curious. So while her friends continued to chatter and babble and, in some cases, doze off, she asked him, “What’d she wanna talk to you about?”

“Uh . . . about Gina, actually,” he replied.

“Gina?” That seemed . . . sort of strange that Octavia would bring up her brother’s deceased ex-girlfriend right before giving birth.

“I told her,” he mumbled quietly.

“You . . .” Clarke’s eyebrows shot up as it dawned on her what that meant. “You told her?”

“Yeah. While you were unconscious.”

“Wow.” That was a really big deal. Clarke wasn’t sure that he’d ever tell anyone else about his and Gina’s child, even though he and his family were very close.

“I’ll probably tell my mom someday, too,” he said. “I don’t know about everyone else, but . . .” He shrugged.

“So . . .” Clarke angled her body towards his, making sure she spoke quietly enough that no one else would hear. “So she wanted to talk to you about . . . the other baby?”

“Yeah, she said she felt like we hadn’t really gotten to, so . . .” He shrugged again. “I don’t know. I’m pretty much just doin’ whatever she wants right now. But after that, she told me she was nervous, and I told her it’d be alright, and then she . . .” He smiled happily. “She thanked me.”

“For what?” Clarke asked.

“Just . . . for everything. That’s what she said.”

Clarke smiled, too, impressed that Octavia had taken the time right now of all times to do that. But Bellamy deserved her thanks. The way he treated her and protected her went well beyond the call of typical big brother duty. He’d done a lot for her over the years, and it was good of her to recognize that.
It wasn’t until 6:00 that night that Octavia’s labor really started to intensify. The yelling and screaming became a near constant, and Jackson speculated that she was probably scaring some of the other patients. From that hour onward, Lincoln and Aurora made no more visits to the waiting room. They were in there with her the whole time, because clearly, that baby was on its way. At 6:24, the screaming finally stopped, and Clarke heard clapping from all the doctors and nurses in the room. That could only mean one thing.

One of the doctors came out a few minutes later and announced, “It’s a boy!” which everyone already knew, but they all jumped out of their seats and started crying and hugging anyway. Their group, their family, had a brand new member.

“Oh shit, I didn’t think I’d get this emotional,” Bellamy said, dabbing at his eyes. “What’s wrong with me?”

“It’s okay,” Clarke said, rubbing his back. There were plenty of aunts and uncles in that room, but he was the true uncle there, the one related by blood. And hey, it’d been an emotional day all around. No one was going to fault him for shedding a few more tears.

About fifteen minutes after the doctor came out and shared the good news, Aurora came out, too, assuring everyone that both the baby and the mother were doing well. She motioned for Bellamy to come with her and then said, “You, too, Clarke.”

“Me?” Clarke said, motioning to herself.

Aurora nodded.

I guess I am the godmother, Clarke thought, rising to her feet when Bellamy did. He took her hand, and together they followed his mother down the hallway to Octavia’s room, which was quiet and calm now, a stark contrast to all the wailing and crying and screaming while she’d pushed.

Clarke could barely believe her eyes when she saw the baby. He was so adorable, with plenty of dark hair already on his head, pudgy little cheeks, and eyes that just couldn’t seem to stay open. He was swaddled in a bunch of blue blankets, and Octavia held him close to her chest, gazing down at him adoringly, cooing at him while Lincoln knelt next to the bed and stroked his son’s hair.

“Oh my god,” she said, amazed that Octavia had actually given birth to that. He wasn’t a small baby. But god, he was so cute.

“This is Augustus Bellamy Woods,” Octavia introduced.

“Augustus?” Bellamy echoed.

“Mmm-hmm.”

He smiled down at his nephew, clearly mesmerized already. Clarke didn’t know what Augustus meant to the Blake siblings, but clearly it meant something, because Bellamy seemed to like that name. And it didn’t hurt that the kid had his name as a middle name, too.

“Did you hold him?” Bellamy asked Lincoln.

“Oh, yeah,” Lincoln said. “Didn’t wanna let go, but Grandma Blake wanted a turn.”

Aurora sighed and shook her head. “I guess that’s what I’m going by.”

“You can be Nana Blake if you want,” Octavia said, marveling for a moment at how her son’s tiny
fingers were already trying to wrap around hers. “Do you wanna hold him?” she offered Bellamy.

Bellamy looked . . . almost a bit taken aback. But he answered, “Yeah,” and bent down as Octavia carefully passed the newborn off. Bellamy held him snugly, gazing at him with a look of wonder in his eyes, and Clarke almost couldn’t breathe for a minute. Because Bellamy Blake with a baby in his arms . . . that was an incredible sight to see.

“I have to get a picture,” Aurora said as she whipped out her phone and started snapping away. Bellamy didn’t even seem fazed by it. He was completely zoned in on his nephew and nothing else.

“He has some freckles like me,” Bellamy noted.

“Yeah,” Octavia agreed. “Clarke, you can hold him, too, if Bellamy ever gives him up.”

“I can?” Clarke asked.

“Well, yeah. He’s your nephew, too.”

_He is, isn’t he?_ Clarke thought. Sure, she and Bellamy hadn’t made things official yet, but she’d become a Blake at some point here, and then her Aunt Clarke title would be the real deal.

“Here you go,” Bellamy said, passing the baby off.

Support the head, was all Clarke could think as she took the baby into her arms. She hadn’t actually really held that many babies before. And she’d never been the type of girl to babysit for other families growing up. Her experiences with children were extremely limited. So holding the baby actually made her kind of nervous. But little Augustus peeked open his eyes as she held him, and she took that to mean she was doing something right.

“He’s beautiful,” she told Octavia and Lincoln. It was too early to tell whether he looked more like her or him, but he definitely had Lincoln’s darker skin tone. His eyes were the exact same shade as Octavia’s, though, and he had her nose, too. It was like he was this perfect little combination of the two of them. Mother, father, son.

“Let me get a picture of all three of you,” Aurora said, taking a step back.

Bellamy leaned in, putting his head near Clarke’s, and they both looked up at Aurora and smiled as she got the shot. Aunt, uncle, nephew. And a little cousin on the way.

Octavia looked tired, and all their friends were still waiting to see the baby, so Clarke and Bellamy left the room after about fifteen minutes. She practically had to drag him away, and everyone else took their turn after them. Emori came out of the room declaring to Murphy, “Okay, that’s it, we’re having a baby,” to which Murphy kind of just smirked this time, and Harper’s mascara was caked on her cheeks when she walked out. “He’s the most precious thing!” she squealed. Jasper deposited all the stuffed animals he’d purchased and once again bragged, “The first gifts came from me.”

As it got later, people started to leave, all of them promising they’d be back to see the baby again tomorrow. Bellamy and Clarke stayed, though, and probably would have stayed longer until Aurora came out into the waiting room and said, “They’re all gonna get some rest now. So you two might as well go home.”

“Are you sure?” Bellamy asked.

“Yeah, we can stay,” Clarke offered.
“You’ve had a big day yourselves,” Aurora reminded them. “Go home, get some rest. Come back and see your nephew tomorrow.”

Bellamy sighed, like he still didn’t quite want to leave, but said, “Okay,” anyway, then asked his mom, “Are you gonna stay?”

“Yes, I’ll stay,” his mother said. “I can’t believe I’m a grandma.”

“An extremely youthful grandma,” Clarke reminded her. She stood up, feeling a nagging urge in her bladder, and she told Bellamy, “I gotta pee before we go.”

“And so it begins,” he noted.

“I know.” It was really gonna suck when she started waking up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. But it’d all be worth it when she and Bellamy had their very own little Augustus to hold.

She found a bathroom, did her business, and took a moment to look at her reflection in the mirror before she walked back out again. Maybe she was just imagining things, but she could kind of see a little bump, or at least the start of one. Either that or she was just bloated. Either one was possible.

Stopping right outside the bathroom door, she thought about about going to the hospital nursery, just to see if she could sneak one more peek at Augustus before she left. Even if he wasn’t in there, other babies would be. It wouldn’t do any harm to just look in at them. Just to see how cute they all were.

So instead of heading back out to Bellamy, she took what was meant to be a quick detour and wound through the hallways to get to the nursery. There were four babies in there, but Augustus was by far the cutest one. Lincoln was in there with him, this big, buff man holding this baby, and he looked the happiest Clarke had ever seen him. When he set his son down in the crib, it seemed like he didn’t want to let him go. Reluctantly, he turned and walked out of the nursery, nearly bumping into Clarke because he couldn’t take his eyes off of his son.

“Oh, sorry, Clarke,” he apologized.

“That’s okay,” she said. He was a new dad. He totally had the right to be distracted.

“Congratulations,” she told him. “He’s perfect.”

“Yeah, he is,” Lincoln agreed. “You can go say goodnight to him if you want.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” He gave her a pat on the shoulder and said, “Congratulations to you, too,” as he headed off the way Clarke had come.

“Thanks,” she whispered. Today had just ended up being a congratulatory day all around. And to think, she’d been so nervous when she’d woken up, so scared. It was a good thing that ultrasound had shown them a baby, because if it hadn’t, this experience with Augustus today would have been totally different.

Clarke slipped into the nursery, noting the motion-activated camera up on the wall and the security guard stationed down the hall. Well, that was good to know, she supposed, that people were monitoring this place and not just anyone could slip in there. Apparently she had permission to be in there, because no one came and told her to leave.

She walked up to Augustus’s crib and peered down at him, smiling. She couldn’t tell if he was
sleeping or not, but his little mouth kept opening and closing, and he was squirming around a bit. A livewire, by the looks of it, just like his mom.

“Hey, you,” she said, reaching down to touch his cheek with one finger. His skin was impossibly soft. And why wouldn’t it be? He was all brand new.

“You’re pretty cute, you know that?” she said, figuring he’d hear it from all sorts of people. And it wouldn’t stop after babyhood, either. Knowing the genes Lincoln and Octavia had given him, this kid would hear that he was cute his entire life.

“I’m your godmother,” she told him, bubbling with excitement. “And one of many aunts. I haven’t known your parents for as long as some of your other aunts and uncles have, but they mean a lot to me. So that means you mean a lot to me.”

Augustus made some kind of gurgling noise, almost like he was saying something back.

“You got some really good parents,” Clarke informed him. “They already love you a lot.”

Augustus gurgled again.

“And your uncle Bellamy . . .” She smiled, just imagining how much he would dote on this boy and treat him like a little prince. “You hit the jackpot with him,” she said, already anticipating that Bellamy would volunteer himself for babysitting duty as early as possible. “He’s a really special guy,” she told Augustus, thinking about how he’d been with her all day. Just all day. And when he hadn’t been with her, he’d been with Octavia. He was constantly putting other people before himself. “He’s the greatest person I’ve ever known in my entire life,” she said, seeing no harm in bragging up Uncle Bellamy even though the baby couldn’t understand a word she was saying. “He’s . . . so smart, and he’ll probably make you watch more history documentaries than you ever cared to see. And he’s kind, just like your dad. So I know they’ll both make sure you’re kind, too. And he’s . . .” She put one hand on her stomach, closing her eyes for a second, cherishing the knowledge that, yes, there was actually a piece of Bellamy in there. “To you, he’s Uncle Bellamy,” she said, “but to someone else, he’s just gonna be Dad. Because . . . we’re gonna give you a cousin.” She laughed a little, picturing Augustus and someone else running around the backyard, probably driving them crazy but still being adorable at the same time. “Someone you can play with and look out for,” she said, “because you’re the older one. So you’re gonna have to look out for your cousin.”

Augustus’s mouth opened and closed again. Like a fish.

“And don’t mind Uncle Bellamy if he gets a little overprotective sometimes,” she went on, knowing he would be. “He just loves you and your mom and all of us a lot. He has so much love to give, and you’re gonna be a part of it. So just make sure you love him back, okay? Because he’s a really special guy. Just like you.”

The baby’s little hands reached for hers, loosely wrapping themselves around one finger.

“And be patient with me,” she pleaded, “because Uncle Bellamy’s gonna be a natural, but I don’t know what I’m doing. And I need you to help me figure it out. I need you to teach me some things about being a mom, because that’s what I’m gonna be. And I don’t know if I’m ready, but . . .” She blinked back tears, choking out a laugh. “I’ll tell you what: I think your cousin’s gonna be perfect just like you are.” She stared down at the baby, fascinated, seeing now why Bellamy had barely been able to take his eyes off of him. This was somebody who had been created out of love. She and Bellamy had done this. They’d created somebody. And it didn’t matter what had transpired after that, or what they’d been to each other at the time. It was love that had made their child, too. It was a love she felt so strongly, now more than ever.
Something told her to look over her shoulder, so she did. And there, watching her intently, was Bellamy. He smiled softly, his eyes warm and inviting as they stared into hers. She had no idea how long he’d been standing there, or if he’d heard anything she’d said. But just seeing him there, knowing that he was the person her child would call Dad . . . It made her heart swell with pride. And affection. And gratitude. She felt so lucky to have him.

He didn’t say anything, but he didn’t need to. She could read the look on his face: First, it said I love you. And then, it said Let’s go home.

Bellamy followed Clarke upstairs, not sure if he was tired or wide awake as they shuffled into the bedroom. Murphy and Emori had both already crashed out on the beanbag downstairs, and Bellamy felt like, if he lay down, he might do the same. Or he might stay awake all night, just thinking. And feeling happy.

“Well, this ended up being a jam-packed day,” Clarke commented, depositing her purse on the floor.

“Yeah,” he agreed, setting his keys atop the dresser. “It was a good day, though.”

“It was,” she said. “It’s sort of like . . . like we became godparents and parents all within the span of a few hours.”

“Yeah, it’s crazy,” he said, running one hand through his hair, sure that it looked a mess. He needed a haircut. “I’m so happy, though.”

“Me, too.” She yawned then, stretching her arms over her head, and the move hiked her shirt up a bit, revealing her stomach. “I’m tired,” she said when she put her arms back down.

“He gave her a curious look, wondering, Or what? Before that phone call from Lincoln earlier today, things had kind of been heating up between the two of them again. Was she wanting to . . . continue that?

“We can’t have sex yet,” he told her. “Doctor’s orders.”

“I know,” she said, swaying closer to him. “That’s okay.”

“Yeah, we probably needed to slow things down anyway,” he said, stroking her hair. “At least a little bit.” God, she was so damn pretty, though. That made it hard to go slow.

“A little bit, yeah,” she agreed. “Actually . . .” Tilting her head to the side, she stared into his eyes thoughtfully for a few seconds before saying, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I think we need to slow things down a lot.”

“Oh.” He frowned, not sure what that entailed. “A lot?”

“It’s just . . . think about it,” she urged. “We’ve never really just taken our time. I mean, we met, and then we hooked up, and then we just kept hooking up, and now here we are.”

“I know,” he said. “But listen, Clarke, I meant what I said last night about spending my life with
“I know, and that’s what I want, too,” she said. “But Bellamy, I feel like we just—we just made a baby without even thinking about it, without even realizing what we were doing. And now we’re gonna be parents, and you’re talking about getting married, and—and we literally just got back together, Bell.”

“Well, I don’t mean to pressure you,” he jumped in quickly.

“No, it’s not pressure,” she assured her. “I mean, I wanna marry you, someday. Obviously.”

“Obviously?” Okay, good to know it was obvious. So that way, when he did pop the question, he wouldn’t have to be too worried about what her answer would be.

“Yes, obviously,” she said, laughing lightly. “But we don’t have to rush out and do that tomorrow. In fact, it’s probably better if we don’t. I think we should just . . . take things slow. For once.”

“With . . . marriage?” he asked, still sort of confused.

“Marriage . . . sex,” she said. “I just think we should ease back into things. Because our relationship’s different now, and I don’t know about you, but I kinda feel like we’ve been given this second chance. Do you—do you feel that way?”

“Oh, yeah,” he said, thinking back to how, a little over a week ago, she’d been lying in that hospital bed, and he’d been so afraid that she’d never wake up and he wouldn’t get to be with her again. And now he had that chance. He didn’t wanna screw it up like he had last time.

“So are you . . . okay with this?” she asked.

“With taking it slow? Sure.” It wasn’t something he was used to, but in the long-run, he knew it was a good idea. Torturous as it would be . . . he could take things slow with Clarke.

“No marriage . . . yet,” she recapped. “No sex. For now.”

“No sex,” he repeated, putting his hands on her waist. “But does that mean I can’t do this?” He bent down and kissed the side of her neck, enjoying her sharp intake of breath, a telltale sign of how the littlest kiss could have a big effect on her.

“No, that’s okay,” she said.

“And this?” He switched to the other side and kissed her there, too. “Is that allowed?” he whispered against her skin.

“That’s definitely allowed,” she told him.

“And what about this?” He gave her a proper kiss on the lips and asked, “Can I still do that?”

“Uh-huh,” she replied a bit dazedly. “In fact, I think you should do that a lot.”

“Like how often?” he teased. “Once a week? Every other day?”

“Like often,” she emphasized, playfully hitting his chest. “I have the thirst, you know. I have needs.”

“Alright, then I’ll do my best to satisfy them without . . . you know, satisfying them,” he promised.

“Okay, good. And I will of course do the same for you.”
“Of course.” Hell, he didn’t even need to make out with this girl or get his hands on her to be satisfied. Just having her around . . . that was enough. “Can I ask one more thing?” he inquired.

“Go ahead,” she urged.

He looked down at his feet for a moment, then back up at her. “Can I still tell you I love you?” And that question wasn’t a joke, because he really wanted to know her answer. If it was too much, too overwhelming, then he’d let up on it. But if she liked hearing it, then he’d tell her every day.

She got that look on her face when he asked that, the kind she got when she became all breathless. When she looked at him like that, it reminded him of the first time he’d ever seen her. Even back then, she’d looked at him like he was . . . special. Not just some average guy.

“Yes,” she replied, looping her arms around his neck. “You can tell me that as much as you want.”

Free reign on that one, huh? Then he was going for it. “I love you,” he said, planting another kiss on her mouth. “I love you,” he repeated, kissing her cheek. Then, he whispered it in her ear, “I love you, Clarke Griffin,” before lowering his head to drop another kiss onto her neck. Yeah, it was cheesy, but . . . what the hell, why not? He had to make up for not saying it so many times before when he should have.

“Mmm, I love you, too,” she purred, tangling her hands in his hair. She seemed . . . so content.

He could have kept kissing her, but . . . there was really no need. The moment between them was intimate enough as it was. So he just hugged her, held her close, breathed her in, and she did the same to him.

It was just a quiet, still moment in a day full of loud ones. But to Bellamy . . . it was everything.
Clarke quickly discovered that being pregnant meant you measured your life in weeks. And each week brought with it a host of new experiences. Some good, some . . . not so good.

After experiencing relatively few symptoms those first six weeks, the signs of pregnancy hit hard in the seventh week. If she hadn’t known she was pregnant before, she definitely would have figured it out when, suddenly, she began waking up around the same time Bellamy did, feeling like her stomach was doing somersaults. She always had to run to the bathroom and feared she wouldn’t make it in time, so she kept her hand plastered over her mouth when she ran, just to block anything from coming out.

Poor Bellamy. She sometimes ran right into him, but he always stopped whatever he was doing, even if he was in the middle of shaving his face or brushing his teeth, and he sat down in front of the toilet with her and held her hair back while she threw up. He didn’t act repulsed, though he must have been, because it looked gross and smelled gross, and sometimes, Clarke even started crying and complaining about it. His response was always, “I love you.”

“I hate you,” she snarled.

“Okay.”

She didn’t really hate him, of course, but really, this just didn’t seem fair. Why did women have to go through all of this? Why couldn’t men have the babies?

Inexplicably, even after throwing up, Clarke found that she was still pretty hungry. But gone were the days of eating Poptarts or cereal for breakfast. Now, she had cravings to deal with.

“What’re you looking for?” Bellamy asked as he came downstairs with his backpack on his shoulders.

“Watermelon!” she practically screamed. It wasn’t that she meant to be so loud; it just happened. “And we don’t have any!” For some reason, this made her feel like crying.

“You want watermelon for breakfast?” he asked, making a face.

“Yes! And pickles!”

“Pickles?” He tilted his head to the side curiously.

“Yes, I want pickles, and I don’t know why!” she yelled, openly crying now. “And I don’t know why I’m getting like this!” It was like she had no control over it; it was awful.

“Do you think maybe you’re having mood swings?” he asked gently.

“No!”

“No?”

She thought about it for a moment, then whimpered, “Maybe,” and cried some more. She felt like a baby, like a weeping baby. Like Augustus, only way less adorable. “I’m yelling at you, and I don’t mean to,” she cried. “And when I was puking, I said I hated you, but I don’t hate you. I just hate that
I have to puke and you get to hold my hair back. Not that holding my hair back is, like, some great privilege. But you know what I mean.”

Bellamy smiled at her and said, “You’re so cute right now,” as he laughed a little.

“This isn’t funny!” she shrieked, throwing her hands down at her sides. “I’m like a basket case, and I’m still fucking hungry!”

“Well, we have food,” he pointed out.

She pouted, unable to push aside the thoughts of the two foods they didn’t have.

Bellamy, sensing her unhappiness, quickly saved the day when he offered, “I could go get you some pickles and watermelon before class.”

“Would you?” she exclaimed, suddenly very excited. Throwing her arms around him, she hugged him gratefully and squealed, “You’re the best!”

During the time that Bellamy was making his run to the store, Clarke peed, got dressed, and tried to pull herself back together. But the second she heard his truck rumble up again, she scampered back downstairs and met him at the door, taking the watermelon and the jar of pickles right out of his hands.

She sat at the kitchen counter and ate two slices of watermelon before diving into the pickles. She stuck the biggest one in her mouth and savored the taste, and Bellamy just stood there, watching in amazement. Or perhaps it was horror.

Murphy strolled out of his room, shirtless and in desperate need of a shower, as Clarke moved onto her second pickle. He chuckled and teased Bellamy, “Is that supposed to be a substitute for your friend down south?”

Bellamy calmly explained, “She’s having food cravings.”

“Oh.” Murphy frowned. “I can’t make a dick joke then?”

Clarke took the pickle out of her mouth, well aware that it was a little phallic but just not caring. “Shut up, Murphy,” she snapped. “I’m not doing anything dirty. I just like sucking all the juice out of it.”

He gave her a look. “Oh, Clarke, this dick joke is writing itself.”

She rolled her eyes and put the pickle back into her mouth. From that day onward, Bellamy made sure there were plenty of pickles and always at least one watermelon in the kitchen.

It was that major mood swing incident that inspired her boyfriend to try to better understand what she was going through. So in the middle of week seven, Bellamy downloaded his “Dad app,” on his phone. (It was technically called something else, but whenever he referenced it, which he did quite often, he called it his Dad app.) Every day, it had some kind of tip or advice or insight for guys like him. And he proudly showed it off to everyone, like it was a new toy. He’d say things like, “Have you seen my awesome Dad app yet?” And whether the answer was yes or no, he always took five minutes afterwards to show it off.

The Dad app had no magical cures for mood swings or weird food cravings, but it did tell how big the baby was each week, which was by far Clarke’s favorite feature. In week seven, apparently the baby was now the size of a blueberry. It’d been upgraded from a pea.
On Saturday night, everyone came over to hang out, just like old times. Except it wasn’t like old times, because Lincoln and Octavia brought the newest member of the group along. Augustus was, of course, the center of attention. Instead of drinking or dancing or playing games, they all just played with him. He was a lively little baby, too, and had no problem staying awake, even when his parents started to yawn.

Clarke and Bellamy got to hold him the most out of everyone, of course. When they cuddled up with him on the couch, Miller remarked, “It’s like looking into the future.”

Clarke smiled for a moment until, all of a sudden, Augustus started to cry. “Oh god,” she said nervously, not sure what to do. What if he was pooping in his diaper? She couldn’t handle that. “Oh god, Bellamy, take him.” She quickly handed him off to his uncle.

“Here, it’s okay,” Octavia said, coming to the rescue. “I think he just needs fed.” She took him out of Bellamy’s arms and brought him into the kitchen, where, like a pro already, she whipped out one of her boobs, and the baby immediately latched on and started suckling.

The guys, and Niylah and Luna, all stared at her, open-mouthed, and got these very horny expressions on their faces. And Octavia so clearly did not care that all her friends had just seen one of her breasts, because she told them, “Carry on.”

“Wow,” Murphy whispered, turning to Clarke. “Are you gonna breastfeed?”

“What? I don’t know.” She hadn’t given it much thought yet.

Beside her, Bellamy’s eyes dropped down to her chest. “It’s a shame if you don’t,” he remarked.

“Oh my god, Bellamy,” she groaned as everyone laughed. “I can’t even right now.”

“Okay, I’ll shut up,” he said quickly. “I don’t want you to yell at me.”

“Didn’t the Dad app warn you I’m probably gonna yell a lot?”

“It did warn me about that,” he acknowledged, putting his arm around her shoulders. “But I was kinda hoping you’d just yell at Murphy.”

“Hey!” Murphy yelped.

“Oh, I will,” she promised, shooting her roommate a glare. He glared right back, raising one eyebrow, and he looked so ridiculous that she couldn’t help but laugh.

Once the seventh week was done, Clarke had even more fun symptoms to deal with: breast tenderness and fatigue. She first realized her boobs were sore while fooling around with Bellamy in bed. (No, they weren’t having sex, but they were still doing . . . other things.) Bellamy was practically smothering himself with her breasts when she cried out, “Ow!” and pushed him off of her.

“What?” he asked.

“You bit me!” she accused.

“I didn’t bite you.”

“Yes, you did,” she insisted, looking down to inspect her nipple.

“I swear to God, I didn’t bite your boob,” he insisted. “They’re just sore right now.”
“Ugh, really sore,” she complained, covering them up with her hands. She hadn’t expected breast tenderness so early on.

Bellamy hovered beside her, waiting a few seconds before asking, “So does this mean we’re done then?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, okay.” Obediently, he got right out of bed and headed into the bathroom to take care of the bulge in his boxers.

Poor, poor Bellamy.

The fatigue, compared to the other symptoms, wasn’t so bad. It just made Clarke feel like napping during the day, which she was able to do quite frequently since she hadn’t started work at Trikru yet. And at night, she started falling asleep around 7:00, right after *Wheel of Fortune*. Usually, she fell asleep with her head in Bellamy’s lap downstairs on the couch, but every morning, when that nauseous feeling hit, she awoke in their bed. So that meant he must have carried her upstairs.

Of course, the eighth week of the pregnancy was a big one, too. Apparently, most couples had their first ultrasound around this week, but for Clarke and Bellamy, it was the second. And even though Clarke felt very pregnant, she knew she and Bellamy would both feel relieved to see that little flash of its heartbeat on the monitor again.

And they did.

“Everything still looks great,” the ultrasound technician—the same one they’d had last time—reported. “This baby’s developing nicely.”

“Is it the size of a raspberry?” Bellamy asked eagerly. “Because I have this Dad app, and it says it’s about the size of a raspberry during this week.”

The technician smiled at him. “That’s a pretty good comparison,” she said. And Bellamy, of course, proceeded to show her his app.

Before leaving the hospital, they stopped by Dr. Tsing’s office and talked to her. She was so happy for them, of course, but since she wasn’t an OBGYN, she wouldn’t be Clarke’s doctor during the pregnancy. She said she still wanted updates, though.

“Oh, you can follow me on Instagram then,” Bellamy told her.

“What, what, what?” Clarke spat. “Since when do you have Instagram?” Bellamy hated social media.

“I don’t have it yet, but I’m gonna get it,” he explained. “So I can show off pictures of my kid.”

“Oh, did your app recommend that?” she teased.

“No, I came up with that all on my own.”

She laughed at him, and then he laughed at himself. Dr. Tsing smiled at the two of them and said, “Your child is very lucky.”

Well, that was such a nice thing to say, and of course it hit Clarke right in the feels. So she kind of started to cry.
“Oh, god,” Bellamy said, immediately seizing the tissues off of the doctor’s desk. “No, don’t get her started!”

Too late.

Upon leaving the hospital, they made a trip to good old Walmart to shop for their little raspberry. Bellamy said they were just gonna pick up a few things. She should have known better.

They got a few toys, some bottles, some diapers, and then they absolutely got lost in the baby clothes. Bellamy found a pink onesie that said Daddy’s Little Princess on it, and his whole face lit up. “Clarke,” he gasped. “This is perfect.”

“Oh my god, it is,” she agreed. It had a cute little crown on it and everything. “Wait, does this mean I’m losing my nickname, though?”

“No, you’re Princess One. She’s Princess Two,” he explained, like he’d already given this a lot of thought.

“What if we have a boy?” she challenged.

“Let’s just get it anyway,” he said, dropping it into the cart. “Besides, I think we’re havin’ a girl.”

“Really?” She had no gut feeling yet.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m like fifty percent sure.” That silly little grin on his face made her laugh.

When it was time to check out, they of course had loaded up their cart with more than a few things. Baby stuff was expensive, and . . . they’d kind of gotten a lot of it.

“Okay,” Bellamy said, trying to conceal his panic as he stared at the total. He checked his wallet, then said, “Maybe we just need to put some stuff back for today.”

“Or maybe you need to let me help,” she said, taking out her debit card. “You don’t have to pay for everything.”

“I know, but . . .”

“Bellamy, we’re a team,” she reminded him. She knew he liked being able to provide, and being a father would probably only heighten that urge to do so, but she had some money in the bank, too.

“Alright,” he said, emptying his wallet. He mumbled to the cashier, “She’s gonna pay the rest of it,” and it must have been a bit of a hard pill for him to swallow. But he did it, and it was a step in the right direction for him.

When week nine rolled around, they reached a milestone. Clarke was lying on her side that Sunday morning, still halfway asleep, when beside her, Bellamy said, “Hey, guess what?”

“Mmm, what?” she murmured, sensing that he was looking at his phone.

“It says it’s a fetus this week, not just an embryo anymore,” he revealed.

“Really?” Undeniably intrigued, she turned over and snuggled in close to him, sneaking a peek at his phone. There was a computer-generated picture of what the baby looked like at this point, and she was delighted to see it looking much more human. “And what fruit size are we at now?” she asked.

“Cherry.”
“Ah.” Getting bigger then. A little more each week. “Hey, speaking of cherries . . .” she segued.

“You want some watermelon?” he guessed, even though that had nothing to do with cherries.

“Yes, please.”

He handed her his phone, tossed the covers aside, and got up. “I’ll go get you some,” he said, obediently shuffling out of the room.

*Oh, poor Bellamy,* she thought, finding that she’d been pitying him a lot lately. Only nine weeks in, and already he was having to spoil her rotten. And it was probably only going to get worse for him.

It was during that milestone ninth week that Clarke first began to notice changes in how her clothing fit. Or rather *didn’t* fit. She was trying to put on a pair of her most well-worn jeans when she realized she couldn’t get them to button up. Now, granted, they hadn’t been the loosest jeans to begin with, because they were left over from high school, and she’d been a size or two smaller in high school. But she’d sort of stretched them out over the years, so when she couldn’t get that button buttoned and couldn’t even get the zipper zipped up all the way, it came as a bit of a surprise.

She went downstairs with her jeans unfastened and pounded on the door to Murphy and Emori’s room. She didn’t really care which one of them opened it, although she did prefer another female for this particular conversation.

And Emori was who she got. Her hair was tousled, and yesterday’s makeup was smeared beneath her eyes. She looked like she’d been sleeping in.

“My pants don’t fit,” Clarke blurted.

“That’s ‘cause Bellamy got into ‘em,” Emori said, rubbing her eyes.

“And look at this.” Clarke lifted her shirt up.

“Oh my god, Clarke, I know you’re bisexual, but what’re we doin’ here?” Emori joked, shielding her eyes.

“My boobs can’t even breathe in this,” she complained. “I think I’m just gonna go braless.” She reached behind her back to locate the clasp, but Emori stopped her.

“No, you need a bra,” she said. “You just need a better one.” She ducked back into her room, grabbed her phone, and came back to the doorway, typing out a text.

“What’re you doing?” Clarke asked her.

“Telling Bellamy to stop and get you a maternity bra on his way home from work,” Emori replied.

*A maternity* bra? Oh, that sounded sexy. But if it was more comfortable, Clarke would definitely take it. “I might go braless until he gets home,” she warned.

“You should be going braless *when* he gets home,” Emori advised. “And pants-less. Seriously, how are you shacking up with Arkadia’s very own sex god and not getting any?”

“We’re taking it slow,” Clarke reminded her.

“Since when?”

“Since . . . we found out I’m pregnant.” She cringed, because . . . yeah, they were totally doing some
things backwards in their relationship.

“I don’t get you guys sometimes,” Emori said, disappearing back into her bedroom.

That night, Bellamy came home with two things: Clarke’s new bra, and Augustus. She reached for the baby, but he handed her the bra instead.

“It’s not my department,” he told her. “I hope that’s good enough. Oh, and by the way, we’re babysitting tonight. O wants a night alone with Lincoln.”

“Oh,” Clarke said knowingly, “you mean they’re gonna--”

“Read the Bible. Sounds about right,” Bellamy cut in. He sat down on the couch with his nephew in his arms, and he just looked like such a dad. It warmed Clarke’s heart. And Augustus was just too cute for words.

Of course, he was less cute when he was crying all through the night, keeping them awake. Even Bellamy looked freaked out when he realized just how much sleep they wouldn’t be getting when they had a newborn of their own.

Week ten proved to be . . . kind of stressful. Mostly because it was the week where Clarke was having the genetic testing done. The night before, she made the mistake of looking things up online, which she really shouldn’t have done, because there were so many things that could be wrong with the baby, things she hadn’t thought about and didn’t want to think about. She realized too late that she should have just stuck with Bellamy’s Dad app (which was estimating that the baby was the size of a strawberry now).

It took a few days—days in which Clarke started putting in a few hours at Trikru just to keep herself distracted—but when the results came back, everything looked good and normal. Their friends came over that night and celebrated, and since Clarke couldn’t drink, she told Bellamy he had to drink for her. He did, and he got a little hammered, and the next morning, they took turns being hunched over the toilet.

It was good for him to have a night of fun, though, because he needed it. Between work and school, he was extremely busy. He was trying to save up as much money as possible for when the baby was born, because his app had told him to start budgeting now. So that meant he was working extra hours and often coming home exhausted; and on top of all that, his class was ending, so he had a final exam to study for. She lay in bed one night, trying to quiz him, and ended up falling asleep in the middle of asking a question.

They were both so tired that they spent their Saturday night asleep upstairs while their friends lived it up downstairs, but a night of rest did them some good. Bellamy actually looked refreshed when he woke up the next morning, and for a change, Clarke didn’t feel nauseous.

“No morning sickness?” he asked as she crawled on top of him.

“Nope.” She really hoped she’d weathered the storm of that particular symptom and that it’d be easier from here on out.

“What’re you doin’?” he asked her as she reached down in between them and peeled back his underwear.

“You’ve been working so hard,” she said, dragging his boxer briefs down far enough that his cock could come out. “And then you still come home and do all sorts of stuff for me.”
“Pickles and maternity bras, Clarke,” he said, downplaying how helpful he’d been.

“Well, I wanna show you how appreciative I am.” She gripped his length in one hand and began to stroke it, remembering exactly how much pressure he liked.

“Oh, shit,” he swore, his eyes nearly rolling back into his head. It was the first time she’d handled him in about six weeks, and he clearly hadn’t been expecting it.

“You like that?” she asked, happy to be able to do this for him.

“Yeah,” he rasped out. “I don’t know if I really deserve it, though. You’re the one making this whole other person in there.”

“Hey, this person’s half you,” she pointed out, using her thumb to smear the head of his cock with his pre-cum.

“Yeah, but still . . .”

“Bellamy.” She’d already decided that this was not going to a ‘poor Bellamy’ moment. She momentarily stopped her ministrations and said, “Let me do this for you.”

He really didn’t put up much resistance. “Okay.”

“Okay.” She sat back on his thighs and ended up using both hands to jerk him off. It didn’t take long, and he actually seemed a little embarrassed that it hadn’t taken longer. He ended up cumming all over her hand and on his own stomach, and . . . god, it was a sight to see. Knowing that his doing that inside of her had created this whole new life . . . it was mind-blowing.

In week eleven, the baby had grown to be the size of a lime, and Clarke continued to feel herself growing, too. Rather than throwing a fit about it, though, she decided to just embrace it. The bigger she became, the bigger the baby became. So it was ultimately a good thing, even if she never lost the weight and had stretch marks for the rest of her life.

Octavia offered up some of her maternity clothes, but they weren’t even technically maternity clothes. They were just larger sizes of normal clothes, and Clarke felt like she’d outgrow them too quickly. So she and the girls got together and went shopping at the mall, mostly for her, because there was a good maternity store there. Clarke emphasized that she wanted stylish maternity clothes, because just because she was pregnant, that didn’t mean she had to walk around looking like she was wearing a paper bag.

Most of the summery clothes were colorful maxi dresses, which were definitely do-able and were perfectly presentable if Clarke decided to wear them out in public. But the more dire need was casual stuff, like jeans and shirts. Sure, she wore Bellamy’s shirts more often than he did these days, but she felt like she needed some of her own, too. So the girls each picked one out for her and loaded her up. And then Octavia found some jeans with an elastic waist, which, according to her, were “heaven-sent.” And Clarke said, “Grab me, like, five pairs then,” because she had a feeling those would come in handy, especially in the winter when she’d be at her biggest.

All the girls had fun with it, trying on stretchy jeans themselves, even though they were swimming in them. “When I get pregnant,” Emori said, “I’m just gonna wear all your hand-me-downs. Kay, Clarke?”

“Oh, okay,” Clarke said. “But I might never part with these jeans. They’re ugly but comfy.” If she could get away with it without looking like too much of a dork, she was totally going to keep wearing these after the baby was born.
When she got home from her shopping excursion, she sort of put on a fashion show for Bellamy
with all her new clothes. He just sat there and smiled and pretended to be interested, saying things
like, “Oh, that looks nice," and “Hey, that fits really well.” But once she was done, he said—no,
_begged_—“Can I please just play video games with Murphy now?”

She sighed. “I suppose.”

Bellamy definitely needed some guy time, so she tried to encourage him to go out on a couple of bro
dates. But while the other guys stayed out at Dropship until midnight, he always came home by
10:00.

He was still busy, of course, even though his class was done. (He’d passed it with an A, shocking no
one.) He’d started up an online one now, and the summer months meant there were lots of busted air
conditioners all over town to fix, so the calls for work kept pouring in. The work was steady, though,
and he was making money, so he never complained.

In the midst of their daily routines, the Fourth of July happened, and Clarke was nervous about it.
Bellamy seemed to be doing pretty well—the fireworks weren’t triggering any painful memories
with him, and he wasn’t having any night tremors like he’d had on New Year’s. But still, on the
actual holiday, with fireworks being lit all over town, he said he was gonna stay up and get some
work done. She assumed he meant work for his class until she woke up in the middle of the night
and found the room empty.

“Bellamy?” she called, sitting upright in the bed, looking around.

A firework across the street momentarily illuminated the room, long enough for her to spot the closed
laptop on the desk. If he’d been working on stuff for his online class, he definitely would have been
using that.

She got out of bed, figuring she’d go check downstairs, but she’d only taken a few steps when she
heard movement in Miller’s old room. That had to be Bellamy.

It sounded like he was . . . building

When she peeked in the door to the bedroom, she found him working on a crib. A _beautiful_ crib he
had to have built himself, because it was way nicer than anything they’d seen at Walmart. He was
nailing some wooden letters onto the headboard. B. L. A. He was spelling out _Blake._

She stood back and watched him work, so impressed that he’d made that without her even realizing
it. And he had blue painters tape up on the wall already, too, around the ceiling and the edges of the
windows, as if putting a fresh coat of paint on the walls was going to be his next project.

_Blake_, she thought, smiling contentedly when he’d nailed the last letter onto the crib. Her baby was
going to be a _Blake._

She closed the door and let him continue his work. No need to disturb him.

Luckily, Bellamy wasn’t _all_ about working, though. He launched his Instagram a couple months
early and went crazy with pictures one night. The first one he ever posted was one of him making an
exaggeratedly shocked face while he had his hands on Clarke’s stomach. The second one was a
photo of their eight-week ultrasound image, and the caption was _I made that._ It didn’t seem to matter
that his only followers were her, their friends, his mother, her mother, and Dr. Tsing. He’d posted
dozens of photos in a matter of only days. There were plenty of adorable pictures of his nephew, too.

Clarke finally understood why Finn had posted all that baby stuff when he and his girlfriend had
been expecting, and why he continued to post so much of it now. It was exciting. When she posted a picture of Bellamy kissing her stomach and captioned it with *He made that*, dozens of people from high school, people she hadn’t spoken to in years (including Finn), posted their congratulations, as did people she’d met and known in college. Lexa posted that she’d be a great mom, and . . . well, Clarke just really hoped that was true.

The twelfth week meant they’d arrived at the plum-sized stage of fetal development, and Bellamy’s app informed him of some exciting new things it could do.

“It can curl its toes and close its fingers now, Clarke,” he told her as he sat with her on the couch, massaging her feet for her. “Our baby has fingers and toes.”

She wriggled her toes against his fingers, smiling. “And what else does it have?”

“Oh, uh . . . I can look it up.” He whipped out his phone.

“No, I mean . . .” What she was curious about couldn’t be answered on that app. A doctor would have to do it. “Does it have . . . you know.”

Apparently he didn’t know, because he just looked confused and said, “Huh?”

She rolled her eyes. “A penis, Bellamy.”

“Oh.” What she was finally asking dawned on him. “You wanna know if it’s a boy or a girl?”

“Maybe.” She wasn’t sure yet.

“Well, I don’t think they can tell the gender yet,” he said. “I think that’s, like, the eighteenth week.” He quickly looked it up on his phone to confirm. “Yep, week eighteen.”

Oh, that seemed like such a long time away, though. Part of her was very impatient and just wanted to know now.

“So you wanna find out, huh?” he said.

“Well, kinda. It’d be helpful, don’t you think? We’d know what to buy and which names to focus on.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, sounding a lot less enthused about it than she was. “I think we should just be surprised, though, be spontaneous.”

“Being spontaneous is what got me knocked up in the first place,” Clarke pointed out. “I was never that spontaneous until I met you, and then all of a sudden I was like, ‘Sure, guy-I-barely-know, let’s go fuck in your truck.’”

He chuckled and put his phone away before resuming her foot massage. “Well, we can still think about names without knowing the gender,” he said. “I’ve thought about it.”

“I’m sure you have.”

“If it’s a boy, I think we should name him after your dad,” he proposed. “Jake.”

Luckily, she had the mood swings a bit more under control at that point, because a couple weeks ago, just hearing her father’s name would have made her burst into tears. “Jake Blake, huh?” she said, testing it out. “Are we really gonna sentence him to that name combo for the rest of his life?”
“Hey, my mom sentenced me to Bellamy.”

“I like your name,” she said, maneuvering so that she was straddling his lap. “Do you have any ideas for girls names?”

“A few,” he replied. “I don’t wanna say ‘em yet.”

“Why not?”

“Because.”

Well, that was hardly an answer, but she let him get away with it. “Okay, how about we both write some ideas down and see if we have any overlap?” she suggested.

“Okay.” As baby-focused as he was, his mind seemed to be drifting to other things when his hands slid over her hips to cup her backside. “How about you make out with me?” he suggested.

“Mmm.” She kissed him hungrily, starting to crave him more than she craved those damn pickles.

Despite the fact that her body was definitely changing, Bellamy seemed into it. It helped her feel comfortable in her own skin knowing that he was still attracted to her, and never was that more obvious than when they went to the lake with their friends that weekend. While the rest of the girls swam, she and Octavia got situated under a large beach umbrella with Augustus, who had on a sun bonnet and so much sunscreen that he’d probably leave paler than he’d shown up. The guys were all playing football on the beach, so Clarke didn’t even think anyone was watching when she took off her swimsuit cover-up; but a loud thunk got her attention, and when she looked out at Bellamy, he looked like he’d fallen over. And the football was lying right next to him. Had it just hit him? Had he been so distracted by her that he hadn’t noticed a football flying at his face?

The other guys were all sort of staring, too, except for Lincoln, who had his hands up and was saying, “Bellamy, I’m open.”

No movement.

“Get up and throw the ball,” Lincoln urged.

The other guys got back to the game, but Bellamy stood up and trotted over to her. “Damn, Clarke.”

“What?” She looked down at her stomach, thinking it still looked acceptable enough for a bikini.

“Put those away,” he said, pointing to her chest. “Even Miller and Jackson were staring.”

“Really?” She readjusted her top, feeling so much sexier in this swimsuit than she did those ugly maternity bras. “Well, they can look, but only you can touch,” she reminded him.

Octavia, sitting on her towel with her son, started to make exaggerated gagging noises.

“You got a problem, O?” Bellamy asked.

“Oh, no, I just threw up in my mouth a little.”

He rolled his eyes, then leaned in and gave Clarke a kiss on the cheek. “Don’t put anything away,” he amended. “You look good.” And with a mischievous gleam in his eyes, he ran back out further on the beach to rejoin his friends.

Clarke settled in next to Octavia on her beach towel, taking a moment to admire her boyfriend’s
toned, tan physique and sweaty muscles as he played shirtless on that beach. “God,” she said, “your brother’s so sexy.”

“Ew, Clarke,” Octavia grumbled.

But there was nothing ew about it. Bellamy always looked good, but lately, he was looking extra good. Maybe it was a hormonal thing.

During the thirteenth week, Clarke’s hormones started . . . changing. A lot. And not in a bad way. She found herself fixating on all things Bellamy Blake: the way his hair fell in front of his eyes when he worked on assignments for his class; the way the sweat glistened on his skin when he went outside to water the plants, shirtless; the way the muscles of his back were both obvious and noticeable even when he was wearing a shirt. And really, how did he stay in such good shape anyway when he only went to the gym with Miller once every few weeks?

It got the point where she felt like she was literally salivating over the man, so when he went to work one day, she decided to pull out her vibrator and get some satisfaction. Or at least try to. But not only was it underwhelming, it also shut off halfway through. Such a disappointment.

She made it through that night without jumping Bellamy’s bones, only because he had a paper to write. But she watched him type, watched his large, strong hands dance rapidly across the keyboard, and all she could think was that those hands could do some real good somewhere else.

“Done,” he proclaimed, shutting the laptop. “Exemplary work.”

She was pretty sure his fingers could do some exemplary work if . . .

“Guess what my app told me today,” he said, lying beside her, his back propped up against the headboard.

“What?” she asked, wondering if it’d told him how fucking horny she’d be.

“Our baby—our little lemon-sized baby—has fingerprints now,” he revealed.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

God, that was amazing. She really had this whole other person forming inside of her. It was so unreal, and momentarily, the thought of her son or daughter’s fingerprints was enough to get her mind off of its father’s fingers.

“And it’s the last week of the first trimester,” he added. “So you’re a third of the way there.”

“A third?” she echoed. Oh, she already felt like she’d been pregnant forever. Her body had already undergone so many drastic changes. But at least she was getting closer to the halfway point; she was making progress.

“Does your app say what we need to be doing?” she asked.

“Of course,” he said boastfully. “One of the things is, we gotta start lookin’ into childbirth classes. I mean, we won’t go to ‘em until week twenty-six, but we gotta sign up in advance.”

“Childbirth class, huh?” That sounded . . . kind of intimidating, because the prospect of childbirth in general was intimidating. But it’d be helpful learning about how to breathe through the pain and
handle the delivery. Octavia said they taught you things to do after the baby was born, too, like how to properly swaddle him in blankets and how to go about breastfeeding for the first time.

“I already looked into it a little bit,” he said. (Of course he had.) “There’s a class at the university rec center. That’s the one O and Lincoln took.”

“Worked out for them,” she noted.

“Yeah, so maybe we should take that one.”

“Mmm-hmm.” She probably should have asked him more about it before she just agreed, but . . . god, his hands were so big. His fingers were so big. Curling up on her side, she rubbed her thighs together and linked her hand with his. “Bellamy, I’m horny,” she blurted unabashedly.

He seemed taken aback to hear that. “Wait, what?”

“I’m horny,” she repeated. “What’s going on with me? Am I supposed to be horny right now?”

“Uh . . . actually, I read something about that,” he said, “but I was trying not to get my hopes up.”

She laughed a little.

“Now that you’re at the end of the first trimester, the morning sickness and stuff calms down,” he explained, “but other stuff . . . intensifies.”

“Like horniness?” she guessed.

“Maybe.”

Well, gone were the days of ‘poor Bellamy’ then, because she was back to having a sexual appetite instead of just an appetite for watermelon and pickles.

“I need something,” she decided, pulling her stretchy shorts down, along with her underwear.

“Whoa,” Bellamy said.

“Do you mind?” she asked, repositioning herself so that she was resting against his larger frame, completely naked from the waist down.

“Oh, I definitely don’t mind,” he said, massaging her bare thighs.

Impatient as she was, though, she couldn’t be bothered with foreplay. She took one of his hands and put it on her pussy, and then she started to grind and wriggle against him as he worked his magic.

He fingered her so good. Always had, but this time felt especially good. The base of his hand rubbed against her clit, and his rough, thick fingers slid first up and down her slit, then in and out of her. Her whole body responded to his touch, rolling and undulating on top of him, and when her orgasm swept through her, it was like the best feeling in the world. God, she’d needed that.

Her sex drive didn’t decrease during the fourteenth week. Not in the slightest. If anything, it just got bigger and more insatiable. In the back of her mind, however, was this very prominent mental reminder that she and Bellamy had agreed to take things slow this time. But that was hard to do when every gut instinct was screaming at her to just . . . do him.

Her friends didn’t know the thirst had gotten so bad, and even Bellamy probably didn’t know, because so far, she’d managed to refrain from ripping his clothes off. But it was bad. On the days she
wasn’t working, she’d taken to sketching dirty pictures again, all the things she wanted to do with him, all the different positions she wanted to do them in. Especially the positions that wouldn’t be so comfortable once she got bigger. Like him on top. Oh god, she loved it so much when he was on top.

She found herself lost in sexual fantasies even during a grocery shopping excursion with Raven to the least sexy store on the planet: Walmart. She was so distracted that she barely even heard her friend ask about the baby.

“Huh?” she said, shaking herself out of her stupor.

“How big is the baby now?” Raven repeated, motioning to the vast array of fresh fruit on display in front of them.

“Oh, uh . . .” Clarke picked up a peach. “About this big.”

“And just think of how much bigger it’s gonna get,” Raven said, her eyes widening. “Have fun pushing that out of your vagina.”

“Gee, thanks.” Clarke put the peach back and picked out a watermelon instead. “Did you know it’s sucking its thumb now?”


“Yeah,” Clarke agreed, but her mind immediately started to drift back into the gutter again.

“Speaking of sucking . . .”

“You sucked Bellamy off last night?” Raven guessed.

“No.” Clarke looked around to make sure no one was within earshot and then scooted her cart closer to her friend’s. “But I wanted to.”

Raven laughed.

“I’m so horny,” she confessed. “I’m thinking about sex all the time. It’s ridiculous.”

“So go for it,” Raven suggested simply. “You guys have taken things slow long enough. It’s been a glacial pace.”

“Yeah, but it’s been going so well,” Clarke said. “And it’s not like we’re not doing anything. I mean, we’ve been pretty . . . hands-on, if you know what I mean.”

“Has he gone down on you?” Raven questioned as he inspected a pack of strawberries.

Clarke shook her head sadly.

“What?” Raven gasped. “But isn’t that, like, his specialty?”

“Yeah,” Clarke said wistfully. “Oh my god, Raven, I can’t contain it. It’s like a sickness. Like last night, he came home late from work, and he was all dirty and sweaty, and he kinda even smelled bad. But I still wanted to get up on him.”

“So do it,” Raven urged. “You’re his pregnant girlfriend. That means you’re entitled to a good laying whenever you feel like it.”

“But--”
“No buts, Clarke,” Raven cut back in. “Now what was the purpose of slowing things down anyway? To reconnect, right?”

Clarke shrugged. “Basically.”

“And do you feel connected?”

Smiling, Clarke answered happily. “Yeah. I mean, I think we’re even closer now than we were before.”

“That’s because you’re in love,” Raven said. “So make love.” She set the strawberries down in her cart and continued down the aisle.

Yeah, Clarke thought, following her. *We are in love.* That wasn’t gonna change, ever. Whether she and Bellamy started having sex again right now or continued to wait, that feeling of love wasn’t going to fade. They were it for each other, and they were in this thing called life for the long haul now. In it together.

It was that conversation with Raven that made her mind up for her: Tonight, no matter what, she and Bellamy were gonna get it on.
Chapter 63

When Clarke had met up with Bellamy for the first time at Dropship, she’d been nervous. And she was nervous now. Even though she lived with the guy. (The lease on her apartment was up next month, and she wasn’t renewing it.) Even though she now knew his body better than her own. Even though she’d seen the best and the worst of him and still adored him anyway. At this point, she was pretty sure she and Bellamy were soul mates, but still . . . she was nervous. Because what if, for whatever reason, he didn’t want to sleep with her right now? Sure, he seemed to enjoy the changes her pregnant body was undergoing, but . . . what if he wanted to keep waiting? What if he turned her down?

“Hey, babe,” he greeted when she walked in the bedroom. He was sitting on the bed, computer on his lap, glasses on his face. He looked like such a sexy nerd.

“Hey,” she said, closing the door.

“Did you have a good day with Raven?” he asked.

“Yep.” She’d thought about him for a good deal of it, about his body and having her hands all over it. “Guess what?” she said, choosing to ease into the sex talk rather than just spring it on him.

“What?” he said, setting the computer aside.

“Freakin’ Walmart, Bellamy. Once again, something huge happened to me at Walmart.”

He tilted his head to the side confusedly. “It did?”

“Yeah. When I was checking out, the clerk looked at me and said congratulations.”

Bellamy just smiled a bit, clearly not understanding why it had felt like such a big deal.

“That’s the first time a stranger’s noticed I’m pregnant just by looking at me,” she explained.

“Oh.” His face lit up a bit, and he took his glasses off, setting them on the nightstand, and then scooted towards the foot of the bed. “That’s awesome, Clarke. Risky of the clerk, though.”

“I know, right? What if I was just getting fat?”

He chuckled and stood up, smoothing one hand over her slightly rounded stomach adoringly. “You are definitely looking pregnant,” he said.

“Yeah,” she agreed. The bump was definitely there, and it would just keep getting bigger. “You know what, I’m gonna get fat, though,” she warned.

“It’s not fat, Clarke; it’s baby weight.”

“It’s still big,” she said emphatically. “You know, I really think I should start up a workout routine or something.”

“Yeah, sure,” he agreed. “I’ve been readin’ on some things. My app says moderate exercise is healthy. So maybe we could start walking every night again. You wanna do that?”
“Sure.” She looked down at her feet, trying to come up with a better segue into the sex stuff then what she currently had in mind. But she was drawing a blank, so she clasped her hands behind her back, trying to be act all innocent when she said, “But you know, what was really a good workout was all that sex we used to have.”

Bellamy laughed a little and agreed, “Yeah. Yeah, it was.”

She waited, wondering if he was going to connect the dots and see what she was getting at here. Bellamy wasn’t a dumb guy; surely he could figure it out. But for some reason, it took him a few seconds. “Oh,” he said finally as it dawned on him. “Oh, you wanna . . . you wanna start having sex again?”

“Well, yeah, I think it’d be good,” she said, trying to be casual about it.

“Good cardio, you mean.”

“Good . . . everything.” She didn’t want him to think she was just interested in using his body for a workout, though, so she put her hands on his chest and said, “You’ve just looked so hot lately, and my sex drive’s kinda . . . at a peak.”

Again, he laughed. “I’ve noticed.”

“And the touching’s great and all, but . . .” Unable to control her hands, she let them rub all over him, appreciating the feel of his pectoral muscles beneath his shirt. “I just really wanna have sex with you, because . . .” She licked her lips, practically salivating. “. . . well, it’s not like you forget how. And we’re also really good at it.”

“Really good,” he agreed. “Hence our child.”

“Exactly.” Her fingers got to work scrunching up his shirt, because she needed it off of him, like, now. “And . . . I mean, it’s not just physical, you know. I love you a lot.”

“I love you a lot, too,” he said, smiling. “And I love the way your body looks right now.” He put his hands on her waist, pulling her closer. “So if you wanna have sex, I wanna have sex.”

“I wanna have so much sex,” she admitted. “Like all night.”

“All night?”

“Yeah.” She ginned mischievously. “Think you can handle that?”

“Oh, yeah,” he replied confidently.

“Are you sure?”

“Pretty sure.”

“Pretty sure?” She tugged upward on his shirt, and he lifted his arms over his head to help her get it off.

“Well, let’s find out,” he suggested, encircling his arms around her again. He kissed her passionately, making her whole body tingle in an instant. Bellamy had a magic mouth. Magic hands. Magic . . . everything.

“You’re so cute,” he murmured against her lips as he kissed her. “Comin’ in here talkin’ about
exercise.”

“Well, it burns calories,” she insisted, running her hands all over his arms, his shoulders . . . any inch of his skin she could reach.

When he kissed his way down to her neck and began to suck vigorously on the skin there, she craned her neck back and moaned, reveling in the sensation. She and Bellamy had done plenty of making out these past few months, but this felt . . . different. Probably because she knew what it was all going to lead up to.

“Oh, take your pants off,” she moaned hungrily.

Lifting his head, he smiled at her with a look of surprise on his face. “Clarke.”

“I know.” She wasn’t usually this forward or bossy when it came to sex, she usually let him take the lead, but she was so freaking horny, and she needed this. “I can’t control it, Bellamy.”

“Well, your wish is my command, Princess.” He unfastened his jeans, keeping his eyes on her the whole time, and pushed them down his legs, stepping out of them rather clumsily before tossing them aside.

Thirsty as all get out, she allowed herself to fixate on his crotch, on the bulge that was always prominent just due to his natural girth but got absolutely huge whenever she paid attention to it with her hands or her mouth.

“You’re so sexy,” she told him, wasting no time pulling his underwear down to unleash his cock from its confines. It leapt into her hand eagerly, and she began to stroke him right away.

“Shit,” he swore, his eyes momentarily closing.

She knew she could jerk him off in no time. The past few weeks had made her an expert at it. But tonight wasn’t about doing the things they’d already been doing in their effort to take things slow. Tonight was about speeding things up, getting back to where they’d been before. Except now, after everything they’d been through and everything they’d shared, it’d be even better.

“You wanna get undressed?” Bellamy asked, reaching for the hem of her shirt as though he were offering to do that for her.

“Not yet.” She was obsessed with this man’s cock, and she wanted to pay some special attention to it before he inevitably ravaged her.

Getting down on her knees, she pulled his underwear all the way down to his feet, and he stepped out of them. Standing completely naked before her, he said, “You don’t have to do this.”

“Oh, trust me, I want to.” She situated herself at eye level with his cock and gripped the base of it, stroking him again. She felt him getting harder in her hand, and it was such a turn-on. She felt some wetness in between her legs already, and she knew it was only going to increase once she had her mouth on him.

“We could lay down or something,” he said, motioning towards the bed.

“No, I’m good down here.” She knew from experience that Bellamy liked having his cock sucked best when he was standing. So down on her knees it was.

“You really don’t have to do this,” he said again.
“Bellamy, shut up.” She leaned forward, first pressing a kiss to the head of his shaft, then tickling her tongue around it. The low, throaty groan that escaped from him made it clear that, already, he was liking this.

Continuing to stroke him at his base, she lavished attention on the head of his cock, kissing and licking and smearing his pre-cum all over her mouth. Soon, she opened her mouth, taking just that top part of him in. She had to open up wide, because now that Bellamy was pretty much fully erect, there was a lot of him to suck on. He was like the world’s biggest lollipop, and she savored the taste.

“Damn, Clarke,” he grunted as she began to bob her head up and down on him, twisting her hand around the base of his shaft in time with each movement. With her free hand, she reached underneath to gently massage his balls, and his whole body jolted forward as a result. His cock hit the back of her throat, and she gagged a little, having to lean back and take him out of her mouth to recollect herself.

“Sorry,” he apologized, reaching out to stroke her hair.

“It’s okay.” This just gave her another idea. Bending down and lifting his cock up a bit, she licked all the way up its underside, from the base to the tip. She swirled her tongue around the head of it, absolutely addicted to the salty taste of him, and then started over again. Bottom to the top.

“Fuck,” he swore, closing his eyes again. “You wanna make me cum, Clarke?”

“Mmm-hmm,” she purred, pressing a chaste kiss to the leaking head of it.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah.” Usually when they had sex, he got her off two or three times. Their orgasm ratio was definitely not equivalent, because oftentimes he withheld his own release just to help her find hers.

“Cum in my mouth,” she told him, hoping it sounded all seductive.

He looked down at her in astonishment. “God, you weren’t kidding when you said you were horny, huh?”

“Nope.” She took him into her mouth again, more of him than last time, bobbing her head up and down as much of her length as she could manage. She was definitely out of practice when it came to deep-throating Bellamy Blake, so she wasn’t even going to try. But as long as she kept her hand wrapped around the base of his cock, then she could pretty much stimulate every inch of it. One of her hands was still free to either fondle him or touch herself, and . . . selfishly, she needed a little something, too. So reached into the waistband of her uber-comfy elastic jeans, slid her hand underneath her panties, and began to rub her clit.

“Oh, fuck yeah, Clarke,” he swore, and at first, she thought it was just because of what she was doing to him. But when she looked up and saw him watching her, she knew it was because of what she was doing to herself, too. He liked watching her touch herself, though he didn’t ask her to do it very often.

She tried to say “You like that?” but that was impossible with her mouth stuffed full. It ended up sounding not sexy at all, and she laughed. It seemed as if even just the vibration of her laughter sent some kind of pulse up his cock, because suddenly, he was tangling one hand in her hair, holding her head steady as he thrust slowly into her mouth. She could tell he was trying not to get too wild, too out of control, but she honestly wouldn’t have minded it in that moment. She wouldn’t have minded if he’d grabbed her head in both hands and just fucked the hell out of her mouth while she kept playing with her pussy, because god, it made her feel so good and so sexy that she could do this to
him. And that no one else could. For the rest of time, this was going to be her job and her job alone. The last time they’d done this, she hadn’t had that certainty.

“I’m gonna fuckin’ cum, Clarke,” he warned, as if to give her one last chance to pull away. She didn’t. She wasn’t going to. She let him continue thrusting into her mouth, noting the way he began to pick up the pace, and when she was pretty sure he was right on the verge of exploding, she took control again, moving her head back and forth, giving him a good squeeze, and seconds later, his seed was shooting down her throat. She steadied her movements and swallowed everything he gave her, absolutely loving it. She’d never really been one for the taste of semen before, but . . . maybe it was like the food cravings or something. He just tasted so good.

She stopped touching herself but didn’t stop touching him as she sat back on her feet and licked her lips, trying to make sure she got every last drop of him. Knowing he’d be sensitive, she made sure to loosen her grip on him, though, and stroke him very gently as his cock gradually went limp in her hand.

“Shit, that was so good,” he rasped, looking a little bit like he was high or something. “I like these hormone changes, Clarke.”

“Much better than my mood swings, huh?”

“Much, better,” he agreed, once again stroking her hair. He cupped her cheek, too, running his thumb across her lips, and . . . it was just the little things like that that reminded her how much he adored her. This wasn’t just about having sex and having an orgasm for him. It was an act of love.

“Come here,” he said, placing his hands beneath her arms to lift her to her feet. He kissed her appreciatively, and she wondered if he could taste himself on her lips. Surely he could. She could always taste herself on his after he . . .

He shivered at just the thought of him going down on her. Her legs shook a bit, and she had to lean against him just to keep from falling over.

“You alright?” he asked.

“Yeah. Just . . .” She blushed, hoping he’d figure out what she wanted—no, what she needed—on his own.

“You got way too many clothes on,” he said, grabbing the bottom of her shirt in both hands. He lifted it over her head in one swift motion and threw it aside. She knew her maternity bra was so not hot so she quickly reached behind her back and unclasped it, letting it drop in between them to the floor.

“How sore are these today?” Bellamy asked, carefully placing his hands on both sides of her breasts. “On a scale of one to ten?”

“Just go for it,” she told him.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He definitely didn’t need to be told twice. Lifting one large breast in his hands, he bent down and clamped his mouth down around her nipple. It was a lot bigger and puffier than normal. Already, her breasts were transforming into a future source of nourishment for her child. But right now, it was all about Bellamy.
He sucked and nipped at first one breast, then the other, seemingly completely fascinated by them, and she knew he could very well stay there for a while if she didn’t give him some other ideas. So she took the initiative to take her jeans off herself, especially since they were also not sexy, and when she stood before him in only her soaking wet panties, he lifted his head from her chest, suddenly intrigued by other things.

“How wet are you?” he asked her.

“Uh, we haven’t had sex in months,” she reminded him.

“So pretty wet then?”

Spreading her legs a bit, she took his hand in hers and urged him to touch her.

“Damn,” he said in amazement, touching her through the thin fabric of her underwear. “That’s all for me, Princess?”

She inhaled sharply, pretty sure she instantly got even wetter when he called her that. “That’s all for you.” Then, testing out a nickname of her own, she added, “Big Papa.”

He laughed. “Big Papa, huh?”

“Well, you’re Big, and you’re a Papa, so . . .” She shrugged, thinking it just kind of made sense.

“All right, I like it,” he said, hooking his fingers into the sides of her panties. She thought he was going to take them off when, suddenly, he let go and said, “Turn around.”

She did, backing up a bit so that her ass could brush against his crotch. He’d be getting hard again in no time.

“You’re so hot right now,” he said, winding his hands around her stomach. Reaching up, he cupped and gently squeezed both of her breasts, and she leaned back against him and moaned, delighting in both the feel of his hands and the feel of his cock sliding against the crack of her ass. Even when it wasn’t hard, it was still big. Bellamy was genetically blessed in so many ways.

When his hands fell away from her, she whimpered in disappointment, but she didn’t have to do without them for long. He took a step back and got down on his knees, and he took hold of both sides of her panties again. This time, he slowly dragged them down over her rear, down her thighs, her legs. She stepped out of them, happy to now be as naked as he was.

“So beautiful,” he whispered, pressing a kiss to her backside. He massaged each of her cheeks with his big, strong hands and she was reminded that Bellamy was not only a boob man; he was an ass man as well.

“We’ll have anal sex later this week,” she told him, just to give him something extra to look forward to.

He stopped everything he was doing and choked out an incredulous, “Seriously?”

“Yeah.” She’d really liked it the first time, and with her hormones acting the way they were . . . she’d probably have an orgasm from it this time.

“Oh my god, Clarke, you are the best pregnant girlfriend ever,” he said, pressing one very enthusiastic kiss to the tattoo on the small of her back before standing up again.
“Well, I know how much you like it,” she said, rubbing her bottom against his crotch again. He was definitely getting hard again. It never really did take him too long to get ready for another round.

“You like it, too, right?” he asked, as if for reassurance, still behind her as he maneuvered her towards the bed.

“Well, I like it.” She pretty much liked everything Bellamy did to her. Some things, like the bottoming out and the titty-fucking, had taken a little getting used to. But now, she loved it. She loved it all.

“Lay down, baby,” he told her when their knees hit the foot of the bed.

She got on all fours and crawled up to the top of their big bed, purposefully wriggling her backside a little more than she had to. “We’re gonna have to do it like this a lot once I get bigger,” she said.

“What, doggy style?” He snorted. “Fine by me.”

“Me, too. But for now . . .” She rolled over onto her back, smiling at him invitingly.

Bellamy got up on the bed, eyes aglow with affection and mischief, and gripped both of her ankles in his hands. She thought he might spread her legs open for her, but he seemed to get distracted by her slightly rounded stomach instead. Even lying down, the bump was still definitely there. It was already way bigger than Octavia’s had been at this point.

“The baby doesn’t know what’s about to go down, Bellamy,” she assured him, sensing his hesitance.

“No, I know, but . . .” He lay down beside her, covering her stomach with one hand, and smiled lovingly. “I just can’t believe you got our baby in there.”

“Really? ’cause you put it there,” she reminded him.

He laughed lightly. “I know. But I still can’t believe it.” His eyes met hers, and then his mouth met hers in the sweetest kiss he’d given her all night. He never ceased to make her feel adored.

Sliding down on the bed, he got himself at eye level with her stomach and gave it a tender kiss. And then another one. And another one. He pressed feather-light kisses all around her bellybutton, and the feeling of his warm breath on her skin made her toes curl.

“Say something to her,” she suggested. “I talk to her all the time.”

“Her?” he echoed.

“Well, yeah, I think so.”

“How sure are you?”

“Like fifty-percent sure,” she replied, mimicking the same stupid response he’d given her.

Grinning, he kissed her stomach again, then rested his head gently against it as he talked to the baby. “Hey, sweetheart,” he said quietly. “Please forgive me for what I’m about to do to your mom. She likes it.”

“She can’t see anything yet, Bellamy.”

“I know.”
“And it’s not like you’re gonna hit her.”

He lifted his head and said, “Uh, Clarke, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I’m kinda packin’ meat down there.”

She giggled at his silly euphemism and assured him, “Oh, trust me, I’ve noticed. But you’re still not gonna hit her. She’s in the womb. So you can go ahead and ravage me now.”

“As you wish, Princess.” He smirked and kissed his way across her lower abdomen and then over to her hip. He situated himself lower on the bed, and she instinctively opened her legs. She raised her hips up to put a pillow underneath them, further elevating and opening herself for his attention.

“Oh, I missed doing this,” he said, kissing the inside of both her thighs before he brought his face down close to her center and breathed some warm air onto her. She literally quivered, so worked up already, so desperate to just feel his mouth on her, doing what it did best.

When he did finally move in all the way and she felt his lips and his tongue on her folds, she was happy to find that the Bellamy Blake method hadn’t changed. He started to completely make out with her lower lips, some low moans escaping his throat as he sucked, licked, and lapped at her. She could feel the evidence of her arousal seeping out, smearing all over his mouth and his chin. His insistent, talented tongue slipped between her folds, tasting her fully, licking her all the way up to her clit. He teased the small bundle of nerves with his tongue, and she gripped the sheets in both hands, holding on tight as she felt her whole pussy start to pulse. It wasn’t going to take her long to cum, not with how turned on she was feeling and with how worked up giving him a blow-job had made her.

“You taste so good,” he murmured, his breath tickling her. He kissed and sucked at her pussy again, burying his whole face against her as he gave her the kind of pleasure he was notorious for. It was like he was completely consuming her, like he couldn’t get enough.

“Oh, Bellamy, please,” she begged, rubbing herself on his face. If they were really able to keep this up all night, as she hoped, then she was literally going to hop on his face and ride it. It wasn’t their normal oral sex position, but she’d done it a few times and really enjoyed it. Or, of course, there was always a sixty-nine.

Just the thought of having Bellamy’s cock in her mouth while he had his mouth on her cunt made her twitch with anticipation, and she felt her orgasm creeping closer.

“Cum for me, Clarke,” he whispered. “Please.”

Oh, she never grew tired of him saying that. Cum for me. For the rest of her life, she would cum only for him. He would be the only person who kissed her, who touched her so intimately. There was no other person she would move onto, as he’d once assumed there would be. He was it for her. He was the one.

Just thinking of him that way was enough to get her over that edge. She felt her orgasm swell up inside her, and then it was like this feeling of warmth and electricity just spread throughout her entire body, all the way through her arms, her legs, her fingers and toes. She rode the wave of euphoria while he continued to eat her out and drink her down, and when it finally began to subside, she felt completely satiated. There was a slight vibration in her pussy, like the aftershocks of an earthquake. And through it all, Bellamy remained with his head between her legs, seemingly reluctant to come back up for air.

“Bellamy,” she said, finally just grabbing a handful of his hair and pulling his head up. “You can stop now.”
“What if I don’t wanna stop?” He smirked mischievously.

“You have to,” she said, “because you have to fuck me now.”

“Hmm.” He slithered back up her body, propping himself up so that he wasn’t crushing her as he hovered atop her. Looking down at her, he said, “Well, what if I don’t wanna fuck you?”

She frowned, confused, and whimpered, “You don’t want to?”

“No,” he said, slowly lowering his face towards her.

She smiled giddily then as his lips found hers, although she hated him a little bit for fooling her like that. Lifting her hips off the pillow a bit, she felt his reignited erection brush against her folds, and she knew he could just slide right in with how wet she was. He reached down, positioning himself, and nestled the tip of his cock inside her. But only the tip. It was like he froze up suddenly and couldn’t go any further.

“What’re you doing?” she said. “Put it in.”

“I don’t wanna crush the baby if we do it like this,” he said. “Maybe you should be on top.” He wrapped his arms around her, and she yelped as he reversed their positions. Suddenly, she was straddling him, and his cock was sliding against the crack of her ass.

“Oh, yeah, I can watch these bounce,” he said, giving her tits a gently squeeze. “I get a good look at this.” He then smoothed his hands down her waist and across her stomach. “This is good stuff.”

It was, definitely, and like any girl, she got a lot of enjoyment out of being on top. But Bellamy managed to missionary into an interesting position, and . . . she couldn’t even necessarily explain it, but she liked the feeling of him on top of her. It made her feel . . . surrounded and secure. And since this was the first time they’d done this in a long time, she really wanted to start out with the position they utilized the most.

“I was really enjoying just lying there not doing anything, though,” she said, pouting.

“Oh, you were, huh?”

“Yeah. You won’t crush her, Bellamy. Just keep yourself propped up.”

“Alright,” he said, once again wrapping his arms around her. They rolled back over so that he was on top once again, and he laughed, shaking his head. “Are we out of practice or something? I don’t remember us fumbling around this much before.”

“We might be out of practice,” she acknowledged. “But that’s okay. We’ve got all night to re-learn.”

“All night,” he echoed, once again getting situated. He held his cock in one hand, re-inserting the head of it into her, and then he leaned forward a bit, one arm on either side of her, and gave her a big kiss as he pushed in further, stretching her in a way she hadn’t been stretched in months. The kiss was meant to distract her, she realized, from the slight momentary pain. Her body definitely had to readjust to the feel of him, regardless of how naturally lubed up she was.

“You okay?” he asked once he was buried inside of her.

“Mmm-hmm,” she said. “Just give me a minute.”

In that minute, he kissed her so tenderly, so softly, as if she were some fragile piece of china that
might break. The way he did it was so loving, it brought tears to her eyes. But he noticed those tears, of course, and worried he was hurting her. “I can stop,” he offered.

“No!” she said a little too loudly. “No, don’t stop.” That was the last thing she wanted him to do. “I’m good now.”

“You sure?” he asked.

She nodded hurriedly and rolled her hips up against his, re-familiarizing herself with the feel of him. Being connected with Bellamy in this way, taking him into her . . . nothing compared to it. Nothing ever would.

“Just tell me if it’s too much,” he said as he began thrusting. They were easy, steady thrusts, not too fast, not too slow; not too deep, not too shallow.

“It’s not too much,” she assured him. In fact, it was all starting to feel just right. Her body was used to accommodating Bellamy. Once they got going, it was as if they fit together like two pieces of a puzzle. No one should have ever been shocked that they’d made a baby.

Bellamy pressed his forehead to hers and started to pant for air as he moved. His thighs smacked against hers, even though he wasn’t thrusting that hard, and she opened her legs even wider so he could push deeper. He wasn’t all the way in, but he was pretty close, and it felt so damn good. Sex with Bellamy made her forget where she ended and where he began. It was like they were just one person now, moving together, bodies rocking, hips rolling. The sweat on his skin mixed with hers, and their mouths mingled together.

“Bellamy?” she gasped, not even sure why she said it with that questioning tone.

“I got you, babe,” he assured her, hooking his arms underneath her. Somehow managing to keep them joined, he sat up, taking her with him. She readjusted a bit now that she was in his lap and hooked her arms around his neck, enjoying the shift in position even though it meant she couldn’t just lie there anymore. She liked the intimacy of this; it was one of her favorites, and he undoubtedly knew that, so that was why he’d switched it up.

“Fuck,” he swore, thrusting up into her, massaging his hands up and down her back and sides. “Fuck, Clarke.”

“Oh . . .” she moaned, closing her eyes so she could concentrate just on the feeling of his cock inside her. “Bellamy . . .”

“Oh, fuck,” he said again, increasing his pace. He pulled her in so close, her whole torso was plastered against him, and he pressed his face to her cleavage, breathing hotly onto her as his dick continued to work its magic. Between them, her pregnant belly slipped and slid against the sheen of sweat on his abs.

“Bell . . .” she gasped.

“I’m right here,” he whispered, running his hands through her hair. “I’m right here.”

Oh, he was right there, and he was never leaving. Knowing that was so utterly intoxicating that she couldn’t help but fall apart again. She came hard, and her orgasm almost instantly triggered his own. In addition to the shocks and spasms coursing through her own body, she felt his cock pulsating within her, felt the warmth of his seed seeping into her. Just like it had fourteen weeks ago.

“Oh god,” she moaned as she came down from it. This had been everything she’d hoped it would be
and more. It was so good that she couldn’t even regret taking things slow. If anything, that must have amplified it. Because she felt as close to Bellamy Blake as she ever had in her entire life. And there wasn’t a doubt in her mind that as the days, months, and even years wore on, she would continue to feel this exact same way.

“I love you,” he told her as they continued to sit together, him still inside of her. He smoothed her damp hair back from her face and said it again. “I love you, Clarke.”

“I love you,” she told him in return. She’d never get tired of saying it, and she’d never get tired of hearing him say it to her.

She did get tired, though, just in general shortly after that. She didn’t want to because . . . all night long. That was the plan and that was the goal. She had a feeling her sex drive wasn’t going to be shutting off anytime soon, so hopefully Bellamy would want to get back to doing this almost every single night.

He didn’t seem disappointed that she was going to end up nodding off earlier than she’d intended. In fact, he just lay there with her, holding her close, enveloping her in those warm, strong arms of his. She rested with her head on his chest, and she felt his heart beating beneath her ear.

“You tired?” he asked, wrapping and rubbing the fingers of his right hand around her left.

“Mmm-hmm,” she replied sleepily. “Sorry.”

“That’s okay.” He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead and urged, “Don’t go to sleep yet, though.”

“Mmm,” was all she could muster in response as her eyelids fell closed.

“Clarke?” he said, linking his fingers with her own for just a moment before unlinking them.

“Hmm?”

“Don’t go to sleep,” he repeated.

“Why not?” she managed tiredly. He was warm and she was comfortable. It was a perfect combination.

“Because,” he said. But that wasn’t an answer. At least not until he added, “There’s something I wanna ask you.”

Curiously, she opened her eyes, looking not up at him, but down at their hands, where his thumb was now stroking specifically over her ring finger. Her empty ring finger. Nowhere else.

She smiled happily, because she knew what his question was going to be.
Well, here we are, at the end of a very long fic, the idea for which occurred to me as I pushed my grocery cart through a Walmart parking lot. Seriously. About a year ago, I began writing it, and four months later, it was done. I don't know if you guys realize that this story is 942 pages long. That means that, if you've made it this far, you have devoted countless hours to reading about these characters and their world. I cannot thank you enough for that and for all the support you have given it (and me) along the way. I've written many pieces of fan fiction over the years, but this is only my second one for the Bellarke fandom, and my first novel-length one. So I certainly did not expect such a massive and passionate response, but I'm thrilled to have gotten that! It makes me excited and inspires me to write more for this fandom. THANK YOU SO MUCH for reading!

Chapter 64 – Epilogue

(9 months later)

There were so many people inside, and all of them were being so loud, that Clarke had to step out into the backyard to take her phone call from her mother. She tried to be brief, because dinner reservations were at 7:30, and it was already almost 7:00. And she still wasn’t sure if she was ready or not. She’d done her hair in haste and picked out the first nice, not-too-fancy-but-still-cute dress she’d spotted in the closet. She’d have to get Raven’s opinion on whether or no she was good to go. Maybe some of the other girls’ opinions, too.

“Well, I’m sure you’ve got plans tonight,” her mom said as their conversation finally wound down, “so I’ll let you go. But happy birthday, Clarke. I love you.”

“Thanks. I love you, too,” Clarke told her before ending the call. She took a deep breath and walked back inside, bracing herself for the inevitable chaos. Because it was Saturday night, and everyone was there, just like usual. Including Augustus, who couldn’t go anywhere without at least ten toys accompanying him, all of which were now scattered across the living room floor.

As was often the case, the eleven-month old was the center of attention. Right now, he was wriggling around, doing his version of dancing, while Miller attempted to beatbox. He had on his father’s baseball cap, which kept falling over his eyes, and everyone was laughing at the way he fell down but always got right back up again.

When he spotted Clarke, though, he stopped dancing and scurried over to her, moving at a pretty brisk pace for someone who had only started walking two months ago. His bare feet padded against the kitchen tile, but he got going so fast that he couldn’t stop himself and ran right into Clarke’s leg. He fell down on his bottom with a plop.

“Whoa, easy there, buddy,” Clarke said, bending down to pick her nephew up.

“I swear, he’s gonna be a track star,” Octavia predicted. “He runs everywhere now.”
“Runs outside,” Lincoln added. He opened his arms wide and said, “Come here, Gusto,” and Augustus began to squirm in Clarke’s arms, wanting his daddy. She set him back down on his own two feet, and he scampered back the way he had come. Lincoln scooped him up with ease.

*Okay, hair check,* Clarke decided as her friends began conversing again. She bent down to get a glimpse of her reflection in the microwave. It was windy outside, so her loose curls were now even looser, but once she combed her fingers through her hair a bit, she decided it still looked good enough.

“You look great,” Emori said, sauntering into the kitchen. “Bellamy’s not gonna know what hit him.”

Clarke smiled, hoping that was true. So often these days, he saw her with her hair in a messy ponytail and in clothes with baby drool and sometimes vomit all over them. Date night was a rare thing, but it was something he’d insisted on for her twenty-third birthday.

“Are you sure you guys are gonna be able to handle it tonight?” Clarke asked, checking the fridge to make sure that she had a couple of bottles of breastmilk in there for the baby.

“Oh, please, John and I are pros,” Emori boasted. “I think I’ve changed almost as many diapers as you have.”

“Almost,” Clarke agreed. “You guys have been such a big help. Seriously, I don’t know how Bellamy and I would manage without you.” Murphy and Emori watched the baby when she and Bellamy needed a nap, they babysat on the days both she and he had to work. Living there had made them a permanent fixture in the baby’s life, so no one, not even Octavia, had questioned the decision to make them the godparents.

“Look at him,” Emori said, leaning back against the counter, staring into the living room.

At first, Clarke thought she was saying to look at Augustus, whom Murphy was playfully and carefully wresting, but that sultry smile on Emori’s lips made it clear that she was talking about Murphy instead.

“He’s such marriage material,” she said.

Clarke thought that was a stretch, but then again, Murphy just wasn’t her type. “That must be why you’re marrying him,” she said.

“Yeah.” Emori gazed down at the ring on her finger and smiled. “Alright, well, have fun tonight, birthday girl,” she said. “And remember, you look slammin’.”

Clarke put her hand on her stomach, happy to have shed most of the weight. There were a couple of pounds that were probably never going to go away, but for the most part, she felt confident about how she looked. It was all thanks to those fitness classes Octavia taught. They were brutal, but they worked wonders.

“Clarke, come join us!” Harper called from the living room. “We’re gonna get him dancing again.”

“He doesn’t need any dance advice from me,” Clarke pointed out, checking to make sure that all the emergency numbers clipped up there: her mom, her stepdad, Bellamy’s mom, Dr. Tsing. She couldn’t help but be a little nervous about stepping out for the night, because it’d been so long since she’d done it.

“I’ll teach him some moves,” Jasper volunteered, jumping to his feet. He started to do some wacky,
arm-flailing move that rivaled even Clarke’s moves in terms of badness, and Monty booed him.

“Get off the stage!” Niylah heckled, but Jasper just kept dancing until Maya grabbed his hand and pulled him back down to the floor.

Clarke laughed at his antics and checked the time again—7:04—then glanced at the stairs, wondering what was taking Bellamy so long. He’d said he was getting ready, but . . . knowing him, he’d gotten sidetracked.

Sensing she had a few more minutes and could still change if she needed to, she motioned Raven into the kitchen and asked, “How do I look?”

“Amazing,” Raven said. Then she laughed.

“What?”

“Oh, nothing. I was just remembering the first time you went out on a date with Bellagio. I helped you pick out something to wear. And now here we are.”

“Here we are,” Clarke agreed. She made a face when she heard something vibrate close by, something that made Raven squirm. “What exactly are you wearing?” Clarke asked her friend.

“Vibrating underwear. Don’t judge,” Raven replied quickly. “My man has his kinks.” She grinned at Roan, who was lounging on their brand new couch, watching his girlfriend lasciviously.

“Not judging,” Clarke assured her. “Besides, Bellamy and I have that public sex thing.”

“Yeah, when is the last time you guys got down outside the walls of this house?” Raven asked.

“It’s been a while,” she admitted. Pregnancy and then motherhood . . . it just made her feel more cautious. Plus, she and Bellamy were exhausted a lot of the time. It wasn’t like they could have sex every single night anymore. They still made it a priority, sure, but . . . they had other priorities now, too.

“Well, maybe it’ll happen tonight,” Raven said hopefully.

“Maybe.” If the opportunity presented itself, she definitely wasn’t opposed to it.

“Just don’t get arrested.”

“We’ll try not to.”

“Who’s getting arrested?” Jackson asked, craning his neck back as he listened in to their conversation.

“No one,” Clarke said, shuffling towards her friends. “Bellamy and I are gonna go out and have a nice, lovely dinner tonight. And Murphy, if you say anything about Bellamy eating out, I swear to God . . .”

“Wasn’t gonna,” he said as he lay down and lifted a giggling, gurgling Augustus into the air. “Not in front of the kid. But at this point, Clarke, the joke doesn’t even have to be said to be made. You know what I mean?”

She rolled her eyes.

“Speaking of my brother, though,” Octavia segued, “where is he anyway?”
Clarke gave her a look. “Where do you think?”

Bellamy sat on the couch in the nursery, his daughter on his lap, an open book in front of her. “And then, Artemis tore the chest hair from the Cyclops,” he read, although he wasn’t really reading so much as he was telling the story from memory. He’d found graphic novel versions of all the Greek myths, and even though they weren’t really meant for little kids, his daughter seemed to like the colorful pictures.

“She just tore it right out, see?” he said, pointing to the appropriate picture. “And that’s how he learned not to mess with her, because she’s pretty tough. Just like you are, Miss Gina Roma Blake.” He kissed the top of her head, where more and more dark, curly hair was starting to grow in each day.

His little girl cooed, as if she understood him, even though he knew she didn’t. Not yet. But she was well on her way.

“Yeah, you’re tough like Artemis,” he said. “So is your Aunt Octavia. That’s always who she reminded me of.” He turned the page but stopped his storytelling when Gina started to grab at his hand. She’d been reaching for and trying to pick up a lot more items lately; she was getting pretty good.

“Hey, hey, hey, give me that back,” he said when she tried to take his wedding ring off his finger. “I need that.” He put it back on, right where it belonged.

Gina let out some high-pitched screeching noise, and even though it probably sounded like nails on a chalkboard to most of the people downstairs, it was one of the greatest sounds in the world to him.

“Is she being fussy?” Clarke asked as she came into the room.

“No.” He glanced up, and when he got a load of his wife’s sexy body in that sexy blue dress, his mouth dropped open. “Wow, you look good,” he complimented. Lowering his head, he said to Gina, “Doesn’t Mommy look good?” and she made some unintelligible sound in response.

“I tried,” Clarke said, swaying her hips as she walked in front of him. Any effort to be flirtatious fell by the wayside, however, when she saw what he was reading her. “The Greek myths again, Bellamy?” she said, yanking the book from his hands. “These stories are full of monsters and violence.”

“It’s educational,” he argued. “She needs to know these things. And she likes it a hell of a lot better than that See Spot Run book you got her. Isn’t that right, Gina-Bina?”

Their little girl held out her pudgy arms and curled her fingers inward, as if reaching for the book her mother held well out of her reach.

“There’s nothing wrong with See Spot Run,” Clarke mumbled, putting the Artemis book back on the shelf. “It’s a classic.”

“It’s a classic,” he mimicked, bouncing Gina up and down on his leg. “You know what’s a classic? My presidents book. She liked that one, too.”

“She’s definitely your child.” Clarke sat down beside him and said, “Here, let me see her.”

He passed the baby off, sort of reluctant to part with her, because he just loved holding her and
playing with her so much. But he loved watching Clarke interact with her, too. He loved watching Clarke hold her and feed her, loved listening to her sing her to sleep at night. She was such a good mother already. And he felt like he was doing pretty good as a dad, too. Lincoln said he was a natural. So did his mom.

“She’s such a mini-you,” Clarke said she cuddled their daughter. “Your hair, your eyes.”

“I think I’m a little darker, though,” he said, holding his arm up to Gina’s.

“Yeah, but look at her cheeks. Look at those freckles,” Clarke said. “That’s such a you thing.”

“Yeah, it is,” he agreed. It made him proud that his daughter looked so much like him, but he could see plenty of Clarke in her, too. Clarke’s mouth, Clarke’s nose, Clarke’s ears. “I think she’s gonna be artistic like you, though,” he told her. “She likes that Crayola board thing.”

“I like that Crayola board thing,” Clarke said. “I gotta hand it to Jasper, he gives good presents.”

“Yeah, and lots of ‘em,” Bellamy said, looking around the room. “She’s got plenty of toys already.” Most of them were things she couldn’t even play with yet or didn’t want to, but they’d spark her interest at some point in the near future. At this rate, he was gonna have to build another toy chest just to house all of her stuffed animals alone.

“Aw, she deserves more toys, though,” Clarke said as she cradled the baby and gently rocked her from side to side. “Because she’s perfect.”

“She is,” Bellamy readily agreed. He had yet to find one fault with her yet. “Honestly, Clarke, I think we made the perfect kid.”

“I think so, too!”

“And you know what’s gonna be really perfect?” He smirked. “When she says Dada as her first word.”

“Nope, it’s gonna be Mama,” Clarke claimed.

“Yeah, right.” They had a legitimate bet going over this, one that was sex-related and involved costumes, and he had no doubt that he was going to win.

“Well, it’s not fair, you know,” she complained. “The D sound is so much easier than the M one.”

“Well, my mom’s been tryin’ to teach her to say Nana. So she might get us both,” he pointed out.

“Hmm, maybe.”

“But I don’t think so. And you know what else I think? I think she’s gonna start talking earlier than my Dad app says she will. Because I can see it in her eyes. She wants to speak. She wants to say Dada. Don’t you, sweetheart?” He tapped her little nose, and she smiled a bit, but that smile morphed into a yawn, and her precious little eyes began to close.

“She wants to sleep. That’s what she wants to do,” Clarke said, getting up. Bellamy followed her as she brought Gina over to the crib and lay her down on her back. “She wants to sleep while Mommy and Daddy go out on their date.”

“You’re a pretty hot date,” he told her, slinking his arm around her waist.

“You’re not too bad yourself.” She turned to face him and kissed him, and he was halfway tempted
to just drag her into the bedroom and keep kissing her—everywhere. But she pulled away and said, “Come on, we gotta leave if we wanna make our dinner reservation.” She started to drag him out of the room, but they’d only made it halfway to the stairs when he dashed back, double-checked that the baby monitor was turned on, and reached down into the crib to touch the top of his little girl’s head. “Goodnight, Princess,” he whispered before he reluctantly left the nursery. He couldn’t help but worry about leaving her for the night. He and Clarke had others watch her during the day sometimes, but they hadn’t left her at night before. And this was supposed to be all night. They had a room at a hotel all booked up. It was just a long time to be without her.

He knew she was in good hands, though, when he walked downstairs and saw all their friends there. Murphy and Emori watched her a lot, and hell, Octavia and Lincoln had more experience than he and Clarke had. Miller, Raven, everybody . . . they were all good with her. And they all loved her a lot. Even little Augustus had always seemed fascinated by this little person who was even littler than he was.

“Go, get out, have fun,” Octavia said. “We’re all good here.”

“Got it covered,” Miller agreed.

“Just call us if you need anything,” Clarke said.

“And if she wakes up and starts crying, just list off all the presidents for her and leave off Trump at the end,” Bellamy told them. “That always works.”

His friends looked at him with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

“What?” he said.

“I think you’re the only one who can do that, nerd,” Raven teased.

“Seriously?” Hadn’t these people ever learned the presidents song? He was gonna teach Gina.

“You guys are gonna be late,” Emori noted. “Head out.”

“Yeah, go make another baby,” Murphy suggested, and everyone laughed.

“Oh my god,” Clarke groaned, walking through the door as Bellamy held it open for her. She acted exasperated when Murphy said that, but Bellamy noticed the faint hints of a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. No, there would be no more baby-making tonight. In fact, he was under strict orders to wear a condom for the time being. But sometimes he forgot, and she didn’t seem all that perturbed about it when he did. So someday in the not too distant future, maybe within the next two years or so . . . yeah. They’d have another baby.

He couldn’t wait.

Arkadia, being the small town that it was, didn’t have much in the way of dining options. It was pretty much just bar food, Valentino’s, Burger Hut, or Subway. So when an actual restaurant called Evangeline’s opened up, it was a big freaking deal. Whenever anyone had any special occasion to celebrate, it seemed they went there to do so, which is why it required a reservation to even get in. Clarke hadn’t expected Bellamy to take her there for her birthday, especially since the food was so expensive, but he’d said she deserved it.

“This place is really nice,” she said, looking around, surveying the fancy décor. There were a bunch
of clocks on the walls, big ones, small ones, all of them slightly more old-fashioned and possibly antiques.

“Yeah, a lot nicer than Valentino’s,” Bellamy agreed.

“I like Valentino’s, though.” That buffet had been her best friend when she’d been pregnant, because she’d just been so damn hungry all the time.

“Yeah, I like it, too,” he said, taking a drink. “Hey, did you hear Lincoln wants to open up a restaurant?”

“I did hear that,” she said. “He and Nyko wanna make Trikru, like, this whole brand in Arkadia. Trikru art gallery, Trikru restaurant, Trikru . . . I don’t know, photography or something.”

“Lincoln’s got a pretty good head for business,” Bellamy remarked. “I think he could make some money off of it.” He sighed, looking down at his lap for a moment before saying, “You okay if we never make that much money?”

“Bellamy.” She gave him a look. Money stuff was . . . a point of contention sometimes. They didn’t argue much, but when they did, it was often about how they were going to pay for things. Between his classes and the baby expenses, things were a little tight sometimes. But they managed. They always would.

“You know what? Once we save up, I wanna fix up the whole house, though,” he announced. “We got this whole basement, but it’s just . . . space.”

“Yeah, it’s scary down there,” Clarke agreed.

“But I could work on it. We could have a finished basement.” His eyes started to light up at the thought. “When Gina’s old enough, we could put her room down there.”

“Why down there?”

“Well, so she doesn’t hear us . . . you know.” He wriggled his eyebrows.

Clarke laughed. “Good idea. Oh, but wait a minute. What about when she’s old enough to have a boyfriend? We can’t have her in the basement then.”

“Ugh,” Bellamy groaned, rubbing his forehead. “No. I don’t even wanna think about that.”

“I’m guessing she’s gonna hit the genetic jackpot like you and your sister did,” Clarke anticipated. “So she’s gonna have a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend. It’s inevitable.”

“And I’m gonna have . . . a Rottweiler and a gun,” Bellamy decided. “Let’s see anybody even try to ask her out then.”

“You are not getting a gun,” she told him.

“Do you want her doin’ the things we do? You want her having sex, getting pregnant?”

Clarke thought about it, cringing. “Maybe you’re getting a gun,” she reconsidered. Anything to help put that protective dad image out there and dissuade the boys.

“See, this is why girls are tough,” he said. “My mom always said, with boys, you only have to worry about one penis. With girls, you have to worry about every penis in the world.”
“True.” Clarke sighed heavily. “Well, we’ll just have to cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“Yep,” he agreed, shutting up about it when the waiter came by with their salads. He placed their bowls down in front of them, along with several options for dressing, and asked, “Anything else I can get you two?”

“Just make sure the food’s top notch,” Bellamy said. “It’s my girl’s twenty-third birthday, so . . .”

“Oh, happy birthday,” the waiter told her.

“Thanks.” She couldn’t be exactly sure, but she was thinking that, a year ago on her birthday, she and Bellamy had conceived Gina.

When the waiter left, she started to pick at her salad, never really a fan of lettuce. She could eat a salad, just because it was healthy, but she didn’t actually enjoy it. Luckily, Bellamy gave her all his croutons and the two pieces of boiled egg he’d gotten in his.

“You know me well,” she said, popping one crouton into her mouth.

“Better than anyone?” he asked.

She nodded, smiling. “Better than anyone.” This man sitting across from her . . . not only was he her husband and the amazing father of her child, but he was still her best friend. And he always would be.

He smiled at her, too.

Halfway through their salads, Clarke heard two familiar voices say, “Mrs. Blake!” and when she looked over to her right, she saw Charlotte and Madi, two students from her after school art club, scurrying towards her.

“Oh, hi, girls,” she said, using her napkin to wipe off her mouth. “How are you guys?”

“Good,” Madi replied.

“Are you guys here with your parents?”

“Yep,” Charlotte chirped. She eyed Bellamy curiously and said, “Are you Mrs. Blake’s husband?”

“I am,” he said. “I’ve heard a lot about you guys. She says you’re good artists.”

Charlotte blushed.

“I’m better than she is,” Madi boasted.

“No, you’re not,” Charlotte snapped.

Clarke laughed at their competitiveness and said, “Well, the school year’s winding down, so we don’t have that many art club days left.”

Both the girls pouted, so she quickly assured them, “But we’re gonna do it next year, too.”

“Yes!” they exclaimed. When their parents called them back over to their table, they said, “Bye, Mrs. Blake,” and Charlotte added, “Bye, Mr. Blake.”

“Bye,” he said, waving at them. “Mr. Blake.” He chuckled, shaking his head. “That sounds so old.”
“That sounds very teacherly,” she hinted. “You know, the junior high social studies teacher’s gonna retire in a couple years. If you have your degree by then . . .”

“I know, I know,” he said, setting his salad aside. “I could teach at the school, you could teach at the school.”

“Well, I gotta take a few classes, too,” she said. “But the principal said he’d hire me. I mean, I never really envisioned myself as an art teacher, but . . . I think it’d be a good fit.”

“It’d be a great fit,” Bellamy agreed. “Just imagine it: You and me, working together.” He grinned and licked his lips. “We could have sex in our classrooms.”

“And then we could get fired in our classrooms,” she said, crushing his dreams.

“Okay, scratch that then.”

She laughed, still liking this vision for their future. “I think it could work,” she said. “We could end up teaching Gina someday.”

“That’s good. I like that,” he said. “Because then I can keep an eye on all the potential boyfriends, and then I might not even need a gun.”

“Or a . . . what was it? A Rottweiler?” She made a face.

“No, I don’t really want a Rottweiler, but I do want a dog,” he blurted. “A puppy.”

“A puppy?” She sat back, crossing her arms over her chest. “Seriously?”

“Yeah. There’s this guy down the street selling Golden Retriever puppies. I think we should get one,” he proposed. “For Gina.”

“Oh, for Gina, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t even try to use your daughter as an excuse, Bellamy. You don’t want it for her; you want it for you.”

“No, for her, too,” he insisted. “So she has a companion growing up.”

“She’ll have Augustus,” Clarke pointed out. “She’ll have siblings.”

“Ooh.” Bellamy grinned. “How many siblings?”

“That’s beside the point. The point is, I don’t know if we need a puppy.” That sounded like a whole lot of extra work in addition to a baby.

“Please?” Bellamy begged. “I never got to have a dog before.”

“I never got to have any pets. Except this goldfish named Ollie, who died and had to be flushed down the toilet. It was traumatizing.”

“Kids love dogs, though,” Bellamy persisted. “And dogs love kids. Especially Golden Retrievers. Come on, Clarke, let’s be great parents. Let’s get Gina a dog before she even knows she wants one.”

She wanted to stand firm on the whole thing, but . . . oh, dammit, that look in his eyes was so
hopeful and adorable. And she had seen some cute dog and baby videos on Youtube a couple weeks ago. And really, she’d always wanted some kind of pet growing up, something fuzzy and furry that she could cuddle with. Her mom had just been so vehemently opposed to animals that she’d never gotten to have one. “Fine, get a dog,” she told him. “But he’s not sleeping on the bed with us.”

“That’s it?” Bellamy said, sounding surprised. “That’s your one stipulation?”

“Well, yeah.” She shrugged. “Bellamy, you and I need our bed for . . .”

“Making Gina’s siblings?” he filled in.

“Well, someday, yeah.”

He smirked. “Sounds good to me.”

When the waiter came back to their table with their meals, Clarke caught a whiff of it and almost vomited. It was definitely seafood, and she wasn’t a seafood fan. During her pregnancy, Murphy had cooked up this salmon, and the lingering smell of it had made her puke for days.

“Here you go,” the waiter said, putting their plates down in front of them. “Calamari.”

“Cala--” Bellamy tried to smile and said, “Oh, so this is tonight’s surprise special?”

“This is the surprise special,” the waiter said. “You two enjoy.”

Clarke stared at her plate in horror, still able to make out some of the . . . tentacles. “Oh my god, Bellamy,” she said before lowering her voice to mimic him. “‘Come on, Clarke, be spontaneous. Just order the special. Let’s be surprised.’ Well, surprise, we’re eating squid.”

He lifted up a piece and made a face before putting it back down again. “We could try it,” he said. “Can’t be any worse than that rabbit I ate that one time.”

“Do you really wanna eat this?” she challenged.

“Well, no, but I shelled out forty bucks for this meal, babe.”

She knew that, and she felt bad for not even trying it, but . . . calamari was just a no go for her. And it was, after all, her birthday.

“Do you wanna go somewhere else?” he asked, seeming to sense that she wasn’t going to touch what was on her plate.

“Yeah.”

“Yeah?” He moved his food around his plate a bit, as if he were trying to make it look like he’d eaten some, and then said, “Well, where do you wanna go?”

Hmm, she thought. This was the only real sit-down restaurant in Arkadia. But that didn’t mean they didn’t have some other options.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Bellamy walked out into the parking lot with an ice cream cone in each hand: chocolate for Clarke, vanilla for him. Her face lit up when she saw it.

“Perfect,” she said, taking it from him. “Thank you.”
“Mmm-hmm.” He hopped up beside her on the bed of the pickup truck, and they sat there together in the Walmart parking lot, having dessert for dinner. It was from the McDonald’s inside, so it was cheap as hell. But it was actually pretty damn good.

“So much better than calamari,” she raved, swirling her tongue around the side of it. “Let’s not go back to that place.”

“Works for me.” He’d never be into all that super fancy stuff. Marcus and Abby had taken Clarke and him out a few times before the baby was born to restaurants like that, and he always had to scour the menu for something that sounded even remotely appetizing. “I don’t know why I even took you there. I should’ve known you wouldn’t like it.”

“Well, maybe if we’d ordered something else,” she said. “But no, this is good. I love ice cream.”

“I can tell.” With his thumb, he brushed a bit of it off her bottom lip for her. God, she was so cute. There wasn’t a day that went by that she didn’t do something adorable. She and Gina were alike in that way.

“Hey, Bellamy?” she said, looking around the parking lot. “I think this is where we first met.”

“Well, no shit,” he said.

“No, I mean, like, right here,” she emphasized. “In this exact spot.”

He looked around, too, trying to remember back that far, over a year and a half ago. He put himself there in his mind, chasing after his watermelon as it veered straight for her, and . . . “I think you’re right,” he said, smiling as he reminisced. “It was right here.”

“Runaway watermelon.”

“Yeah. Thank God it did that.” It was crazy to think how that one, simple moment had changed his life so profoundly. He never would have anticipated it at the time. “Look where we are now.”

“Still in the same parking lot.”

“No, but . . . in life,” he clarified. “We have a beautiful daughter. We’re married. We owe a lot to that watermelon if you really think about it.” Maybe it’d been fate’s way of intervening, stupid as that sounded.

“Hmm, we do,” she said, angling her body towards his. “I wonder what ever became of it.”

“I think Miller ate it.” He shrugged.

“God, it is weird, though,” she said. “We have a four month-old baby. And we’ve been married for six months.”

“Six months of pure bliss, I’m sure,” he joked.

She snorted, shaking her head. But then she said, “No, it has been pretty good, though.”

“Yeah.” They’d had a lot of sleepless nights with Gina so far, and that was only going to continue. They’d gotten stressed and pissed, sometimes even at each other, and that was gonna happen again, too. It was inevitable. But it never seemed like they went to bed angry. He told her he loved her every night, and she told him the same. As long as that never changed—and it wouldn’t—the vows they’d made to each other would be easy to keep for the rest of their lives.
“I still wanna take you on a real honeymoon, though,” he told her. “Because a few days in D.C. . . . that’s not good enough.”

“I thought it was fun,” she said.

“No, we should go somewhere this summer,” he said as he continued to eat his rapidly melting ice cream.

“Where?”

“I don’t know. Wherever you want.”

“Hmm.” She thought about it for a moment, then suggested, “We could take another road trip.”

“And have sex on an open highway?”

“Oh my god.” She covered her face, shaking her head in embarrassment. “There are some things our daughter can just never know about. That’s one of them.”

“And getting arrested,” he added.

“That, too.” She laughed a little despite herself and then returned to the honeymoon topic. “Okay, so we’re gonna fix up the basement, get a dog, go on a honeymoon, raise a kid, at some point have another baby . . .”

“Yep.” Sounded like the American dream to him.

“How exactly are we gonna afford all this?”

“Well . . .” He’d work his ass off, that was how. But logistically, he could only work so much. “Okay, the basement can wait a few years.”

“So can the honeymoon,” she said.

“No.” He really regretted not being able to give her a week-long honeymoon somewhere. It was just that she’d been too far along in the pregnancy to really travel anywhere far from home, and most of the money he’d saved up had been spent on the wedding itself. Even small, short-notice weddings were expensive.

“Bellamy, I don’t need a honeymoon,” she said.

“Because every day you spend with me is a honeymoon? I know,” he joked. “But, Clarke . . . we deserve one. Or at least you do. You literally gave birth to the world’s most perfect human being. That’s amazing.”

“Well, I couldn’t have done it without you,” she recalled. “I was so scared.”

“I know.” Gina had come a few weeks early, so his stomach had been in knots, too. And Clarke had opted to have a natural childbirth, so . . . to say that it had been painful for her was an understatement. But she was a badass; he’d never doubted she could do it.

“Well, maybe we can plan a cheap honeymoon then,” she said. “Like . . . Hershey, Pennsylvania or something.”

“Isn’t that where they have that chocolate factory?”
“Yes, and I for one would be very content at the chocolate factory.”

He took one look at her ice cream cone, which had very little ice cream left on it, and knew she was being serious. He had visions of something like Hawaii, though, or Florida. Just somewhere far from home where she could completely mellow out and relax. Maybe they could take her parents up on that offer to go to Aruba. If they were willing to help . . . well, he could suck it up and not turn it down.

“Where do you wanna go next tonight?” she asked him, nudging his side.

“Well, we could go check into the hotel,” he said.

“We could. Or . . .” She hopped down off the bed of the truck and stood in between his legs, putting her hands on his thighs. “We could go somewhere else.”

He stared at her curiously, wondering what she had in mind. But Arkadia didn’t have many options, and he had feeling he knew.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

When Clarke came out of Dropship’s bathroom, she saw that Bellamy, still sitting at the bar, was now surrounded by people. Men, women, even the bartender. He was showing off pictures of Gina on his phone, as he often did, and everyone was saying how beautiful she was and how cute the pictures were.

“You did good, Bellamy,” the bartender said.

“Best thing I’ve ever done in my life,” he agreed.

When Clarke ambled back up to him and squeezed back into her seat, people started to disperse, but not without also telling her what a precious baby Gina was. She thanked them, though of course she already knew that.

“I don’t even know some of those people,” she said, taking a drink.

He shrugged. “People I’ve worked for. Some people I went to high school with.”

“You know everyone.”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

She looked around, remembering how she’d sat at this bar and waited for him over a year and a half ago, so nervous that he wouldn’t show up and that the guy from the Walmart parking lot would always be just that, nothing more.

“I hope you don’t mind coming here,” she said. It was a far cry from that Evangeline’s restaurant, but it was a piece of home. And the nachos were to die for. “I just thought . . . why not, you know? This is kinda where we had our first date.”

“I remember,” he said. Taking another drink, he grinned at her and recalled, “I wanted to get in your pants so bad.”

“Well, congrats, you did.” She still didn’t know what had possessed her to hook up with him that night when it was so totally not something she normally would have done. But she had no regrets. Obviously. Things worked out the way they were supposed to.
“This is where we first got to know each other,” he said, patting the bar. “Right here. You couldn’t even remember my name at first.”

“Well, in my defense, it’s not a common name.”

“And then we played some pool,” he went on, “hung out for a while.”

“It was a fun night,” she said, casting a quick glance over her shoulder towards the bathroom, or more specifically, the hallway right outside the bathroom. It was dimly-lit, pretty secluded, and perhaps not the most romantic location for a first kiss. But the way Bellamy had started to make out with her there had set her whole body on fire. “We had our first kiss right back there,” she reminisced. “You ambushed me when I came out of the bathroom.”

“I ambushed you?” he resounded.

“Yeah, but I wanted to be ambushed.” She took another sip of her beer, nearing the bottom of the glass now. “And it was a good kiss.”

“Yeah, it was,” he agreed. He got this mischievous look on his face and started to lean in, like he wanted to kiss her now. She leaned in, too, meeting his lips, and god, it felt just as good as it had that first night. Maybe even better. Because the person she was kissing was no longer a relative stranger. He was the person she’d chosen to build a life with, to have a family with. He was . . . her other half. As cheesy as that sounded.

The tip of his tongue brushed against hers, and whenever she felt Bellamy’s tongue during a kiss, that was usually a telltale indicator that he wanted to do a little more than kissing. He sat back, though, just smiling at her, and she pretended not to know what he had on his mind.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he said as his eyes began to roam all over her. “It’s just . . . I really wanna make love to my wife right now.”

“Make love to her?” she challenged. “Or fuck her?” There was a definitely a difference, but he was a consummate professional when it came to either one.

Bellamy’s mischievous grin intensified, and he didn’t answer. But he didn’t really need to. It was obvious.

She downed the rest of her beer, set the empty glass down on the counter, and slid off her bar stool. “Let’s go,” she said, grabbing his hand.

He slapped a couple of bucks down on the counter and let her drag him out the door, through the parking lot. Sure, they had a hotel room booked up that they could check into whenever they liked, but . . . who were they kidding? They both knew where this was going down.

Five minutes later, after some very minimal but effective foreplay, Clarke found herself in the backseat of the truck with her husband, on his lap, holding onto the seat with one hand and his shoulder with the other as she rode him. With it being so warm out, the windows hadn’t fogged up very much, and they were going at it hard enough and fast enough that she felt like they might actually be making the truck rock. So there was a very real chance that anyone who walked by or looked outside would know exactly what was going on. But she didn’t care. Bellamy was inside her, and that was the only thing that mattered.

She panted for air as they moved together, hips colliding as he thrust up to meet her. The only sounds
he was making were these low, guttural groans that sounded so turned on, she didn’t know how he was managing to hold off on cumming. Like always, he probably wanted to get her there first. And he would in no time.

“Oh god,” she gasped, angling herself just right so that her clit was rubbing against him. “Bellamy . . .”

He reached behind her, hiking her dress up even further, and squeezed the round globes of her ass hard, pushing her even closer to him. She felt like he was all the way in, or at least close to it, and it was such a good feeling. She loved the way he filled her up.

She grinded down on him, desperately seeking release, and her hair fell on either side of her face when she lowered her head to his. He kissed her sloppily, never once breaking their rhythm and murmured against her mouth, “Come on, baby.”

Oh, the way he talked to her when they were going at it . . . it was almost as hot as the sex itself. And it was just what she needed to push her over the edge. Her whole body clenched and squeezed as she flew apart, and she had to quit bouncing and just stilled as she came. On its own accord, her pussy clamped down around his cock, pulsating and tingling with the amazing sensations coursing through her body. He thrust up into her a few more times, and her own orgasm seemed to have triggered his, because he came just a few seconds after she did.

They collapsed in a heap afterwards, both of them sweaty and satiated, and Clarke kept him inside of her, not wanting to part.

“Good to know truck fucking’s still our specialty,” she said breathily.

He laughed dazedly, running his hands through her hair. They lay together in the backseat for several minutes, just holding each other, breathing together, recovering.

“I love you so much, Clarke,” he said out of nowhere, his breath tickling her face.

She lifted her head, smiling down at him, and said, “I love you, too.” Then they kissed each other again, both of their mouths lazy and tired now, but still unable to stop.

They redressed and left Dropship shortly after that, and Bellamy drove them to the hotel they’d booked for the night. It was an Arkadia hotel, so it wasn’t the world’s nicest hotel or anything, but it would serve its purpose: getting them out of the house for the night. One night away, all to themselves.

Just one night.

Bellamy shut off the truck, and they sat there outside the building, neither one of them making a move to get out and go inside. She wondered if he was thinking the same thing she was, if he had the same desire to turn around and go home that she did.

It wasn’t that they didn’t trust their friends to watch Gina for the night. It was just that . . . they missed her.

“You wanna just go home?” he asked her.

“Yeah.”

“Yeah?” He stuck the key back in the ignition and said, “Me, too.” Starting up the truck, he smiled at her and shook his head, like he couldn’t believe they were giving up a night alone to go home and be
woken up by a crying baby every couple hours. But they were used to it, and as tired as it made them, they loved it.

When they got home, the house was mostly dark and very quiet. The only light in the living room was from the TV, and the only people still there were Lincoln, Octavia, and Augustus. Lincoln lay on the couch with his son on his stomach, and both of them were sleeping. Octavia was curled up in the recliner, flipping channels on the TV. She set the remote aside and stood up when Bellamy and Clarke walked in.

“What’re you guys doing here?” she asked them.

“We decided we’d just come home,” Bellamy replied.

“We wanted to see Gina,” Clarke confessed.

Octavia rolled her eyes and shook her head. “She’s fine, you know. She slept for a while, then she woke up and we fed her, changed her diaper, and now she’s sleeping again.”

“When did everyone else leave?” Bellamy asked, toeing off his shoes.

“About an hour ago,” Octavia answered. “They love these kids, but they get worn out pretty easily.”

“Even Murphy and Emori?” Clarke asked.

“I’m pretty sure they’re working on a kid of their own,” Octavia said. “I heard sounds.”

“Well, thanks for staying,” Bellamy said, giving his sister a hug. “You’re a good aunt.”

“And you’re an okay uncle,” she retorted. “Most of the time.”

“Most of the time?”

“Fine, all the time,” she conceded before yawning. “Well, if you guys are home, we’re gonna go,” she said. Turning around, she said, “Lincoln?”

He quickly woke up just by hearing her say his name.

“Let’s go,” she said.

He sat up slowly, careful not to disturb Augustus, and stood up, holding his son securely in his arms. Augustus’s head rested on his father’s broad shoulder, and Clarke noticed he was sucking his thumb. “He’s so cute,” she said, giving him a kiss on his soft little cheek as Lincoln carried him past. She and Bellamy were going to have to have a son, too. Even if it took three or four more babies, Bellamy deserved to have a little boy who he could teach to be a great man, just like he was.

“Bye, buddy,” Bellamy said, giving his nephew’s head an affectionate little rub before Lincoln carried him out the door.

“Happy birthday,” Lincoln told Clarke one more time.

“Thanks.”

Octavia was left to carry her son’s toys out, and they were all shoved into a bag that probably weighed half as much as she did. She stopped on her way out and gave Clarke a hug and said, “Happy birthday, sister-in-law. Hope you had a good one.”
“Oh, I did,” Clarke promised her, shooting a grin at Bellamy.

“Gross,” Octavia said, seeming to sense what they were referencing. She waved goodbye to both of them and walked out the door.

Bellamy shut off the TV and then followed Clarke upstairs. But she went straight into their bedroom while he first slipped into the nursery. She got out of her dress and got into one of his t-shirts, then pulled back the covers on the bed and rearranged the pillows just the way they liked, making sure to put one of the smaller pillows down in the middle of the bed as she lay down.

When Bellamy came into the room, a precious sleeping Gina was in his arms. “She’s out of it,” he said. “I think she’s dreaming.”

“Hmm, I wonder what she dreams about,” Clarke mused. “Maybe her daddy?”

He sat down on his side of the bed, gazing at their daughter with love in his eyes. “You think so?”

“Well, I mean, I dream about her daddy.”

“Different kinds of dreams, Clarke.” He set Gina down on the pillow in between them and lay down beside her on his side. Clarke did the same, facing him and facing her, and she touched Gina’s tiny little hand with her fingertip. Gina’s fingers instinctively curled around her finger.

“Gina Roma Blake,” Clarke cooed in a sing-song voice. “We must really love you. We cut our date night short for you.”

“This is better,” Bellamy said, stroking the back of his hand across his daughter’s cheek. “I don’t wanna be away from her.”

“Me, neither,” Clarke said. “Especially not when she’s so perfect.”

“So perfect,” he agreed emphatically. “Just like you.”

She shook her head, denying that. “I’m not perfect.”

“To me, you are,” he said, smiling at her lovingly.

She smiled back, thinking the same about him. It didn’t matter if they fought or disagreed on things from time to time. It didn’t matter if the days were easy like this one or hard like some of the others. Through it all, he was the perfect person for her, the perfect companion for the rest of her life.

“You know we can’t let her sleep in here all night,” she said, feeling like her eyes could fall shut at any minute. “When are you gonna put her back in her crib?”

“Mmm,” he murmured, sounding like he was about to fall asleep, too. “Eventually.”

Eventually, she thought, feeling completely and utterly content as she lay there with the two most important people in the world to her, in no big hurry to move. Yeah. Eventually sounded good.

THE END

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