One bullet from the Mountain Men and the Commander of the Twelve Clans tumbles down the mountain and onto the forest floor.

The Commander is shocked when she's saved by a beautiful, blue-eyed Skai Girl and does everything in her power to keep her people safe by pretending that she does not understand English.

Neither woman expects the sudden heat between them in the close quarters of the bunker as Lexa begins to heal.

All hell breaks loose when they find out who the other is.

My first attempt at fanfiction so please bear with me. Cheers.
All Trigadesleng will be in italics and written in English. I tried footnotes and parentheses but both drove me insane trying to keep it all linked. I also find it hard to do as a reader. I hope this is a better reading experience from that choice.

See the end of the work for more notes.
A shot in the dark sends Lexa tumbling to the forest floor from a ridge near the Mount Weather entrance. Clarke stumbles upon the strangest thing. Finn is not welcome anymore, and Raven feels jealous and betrayed.

The first shot is a shock.

She had been waiting with her warriors hunkered down beneath the trees just before the mountain's entrance. She'd watched as small puffs of mist came from their muted breathing, their furs, and leathers tightening as the sun began its journey towards dusk, casting long shadows as it hid behind the mountain.

The Commander had been waiting for the Mountain Men to come out of the mouth of their natural fortress. There had been a strong sense of expectation that moved through all of them as they held their position. She had hoped they would be able to strike first and finally remove the threat to her people.

The first thing she'd learned as a warrior was that nothing can be assumed and that all plans change when in battle. She had not expected them to surprise her and her warriors; the best of all her clans. To be caught on the back foot and even worse - she had not expected the Mountain Men to be without their suits. The protective covering they always kept on when they came out of the mountain. Suits that kept them safe from the world outside. The Mountain Men were not meant to be waiting for her and her people - laying the foundations of their own trap. And that could only mean one thing; somebody had betrayed her.

The slice of bullets in the darkening light was awful, and she'd cried out orders, fast, angry and terrified. They had expected the fire guns but not this. Men out in the open with no apparent weakness to the air of the Earth. She let loose several arrows that found their way into the chest of the oppressor, but still, they came. Steady. And then she'd felt pain as one of the bullets from the fire guns found her body. She'd gone flying backward into the forest ledge below. Tumbling and scraping across shards of ancient stone that protruded through the forest floor.

"Heda!"

Lexa could hear Gustus yelling above her through the thickness of the trees. She felt the burning in her shoulder where the Mountain man's tech had torn across the hardened leather of her battle armor. The bullet had not done too much damage, but the sting in her arm where it had breached her flesh hurt. She struggled to her feet to find her way back to the battle when she heard the grunts of the Mountain Men speaking the language of warriors.

"I saw her fall down that ledge. Cage, that way. If we get her, then this is all over for them."

She heard the sounds of deep, guttural laughter. Lexa could feel a rage sweep through her. She would not let them find her. She spun on her heels and began to run back behind their line of attack. The constant sound of the fire weapons also made marks in the darkness. This illuminated a path.
for her to find them as she ran softly through the underground.

Within minutes she came upon one of the Mountain men raising a long fire weapon - his gaze aimed at Gustus and Ryder as they raced over their fallen brothers and sisters. Lexa raised the bow to the side of her face. Muscled arms did not tremble despite the agonizing thrum of blood seeping from her shoulder. She steadied her breath and took the shot as the man went to press his finger in the curved slot of his fire machine. The arrow sliced through his neck and he was dead in seconds as his lifeblood seeped from his throat.

Lexa looked over at her people and shook her head quietly at those closest to her. She indicated with her head for them to begin a retreat and she would follow the trail of mountain men and pick them off as she came across each one. She could see Ryder move, and Gustus whistled to the others. More cracks burst through the darkness illuminating the position of each of the men who had come out into the dying light to trap and kill her. She gritted her teeth and moved towards them, her ears desperate to make sure that no-one was stalking her as she followed these murderers, these killers of her people.

Her arrows flew across the distance and were true bringing down two more of the unsuspecting men who no longer wore their suits to protect them from the air. Air that made their faces blister and their blood burst from beneath their skin. She didn't understand why they were free to walk outside now. But she would find out and kill them all - this she swore with fury as more of her people were shot down before her.

The burst of bark chips flying from a tree splashed across her face; the bark cutting into the side of her jaw was the only indication she had that a mountain man had discovered her position. She rolled to the ground and moved away from where she'd been as more bursts of fire cracked across the darkness. She aimed and let another arrow fly. She heard the grunt of someone falling but not before another burst of metal screamed towards her.

The Commander of the twelve clans felt a burning tear through her and cried out. She fell forward and began to roll down the ledge to the forest below. This time Lexa was unable to stop herself as the forest tore her skin as she rolled over and over, her head smashing against tree roots, her legs scrambling to get purchase on the ground that was slippery with leaves and mud. She was hurt terribly and this time; the Commander wasn't sure if she was going to survive.

* * *

"Mom, I heard you the first time. I'll be fine. Seriously. I don't need anyone to come with me, I've got my gun, and I'm only going past the ridge where we found what we needed for the local antibacterial pastes. We need this."

Clarke looked towards her mother, her face was already drawn into a stubborn line.

"I don't understand, Clarke. Why don't you take one of the boys with you? Finn or Bellamy? I'm sure they'd be happy to go along and protect you in case any Grounders are in the area."

Clarke could feel her eyes rolling. She didn't want Bellamy or Finn coming with her. She was more likely to have problems with either of the boys than any Grounder that might be out there, but this wasn't something she was willing to tell her mother just yet.

"I've got my gun. I know the terrain better than they do seeing as how they rarely leave Arcadia. Mom, come on. I don't need a 'man' for protection. We don't have time to argue. The light will be gone in a few hours. There's a bunker nearby which I can close off and keep myself protected in. I've got one of Raven's radios."
Abby Griffin stared at the look on her daughter's face. She could see the obdurate set of her jaw and knew that Clarke was going whether Abby liked it or not.

"What aren't you telling me, Clarke?"

"I don't understand why a two-hour trek into the forest has got you so -"

"Clarke, I know my daughter. You're only determined when something has upset you. Your first instinct is to run somewhere where no-one can talk to you."

Clarke sighed and just looked at her mother. Her mom's face was tired and drawn. Landing on the ground several months ago had taken a toll on the older woman, and Clarke felt guilt move through her as she saw the effects of always being in the medical bay treating the wounds of the steady stream of injured. The sicknesses that they are no longer protected from when they were in the controlled area up in orbit is hitting every single Ark member from colds to poison ivy.

Living on the ground has not been comfortable from the beginning. Clarke worried. She worried about them all, and she worried about this increasing war between her people; the Arcadians, and those from the Earth. Apparently, they had a new enemy besides pestilence, sickness, the ongoing threat of where to get food from, and the constant threat of war with the Grounders. Apparently, Clarke now had the danger of the Commander of the Twelve Clans who wanted her dead after she'd killed three hundred of her warriors at the Drop Ship.

Well, she can come and find me. Clarke's thoughts were dark, and she knew she had to stop before her fists curled and she broke something in the medical bay. She pulled a few more things to fit into her emergency first aid bag. Just in case and that only seemed to make her mother worry more.

"Relax mom," she smiled as she packed a range of medications into the old backpack. "It isn't because I'll need it. You know that right?"

She looked up into Abby's face and smiled as she tried to alleviate her mother's fears. She tried in her own way to remind Abby that she and the others who'd been sent down to Earth, had long since learned to survive the hard way. Abby's eyebrow quirked upwards, almost scoffing at Clarke's words. Clarke figured her mom was still worried about the kill order, but the Grounders didn't know what Clarke looked like unless they'd been at that battle. So. That kind of made it a little easier. Maybe.

The smells in the medical bay always calmed Clarke. The smell of antiseptics and clean, white surfaces. It smelled of her mother, of home, of comfort. It reminded her of times gone past. Of different fears which seem so ridiculously small now.

Abby looked across at Clarke. Her daughter had grown in the year they'd been separated by space. Clarke's eyes had a depth to them that spoke of suffering. Something she'd not wanted to see, but she too was a part of Clarke's pain, and Abby didn't believe that she'd ever forgive herself for that.

Maybe that's why she was so overprotective now and was probably why she gave in to Clarke's need to get out of Arcadia and get some damn space from all of these people. She was Clarke's mother, and she knew exactly why her daughter needed to go on a medical supply exploration in the middle of an afternoon in the middle of Fall. With a bounty on her head. She smiled inwardly to herself.

"Ok," Abby's voice was gentle when she finally spoke. She watched as Clarke stopped packing her bag, and looked up at her with wide, surprised eyes. The blue of them, just like her father's. It still made her heart clench at times. Regret bitter in her mouth as she thought of him and the terrible
waste of it. Jaha. Damn the man. And damn her trust in him.

"What?" Clarke looked around in confusion as if she was searching for some kind of explanation.

"Ha. Don't be so rude. It's not as if you need my permission anymore, Clarke."

She watched the little smile on Clarke's face and wondered at her own ridiculousness. Clarke had battled wars and won. She'd survived. She'd done more in her time on the ground than any of them had in the lifetimes they'd had on the Ark.

"Mom, you don't have to worry. I would have thought that by now you would have figured out that I can take care of myself. And I certainly don't need a man to look after me," Clarke's voice rasped on that final sentence. Her contempt for the boys in her generation apparent. Men. God, Abby realized that they were barely boys anymore. Bellamy and Finn, both of them, having shot up several inches and their time on the ground had seen their musculature change.

There were more things for a mother to worry about, and maybe Clarke was right. She was better off on her own. Still, a part of her twinged with worry.

"Clarke, it's not crazy to think the worse. There are grounders out there. Maybe Raven or Octavia can come with you?"

Clarke shook her head before Abby could even finish her sentence.

"No, Octavia is with Lincoln somewhere near Ton DC and Raven's working on some super urgent project for Sinclair."

She moved the instruments and some of the standard contents of the first aid kit in her backpack over. Now she could push in more bags to collect the specimens they needed to for some of the ointments that Lincoln had introduced to them.

"Ok. Go, go! Before I change my mind."

Clare smiled softly and looked at her mother in amusement.

"You know I would have gone anyway."

"I'm the Chancellor and your mother."

"Yep, and I would still have gone anyway." Clarke laughed and moved the backpack onto her shoulders before leaning forward to give her mother a quick, tight hug. She stiffened when Abby drew her in closer and for longer.

Clarke was still uncomfortable with her. The sting of betrayal of her father's death was still raw between them. Memories of his face freezing and spinning away, tight with pain as he was floated from the Ark. The bitterness stood between them, and Clarke's animosity towards Jaha was overt these days. Abby tried not to think about that and hoped to God that Jaha would stop looking to Clarke as the reason why everything was going wrong on the Ground. Clarke was the reason most of them were still alive.

Clarke turned and walked away, leaving her mother and the comfort of the medical wing behind her. She walked toward the gates feeling the outside temperature hit her at once. The sounds of Arcadia all around her. People calling out, the clank of metals being re-purposed for something their original makers had never intended, commands from the sentries being barked out and the feel of the breeze as it swept through the area.
The smells of the earth never failed to amaze Clarke as she walked out of the encampment and towards the ridged forest a few miles away. If she went quickly, she’d be able to get samples of the anesthetic compound that Lincoln had introduced her to. The botany behind it all was fascinating, and she’d spend hours crawling with Monty across the landscape trying to find the plants and roots they needed for their respective needs. Clarke for medicine and Monty for homemade gin.

Clarke grinned as she felt the weight of Arcadia and its inhabitants lift from her chest the further she walked away. The sounds of the forest became greater, diminishing the incessant clatter and clang of the Arcadian's and she finally felt at peace.

She didn't know how to explain the unbelievable claustrophobia she felt living on the ground with her people. They tried to reproduce the life they'd left up in space. The proximity. It was a kind of interconnection that made her feel an unbearable crushing of spirit.

And things had gotten crazy when Raven had arrived. Raven from the engineering part of the Ark. Raven with her dark humor and dry wit. Raven, whom she liked. And who she found out was Finn's girlfriend. Clarke felt the stab of pain go through her. It was crazy. Three months since the Ark landed.

Three months since the world changed. Again.

Clarke looked into the trees. The light was fading, and she'd have to find somewhere to camp for the night. This wasn't an issue as she'd already mapped her route. The GPS systems they had were decent at pinpointing the location and Clarke had inputted these from her last trip. She’d coded several large-sized caves and underground bunkers into the GPS and then programmed her path to go past the old container she and Finn had found.

It seemed like a thousand years ago. When she'd divested herself of the need to protect everyone, just for one minute; one night. What a fiasco. She'd lost herself for a time, and Finn had been considerate. Kind. Loving. And Clarke had felt her resolve sway a little beneath his ministrations. He'd been so lovely, and she'd been swept up by his mischievousness. The way he'd sass Bellamy during their first few days on the ground without any adults around. Finn was gorgeous in a windswept kind of way, and Clarke had been resistant, not trusting anyone who put so much effort into maintaining that look Finn had going on with his luscious brown hair.

Yep. A thousand years ago, and so Clarke kept walking.

* * *

He's listening to Raven talk about shaft cams and multi propulsion feeds when he sees Clarke. Just a glimpse of sunshine blonde as she walks past Raven's workshop. Raven is bent over looking through some 'omoter' thingy - she did tell him, but to him, it's just a giant ass magnifying glass that's connected to tubing and wires.

So she doesn't see. Doesn't see how his breath catches and his mouth opens a little. How his eyes dart towards the doorway, watching Clarke's figure as she walks through the main gates. She doesn't see the quick, sudden darkening of deep brown eyes fill with pain.

Finn swallows hard as he watches Clarke. Where was she going? He can see that she's gone through the gates and has enough gear on her that signifies an extended exploration.

It couldn't be on her own. Abby would never let anyone out now on their own. Too many Grounders. Too many dangers. Would she? And Clarke's got that bounty on her head now.
It takes everything in his body to stay still and pass some pneumatic tool to Raven instead of racing after her. Clarke. His Clarke. It still hurts his heart, but he can't leave Raven. Can't disappoint her. She loves him, and now she's here. Here and he has to let go of Clarke. Clarke who he knows he hurt by not telling her about Raven. Clarke who is one of Raven's best friend's.

He'd never meant to hurt any of them. He'd never meant to fall in love with the blonde, exceptional Clarke Griffin. Stubborn. Agonizingly adamant in her belief in right and wrong.

Her eyes so blue and so unbearably disappointed when she'd found out about Raven.

He really hadn't meant to hurt anyone. Hadn't meant to fall in love with anyone and not with the head of the medical's daughter.

God, Clarke.

"Where are you?"

He looked up, startled. Two very dark eyes stared at him in confusion. A little worry in her eyes. Yeah, he'd never meant to hurt anyone.

"Here." He smiled his smile, the one that Clarke used to tease him was his charmer's, good for nothing smile. "I'm here Raven. Just tired."

He raised her fingertips to his lips and kissed them softly. Her eyes softened. The wary suspicion leaving as she smiled down at him.

He had to find a way to follow Clarke later. Make sure she was OK. He would have to wait though till Raven fell asleep.

* * *

Clarke feels it before she sees it. Something on the ground - just before she stumbles. Her reaction is too late and she almost goes flying face first into the mud. She looked down to see what had tripped her and almost fainted when she saw the Grounder woman hidden beneath some low bushes on the forest floor.

Clarke looked up and could see the ledge where the woman had slid down before coming to an abrupt halt to where she now lay. There was blood smeared across the grass, and in the dying light, Clarke could have sworn that it looked black. She moved carefully and listened to her surroundings. Other than her harsh breathing there was not much else happening until she heard the echo of a shout.

Damn. Whoever had hurt this woman was still on the hunt for her. She didn't think twice as she quickly looked over the woman's body. Gently feeling through her clothes for any wounds. There were two obvious injuries. Possibly more. One on the right side, a slice through the arm and the blood was now soaking through a heavy jacket and overcoat.

Clarke's hands stilled when the woman groaned as she passed over her right side. No, no, no. Abdomen. A severe darkening of material which was slick with moisture. More blood. She quickly checked the woman's pulse which was thready. OK. OK. She could do this.

Clarke's panic was pushed far away and all the lessons and keen observance of her mother's work in the trauma room in the last few weeks kicked in. She'd had her own fair share of stitching and putting back together Arkers who'd done stupid things like walked into Grounder traps or
accidentally shot each other in fear in their first few weeks re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. The girl before Clarke was in trouble if she didn't do something quickly.

Clarke almost screamed when a hand grabbed her wrist and held her tight. Clarke looked down in shock as deep green eyes stared up at her and began to speak softly, the voice barely above a low growl. Clarke had no idea what the woman was saying, but they didn't have much time before the injuries would cause the injured Grounder to bleed out.

"Listen, you don't have time, and I don't understand what you're saying," Clarke whispered. The knowledge that they had to be careful seemed evident by the sudden stillness of the young woman before her, the absence of sound in the forest a dark cloak holding the threat that surrounded them.

"You have to get up. I'll help you, but I can't carry you. Can you get up?" Clarke motioned upwards to help describe what she wanted the woman to do, who quickly nodded. She grunted softly, the pain evident in the way she quickly covered her stomach when Clarke lifted her slowly to her feet.

"It's not far. We have to be quiet. Whoever is chasing you is close." Clarke whispered softly. She wasn't sure if the woman understood her but the oppressive silence and the amount of blood seeping through the girl's clothes was beginning to make Clarke nervous.

They'd only walked a few steps before both women heard the sounds of booted feet running through the forest. The crunching of forest floor detritus a dead give away to the Grounder's pursuers.

Clarke looked up and tilted her head. The idiots were going in the wrong direction. She breathed a quick sigh of relief but knew it wouldn't be long before they found the blood-splattered ground near here and began using it to track them.

It had started to rain, the fat drops were cold against her neck, but there wasn't enough to cover where the grounder girl had slid down about thirty feet from the first rampart that led into Mount Weather. The cave she'd set out for wasn't too far away, but Clarke wasn't sure how long the woman holding onto her could go on for. Her grip, despite her injuries, was like steel. Clarke was careful to maneuver them through the woods trying to keep the woman's blood loss to a minimum. They had to stop soon. She had to get something, anything onto the wound to stop the bleeding.

She could feel the young woman's breathing become more labored. Damn. She looked at her handheld to check her coordinates, the light from it glowed a sickly green in the darkening light. Only a few yards but it may as well have been a galaxy as the mouth of the cave seemed to be just that too far away.

Clarke almost cried when they finally stumbled through the obscured entry where she positioned the woman against a wall. Moving quickly, Clarke went back and covered the entry so that they were blocked from view and no-one would see the light from her hand unit as she tried to stitch this woman together.

She watched as the woman sagged to her knees and Clarke raced over and helped slowly lower her to the ground. In the silence of the cave, their combined breathing was harsh and seemed so loud in the darkness. Clarke quickly twisted the backpack she had on and moved through its contents to find the things she needed. Something to clean and stitch the wound. Something to stop the pain. Not as easy but she knew she'd find an ampule of something in her kit. The woman's soft gasp of pain made Clarke look up into tired, angry green eyes.

"It's ok. I'm going to see where you're injured, OK? " Clarke spoke slowly, softly as she used her
hands to describe what she wanted to do. The Grounder nodded her head curtly and said something in her language. Sometimes Clarke felt she almost understood it, but then the words would slip away into a weird incomprehensibility that made her head hurt.

"I have to cut your shirt alright? I'm not going to hurt you," Clarke moved forward and carefully lifted the material at the women's abdomen. It was hard as she struggled against the blood that was beginning to clot in the fabric, but finally, she was able to see the extent of the wound.

"Damn!" It was a quiet little explosion from her lips. Involuntary and blue eyes quickly looked over to quiet green ones to see if she understood. The woman had responded to the way Clarke's face had gone a deathly white, and she moved across to grab Clarke's wrist again.

A string of words came out softly, pain hardening the woman's face, the dark warrior lines streaked with blood and mud made most of her features indeterminate.

Clarke hushed her.

"It's fine. I've got this." Clarke gritted her teeth and found what she needed. Swabs to wipe away most of the blood. Alcohol to remove any possible infection in the open wound. She went to work and began to clean the area as quickly as possible. Within minutes she could see the torn edges of flesh where something had cut deeply across the woman's stomach. Like a ridge of fire that was seeping black blood. How was that possible?

Clarke had seen enough bullet wounds to recognize one, and this looked very much like someone had shot and hit the young woman beneath her, but how? Grounders didn't have firepower. They didn't use guns. Was this from the Mountain Men she'd heard Octavia speak of?

Clarke began to look at the wound to see the extent of the injury. It wasn't deep, and there was no sign of entry into the abdominal cavity which meant no damage to the organs, but the trajectory across the woman's abs suggested she'd be tight and sore for several days.

"What are you doing?" the young woman's voice is laced with suspicion.

"I know what I'm doing. I am a doctor, ok? I know you don't understand me. Just trust me that I've got this. I am going to thread this through your skin, which when you think about it, sounds like torture. I guess it is torture as I don't have anything strong enough to numb this for you. I'm sorry about that."

Clarke prattled as she disinfected the wound with the supplies she had. Her hands are steady although they're slick with blood now.

"I've had far worse injuries. This will not hurt me." The words are harsh, but the grounder's voice is cracked with pain.

"You look like a strong warrior, so this is probably a walk in the black forest for you." Clarke rolls her eyes at herself and grimaces at the uncomprehending stare from the young woman in front of her. God, those green eyes.

"Sorry, sorry. God. You probably have no idea what the Black Forest is. Never mind. Hey, you probably know that you look stupefyingly scary. And yet here we are, I'm the one with the capacity to inflict harm on you. I've got a gun, and you've got the most ridiculously, pretty green eyes I've ever seen. I'm not going to use the gun otherwise the whole exercise of sewing your injury becomes moot, doesn't it?"

Clarke is smiling happily into those green eyes that just blink back at her.
"You think my eyes are pretty? Huh. What else will you tell me when you think I don't understand your words? Will you tell me the secrets of your clan? Tell me where your weaknesses are? And your eyes are like the sky."

"It's so weird, Grounder Girl, but I could swear I almost understand what you're saying, and then the next minute it's just a garbled mishmash of - nonwords."

The girl smiled. Clarke flinched. The grin was so predatory it almost seemed like the girl was ready to pounce on her but, the loss of blood and the pain should have affected her, and Clarke knew that eventually the girl's body would give in.

"I shouldn't be so scared of you," Clarke whispered. "You're too pretty to be so terrifying, but God, look at you. I wonder what you look like under all this blood and grime. Do you know you've still got leaves in your hair?"

"You should be scared of me. I am the Commander of the Twelve Clans. I have been fighting since the moment I could hold a sword, and I've been hunting since I could pull a bow. I could cut you into a hundred pieces before -"

The girl stopped as she suddenly realized that this woman was helping her and hadn't thought of her safety to do so.

"Are all the Skai people as foolish as you? Why are you helping me? I'm your enemy."

"Wow. I had thought your body would have quit by now. Listen to you, Grounder Girl. Don't you like the sound of your voice? If I didn't know any better, I'd call you Principessa. That's Italian for a princess."

"I am not a princess! I command armies."

The words sound strange and harsh as they pass the beautiful, soft, full lips.

"Don't like Princess huh? No, me either. That's what my friends call me. But I'm not a princess either. Dreamer, yes. I have dreams just like you probably do too. I believe that this world has more to offer than this war we seem to have set off with your people."

Lexa notices the sadness in the young woman's blue eyes. Does the Skai girl want more for her people like she does for hers? Is there a way that they can build a bridge because she's pragmatic more than anything else. If she can find a way to help her people live in peace, she will.

Lexa can feel a deep tiredness sweep through her and maybe it is this that brings her guard down.

"I may command armies Skai Girl, but I'd like to know what it's like to command your body beneath mine."

The words fade into a slurred murmur, and she doesn't see Clarke smile down at her.

"And there it is. Your body's natural responses finally kicked in. You won't feel a thing. I promise."

Clarke breathed out a sigh when intense green eyes rolled back, and the grounder succumbed to the pain in her body causing it to shut down in a faint.

Clarke had been impressed by how long the girl was able to maintain a stoic visage as Clarke had pulled edges of the skin together over tight, hard muscle. Not a sound. Maybe the softest of whimpers just before she murmured that last sentence which had made Clarke feel something odd
flare up in her breast, but still - that steady green gaze that flickered in and out of consciousness had been daunting.

"OK." Clarke whispered, "you're almost done, but you're not going to feel so great when you wake up again."

She looked through her pack until she found the antibiotic tabs she'd been looking for. She didn't know if it would work. Was the physiology of those who'd lived on the ground different to hers? Would they be resistant to the drugs that the Ark had continued to produce a hundred years later living in the sky?

Clarke gently moved the head of the young woman towards her and cradled her in her arms. There was not a lot in the cave. Nothing that she could see from where she was trapped beneath the woman's body.

Clarke looked down at the face before her, still dirt encrusted, bloodied and hiding the woman's features. She reached over to the pack and grabbed some cleaning swabs, slowly moving across skin to remove the blood and grit of battle. Within minutes the face was cleaned, and Clarke was a little shocked by the beautiful young woman in front of her.

"God, whoever the hell you are, you're stunning!" she whispered again not wanting to wake her yet. Not wanting to bring her back to a world of pain. Clarke had tied off the wound on the arm bandaging it quickly after she'd sewn the gash up that ran across the woman's abdomen.

She could see that the girl was well and truly out of it now. The pain must have been unbearable, and Clarke could see some of the abrasions that littered the girl's body. Thank God the girl's system had kicked in and took over; protecting her from the obvious pain.

She shifted slightly, moving the woman's head till she was resting on the floor. Her own body ached. The tension of trying to remember everything she'd learned, stitching through flesh slippery with blood and keeping her hands steady. It had all accumulated in her body, manifesting as a general stiffening throughout her body. She stretched backward allowing each vertebra to release the tension they'd held while keeping her body upright. She twisted her neck from side to side and got up slowly.

She looked around the cave. She knew that when she'd last been here with Raven and Octavia, they'd packed supplies to leave in the back. They'd covered them in an air-tight drum so that animals would not be able to smell the food and other supplies they'd left behind for emergencies.

She hadn't been the one to pack it away though, and it took her several minutes before she found where Octavia had cleverly hidden it in a small crack between two overlapping shelves of rock. She didn't try to drag the whole thing over as it was too big. Instead, she removed the cover and grabbed the blankets and water bottles near the top.

Clarke looked over at the woman on the floor. She could feel how cold it was getting already. The icy edges were seeping into the darkness of the space they were in. She quickly moved back to the woman and covered her in the heaviest of the blankets. The other she rolled into a pillow which she quietly placed under dark matted hair, the thick braids that twined around the woman's face hanging in clumps.

She sighed. The girl was breathtaking even in the kind of sleep that she was in. Her face was pale from blood loss, fatigue and pain. Clarke reached across and moved an errant braid that had fallen across her face, her fingertips gingerly touching that side; the skin soft and warm beneath her touch.
Well, at least the girl was breathing better. Clarke watched her chest rise and fall and started to slowly clean away the worst of the blood and dirt. She was damned if she was going to let all that hard work go to waste just on something stupid as a bit of grime that would cause infection. After Clarke had done the best that she could, she moved back to the barrel and grabbed the dried fruit and meat that had been stored there. She couldn't light a fire. Not while there were still men out there with guns.

Clarke began to chew one of the dried strips of meat that Lincoln had taught Octavia to cure. It was good. A little chewy but it felt good to have protein breaking down in her mouth.

The sharp, strong flavors heady after the adrenaline rush of the last two hours. Who had shot this woman and more importantly, why? Hadn't Kane or Jaha made contact with Mount Weather? She'd heard her mother talking to Kane. Mount Weather had survivors. People like them, who had survived on technology from a hundred years ago. Jaha had managed a quick garbled message before they'd hit Earth's atmosphere and lost the signal. They hadn't been in contact since.

Clarke's eyes shot up as the young woman before her groaned loudly, the voice breaking into a soft cry which was bitten back at the last moment. Clarke admired the girl's incredible resilience to endure such pain. Unbelievable. She filled a small cup with water and moved it to the girl's lips, but she can see straight away that it's going to be difficult if not dangerous to the girl's health if she accidentally ends up drowning her.

The girl cries out again and green eyes open, wide with panic and pain.

Clarke bends down and whispers stupid words. Soft words. Things to help.

"I'm going to try and get you something that will help with the pain."

She moves over to the water and her kit and rummages quickly trying to find one of the ampules she knows is filled with a sleep medication. Extremely strong. She remembers the dosages. How could she not with her mother's bright eyes burning into Clarke's when she'd first started mixing them. Testing her on ratio, weight, and age. Over and over. Clarke knows that the dosage is correct. For someone who grew up in the sky. Will it be right for this woman who's only lived on the Earth?

The woman shifts and from the panic in her eyes Clarke can tell she doesn't trust whatever Clarke is up to. Clarke stirs the liquid into the water and speaks carefully, explaining what's in the water. She knows the woman doesn't understand her words, so she tries to describe it using her hands and through movements. It's difficult, and if it were any other time Clarke would laugh at the comical look of absolute confusion on the woman's face.

She moves over and brings the cup closer to the prone woman.

"Sleep. Stop pain. No pain, here." Clarke points to the gunshot wound and then back to the cup. "Better."

She feels foolish, but she's hoping by some miracle that the woman in her pain driven state, is able to decipher her actions.

"Better," the woman repeats.

Her voice is rough, low and gravelly. Clarke moves closer as the woman seems to be awake. She wishes she could speak the language. Explain. Explain that she's not trying to poison her even though she's a little worried what will happen once the woman has recovered from her injuries. If.
If she recovers.

She watches as the woman stares at the cup with mistrust.

"Please. I know you don't know me. I want to help you." Clarke's frustration and desire to assist must come through. Clarke can see the shift in the woman's body when she relaxes, and her lips reach for the liquid which she sips slowly, wincing a little at the bitter aftertaste.

Clarke smiles. It's soft. Gentle and she hopes non-threatening, but it doesn't matter as she sees the pain slowly seep from the woman's features as the drug begins to work on her body. The quick look of alarm in deep green eyes before they become glassy and her head thumps back onto Clarke's waiting arm.

It's not that she doesn't care. She does but after a few minutes, and the adrenaline has well and truly worn off, Clarke knows that they need to move. She can't just sit there holding onto this stranger that she's tripped over in the dark.

Clarke moves slowly disengaging her arm before getting up to search around the cave. It's not far from one of the underground bunkers they found which has better facilities for them to use. Lights. More bandages. Solar powered heating and a little benchtop oven. Crazy little things but small things that could save this woman's life.

Clarke doesn't stop worrying that at any moment one of the men with guns that shot this woman will come bursting through the entrance of the cave. She's got her gun but will it be enough if there's too many of them? And why are they hunting her? Or are they at war and Clarke's walked into some skirmish?

"God, stop thinking!"

She whispers admonitions to herself to minimize her tendency towards catastrophic thinking. Something Abby used to tease her about. No-one is teasing her anymore because the catastrophe Clarke imagined as a child and teenager growing up, is so much worse in reality.

And she's one of the few not paralyzed with indecision. Prepare for the worst; hope for the best. It's been her motto. With her lists and things, she needed to do before the end of the day. Now there are no lists. There is just doing, and it's freaking her out. That's why she had to get out. She needed to create a list, plan and get here and hope that she'd find the things she needed to bring back to Arcadia to replenish their medical stores with alternate botanicals.

She found some more supplies including a heat pack that Raven had planted at the bottom of the barrel. She almost fell into the old barrel as she tried to fish it out before bringing it over to the prone woman, clicked the pack on and moving it under the girl's torso.

There was no point putting it under her feet as she had thick boots on that looked like they could withstand intense cold and protect from mud and rain. Mud coated the girl from the soles of those boots right up to her neck. Splashes of ochre and brown and that strange blackness which Clarke had assumed was blood. The long cloak the young woman had also been wearing bore what looked like the results of a fall. Mud, grass, and clumps of bark smeared the folds of thick dark cloth.

Clarke wasn't a rocket scientist like Raven, but even she could see that the girl had fallen from the side of the mountain. Hopefully, she'd done enough to help the girl survive. Clarke sighed. This was her first patient in the field, and she hoped to God that she had not gone and killed her.

* * *
Clarke knew they had to get out of here and soon. But how? Clarke looked around, searching for something, anything, that she could use to move the woman who was in no shape to walk. She kept calling her the Grounder Girl in her head but knew that was a way of distancing herself in case - well, just in case. Grounder Girl hadn't moved in a while, but she was still breathing. Deeply and steadily which was a good sign but absolutely no guarantee that she would be walking when Clarke needed her to.

Her eyes kept roving around the space, the darkness more inky in parts as the last of daylight had gone, and only Clarke's little radio was left giving off its weird green glow. Dull enough that no-one would notice it but luminescent enough to provide enough light to her immediate surroundings. Her eyes kept coming back to the barrel which was more of a box made of interconnected fabricated parts. Easy to construct, water and airtight, and easy to disassemble. Maybe.

Clarke dropped to her knees and went to work taking it apart. Within minutes there were bits of coiled rope, bandages, meat, dried fruit and a first aid kit that was better equipped than the one she'd carried. She continued to mutter softly under her breath so that Grounder Girl wouldn't wake up. After a few stops and starts, she managed to flatten the storage barrel and use the curved parts to create a cradle for her makeshift stretcher. Using the rope to form a harness, it looped to the other end around the head of her make-shift litter.

This would give her enough to pull the stretcher and keep Grounder Girl relatively safe and contained when she moved her. She didn't want to accidentally tip her over on their journey to the bunker. At the back of her mind, she could hear her voice saying, please not the place where you had sex with Finn Collins. But they had no choice. The bunker would have things in it that would keep them safer and help Grounder Girl with any possible complications.

The bullet had been relatively shallow, but Grounder Girl had been laying in the dirt for who knew how long.

Clarke grunted as she shifted the harness over her shoulders. Grounder Girl was gorgeous, but she was also heavy.

She pursed her lips and looked back at her cargo, and then the safety of the cave where they'd spent the last few hours. The weather had gotten worse as the night had worn on, and even though it wasn't the best idea to move, there was no way for Clarke to protect it effectively with her one gun and only a limited supply of bullets.

They had to move on so Clarke could access some of the equipment she new was in the bunker. It wasn't far, but with the steady drizzle and the cold of the evening air it meant for a miserable journey.

Clarke double checked that she'd covered the young warrior correctly with the wet weather tarpaulin she'd found. After separating it in two pieces by cutting the large sheet with one of Grounder Girl's knives that Clarke had found strapped to the woman's boot, she'd used the largest section to wrap around the stretcher to help move it across the terrain and to keep her grounder protected against the elements.

There was no point in giving the girl pneumonia after all that effort sliding across blood and flesh stitching her together.

The rest she used to fashion a makeshift raincoat for herself. She'd waited hours in the cold, using her body heat to keep the temperature levels of her patient even. It had been blissful although a tad nerve-wracking as she'd waited with her gun pointed to the cave entrance.
The sounds of rain had increased outside. It was the last of summer, and already the evenings were getting bitterly cold. With the steady drizzle she could hear outside, Clarke felt anxiety rising steadily as she wondered how to get to the bunker without killing both of them. With one last look at their cave, she pulled past the cave entrance and began their journey.

She hated the feel of the rain pattering against the slick material of her poncho, but even worse, she hated the sensation of it as it slid against the back of her neck in sharp pellets of cold. Clarke looked up and around before heading downward and towards the bunker.

That was something she had going for her. The journey was mostly downhill as they headed back into the valley before the mountain. She could hear the slushing sound of the stretcher behind her as it moved across the leaves that littered the forest. Clarke thanked whatever Gods there were that there was so much foliage that would cover their tracks as they walked.

Whatever line in the mud that they made would soon be washed away by the incessant rain. Within minutes she could feel her whole body heating up from the effort of dragging the weight behind her. She stumbled a few times, slipping in the dark pre-dawn light, scrambling to keep her and her first ever in the field patient steady. A few times she almost fell onto grounder girl as the incline forced the stretcher into the back of her legs making her almost step onto the woman's head.

Clarke's thigh's were burning when the first dark grey lines of light streaked across the horizon, and she could see the bunker not too far in the distance.

It was very cleverly hidden. Craftily built into its environment and if she and Finn hadn't found it on accident that time running from the awful, yellow acid that had burned through the backs of their jeans - they would never have seen it again if Clarke had not left a little sign for herself up in the trees.

She'd learned that from the Grounders. To put things upward away from normal eye range. With her gaze firmly fixed on the triangle she'd carved up into a tree, she almost missed the opening to the bunker, causing her to slide precariously in a muddy channel that had formed from the run-off from the mountain's edge. Not far away, she could hear the thrum and roar of the river as the rain added to its depths.

It was still dark, and Clarke could hear Grounder Girl moaning softly over the sounds of water all around her. The rain dropped in flurries from the treetops had now wholly saturated her hair, and face as both hands felt frozen as she grappled with the opening to the bunker.

The intensity of water on her hands felt like ice seeping through her skin, and it was not like anything she's ever experienced before. The Ark temperature had fluctuations when their orbit was closer to the sun or behind the moon, but their technology had minimized the effects of both extremes. And Clarke had never known cold. Or heat. And if she didn't get this damn door open soon she probably would not experience much more in life anyway.

Her fingers slipped on the water that covered the handle, but she eventually moved it and heard the sudden click and whoosh as sealed air released. She quickly threw off her harness and began to re-tie it so that the ends of the rope met in the middle of the stretcher.

She changed the fulcrum so that when she lowered it down into the bunker: the center of gravity was steady and she didn't smash the poor girl into the sides of the walls or send her crashing below.

It wasn't a significant drop. Maybe eight feet at the most but Clarke didn't want to knock the girl's body any more than she already had. She didn't need to be strong. By using the bars on the outer hinge of the bunker, Clarke was able to use that as a balance to lower the stretcher steadily down.
She felt the grip of rope across her fingers as she pushed her booted feet against the side of the entry hatch.

With only a few feet to go she felt the slip a second before it happened, the burn of the rope and the sound of something moving quickly through the room. Clarke looked on in a slight panic as she did everything she could to slow down the trajectory of Grounder Girl.

The rope burned and her feet and back felt the full force of it as she slowed the stretcher inches before it hit the ground. Moving the last few inches with the most extreme care, Clarke finally breathed a sigh of relief as she felt the floor of the bunker meet the underside of the stretcher. Peering down into the darkness and shaking the rain from her hair and face, Clarke moved to brace her feet on the beginning of the rungs before lowering herself down and closing the hatch behind her.

She locked the hatch.

She didn't know why. It felt like the smart thing to do if men with guns were chasing Grounder Girl.

Clarke moved quickly to the stretcher to check on her patient who was still murmuring in her sleep. Her fingers were still freezing, and she shook as she slowly untied each fastening around the woman's body.

It had been weeks since she'd been back here with Raven and Octavia. Raven had tinkered for a few hours before she'd got the solar panels functional with the electrical system within the bunker. Most of it had been gloriously intact after 90 odd years of neglect. The people who had planned for it had never had the chance to get there on time. Stocks of canned food and bottled water had to be thrown out, which they'd replaced with the small barrels of dried meat and fruits that would get them through emergencies.

Clarke classified the predicament she was in right now as very much an emergency.

She stumbled to the panel that controlled the bunker's thermostat, her fingers so pale in the darkness. The interior was already warmer than outside, but the sudden rush of heated air made her groan out loud. She flicked switches, and her fingers tapped slowly on the keyboard as she slowly turned the lighting on. Soft. Subtle lighting. Nothing that would disturb her patient but enough light to help her view the girl's injuries.

She snapped her head around when she heard the girl begin to murmur. Damn. She needed to get her out of those wet clothes and onto one of the beds. In the growing light of the room, she moved quickly over to Grounder Girl who was still strapped tightly to her stretcher.

She groaned softly, her body aching with cold and exertion before crouching down to the ground. Clarke's hands moved quickly over the woman's face and body as she slid off the wet weather protection from the stretcher. Her fingers grazed soft skin, and she felt terrible anxiety fill her when she realized how hot that skin was to the touch.

"Shit! Come on Grounder Girl. Don't give up on me yet." Clarke's words were muttered softly almost as if she didn't want to be overheard.

Within minutes she'd torn off the material that had protected the young woman's face and torso. With frantic fingers, she began to remove the girl's clothing starting with the complicated overcoat she was wearing. She had to peel it off so as not to jostle her and split the stitching Clarke had been fastidious about pulling through the girl's skin. She moved to the boots that were high up the girl's
legs with what appeared to be dozens of leather lacing that went across and in through the boot eyelets. They were still wet and mud encrusted, and Clarke swore in frustration. After several minutes struggling with the unfamiliar zips and hasps and clasps, she finally had the woman in her underwear.

"I have to be honest gorgeous, I usually like to wine and dine before we get to this part, but it looks like you and I are headed for an unusual relationship," Clarke joked as she tried not to stare at the unconscious woman.

She noticed the muscle definition on long arms and legs, the flat planes of her patient's stomach, and except for where Clarke had bandaged her that was now stained a deep aubergine; this girl was the epitome of fit and healthy.

Clarke sighed as she tried to figure out how to move the dead weight of the woman from the floor to one of the beds that she had set up quickly. A violent shiver wracked through the girl's body, and she knew she had to get moving or not only would her patient be in trouble; she'd be dead if Clarke couldn't figure this out. And quickly.

Using whatever strength she had left, Clarke began to move the girl by threading her own arms beneath the woman's armpits and slowly dragged her to the bed. It wasn't ideal and if Clarke weren't careful she'd probably make her bleed again but she managed it and softly rolled the woman onto one of the pullout beds she'd drawn out from the wall. With a soft grunt, she lifted and pushed her the last part of the way, easing her under blankets and onto a pillow she'd fashioned from some of the cushions she had found in the cupboards.

"OK. Now we're settled." She continued to murmur to her still patient. A part of her knew it was probably due to being alone and the silence; that need for human connection. She didn't really know, but she couldn't stand the mute silence from the other inhabitant of the bunker.

"I'm going to take care of you OK? Now, I know you're almost naked. You'll have to forgive me for that, but we don't have much of a choice. I'm going to get your temperature back to normal. You watch."

Clarke continued talking softly as she walked around the bunker, moving from the kitchen space which consisted of a sink and some glass contained cupboards. She found a pot that she used to boil water from the water system that Raven had jerry-rigged only weeks before.

She'd need a lot of hot water to help remove the dirt. Get the girl clean. Get her fever free. She moved a soft towel over the girl's face which was no longer terrifying, but the remnants from the black markings she'd had on her face had smeared across prominent cheekbones mingling with blood and mud. After a few wipes, Clarke had mostly got her clean again, and she breathed out slowly at the young beauty that had been hidden beneath all that muck.

"Wow, Grounder Girl."

She is still whispering as she doesn't want to wake her patient. The best solution for most kinds of healing is rest and sleep.

"I don't know about you, but it sucks wearing wet clothes, so I hope you don't mind if I change into something more comfortable."

She walked to one of the many cupboards she'd found and slid a drawer out. She struggled but slowly removed her wet clothes and dried off within minutes. It takes a bit of time to sort through the clothing but eventually she finds a pair of trousers made in a soft material bound with a band.
around the waist, and an old t-shirt with some kind of icon from a hundred years ago.

She walks over to the first aid kit that she'd found rummaging through the lockers. It's old and made from fabric that Clarke recognizes as being man-made. It's hardy and looks water-resistant. There are more bandages and ancient creams, antiseptics, alcohol wipes and scissors. It's handy, but a lot of it will need to be thrown out as they're well beyond their expiry dates. It's comfortable. The room is warming up, and the sound of the rain on the roof of the bunker is steady. Soporific.

"Hey, I don't know if you can hear me. I want to help you. I'm going to find you some antibiotics in my bag OK? I'm not sure if it will work on your body seeing as how you seem to have black blood. I don't know if that's radiation and that's how you guys survived the nuclear fallout. I don't know if your cellular structure is the same as mine, but I'm doing everything I can to help you get through this."

She knows she is being nonsensical as she gets more antibiotics from her pack and begins to heat up some water on the stove before dissolving this into the pot. It's rudimentary, but it's a hell of a lot better than the rain and mud and airborne infections she had to face when they were in the cave. She stirs and pours the solution into a syringe before letting it cool down. It doesn't take long, and within minutes Grounder Girl has another shot of a general purpose antibiotic floating through her system.

Clarke can feel the ache in her bones. In the backs of her legs and in the tightness of her calve muscles. It's been a hellishly long night, and she knows it's now early morning, but her eyes ache along with the rest of her body. She shifts the girl over a little on the bed and slides under the blankets. The warmth and the sound of rain falling onto the rooftop is an unexpected lullaby, and within minutes, she's asleep.
Clarke and Lexa discover each other. Things get hot in the confines of a contained space.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the kind words of encouragement. For that, you get another chapter. I have already written about five chapters but they need serious editing before I can post so please bear with me.

I hope you enjoy this next chapter.

She can feel pain. It is tight, an awful streak of discomfort across her lower abdomen each time she takes a breath. There's a sound in the distance. She recognizes the softly muted splash of water falling onto a rooftop. It is not Polis. Not her room. Her room has a different sound as the water would beat against the ancient walls of her Tower.

She shifted a little and felt a soft cushion blocking her path. Pain tightened across her abdomen, and she held in the soft groan that would have escaped her mouth. She didn't know where she was. Was she in the mountain? Captured? She slit her eyes to see what she could beneath eyelids that fluttered against the light of the room she was in and gasped. Her eyes widened as she looked into eyes the color of the sky in Winter when the days were short and intense. Eyes that were wide open and staring at her.

Lexa tried to move backward but felt her body halt as she met a wall. Her hand shot out and grabbed the wrist of the woman who was bending down and looking into her eyes.

The eyes belong to a young woman. A Skai girl from the looks of her skin of which she can see a lot. The girl is barely clad in thin material covering her torso and soft trousers that would never protect her legs in battle. They were inside somewhere safe. Somewhere that this girl felt comfortable enough to be so casually dressed.

She remembers her. Slowly.

"Hey! Don't move too much. I don't want you to rip out your stitches."

The girl is around the same age as her. Her voice is deep, melodious and throaty which makes Lexa look up at her again. She remembers the girl speaking in Gonasleng and telling Lexa that she was beautiful. She recalls that the girl helped her, walking her to a cave where she had taken out a bag and used the contents to tie her skin together. It had been sharp and painful until it was not. She does not remember losing consciousness.

The Skai girl only seems to understand Gonasleng. For a moment she wonders if she's from the
Mountain but dismisses it almost immediately. The young woman would be burnt to a crisp, her skin reacting in a violent rash of pustules if she was outside of the mountain without the coverings of the mountain men. But then she remembers the Maunon who walked free and had shot at her and her warriors.

Lexa's logic tells her that this young, blonde beauty has to be Skaikru. There are no scars on her body. Pale, pale skin as if her flesh has never been kissed by sunlight.

Lexa has been trained since she was five years old and she knows that it is never a good idea to ever let the enemy know anything about you. So. She allows the girl to continue talking to her in Gonasleng and puts on a face that shows that she has no comprehension of what she's listening to. She asks questions only in her tongue and not the warrior's language. She watches the confusion in the girl's eyes as Lexa barks out commands.

"Please." The young woman lifts her hands up. A sign of surrender. Of peace.

"I'm trying to help you. I've been helping you since yesterday afternoon when I found you bleeding to death."

Lexa tries her best not to scoff. Surely this is an exaggeration. She's the Commander. Her blood flow would have stopped, and she would have healed. Eventually. And yet her body feels heavy, and the pain across her stomach is sharp when she moves, and the tightness in her shoulder is evident when she attempts to get up.

She watches as the girl tries to pantomime finding her and struggles not to laugh. The girl is stunning, and for a second, Lexa wishes she was in better shape so that she can pull the girl onto her. She shuts down the thought immediately.

Beneath her she feels the crispness of unfamiliar material around her body and looks down. Not furs. Fabric from before the fires.

Two blue eyes continue to stare at her and Lexa is drawn back to that gaze. They are eyes that have darkened and are rimmed with tiredness. Has the girl been up all night attending to her? Why would she do that? The girl seems to understand Lexa's reaction.

"I'm a doctor. This is what I do. Well, I'm not a doctor yet, but almost. And I would do it for you or anyone whom I had found injured. I've rested next to you. I hope you don't mind, but I was tired. And I didn't want to be too far from you if anything happened overnight."

Lexa watches the mixed emotions of the young woman. Some of the words she doesn't quite understand. Like doctor.

And so she repeats it.

"Doctor?" The Gonasleng sounds accented and stilted when she repeats it.

She watches the girl's eyes light up.

"Yes, doctor! Probably like a healer in your world. I don't know if you have doctors, like surgical ones. I guess you would as you seem to be at war a lot, and that means injuries. And if you have injuries…"

The girl does not stop the flow of words until she sees the growing incomprehension on Lexa's face.
"Sorry. I'm thinking aloud. I know you don't understand." The girl seems sad that she is not able to communicate with Lexa which both amuses and confuses her.

The girl intrigues her. She doesn't seem to be anything like how she imagined the Skai people to be. Men and women who fell from the sky. People who had guns like the Mountain Men but could live in the sunlight. And people who had killed three hundred of her warriors. She was still furious about that, but for now, she had to rely on this Skai girl to heal her. And for now, she would wait until she had more information.

This girl would have information Lexa could use against her people, but she would not know that she'd done it or whom she had given the information to.

That would be a certain amount of justice. For her people.

She stretched but bit back a groan when she felt the twinge across her abdomen and her left shoulder. She pulled the material from her body and noticed the bandage across her stomach.

"What is this?" she goes to pluck at the strange white material that is stuck to her stomach.

"Don't pull!" The voice was sharp with command as if the young woman was used to barking out orders. Too. This girl had some power too. Maybe as a 'doctor.'

"That's an adhesive bandage. I've taped it closely around the wound so that we didn't have to use a whole bandage to wrap around you. It's almost a hundred years old, but hey, it still works."

Lexa fell back onto the mattress beneath her and groaned softly. She ached all over. The hunt of the last two nights had caught up with her and something, maybe the wound from the Mountain Men's weapon was filling her with a previously not experienced lethargy. She just wants to lay back and sleep more, but she had to get back to her people.

She flinched when she felt gentle fingers move towards the wound and her hand shot out again grabbing the wrist of the young Skai girl.

"I have to check your wound. Please." The words were whispered. The voice is soft, careful. She opened her eyes and felt trapped by the intense blue so close to her face. Lexa didn't release the girl until she had mimed out what she meant and only then, did Lexa slowly let her go.

"Strong grip!" A throaty rasp of a laugh which sent a strong pulse through Lexa, her core clenching with a sudden need. She blinked wondering where this was coming from. Surely it has not been that long since she last lay with a woman?

"My name is Clarke." The woman pointed to herself. A very barely clad self where Lexa could see through the thin fabric and the faint outline of two well-rounded breasts. Lexa's eyes flicked upwards quickly, but from the gentle lift of the girl's lips pulling into a lopsided smile, she could see that she had been keenly observed looking where she should not have.

"Clarke," Lexa repeated. "Doctor Clarke."

The girl's smile was radiant, and it felt like sunshine had seeped into the room. Lexa felt another uncomfortable twist to her stomach. A fluttering of emotion.

"And who are you?" Clarke whispered as she pointed to Lexa.

"Lela. Ai laik Lela." She wanted to roar that she was the Commander and that Clarke had no idea what sort of trouble she was in. But she smiled instead.
The girl began to pull the covering over her wound off. Lexa barely flinched at the sharp sting when it tugged at her skin.

"Hmm. Lexa. That's a beautiful name." Blue eyes looked up and smiled at her, "not unlike yourself."

It took all of Lexa's willpower not to blush. To not respond. And it was more difficult not to react when she saw Clarke the doctor start to flush with embarrassment.

It had been over a year since Costia, and her role as Commander had made flirtations difficult. She'd tumbled into bed with other warrior women after a battle, her blood boiling with need, but nothing serious. Not since Costia. She could feel her thoughts darkening.

"Oh my God. I can't believe I just said that." Clarke brought her hand to her face and covered it with her palm. Smacking herself with it.

Lexa grinned. She felt it fill her insides with such a joy. The sheer foolishness of this moment and Clarke's actions made her throw her head back with laughter.

"I know you don't understand a word I'm saying, which let's face it is a Godsend because you have no idea what an absolute idiot I just made of myself. Or maybe you do. Maybe you can understand what I've done just from my actions. Which is probably why you're laughing your head off at me right now," Clarke said in a voice that held laughter in her tone.

Clarke seemed to talk, and talk and Lexa could not help herself. She'd never been in this position. She was a serious person. The people around her were serious. The world was hard and every day survived, was a day of success.

She moved two fingertips to Clarke's lips to silence her.

"You talk too much, Clarke." Lexa smiled softly and said the word's quietly in her own tongue, but it was clear that Clarke understood the meaning behind her tone and action.

Lexa watched as Clarke gently moved the fingertips from her lips and smiled.

"I know," Clarke looked down shyly, "I ramble when I get nervous. Not always. And it is a particular kind of nervous."

Lexa tilted her head feigning confusion. She still had to keep her guard up no matter that Clarke was no threat to her. Right now. She needed to find out more about her and her people. Why were they here?

She bit her lip as she thought through strategy after strategy. The best way to glean the information from Clarke was to continue her charade and hope that the girl let slip any important information.

But she wondered what 'particular' kind of nervous Clarke meant.

She watched as Clarke cleaned her wound again using water that she seemed to have made hot without fire. Lexa's eyes had surreptitiously covered the room looking everywhere for Clarke's source of heat. In the end, she imagined that it was some kind of 'Tek.' Something else she needed to be wary of.

Clarke's hands were strong and dexterous as she moved a small towel across Lexa's skin around the edges of her wound; away from the 'stitches' so that they didn't dissolve. Lexa had no idea what Clarke meant when she said these things but felt that she was being looked after by the
Within minutes Clarke had put on a new covering over the wound. Apparently, Clarke was more than capable, and Lexa breathed out in relief.

"Ok, Lexa. You won't be able to do much for the next few days, but we're going to have to move again, or someone from the Ark may find us here. Don't panic. Well, you don't need to panic at all as you have no idea what I'm saying, but I have to panic because I don't know what they'll do with a live Grounder. In here. With me."

Lexa tilted her head again watching Clarke's lips move as she continued to speak quietly. Clarke had obviously thought about moving Lexa as it was unsafe to stay in one spot, and unsafe to stay somewhere where other Skai people would come.

She was intrigued by Clarke's need to keep her safe even from her own people. She wondered what Clarke's investment was. Why she needed her to be safe when she could easily kill her or use her as a hostage or bargaining tool. But then it was apparent that Clarke had no idea who she was dealing with.

"Klark." Her voice was still a little rough, but the one word made Clarke's whole body still. Bright blue eyes peered at her.

"Klark," she repeated her voice soft and lazy with whatever had been put into her blood. Skai tech medicine. She spoke gently in Trigedasleng, and slowly with some soft movements to illustrate her meaning.

"If I must stay still, then I will need to sleep. And Klark," she watched with interest at the way Clarke bit her bottom lip each time she said her name.

Lexa liked it. She wondered what it would be like to bite that lip herself. She smiled softly. Clarke was not of her people. She was far away from anyone who knew who she was or any of her responsibilities. She was tempted with the Skai Girl, with her bright blue eyes and big, wide smile.

And her obvious attraction to Lexa.

She was tempted by that the most. Her thoughts grew murkier as the grayness on the edges of her consciousness took over, and finally, she fell asleep with an image of Clarke's body beneath hers whispering her name.

* * * * * * *

She wakes to the sound of rain pounding in sheets on the rooftop. It is comforting and almost lulls her back to sleep. The wet season is not to start for another week or so, but she does need to get out of here and back to her people.

The bed that she's fallen asleep in is soft and warm, but the room is darker now with no light coming through from above. She can feel the walls closing in on her but continues to breathe through it as she must stay for now. Her people will find her. And hopefully, by then, she'll have figured out what to do with Doctor Clarke.

She watches Clarke tread quietly around this place that she keeps calling the 'bunker.' Clarke is searching around the darkened room opening and closing cabinets quietly. It is obvious she thinks Lexa is still asleep as she tries not to disturb her.

The girl is inquisitive and curiously excited when she stumbles upon something new. Lexa looks at
how her face lights up. Her dark eyebrows lifting so high they almost meet the beginning of her golden hairline. Clarke brings out containers and things she's never seen before. Some things she can make sense of as she's seen old, broken versions in the marketplace of Polis, but the ones here are in perfect condition. She's certain that they've been preserved by the 'bunker.'

A soft glow suddenly comes on around the edges of the walls, and she looks around quickly. She did not see Clarke lighting candles. Where has this light come from? She doesn't realize that Clarke is now watching her. A huge smile on her face as she battles a need to laugh outright. In the end, giggles win out, and for the first time, Lexa sees the young woman; the girl. She's delighted with this Clarke. Clarke who is not so secretly pleased that she's confounded her.

"You're awake," Clarke's smile is soft as she watches Lexa's confusion. "They're lights. Everything is solar powered, but the electricals weren't connected up when we last came here."

Lexa stilled but continued to smile so that Clarke would not realize that she's understood her words. Clarke had been here before. Was this some secret jail where Skaikru kept their prisoners?

Clarke was still smiling wide at her and started to act out the words to what she was saying. Lexa was impressed as the girl had a brilliant capacity to translate her words into actions.

Lexa lifted her eyes and looked into Clarke's who's smile stuttered for a minute. She wondered if Clarke was feeling the same immediate attraction that was distracting Lexa, who felt unable to focus on anything other than the young woman sharing this room with her.

She's been drifting in and out of sleep which she blames on the Tek medicine that Clarke has put into her body. She knows that her blood would have helped her heal, but she's not sure how quickly it would have happened without Clarke's help. A part of her knows that she would have survived. She knows her body and what it is capable of, but she's pretty sure that the Mountain Men would have found her eventually. And for that, she will be grateful to Clarke. To Skaikru even though they'll never know exactly what they have done.

She smiles at Clarke and her antics, laughing softly as she mimes the sun's rays going into the 'bunker' and how it gives it the source to create light. It is good, but some things are lost in translation. They have similar in Polis. Things that survived Praimfaya.

"Klark, why is there such sadness in your eyes?" she murmurs as she stares into Clarke's blue eyes. They are eyes that reflect everything that Clarke is thinking. It is clear that the Skai people have yet to learn to govern their features and their responses to things.

Clarke tilts her head at Lexa and smiles as she walks to the side of the bed. She reaches out and moves soft fingertips against Lexa's forehead and then down to her neck. She's checking the lifeblood that is beating inside Lexa who wonders if the girl notices how it is speeding up.

"Well, that's a lot better than yesterday. I knew you would be good as your injuries aren't that bad but," Clarke looks down at her with a worried frown, "you bled a lot, and I was worried that maybe it was too much. God, your face looks so much better today."

She points to Lexa's face and indicates with her hands that she looks terrible.

Lexa tries not to frown at that. What does Clarke mean? Lexa knows she's attractive. Even before she ascended to be Commander of her people she'd had a lot of interest from both sexes.

Her body is strong. She knows her features are attractive as she remembers how Costia used to stare at her for hours when she'd be training, finally working up the courage to speak to her after
some friends had pushed her forward.

She blinks, trying to get rid of the memory. She's in a world far away from Polis, from memories of Costia and everything that she has lost because she is the Commander. Here, she is no-one. A simple girl who has been wounded and is now being healed by the enemy. And Clarke, right now she's not the enemy. She's a simple girl who is trapped here with her after she's saved Lexa's life.

"Do you not like my face?" Lexa points to her features as she speaks the words slowly in her own language.

Clarke huffs and slowly releases a breath as her face begins to redden slowly with a blush. It is unmistakable that she understands what Lexa has asked.

"Your face is beautiful. You are beautiful. God, you're stunning. I'm beginning to think that all Grounder women are terrifyingly beautiful."

Clarke's words come out in a rush, spilling from her lips without intention. Lexa watches Clarke. The gradual reddening that creeps up from her neck and onto her cheeks. Lexa tries not to smile and is slightly horrified when she giggles. She watches Clarke as blue eyes widen. They stare into her own eyes as if she's discovered something astonishing.

"God, you're human. I- God. We forget sometimes. We've been running scared from your people since we landed and I- I have done, and my people have done - terrible things to survive a battle we never intended," Clarke says, and her voice catches on her words.

She looks at Lexa with such misery in her eyes that Lexa cannot help herself when she finds her hand moving to Clarke's face, fingertips gently tracing the outline of Clarke's cheek.

"Klark. Doctor," Lexa whispers again, her voice is raspy, and she realizes she probably needs more water. She finds it strange that even as Clarke struggles with her emotions, she senses Lexa's need and within moments Clarke has reached across to the nearby table and poured water into a clear glass tumbler. Another thing she notices that have been preserved from the Praimfeya. She takes it gratefully from Clarke's hands.

"Mochof, Klark." She almost groans as the liquid seeps into the dryness of her throat.

"Mochof," Clarke repeats, and she can see how the girl's mind is breaking up the word, trying to find why it sounds the way it sounds, and why it means, what it means. "Mochof. Thank you. Much of? It almost sounds - no, not Dutch or Portuguese but something like English but a shortcut?"

Lexa has never thought about her language and how it was formed. She only knows that it is the language of her people in everyday life. English is the language of war. Of spies and secrets and lies. But she likes watching how Clarke's brow furrows until she has lines creasing her forehead. She moves her thumb until it is absent-mindedly stroking those lines away.

"Klark. Reshop. Rest your mind for a little while," Lexa smiles softly as she says the words and watches as the girl's brow crinkle even further as she tries to work out what Lexa is saying. Lexa taps the side of Clarke's head and mimes sleep.

"Oh." Clarke smiles as she replies, "yes, I know. I think too much. I worry too much. My dad always used to say that he had two Abby's. Two worriers. Not warriors. Although he did like to pun on that one."

Clarke grins and laughs at the memory, rolling her eyes as she remembers how he used to try and
rub the lines away from their foreheads. Abby would often shriek, and Clarke would chase him. As she got older, he didn't try to rub away the lines and would try to reason with her.

"If it is a problem - then there's a solution. You cannot worry the solution into being. You have to find all the variables, all the facts, all the possibilities. Once you know some of those bits and pieces; you'll be able to start seeing the solutions. If you've only got one choice, Clarke - then you may as well be dead. Always try and find multiple solutions to the one problem. That's what tells you that you're on the right track."

He'd gone on and on about it, but in the end, he'd done exactly what he'd told Clarke not to do. He'd cornered himself with the idea that there was only one solution to the oxygen problem. In the end, he'd been right. If you think you've only the one choice, then you paint yourself into a corner. Deadly.

"Klark, you are thinking again. And it is hurting you. I can see it," Lexa tugs at Clarke's hair playfully. It is sinfully soft against her fingers, and she's tempted to pull Clarke towards her.

Clarke grins. It's a cheeky smile, and Lexa can see the little girl she once would have been.

"If I didn't know any better, I would think you were trying to turn my brain off. Tugging my hair won't do that."

"And what will help you turn off your mind, Klark?" Lexa's tone of voice is impish, and it's heavily laden with innuendo. Completely lost to Clarke who just stares at her for a moment before biting her bottom lip. Lexa can feel her stomach clench.

"I really should be checking your injuries," Clarke says, "I don't want you to tear that stitching on your abdomen."

Lexa can feel amusement rise in her chest. It blossoms and spreads along her arms and up her throat and into her eyes. She is not with her people, and she'll never see Clarke again. This girl who came out of the rain and saved her. She barely knows her. But already she knows she wants her. Wants to feel the silk of that hair between her fingers.

Clarke slides forward on the bed and slowly pulls down the sheet covering Lexa's torso. Lexa lies back and waits to see what Clarke will do when she sees her injuries. Already she can feel the bruising and pain in her shoulder has almost gone. Her stomach only hurts when she twists a certain way, the skin pulling against the stitching. She observes Clarke lifting the bandage and the way her eyes widen a little before they're darting up to look back at Lexa.

"How? What?" Clarke bends down so that she's almost eye level with the injury.

"I am a nightblood. My body heals faster than other people. Faster than anyone I know. It's another reason why I am who I am."

She does not speak her title here. She wants to keep it outside of the 'bunker' so that she can be someone else for this time she has to heal. Time that she does not have a lot of. She must go soon so that she can find out who has betrayed her. Who sent her to her death at the mountain.

"Lexa, I'm going to have to take out your stitches. Normally I'd leave them on longer, but you seem to be getting better a lot quicker than I expected."

The shock in Clarke's voice makes Lexa feel a sense of pride. She knows that she is different, but she's never felt this thrill of being special before.
"I should call you Supergirl, hmm?" Clarke's fingers trace the edges of the wound and Lexa gasps quietly. It's a sudden, sharp intake of breath that has Clarke apologizing profusely.

"Oh my God, I've hurt you. I am so sorry, Lexa. Here. I have some pills that you can take for the pain."

Clarke rushes from the bed and hurries through the room to find her med kit. She's back with a bottle which she quickly opens indicating to Lexa to take them.

Lexa shakes her head and purses her lips. She does not want that stuff back inside her body. It has made her sluggish. Unable to think. The only thing she seems capable of at the moment is wildly fantasizing having this woman at her mercy beneath her body.

"Are you sure? I didn't think that would hurt -" Clarke says and stops when she sees the blush that is sweeping across Lexa's cheeks.

"Oh. Oh!" She exhales softly. There is a mixture of amusement and a little flicker of something that flashes quickly behind her eyes. Most people would not have noticed but Lexa, Lexa has spent a lifetime paying attention to details. She can see that Clarke is responding to Lexa's reaction. And she waits to see what she does next.

"Lexa. I - we. I don't know a thing about you. We can't talk to one another," Clarke says, and Lexa winces internally at that statement. Eyelashes fluttering, she looks up at Clarke through dark lashes.

"Klark. We are separated from our people. We are alone here. I do not know you. I only know that I find you -" she pauses and points to Clarke's face and body and stresses the next word so that Clarke knows exactly what she means, "so, very beautiful."

Clarke stares at her and then looks down at her fingertips which have moved back to Lexa's stomach. She blinks when she realizes she's brushing Lexa lightly with her fingers.

Slowly, she lets out a long, low sigh and looks back at Lexa who is still staring up at her through dark, long lashes. Her other hand reaches out and touches Lexa's face which has stilled.

Lexa asks Clarke, and her voice is deep and serious, and frighteningly cautious - her Trigadesleng is slow and quietly seductive, spoken in the gentler cadences of the Trikru accent. Her dialect is a lot softer than the more guttural tones of Azgeda and Podunkru.

"Do you want to come and join me in this bed, Clarke?"

She watches with surprise at the pink blush creeping up Clarke's neck. Lexa knows that Clarke understands precisely what she means even if she doesn't understand the words.

She watches as Clarke's mouth tightens to a thin crimson line as she struggles with whatever is going on inside her head. Things that Lexa is pretty sure Clarke is about to divulge. She feels a slight twinge of regret for if Clarke ever finds out she understands her, the chance of her ever speaking to her again are slim. And she would not blame her, but she is the Commander, and everything she does is for her people.

Well, almost everything a quiet little voice tells her.

"That's very forward of you Grounder Girl, Lexa." Clarke's voice is soft, and Lexa feels her stomach flip when Clarke traces a line across her jawline.

"I'm not so easy to get into bed green-eyed one," Clarke looks into her eyes and Lexa can see the
seriousness there and regrets her own urgency. She can see pain. Maybe not the same as hers but there is a look of sadness and regret, and Lexa does not want Clarke to feel so sad.

She takes Clarke's hand into her own and gently rubs a thumb across her palm. She tugs her forward towards her, and she watches Clarke's blue eyes widen as she bends forward to move against the tip of Clarke's nose.

She knows she is behaving foolishly. The Commander does not do this. It is a good thing that the Commander is not here she thinks before interlocking Clarke's fingers with her own.

Lexa looks into Clarke's eyes and acknowledges the emotions she saw in them as she tightens her hold. Blinking a few times before releasing the hand and tracing a line along Clarke's own jawline. She can feel Clarke trembling beneath her fingertips, and she does not push her any further. After all, the girl has saved the life of the Commander of the Twelve Clans.

She smiles softly.

"Moho, Clarke."

The words are gentle, and she can tell that Clarke can see what she means when she smiles back at her.

"It's my pleasure, Lexa."

And Lexa feels a strong sense of something fill her. Clarke may break her heart if she's not careful.

* * *

Lexa had dozed off again, but already she can feel herself getting better. She thinks she's been in this place with Clarke for almost three days now. The pain that sliced across her stomach is nearly nonexistent and compared to other injuries she's had over her life, it's barely anything.

She must have bled a lot because she is so much weaker than she had expected. When she wakes up, she finds that she's pushed the covers off the top part of her body and has pulled off her sleep shirt. She's never liked to be constrained at night when she rests. Years of having to be ready for battle has taught her to get used to it but whenever she has a chance to remove her clothes; she will.

It must have only just happened though because she hears a crash in the bunker and looks up to the source of the noise, and sees Clarke desperately trying to not to look over at her.

"Jesus Christ, Lexa. Do you have to be so - ?" Lexa cannot hear the last word which is muffled as Clarke desperately looks away from Lexa's very naked torso.

The tension between them has been intriguing. Soft looks and sharp inhalations of breath as Lexa tries not to overstep the boundaries Clarke has silently set up.

She watches as Clarke moves to pick up the things she's just dropped. It looks like another one of the meals she's tried to prepare that has been stored, which is now a mess on the floor. Lexa sits up and attempts to move her legs over the side of the bed to go and help Clarke. She feels the wave of dizziness move through her head before black spots appear before her eyes.

She takes a few deep breaths and is grateful that Clarke hasn't seen her yet. Gingerly, she moves her feet to the floor and feels her weight. She can tell she's weaker. It's a combination of whatever Clarke has put into her and not having used her body for a few days. She needs to stretch and move.
She is conscious that she's only got some very short undershorts on. Her torso is very much bare. She moves a few steps tentatively towards Clarke. There's not much between the bed she's been lying in and the area that Clarke is preparing food. It's another small area made up of metals and wood, cleverly hinged things that disappear at the press of a button. There's another space with some soft chairs and a large blank panel that is recessed into the wall that she has to navigate before she gets to Clarke who is now only a few feet away.

It's when Lexa is merely a few feet from Clarke that the girl looks up and sees that Lexa's leaning heavily against the chairs in between her and Clarke.

"Lexa, no!"

Clarke's voice sounds as if they are inside water and Clarke is a long way away. She can hear Clarke moving towards her and then feels two powerful arms hold her up. Steady hands grasp the side of her left arm and pulls it over a shoulder. Clarke is a little shorter than her but not enough to be of consequence as she moves under Lexa's shoulder to keep her upright as they walk back to the bed area.

Lexa tries to contain her gasp of relief at the feel of the warm sheets and blankets beneath her. Clarke's voice is right near her ear as she gently moved her back into bed.

"I've got you, Lexa. Trust me. I won't let you go. I promise."

Her words are sweet, and it breaks something inside Lexa. She turns her head away before Clarke can see her reaction. She does not want Clarke to notice that she understands what the girl has just said.

She feels tears of shame burning her eyes when she hears herself hiccupping back a sob. Those words. They're not true. No-one has ever had her. She's been lost for so long, and she does not believe for a moment that Clarke will not leave her like Costia did.

She cannot stop her trembling and hates how she is unable to stop this vulnerability, from exposing her emotions like this to a complete stranger. To Skaikru. To the enemy. She breathes in deeply trying to quell the ongoing feelings that are betraying her absolutely.

"Lexa, please don't."

She senses Clarke sliding into the bed with her. The softness of skin as legs entangle as she pulls Lexa into her and all Lexa can feel is the care of this strange Skai girl who took a risk and dragged an injured, bleeding Grounder to safety. She pulled the enemy to safety. She was foolish. Foolish to trust.

And Lexa doesn't know if she means herself or Clarke at this point as she feels another part of the wall that she'd constructed over the years slowly disintegrate.

Soft lips move across her forehead and strong fingers push through Lexa's hair, stroking her scalp and soothing her.

"Oh Lexa, I don't know what's going in your head right now, but I wish you understood my words. I don't know who you are, but you feel - special. I want to help you. I want to help you get out of here before my people come."

She hears Clarke's sigh against her hair, a soft puff that blows the soft curls from her forehead.

"And they will come, Lexa."
Lexa feels soft fingertips move again. Across her face and down her neck. She trembles as the feeling of this beautiful, young girl shifting across her own skin sends jolts of need through her.

If she weren't so weak, she would have flipped Clarke over so that she was beneath her, and Lexa would take her slowly as the day darkened and the rain continued to pound on the ceiling outside. A part of her knows she's delirious. That this isn't her but a weakened version. A result of the blood loss and the alien tech that moves through her body. The only thing it has not done is dull her senses which seem to be reeling with need for Clarke.

She laughs softly through her tears. Clarke. Beautiful, Doctor Clarke, who has swept her half-naked body into her arms and continues to try and soothe her. Clarke has no idea who she is holding, and the world of hate and pain at her doorstep.

"Klark."

"Shh. Sleep Lexa. I swear. I promise I'll be here when you wake up. I promise."

And Lexa feels tiredness and a strange sexual lethargy move through her. The last thing she sees are two beautiful blue eyes staring at her as she continues to whisper Clarke's name over and over again.

* * *

Clarke groans softly and awakens to a gentle movement. She feels soft skin between her legs and groans again when she feels long fingers moving across her ass, kneading her flesh so softly and pulling at her.

Her eyes flutter open and look at the woman she's sharing a bed with. Lexa's features are gentle in the muted light of the bunker. Clarke had turned them low just before she slid into bed next to her patient.

She'd needed sleep desperately, but she remembered her promise to Lexa that she would be there when the woman woke up. A vow she's semi regretting now as she watches the young grounder girl's eyes flash from side to side, evidently still in a deep sleep.

"Klark." Lexa's voice in her sleep is husky and low, and Clarke feels her stomach flip. Lexa's thigh is positioned just between her legs. She's not quite touching Clarke there, but she's pretty close, and the gentle sway of her hips is making it impossible not to feel.

Clarke bites back a moan when Lexa calls Clarke's name again and says soft words in her language. She doesn't know if she's migrated towards Lexa in sleep or whether her young patient has pulled her towards her in what is surely an erotic dream.

She can't help the sudden tightening at the apex of her legs as Lexa moves her knee and Clarke is now definitely pulled tight against a strong, bare muscled leg.

"Lexa," she whispers and tries to wake Lexa from any further movement. She feels her own rising desire but feels a strange dissonance as Lexa is still asleep. She doesn't want to do anything with the woman while she's unconscious.

"Mm, Klarker. Meizen."

Clarke watches as Lexa smiles in her sleep. It's unbelievably sexy, and she really wants Lexa to wake now.
"Lexa. Wake up." She moves her fingertips to Lexa's face and gently traces along high cheekbones. She can't help the groan when Lexa moves her hand strongly against Clarke's backside, pulling her closer onto Lexa's thigh.

"Jok, Klarke." Lexa's voice is guttural and low, and it's doing all sort of crazy things to Clarke who definitely needs to do something besides ride the beautiful Grounder girl's leg.

"Please, please Lexa. Wake up before I do something really wrong when you're asleep."

Lexa smiles and slowly opens her eyes.

"I am not sleeping, Klarke."

Lexa's smile is lazy and soft, and it's obvious to Clarke that she is still partly dreaming. And God, her voice and the way she's looking at her. If Clarke didn't know better, she'd swear the girl knew what Clarke had just whispered desperately.

"Klark, I want you. I can see how serious you are but fuck, Klark. You are like me. I see how much you care about everything. I see the hurt in you. And fuck, I want to fuck you senseless."

Clarke listens to Lexa's words and can see that she's trying to say something crucial. It's clear in the way her eyes have darkened, and all traces of sleep have left her. Clarke gasps when she feels those fingers that have been solidly placed against her backside move slowly upwards until they're at the edge of Clarke's flimsy cotton top.

She feels her back arch instinctively and watches as Lexa's green eyes get a dangerous glint in them in response to Clarke's reaction.

"Lexa, do you have any idea what you're doing to me?" Clarke asks desperately, she's conscious of how wet she is. She's also aware that Lexa can feel this through the fabric of Clarke's underwear.

She whimpers in a hushed breath when she watches Lexa swallow, her throat moving slowly as if it's dry and the movement of muscles working in her throat is so unbearably erotic. They watch each other; eyes straining to look at every tiny shift of body, of skin and shadows.

Lexa's eyes are full of inquiry. Seeking consent. Clarke can imagine what her own eyes show. Desire, need and a little bit of fear. She's never slept with a woman but God, it feels so soft, so perfectly aligned and she can't stop her eyes from drifting down to Lexa's lips which have deepened to a lush red.

Clarke knows that her breathing has become erratic, that the rise and fall of her breast now match that of Lexa's. The ache between her legs has become intense, and Lexa has shifted her leg away from contact. She's trying to be honorable, but it's driving Clarke over the edge.

They have been circling each other since Lexa became more awake. Clarke remembers moments and the sudden flush of heat she would feel when Lexa inadvertently brushed against her in the small confines of the bunker. The way she'd focus on Lexa's mouth when she ate the food she was able to prepare. Or the many times Clarke had caught curious green eyes staring at the backs of Clarke's legs.

She knows Lexa is attracted to her but that she never pushes Clarke after that first morning where Clarke had told her about Finn. Her discomfort about the bunker.

Clarke has learned a few words listening to Lexa. She's learned please and thank you as Lexa often says these things when she needed something like water, and Clarke's learned the responses Lexa
gives when she receives something. So she tries to say what she thinks is the right word for what she wants.

"Beja, Lexa. Please."

Clarke's voice breaks and the aching she feels inside is eloquently expressed with her soft explosions of breath. Lexa groans at the sound of Clarke's need, her own voice escaping in a soft, tortured cry at Clarke's use of her language.

Clarke moves her own hand and slides beneath Lexa's shirt as the woman pulls her back onto her leg and provokes Clarke deliberately; her hips thrusting so that Clarke feels the impact each time she drags her skin slowly between the heat there.

"Oh my -" Clarke can feel her eyes rolling back in her head as her body is filled with so many strong emotions. Desire, dark and sharp between her legs. Want, so heavy it shuts all thoughts from her mind, and Clarke Griffin finds herself swearing and speaking Lexa's name in the most dangerous voice she's ever heard come from her mouth.

"God, Lexa! I want you to -"

She can't speak as she watches how Lexa looks at her as she slowly moves against Clarke. It's intentional and the seductiveness of her body moving against hers is intoxicating.

Their breathing is harsh and loud, and the scent of their sex is subtle beneath the soft material that covers their bodies. Lexa groans and whispers Clarke's name as she brushes against her lips. She wants more, Clarke can feel it in the way her mouth move against hers. Soft. Slow. Insistent. Clarke surrenders and opens her mouth to let Lexa in. She feels the resonance of Lexa's groan when their tongues touch; tasting each other for the first time.

Clarke can't believe this. The sound of rain is still steady outside, and it creates an unbearably soft cocoon for them. She feels herself yielding.

The desire that has sprung up between them since the moment Lexa opened her eyes has been creating tension inside her, and now every sensation in her body seems electrified. Fingers trace against the skin of her lower back, and she feels a tentative touch slide beneath the top of her underwear.

"Klark, are you sure?"

There is a tenderness to Lexa's voice, and the strange words that she speaks feels like she's checking in, especially with the way she strokes Clarke's cheek.

This isn't the same as the other times Clarke has had sex. She was intimate with Finn who was careful, but he'd never checked in with her emotionally like this. With him, it had been physical, and she'd been drawn to him at the time, but the connection was nothing like this where she feels every part of her responding to every interaction with Lexa.

From the sound of her voice, the rasp of her breath as it skimmed past her ear or across her mouth, the intensity of that green gaze as she looked at Clarke, her eyes lingering on every part of her body, the way her skin smelt and felt along her own body. It was heady.

And exhilarating.

With Lexa, the unfamiliar Grounder words and the soft way she touches her, and the way she looks - really looks into Clarke's eyes; makes her feel honored. It makes Clarke's heart hammer in her
chest, and she knows what Lexa is asking of her. Recognises it in the way she's looking at Clarke. She's beautiful in her fierceness but tonight, Lexa is all soft angles and luscious, and Clarke just wants to devour her, drink from her and see what the night brings.

Clarke is also desperately aware that Lexa's wound is right there between them, but the girl is unbelievably resilient. Her wound had healed a lot quicker than Clarke had expected, but the physician in Clarke doesn't want to re-injure her, and she's pretty sure any strenuous sexual activity is going to do more harm than good. And yet her body feels like it's on fire.

And the physician in her currently doesn't give a damn.

The consent that Lexa had been requesting with her words, her gentle but damn hot and seriously sexual looks destroyed any uncertainty left in Clarke. She realizes that as all rational thought has left her when Lexa moves her mouth and slides it down to Clarke's neck and begins to align the softest lips against her skin where her pulse is thrumming erratically.

"Sha," Clarke whispers and Lexa groans and it is evident that she likes the sound of Clarke using Lexa's language. She knows they are simple words, but they unequivocally communicate what she wants.

Clarke slides against the muscled thigh between her legs. She can feel the heat and slickness there increasing. A part of her is embarrassed at how aroused she is, but the part that has become utterly instinctual tells her to rip off her clothes and feel skin on skin contact. She whimpers, a tiny little cry from the back of her throat when Lexa's fingers glide across her flesh and moves to the front of her and brushes against a nipple.

Green eyes are locked onto Clarke's as fingers move carefully and gently cups her breasts. Clarke inhales, and the scent of Lexa's breath is sweet and warm, but Clarke resists the need to dive into her mouth again, and instead, she continues their prolonged stare as Lexa moves her hands over Clarke's skin. She sees something in those deep green eyes and the slight parting of Lexa's mouth as she squeezes her breast before sliding her fingertips to pinch an already erect nipple.

Clarke responds immediately. Her back curves sinuously and she feels her head move as her eyes close tight. All she can feel is her body's complete response to Lexa. It is absolute, and she jerks against Lexa's thigh.

"Klark," Lexa voice is fierce when she speaks against Clarke's ear. Clarke shakes involuntarily as the sound sends shivers down her body. Clarke doesn't need more words. She knows what Lexa wants, and she slowly opens her eyes again to continue their intimacy through the most exquisitely erotic gaze she's experienced. Ever.

Clarke lets out a slow breath and speaks soft words, gentle words. Words from another time, another world. When the world had different cities alight with electricity, and people passing through communicated in different languages. Not this tight world of Grounders and Sky People. Of us and them.

"You are magnificent, Lexa. Your eyes hold the world and it's breathtaking." She whispers the words in French and the cadence is soft. Lyrical and she watches in a quiet delight when Lexa moans against her in response. She knows that the other woman doesn't understand the words but the way Clarke is speaking them is enough for both of them to respond in their own ways.

Lexa groans quietly when Clarke moves against her leg and then shifts so that she can trace Lexa's collarbones with her tongue. Clarke raises her arm and pulls Lexa closer to her. The bunker is filled with the sound of their soft cries and whispered words.
Clarke can feel her stomach clench when she hears the sound her actions are causing in Lexa. Low and guttural and her name murmured in urgent, sharp gasps of need. Clarke moves against her, and now it's her turn to deliberately provoke as she presses against Lexa's core.

She's scared if she keeps moving she's going to come on Lexa's leg. She doesn't want to do that, but Lexa's inexorable movements are winding her tighter and tighter. She can feel everything in her there becoming the focal point of everything.

Lexa cries out and moves her mouth to Clarke's and kisses her deeply and it's just too much. Clarke feels everything transform as the muscles at her center begin to convulse, and Lexa is swallowing her cries, sucking on her tongue and pushing her own tongue deep into Clarke's mouth. It's too much and she comes undone in a spectacular wail that resounds in the confines of the bunker.

She can feel Lexa move once, then twice against her and then she's crying out Clarke's name in that way she does, and Clarke can feel the contraction of Lexa's core against her. Her stomach flips over and over in a rhythm that matches Lexa's short cries.

They both lay there. Sweat has made Clarke's hair stick to her forehead and the sides of her face. Lexa's eyes are closed, but there's a soft self-satisfied smile on her face. Clarke wants to kiss the smile, but she's too tired to move. She shifts until her head is nestled against Lexa's neck.

"I -" She doesn't know what to say. She wants to tell Lexa how she's never felt anything so absolute before. How her body has never behaved like this. But the words are lost on a lazy tongue whose mind is still stuck on the orgasm that just exploded through her body.

"Shh, Klarke. Go to sleep." Lexa's voice is tired, and Clarke watches as her eyelids lower, and within seconds, Clarke follows Lexa into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I look forward to any constructive criticism. Are my paragraphs too long, exposition too lengthy?
Cheers.
UTC
Lexa can feel a delicious ache move through her body as she stretches out beneath the soft linens of the bed. She groans low in the back of her throat as her legs and toes extend downwards. She can feel a dull heavy heat between her legs. She'd fallen asleep after they'd both come. Her eyes fly open when memories slowly come back to her. The night. The dream she had of her and Clarke's bodies erotically intertwined. The physicality of that imagery had made itself known with her moving slowly against Clarke in her sleep. She had shifted from a deep sleep to consciousness with the sounds of Clarke's desperate voice begging her to waken.

She stretched across to feel along the bed. The sheets were cool to her touch. Clarke. She raised herself up in the bed and looked around the room. No Clarke. She could feel her heart begin to beat harder.

Had the girl run away because of the physical intimacy? Had she transgressed some cultural normality of the Skaikru with her body last night?

Lexa could feel that her body moved more freely today and the dizziness of the previous day had disappeared. She walked slowly across the floor looking from left to right and up and down. Her eyes search in the semi-darkness for any sign of Clarke. In the background, she heard the sudden sound of water moving fast. Not from outside. The rain was still steady and soft against the roof of the bunker.

She looked up as a door slid to the left and light slipped into the room with Clarke silhouetted in the door frame. From the look on Clarke's face, Lexa could see - shame, and this disturbed her. She had not exerted her strength over Clarke. What they had done had been something both had desired. So, why did Clarke shy away from her with eyes downcast and bright red cheeks?

"Klark?" Lexa said softly. She wondered if she should stop this farce of not understanding Gona. She did not wish to hurt Clarke.

"Hey," Clarke answered her and smiled softly, "do you need the bathroom?"

Bathroom. Lexa remembers Clarke showing her this room on the first day when she was in a black haze of pain and could barely walk. Clarke had helped her stagger to a small closed off room and seated her where she could relieve herself. She remembers Clarke’s bright red face. They had done
this a few times before Lexa was able to go in on her own, and no longer needing Clarke to assist her with the amenities. She remembers the water that came from silver spouts and the glassed-in cubicle in the corner. Clarke had mentioned the shower, but she knew of these. They had similar in the tower at Polis. She remembers thinking that she'd like to show Clarke Polis.

Lexa nods, and Clarke steps aside to let her through, but Lexa's hand flashes towards Clarke and gently cups her face.

"Are you ok, Klark?"

She watches as dark lashes flutter against soft cheeks. Those beautiful blue eyes are hidden as Clarke shuts them and moves her head away, but Lexa is insistent.

"Hey! What is it?" Her words are gentle, her fingertips softly trace Clarke's jawline as she tries to coax her into looking into Lexa's eyes. She knows Clarke is picking up words. They've exchanged them softly between each other. Lexa is quietly thrilled each time Clarke uses a new word she's learning. She can see that Clarke understands her question.

"It's nothing. I'm ok. Go on. I'll meet you back in the - " And again, there it is. A deep blush that suffuses Clarke's face.

Lexa bites her lip. She could easily resolve this by talking to Clarke in the warrior's tongue but she cannot. If she does, she compromises so many things as she is unable to see all the different variables.

She's learned a lot about the Skaikru already with Clarke. She already knew where they were located. Now she knows that they have a fence that will kill her people instantly should they touch it. Clarke uses a lot of language that Lexa does not quite understand. She knows it has to do with Tek. Tek that the Mountain Men also have.

She also knows that if she speaks in Gona to Clarke now, whatever tenuous connection they had made in the evening before will be shattered completely. She realizes that in the intensely short time that they have spent together, she's made a connection with Clarke that she has not done in a long time.

She's had sex in the past. She's had many nighttime explosions that burst the tension and adrenaline of battle, but she's never had this soft coming together where they are are exploring each other with a lot of sign language on both sides, and an intimacy that goes beyond their words.

She had never allowed herself this level of closeness. Not since Costia. And she'd shuttered her heart from that moment in time, desperate to never feel that kind of pain ever again.

It had been her one rule. Express herself sexually but never ever feel for anyone ever again. Here she was. Utterly giving a part of herself away. She knows she's rationalizing when she justifies her behavior by thinking they'll never meet again. And that makes it permissible.

Lexa stroked Clarke's face and moved to kiss the girl's forehead. She ventured some simple words in English and patted Clarke gently on the shoulder as she shifted away from her.

"Ok. All good, Clarke. Ok?"

Dark blue eyes looked up at her and glittered as tears stood dangerously on the edges of her eyelashes. She watched Clarke's mouth tremble and wondered what in jok's name was causing the girl so much distress.

"Klark, beja. I don't want you to be so sad. Please wait for me in the bed. I will come and talk to
you. Please, Klark."

Her words in Trigadesleng seemed to go over Clarke's head, and she studies how Clarke holds herself so still as if she was waiting to be hurt. Lexa could feel her lips thinning with anger. She did not understand what was happening in Clarke's mind, but the sorrow in her gaze was enough to tell Lexa that Clarke had been hurt. Maybe recently.

"Kom, Klark." She grabbed Clarke around the waist and walked her back to the bed. She motioned for her to sit and then indicated that she would go back to the bathroom as she was now getting a little desperate.

Clarke had nodded weakly and then smiled softly.

"Go, go. I wouldn't want you to have an accident."

Lexa looked at her in complete bafflement. Why would she have an accident unless Clarke meant that she was worried that she'd hurt her injury again? She looked down at the bandage on her stomach and then back up at Clarke.

Clarke burst out into soft laughter. "Not that kind of accident. I meant that you- uh, you know." Lexa watched as Clarke's face reddened again.


It did not take her too long with her morning release, but Lexa was fascinated by the bathroom. Lexa knew that she needed to get back to Clarke to find out what was going on, so she curbed the curiosity that filled her.

As she approached Clarke, Lexa noticed again how her body felt a lot better than the previous days. The muscles in her abdomen were no longer tight and painful with each step. Her legs felt stronger, and she knew she was close to leaving this place as she was almost recovered. She would have to do less for a few weeks, but she'd also need to strengthen everything. She thought of Aden and the other Naitblida, and their training sessions. Maybe she could join them with Titus. It would not do for the Commander to be indefinitely out of commission.

Clarke had not returned to the bed. Instead, Lexa found her sitting in one of the soft chairs nearby. She had paper and drawing tools which she was using to sketch lazily what was around her. Lexa's eyes widened at the luxury. Paper was only used for her maps as it was so scarce. Some clans had learned the skill to pulp and remake paper, but they took a long time to create and were used with care. Broadleaf clan had made bigger steps in the last few years and she now had packages of paper but it was unusual, and she was the Commander.

"Klark," she deliberately kept her voice soft and gentle. This was no time for Clarke to see the face of the Commander, a part of her persona that Clarke had yet to see.

Blue eyes looked up from her drawing and Lexa could see the shyness still there, a reticence that was perplexing to Lexa. Right about now, she would typically be going for an early morning round of sex, but Clarke's behavior has pushed all thoughts of that from her head. Mostly.

She could not help her eyes tracing the curves beneath the thin shirt Clarke was wearing. She had changed into a different one. It was a deep blue that made the color of Clarke's eyes seem even more intense. She watched as those eyes darkened and Clarke's mouth tightened as she let out a long breath before looking back at Lexa with a very determined seriousness to her gaze.
"I'm sorry, Lexa." Clarke sighed again in slight exasperation with the language difficulties.

"I don't mean to be so distant this morning. I - I don't regret last night at all, and I know that this must seem so confusing."

Clarke closed her eyes before determinedly continuing on. Lexa wondered why she persevered if Clarke thought she could not understand much of what she was saying. As if she could read Lexa's mind, Clarke's next words helped her understand.

"I know you don't understand me. I get it. I wish you did because - Oh God. This is just so ridiculously embarrassing, but I need to tell you. Even though you have no idea. Ok. Enough Clarke, just say it."

Lexa looked on with wide eyes as Clarke rambled almost incoherently. Clarke noticed her stare and mistook it for incomprehension. On many levels, it was as Lexa had no idea where any of this was coming from.

For her, they'd enjoyed physical pleasure, and it was an enjoyable release, one that she'd like to repeat. Clarke was beautiful, and her body was a delight that she would most certainly want to dive into again. She blinked as Clarke continued, snapping her out of her sexual imaginings.

"I had sex in here. God, with Finn." Clarke rolled her eyes at herself and looked away from Lexa as she couldn't maintain eye contact as shame filled her mind again.

"I'm sorry, Lexa. I don't do this kind of thing. I'm not a virgin or prudish. I've had sex. It was just - I thought it was special. I thought that it meant something you know?"

Clarke looked at her as if she expected Lexa to answer her. It took all of Lexa's senses to ensure that she only smiled at Clarke encouragingly instead of nodding her assent. She did not think that Clarke would notice in her current state, but she wasn't going to risk it.

"I sound ridiculous," Clarke smiled through tears that threatened to tumble again.

"I swear, Lexa, I'm usually a lot more mature than this, but so many things happened when we hit the ground. We burned through the damn atmosphere and almost died, and then we didn't. And then you guys - Grounders, decided that you wanted us all dead. And I didn't know why."

Clarke's voice held all the rage and confusion of that time. The frustration. Lexa knelt before Clarke in her chair and moved her hands to cover Clarke's knees.

"Klark, it really is ok. Please, you don't have to explain anything to me." Lexa tries with her eyes and her body to translate the meaning of her Trigadesleng words.

She knows that Clarke is struggling hard with something and she wants to be able to talk to her in English. In Gona, but she can't. Not yet. And assuredly not right now.

Clarke's smile is a little watery at the words of comfort that she partly understands. She gets the intent and reaches down to take Lexa's hands into her own.

"You're very sweet. I can't believe you're some kind of warrior. You have to be with those - " Clarke's eyes inadvertently dart to Lexa's stomach and the hard planes of her abdominals. Lexa smiles and tries hard not to show off by flexing those muscles and watches with interest as Clarke swallows hard before continuing.

"I slept with someone here. I had sex with him right on that floor behind you."
Lexa tries hard not to stiffen and look behind her as Clarke's eyes drift to the floor behind Lexa.

"He wasn't the first you know, but he was special. I mean - God. The things we had to do. The people we killed. Your people. My friends. I watched people I grew up with on the Ark die. Die horribly and never in a way that I could have imagined, Lexa. This world, which I had dreamed of for so long and so much. It was more than I imagined. So much more. It's harder. I can't believe how hard it is to just survive here." Clarke's shoulders dropped and she breathed out slowly before turning her eyes back to Lexa's.

"We had been through a lot. He kept me sane. He grounded me." Clarke laughed bitterly at the word she used. "He charmed me when I needed to keep my head on straight and work things out. To stay safe as we hoped that the rest of the Ark would come down. We waited and waited, but so many things happened. I couldn't save everyone, and one day, we ran to escape this gas stuff."

Lexa's body stiffened, but she forced herself to continue to breathe normally. The Mountain Men. They'd attacked Clarke's people too.

"Well, we stumbled on this bunker just as the gas almost caught up to us. Behind us were friends of mine. We watched them try and get to us, but they - they didn't make it. It was all too much. I was frightened, and just so many things had happened. We were both wound up tight, and I knew he liked me. I tried not to - I tried not to have feelings you know." Clarke's voice had lowered, and Lexa moved forward to hear the whispered words.

"He made me laugh. He made me forget. I wanted to forget just for a bit if you can understand. Last night with you," Clarke looked up into Lexa's eyes and Lexa could feel her stomach flutter again. She wasn't meant to be feeling this, but those eyes seemed to look right inside her mind, which she really should not be allowing.

"You," Clarke's voice was gravelly, cracking a little with emotion, "I know there's been this tension between us. Yes, I felt it. I can tell that the words you say to me - that you were charming me too. I don't want to be charmed, Lexa. This world is too much for charm. I need it to be real on some kind of level. I know you, and I," Clarke gestured between them, a little hand movement that showed the intimacy of two, "that we have something happening between us. Chemistry. I don't know what it is. Maybe I shouldn't because, well because to all intents and purposes, Lexa; you're my patient."

Lexa watched as Clarke's brow furrowed and if Lexa has been looking, she would have seen the identical furrows on her own forehead.

"Not that means anything. Nothing seems to have context anymore, Lexa. That's what I mean. What I did with you felt wonderful. And you and I, after we leave here we'll probably never see each other again."

Clarke took a big gulp of some of the water she had sitting on the table. She slid it over to Lexa who quietly took a sip.

"Nothing makes sense to me anymore, Lexa. The Earth is one big, fat, frightening elixir of fear, heartache and limited choices. It's nothing that I had expected. It's less because it makes me feel like every choice I make is going to end up killing me. It's more because every breath I take isn't recycled, and I can smell life. It's unbelievable. I want to live here. I don't want to have to worry that someone is going to kill me at every turn."

Clarke looked up into Lexa's eyes. Lexa who was holding so tight to her words. Every part of her wanted to move forward and take Clarke into her arms. She was desperate to speak to her, comfort her.
There were days when the mantle of the Commander seemed so unbearably heavy. This moment; more so than many.

She reached over to Clarke and took her hand gently into her own. She looked at the delicate hairs of gold that dusted Clarke's forearms, the paleness of her skin that seemed like it had never seen the light. She wondered what Clarke had seen up in the skies. What had it been like? And she did not want Clarke to expose her personal truths anymore, thinking that Lexa did not understand her words. This was going into the realms of unfairness and Lexa hated it.

Before Clarke could say, more Lexa pulled her up to her feet and pulled her in close to her own body. Clarke looked up with wide eyes.

"God. You don't understand any word of what I'm saying. You don't understand how hard it has been here. How I just want some peace. I mean, that's what I was doing when I found you, Lexa. I was trying to find peace. Away from the Ark. Away from my mother. Away from damn Finn!"

Lexa flinched at the anger in Clarke's voice when she said the last part. Quietly, she moved her hand up to Clarke's forehead, but Clarke jerked her head away abruptly.

"Lexa." It was a quiet plea. "Klark Kom Skaikru," Lexa whispered and watched as Clarke swallowed hard. "You have lived up in the skies. You deserve to live on the Earth too. You need to trust yourself, Klark. I will help you ease into this world if you let me."

Lexa's words are unbearably soft, and she can see that some of her intent is coming through to Clarke who just looks at her with eyes filling with tears. It's not the words that she doesn't understand that moves Clarke. It's the kindness of the young warrior's eyes. The empathy in her soft smile. Clarke can see that it is no longer the use of charm, instead, it was something far more real.

Lexa feels more than that now, and she wants to help ease some of Clarke's suffering. There is something about Clarke that makes her heart ache. They both have an opportunity here.

After they leave the bunker, they will go back to their own lives. A life where Lexa may have to order to kill Clarke's clan. This is not a thing that she can think about now. Right now, she wants to embrace the girl before her, pull her back down into soft, warm coverings and taste of one another. Slowly.

Clarke steps closer into Lexa and allows herself to be wrapped in two strong arms - arms that gently pull her towards the bed. Arms that soften the stumble and tumble when the backs of Clarke's knees hit the mattress, and they fall onto it.

The rain is still steady outside, and through its noise, Lexa can hear the sounds of birdsong. In the bunker, she can only hear Clarke's soft exhalation as Lexa lands on top of her with her arms going out to break her fall so that she doesn't crush Clarke beneath. They both become exquisitely still when Clarke lets out a soft moan.

Green eyes look down at the figure below her. The Skaikru are not muscled as her people are, but Clarke has her own intrinsic beauty, the rounded curves of her breasts are straining against the soft shirt she's wearing, and Lexa wants to taste them beneath her tongue, which must be reflected in her gaze as Clarke responds with a soft groan.

"Lexa, you don't say a lot, but when you do, I can feel your words inside me. I hope that one day I'll understand you. I hope that one day you're not coming to kill my people or me. For now, we've got
this moment. Three months ago I was in here with someone I thought I could trust. I'm in here now with you, and I am pretty God damn sure that I'm not meant to trust you."

Clarke laughed before pulling Lexa forward with a hand firmly placed on the back of her neck.

"God. You are so beautiful, Lexa. Those green eyes. I could fall in them, and it would take me a while to pull myself back out."

Lexa smiled. She figured that the tone of Clarke's voice was enough for Lexa to assume that she was saying good things. And with that in mind, she bent forward until all she could see were lush lips starting to part.

Clarke's breath was a mixture of the water she had just drunk and warmth. Lexa could feel her senses flaring as she took in all of Clarke. The feel of her skin. The smell of her hair as Lexa moved her fingers through it. The sound she made when Lexa unequivocally made her intentions clear as she moved between Clarke's legs and undulated against her.

"Oh my God, Lexa."

Lexa loved how Clarke said her name. How she drew out the last part so it sounded like a song. "Mm," Lexa murmured against Clarke's ear, "Klark, I need you. I want to touch all of you. Fuck you senseless. Taste you. Swallow you. I want this now."

Clarke groaned at the words that were being growled in her ear. She had a pretty good idea what was being said and responded in the only way she could. She lifted her legs and wrapped Lexa's hips with them and pulled her onto her core. They both cried out at the abrupt contact.

"Lexa!" Clarke moved beneath Lexa and thrust upwards making Lexa grunt with her own need. The small tug of pain in her abdomen reminded Lexa of her injury, but she didn't pay it any heed. Lexa moved with Clarke and stared into blue eyes as she began to create unbearably tense friction between their two bodies. Her stare reflected that need, hunger in the way her lips parted and her breath came out in sharp, steady shocks.

"Fuck, fuck, Klark. I want to devour you. Fuck." Lexa's words spilled from her mouth in a litany of expletives and soft groans.

Clarke smiled as she hummed softly against Lexa's mouth her words tumbling into Lexa's increased panting.
"I'm going to guess from that repetition. Jok means fuck?"

Clarke almost repeats the word in a loud cry as Lexa moved against her, slick with need, and building desire up again the to do so much more than what they had done the previous night.

"We're never going to see each other again. I can lose myself to you. For last night. For now. For whatever we have. And once this is done then that's it, I'll never see you again, and so this is ok. Isn't it?"

Clarke whispered the words hurriedly as Lexa stood up, moved away from the bed and looked down at Clarke. Slowly, Lexa began to remove her clothing by sliding her underwear from her body. Standing naked before Clarke she stood before her proudly and watched as Clarke stared at her with her mouth slightly open in shock.

She liked the reaction she saw in Clarke. The heat in her blue eyes. Lexa quirked an eyebrow at Clarke as if to say, now you.

Lexa bent forward, her fingertips tracing Clarke's skin from her knees then up towards Clarke's
shorts which she slowly slid from Clarke's body. Lexa groaned as she looked down at the woman before her. A blonde vee of curls that were darkened with moisture. Lexa could feel her breath coming in short, sharp gasps. Her stomach flipped at seeing Clarke's sex. She groaned and could feel her mouth watering, wanting to taste Clarke, now.

Impatiently, she moved and slid the shirt from Clarke's body. It was soft to touch and nothing like the weighty materials that she used daily to go out into the world. The Commander's outfit was made up of layered armor. Undershirts, hardened cottoned, leather and vambraces of polished materials. Things that would protect her from her enemies. From arrows. From blades, but not from the metal of bullets.

And here they were. Both of them were armed with nothing but their skin.

Clarke's blue eyes were looking at her with uncertainty as Lexa looked down at her body lying on the sheets.

Clarke was exquisite. Long legs that were like alabaster and smooth, tapering up towards hips that flared in a curvaceous way, her flat abdomen that narrowed towards two very firm, well-rounded breasts. Lexa let out a sigh before murmuring words of need at Clarke who didn't understand the exact meaning but certainly got the gist of it.

"Jok, Klark!"  Lexa's voice broke as she joined Clarke on the bed, their bodies finally sliding against each other.

Lexa felt warmth and silk around her and beneath her before bending her head to kiss Clarke deeply. She tasted Clarke's tongue against hers, the heady heat of it as it plunged into her own mouth as if Clarke could not get enough of Lexa.

She felt Clarke's hands move over her back, fingers digging deep into her shoulders as she tried to pull Lexa closer in towards her. Lexa glided over Clarke's body using her own to create one long line of friction. Skin on skin. Belly to belly.

They groaned at the softness of their breasts pushing against each other. She heard Clarke's quiet moan as Lexa nipped at her flesh, full lips moving across the softest skin.

Clarke was nothing like anyone she'd slept with before. For a hundred reasons. She is not from the ground, and her body is not littered with scars like hers is. She's noticed that Clarke's fingertips have callouses on the left hand. Not from a sword but certainly from holding and pressing something regularly. She shivers when Clarke uses it to stroke the underside of her breasts.

They both know that they're committing something that cannot be undone. They know it, and yet their bodies continue to respond, and Lexa's mind is shuttered from all thought except the scent of Clarke which is driving her insane, and she wants her. Now.

It's inexplicable. She's known her for less than a week, and she's exposed herself in the worst possible way, opening up a part of her heart that has not known light since Costia.

Costia who is not here.

She pushes Clarke's knees apart, and she lifts a long leg over her shoulder before sliding her hand against Clarke's center. Clarke reacts by arching up against her, begging for more. Lexa moves her mouth slowly across skin that is stretched and aching, reddening as she slides across each plane before getting closer to Clarke's opening. She can smell her rich, earthy scent in waves as they intermingle with her own. The room in the bunker is fast becoming enriched with their essence.
"Lexa, please." Clarke's voice is so tight, her throat is stretched back so that Lexa can only see her jawline and the tip of her nose as she moves further down Clarke's body until she's there.

Her eyes flutter, blinking rapidly at the flushed crimson of Clarke's sex which is soft, a decadent confluence of lines and smells that pulls Lexa closer to her. She drowns as her senses are invaded. The tip of her tongues slides through Clarke's wetness, and Lexa groans out Clarke's name over and over as she reels from the taste of Clarke on her lips and tongue.

She pushes in deep, her tongue strong as she wills it to go deeper into the heat of Clarke's body. She watches as Clarke involuntarily jerks from the penetration, her mouth a wide oh of surprise. Fingers curl into Lexa's thick dark curls, and she feels the force of Clarke's hand as she urges Lexa forward.

Lexa slides out of her and covers Clarke with an open-mouthed kiss, sucking and licking all around her entrance and delights in the way Clarke moves and cries out beneath her. Clarke says words to Lexa. Words that tumble and echo in the room as she feels muscles contract and lengthen beneath Lexa's adept tongue.

"Lexa. God, what are you doing to me? I want you to do whatever you want. I am completely at your - ," Clarke whispers the words with such urgency. The words disappearing into a quiet wail.

Lexa's eyes shoot open at Clarke's words that are uttered in a long, low growl of sexual need. Green eyes stare up at deep blue ones.

"I want you to do whatever you want. I want you to take me any way you please," Clarke says as she looks down at Lexa. Her eyes are like midnight.

Lexa almost faints at the words which makes her stomach clench so hard she feels like she's going to blackout. Words she's not meant to understand.

She cries out against Clarke and licks her hard, her tongue flat and wide against a crimson nub which is wet with Clarke's essence and Lexa's ministrations. Clarke almost screams.

They're both so sexually wound up now. Lexa can feel that Clarke has never given this side of herself to anyone. That she's taking a calculated risk based on the fact that they'll never see each other again. And Clarke's absolute acquiescence makes Lexa want to implode.

Clarke begins to wail softly against the pillow when Lexa enters her with long, beautiful fingers. First two which she slides in steadily and pumps in and out of her. And Lexa is ravenous as she continues to consume all of Clarke into her mouth, against her lips, and on her tongue. She pushes Clarke's legs further apart and pushes in three fingers which stretches Clarke, and she watches Clarke as she chokes on her breath; she's desperate for more.

Lexa slams into her hard and Clarke cries out. Again and again. Lexa feels her knuckles bruise along the edges of Clarke's backside. Lexa grunts, and it's almost animalistic, predatory as she wants more of Clarke everywhere. Clarke needs her to give more, and so Lexa pushes back on the leg that's on her shoulder giving her greater access and a better angle to get inside Clarke.

When she pushes four fingers into Clarke and twists them so that she can touch her in that spot she almost explodes herself when Clarke screams out her name begging her to do what she wills upon her body.

Clarke comes undone in the most beautiful way beneath Lexa's strength, and the force of her fingers and the carnality of her tongue tasting and eating from her essence.
Clarke convulses around her fingers hard. She cries out Lexa's name over and over. Lexa slides up Clarke's body and continues to fuck her through her orgasm. By the time she reaches Clarke's mouth to capture it in a deep, languorous kiss; Clarke is holding her tight against her body as she angles herself so that Lexa can fit as much of her hand into Clarke.

Clarke is mesmerizing. No-one has opened up to the Commander like this.

And the Commander wants more.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback, thoughts, responses of any kind, are greatly appreciated.
Chapter Summary

Finn goes in search for Clarke.

Chapter Notes

This is a very short chapter. Mostly to get some of the plot going. (what plot you may well ask!) :-)

He can't believe how the rain has come up from nowhere. Clarke left hours before he was able to get away from the Ark and it was nightfall by the time he could escape.

Raven had wanted to share his quarters, but he'd left at dinner time pleading a headache. He felt guilty when she'd wanted to go to medical to get him something. He'd been abrupt. Almost rude and he knew that Raven knew something was up.

His heart ached for Raven. He loved her. He'd always loved her. Somewhere along the way she became his responsibility. Someone to look after and when she'd fallen for him, he knew it was up to him to make sure she was ok.

Raven was beautiful. Super intelligent. He remembers how she and Jake Griffin would talk about trajectories and physics and ballast. What would hold, what would collapse and at what point. His brain would blink out, and he'd watch her. Fondly.

And it was up to him to make sure that Raven was ok, but he didn't love her the way she loved him. When the Ark came down, and Raven had been so excited to see him, almost toppling him over in her exuberance, he felt a tremor of shock go through him at the realization that he loved her less. Horror. It had chilled him because he wanted Raven away. Away from him, away from here and away from Clarke.

It was almost two days since he'd left the Ark and he hadn't seen traces of Clarke anywhere. She wasn't in any of the places that she was meant to be.

He'd checked along the ridge where he knew a lot of the botanicals were that Lincoln and Clarke would go to harvest for more of the Grounder medicine.

And then the rain had started the night Clarke had gone. That was almost three days ago, and he'd been camping out in the cave that Clarke, Raven, and Octavia had found. They'd fixed it up for emergencies, but when he'd got there it was evident that someone had been there. They'd cleaned up, but most of the food was missing, and the first aid kit was gone.

Maybe some Grounders had found it and ransacked it.
Fucking Grounders.

The rage he felt growing inside of him was frightening. He didn't know why or where it came from. He just knew that if it weren't for them, maybe Clarke and he would be together still and not at war with one another like they were now.

She wouldn't even look him in the eye. She'd always leave the room if he came into it, and it fucking hurt. On one level, Finn knew he was illogical blaming the Grounders for everything going wrong in his life.

The part of him that had been so curious that there were people here had been crushed the second they'd tried to kill Clarke, and when the Ark came down.

The second that Raven came back and brought everything back into perspective.

He hated how everyone went back to the way they'd been on the Ark. The little demarcations that had separated social groups; from the elite classes like where Clarke and Wells came from down to where he and Raven had fitted in the lower ends of maintenance.

*The not elite.*

He laughed at his inability to articulate the social structure that represented the powerless. Raven reminded him of not having power. A world where the elite made the decisions and choices for everyone on the Ark.

Clarke stumbled into his life in all of her glorious blue-eyed beauty. She was the sun and everything it represented. Power. Freedom.

And God, hadn't he fallen for everything she represented? He grunts as he moves through the cave and peers out. It's damp, and although the cave entrance is well protected, every so often a gust of rain and wind swirls in, and he gets a face full of cold, wet air.

"Fuck!"

He screams and fills it with the frustration that is building up in him. His anger seems to be always there now. The peace and gentleness that used to fill him has slowly disappeared with every day that passes on Earth.

Under the bright yellow sun that he was never allowed to watch on the Ark. Each pass of the sun's radiance would be shielded heavily by the shutters that automatically came down on the side of the Ark facing its blazing glory. It had taken almost a hundred years, but their bodies had slowly adapted to the increase in radiation. Clarke had explained it, but most of it went over his head. Clarke was like Raven in that way.

A lot smarter than him.

Finn sighed before walking along the caves perimeter yet again. He's missed something. He knows it. As he walks along the edges, the rain breaks for a moment, and the silence is weird.

He looks at the opening and in the strange light that is coming through he sees something reflected on the top shelf where the barrel should have been.

Quickly, he scrambles over rocks and dirt and climbs up to the ledge. There. One of Clarke's syringes has fallen or been thrown aside. Her jabbers. It's been used, and there's a black, viscous material that is coating the tip.
Not blood. It's hard like blood, but it's black so something else. He doesn't want to think what it could be but he feels his heart rate increase. Clarke is injured.

Why else is there a used jabber which looks like it contained antibiotics? Finn has been around Clarke enough times to know the difference. Plus, it's the only thing she carries in a jabber in her med kits. Clarke believes it's better to get to know and use the plants here on earth. Something to do with efficacy.

"Where the hell are you, Clarke?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm not on Tumblr. Is that an easier space to talk about plot points and what you want to see in this fic?
When It Was Me

Chapter Summary

Raven loses her cool, and Abby tries to douse the fire with gasoline.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the kudos and comments guys. I really appreciate it. Each comment helps me figure out where to go next. This chapter is another plot mover chapter.

Next chapter will be more Clarke and Lexa.

Raven is breathless when she walks up to his room. The walls of the Ark seem so strange now that they are on the ground. The dull sheen of metal is a terrible reminder of days of feeling unbearably trapped in the heavens.

She's so focused on her thoughts she doesn't see that his room is empty at first. She'd barged in of course because that was her way. Unthinking. Mind in the sky.

Raven looks around the room. She smells his particular boy, Finn smell. His clothes are strewn everywhere as if he's tried to find clothes in a hurry. Boots are gone, but the inside Ark shoes are wedged near the bed's legs. One is sticking out whilst the other is tightly pushed in between the wall and the bed. She kicks it.

Her mind is ahead of what she sees. She knows Finn as much as she knows herself. He's not the tidiest, but he's definitely not this tornado she sees before her. He's done this in a blind rush. Grabbing things, throwing what's not needed onto the bed, kicking things out of the way till they get pushed under the bed. His bed.

She can't tell if he's slept in it or not as there's a mess everywhere. His guard jacket and his gun. Both are gone.

Raven turns around slowly in the room. Her eyes slowly document everything. The picture of them in the airlock area on the Ark. They'd been in bed all afternoon, and you can see it on her face. That beatific look of someone crazy, head over heels in love.

Finn's face is soft, gentle and he's looking at her with affection. She wants that boy back. The Finn she's learning on the ground is not the same one from the sky. He's all angles and planes and more often than not, he just stares blankly into space instead of at her. She's been noticing it more and more. And when she challenges him, she watches him bring himself back to her from wherever he was.

She knows he's thinking of Clarke. She's seen the way he tries not to look at her. His eyes always keeping her in his periphery. She's not an idiot. She's a physicist and an engineer. She can just as
easily blow things up as she can build things. Right now, she wants to blow Clarke Griffin up to the heavens.

Raven has no qualms about slamming out of the room. She can hear the sound of the metal door clanging against the frame as it slams shut behind her. She's not running, but she's not walking either.

She walks past people who go to speak to her, but one look at her face and they quickly turn away except Bellamy who reaches out to grab her arm.

"Hey! Where's the fire?"

She shrugs his arm off and continues her striding towards Clarke's room.

"Raven! What the hell?"

She feels Bellamy trotting up to keep abreast of her within the confines of the narrow Ark corridors. She feels him reach for her shoulder and she feels rage spill out of her. Better to feel this than the awful, empty sadness of Finn.

"Fuck off, Bellamy." Her voice is acidic, and she is undeterred by his pull on her shoulder which she shrugs off again. He's not deterred as he steps in front of her.

"Come on, Raven. What's going on? Is it Finn? Has he done something to you?"

She steps around him and walks up to Clarke's door and begins to bang on it.

"Clarke! Get the fuck out of here, now!"

Her voice isn't controlled, and she can hear the tears in it. She channels her rage so that the tears she feels don't overwhelm her.

She raises her fist to bang on the door again, but Bellamy grabs at her wrist.

"Ray. She's not here. I haven't seen her in a few days."

Raven's brain ticks at a hundred miles with this new fact. Finn's been with her for the last two days. So Clarke isn't the issue.

Maybe.

She breathes out and sags against the door.

"Raven? Are you ok?"

They both jump at the sound of Abby's voice. She looks up into the older Griffin's face and tries her best to not show her contempt for the new Chancellor.

"Where's Clarke?" Raven's voice is sharp and Abby's eyes narrow at the tone of the young engineer's voice.

"She left two days ago on a field trip for the medical center. Why?"

Abby's voice is suspicious. No-one has said anything to her, least of all Clarke, but she's seen the way the two young women have been around each other. She's sensed the tension and guesses that it has something to do with the Collins boy. She tries not to roll her eyes at the adolescent dramatics.
"If you want to contact her she's got one of her radios with her. She's due back this afternoon. I'm sure you can catch up with her then."

Abby knows that Raven is one of Clarke's few good friends. Her daughter is private and doesn't form connections quickly or easily, but when she does, she holds on for long and strong.

She's entirely unimpressed with Raven's current behavior.

"Is something wrong, Raven? Something you want to tell me?"

Abby keeps the anger out of her voice. She's pretty sure Clarke would be furious if she tried to fight her battles for her, in particularly against someone she sees as a close friend.

Raven can feel her anger spike again as she sees the look of judgment in Abby's eyes.

"Is she with Finn?" Raven knows she's been unreasonable. Finn left hours ago. Clarke has been gone for days and is meant to be back today. It doesn't make sense. She watches as Abby's eyes widen in understanding.

"Is that what's wrong, Raven?" Abby's voice is clipped. She watches Raven as she struggles with her temper, watches the sudden curling of fingers that turn into fists. Bellamy is looking at them both wide-eyed, wondering what the hell he's walked into.

"He's not in his room." Raven's words are short. Clipped and she stares resentfully at the both of them.

"Have you checked - " Bellamy begins to say but is cut off very quickly by Raven's emphatic head shake.

"I've checked everywhere. Everywhere except Clarke's room."

Abby and Bellamy both mirror surprise. So. Neither of them was aware of what Clarke's done. She knows she's unreasonable. She knows that Clarke didn't know, but she can't help herself. All of her anger and all of her resentment is thrown directly at Clarke.

"Why would Clarke be in Finn's room?" Abby is staring at Raven now with a definite hint of maternal anger. Protective and angered by Raven's insinuation.

"Because she's been fucking him."

She hears Bellamy's sound of shock but ignores him. Instead, she watches Abby and how she responds.

"You knew!" Raven's voice is angry, accusatory as if Abby has had something to do with this.

Abby takes her time responding to Raven. She walks past her and opens up her daughter's room. It's typical Clarke. There are rows of artwork on the walls. Books lie in small piles by her bedside. Clothes folded neatly and in their respective corners.

But no Clarke. Which she knew but she needed to check that Finn hadn't squirreled himself in there for whatever Godforsaken reason.

"I didn't know, Raven and I'd really appreciate if you didn't scream at me. I understand that something is going on with you guys, but in the general scheme of things, I think we've got a hell of a lot more things to worry about than who Finn is in bed with."
It hurts, and Abby can see it in the way Raven's face flinches at the words. She hadn't meant to be callous, but death and dying had made her less tolerant of these dramas.

Abby knows she should try better. She knows she should; especially for Clarke's sake.

"I'm sorry, Raven. I know you've been terribly hurt."

She looks to Bellamy as she begins to flounder. She's good in the operating theatre. Good at stitching and healing and she mostly knows the words to say to help people heal themselves, but Raven's rage is discomfiting. All of this is.

She doesn't want to think about Clarke having sex. Not yet. In her mind, she's still her little girl. She doesn't want to be having this conversation at all.

"Raven, I'll help you find him. Come on." Bellamy smiles at Abby and slowly pushes Raven in front of him to walk towards the exit.

"Raven," Abby calls out, and Raven turns her head back to look at her over her shoulder. Her eyes are prickling with unshed tears.

"I'm sorry, Raven. She never would have done it if she'd known."

Raven turns away without saying anything. What can she say? Clarke is a good person. Finn is too. But they had sex and each time she thinks about it, his body with Clarke's she feels an agony that pokes her insides leaving her breathless.

And she is agonizingly lonely. Finn has always been there. For her.

Only her.
Clarke and Lexa begin the process of letting each other go. They know they must say goodbye. Finn is dangerously close.

This chapter is all about these girls living in the moment, and the ache of having to let someone go before you can start anything.

Clarke bends forward to inspect the bandage on Lexa's abdomen. She lifts one corner and quickly peels it from the firm skin and muscled flesh beneath her fingertips.

Lexa barely flinches, and the only way Clarke can see a reaction is in the tiny muscles in the girl's body that tighten for a brief moment.

Lexa says something softly in her language. Clarke can tell she's mocking her. Clarke now knows so many words which she's tucked away into her meticulous mind. It helps that she learned French and German on the Ark. She wanted to learn Mandarin too, but Abby had put her foot down and said she needed to focus on medicine as they required real skills on the Ark.

And Abby had been right, and Clarke had focused on learning more on how to heal people. The Ark was a cross-section of several cultures and languages, many of which had survived the ninety-odd years in space.

They'd evolved in the way that language changes in enclosed spaces. English became the common language across different parts of the Ark. German had been effortless to learn as she'd been speaking it from an early age because of her dad.

Jake (Jakobus) had been a descendant of the German and British space team. Clarke smiled at the memory of him putting on a ridiculous fake accent when Clarke had tried to read Also Sprach Zarathustra in the original text.

The language of the Ark had evolved with a lot of their words incorporated into the speech of each other. Simple words. Different things. And Clarke had found she had a knack for it. She could hear the words and repeat it back so that she sounded exactly like the audio files from a hundred years ago.

When she listens to Lexa speak, she can hear the English beneath it. She's sure of it. Some strange vernacular from a specific moment in time where the language evolved.

"Ok. That's looking a lot better than it did even yesterday. Are all grounders like you?" Clarke smiled at Lexa who tilts her head at Clarke.
Clarke feels her tummy dip again like it almost always does with this girl.

"Grounders?" Lexa's voice is soft and tired.

It feels like they'd not stopped the whole night. They would drift asleep entangled, and then one of them would wake up and start kissing skin or sliding a tongue alongside an ear, and that would be it. The other would groan awake, and they'd kiss intensely and move their bodies so that they were pressed hard against each other.

Clarke closes her eyes and bites back a moan when a particular memory assails her.

"Grounders. That's what Skaikru call your people. From the ground. Grounders." Clarke opens up her eyes and catches green eyes looking at her intently. She's pretty sure Lexa understands, and she confirms it with a quick nod of her head.

"It's not meant to be derogatory." Clarke sighs. "Well, not always."

She packs away the kit and moves it from the side of the bed where she's been attending Lexa. Her fingers slide across warm, tanned skin. Lexa is burnished gold and copper; her skin follows the curves and planes of taut muscles.

And she's watching Clarke with lazy, green eyes like a jungle cat ready to leap onto her prey.

Clarke shivers for a moment at that look which hides nothing. Not the desire or need. Clarke's body aches from all the different things they've done throughout the night and wonders at herself. At this strange new proclivity of hers.

She's not ashamed, and some of the angst she'd been feeling about Finn has receded. A lot. Clarke is discovering that her body responds spectacularly to a woman's touch. Well, maybe it's just this woman, but Clarke doesn't care.

There is a terrible bittersweetness to it all as they're both aware that when they leave here, their lives will diverge.

And maybe that's why Clarke responds to that cat-like look of Lexa's and moves onto the bed again. She strips, and Lexa's eyes darken when they alight on Clarke's breasts which are high, deliciously curvaceous and perfectly rounded.

Clarke watches as Lexa licks her lips and it's too much. She springs forward and knocks Lexa back onto the bed her whole body moving against her. There's no thought only feelings that erupt inside of her. There's no Finn. No Raven. No guilt.

She takes from Lexa and gives back to her over and over with her mouth, her fingers and with long looks of need and soft, soft cries that propel Lexa into the most extraordinary sexual feats where she too opens up to Clarke.

And God, how Lexa responds to her request to do whatever she wants to her; for Lexa most certainly does. She takes Clarke hard and slow. She pushes her and Clarke cannot help but cry out in long, low cries that fill the bunker.

Clarke loves how Lexa responds to her too. The way she talks to her in that strange lexicon that Clarke almost understands. Her heart beats hard, and her stomach tilts when Lexa begs her.

Please, please, Clarke. Fuck me. Over and over and it's wondrous. They ache and hurt in places, but both want more. It's heady, and at one point Clarke burst into tears after a powerful orgasm that
consumes her and almost causes her to blackout from the intensity of it. She can feel the act of
tenderness when cradled by strong arms, and by green eyes that look at her worriedly.

"Oh God, Lexa." Clarke laughs softly into her neck. "I'm ok. Ai laik ok. I think. God. I'm sorry. I
can't help crying, but it's good crying see."

She tries to smile through the tears and pulls Lexa's hand sticky with Clarke's essence and places it
against her heart.

"I am just feeling so much with you. I didn't think I could. I've never felt this much before with
anyone, but I don't have much to go compare it to. My parents were protective of me and I've only
had very brief encounters on the Ark. Nothing serious. Nothing that swept me away and it was
always just a bit of fun. And since we've been on Earth, I've only slept with Finn and he isn't you. I
didn't feel like this. And God, down here everything seems to break."

She doesn't say that Lexa is going to be something else that will hurt her heart.

She hiccoughs with a small sob and quickly covers her traitorous mouth. Clarke doesn't see how
luminescent her tears turn her blue eyes, how it causes the sudden pain in Lexa's own.

"I wish I could tell you all the things that are going on inside me, Lexa. I'm crying because my
heart feels like its exploding with you. And I barely know you. And we have to say goodbye."

Clarke turns away; her face is reddening with embarrassment.

Lexa looks at her with such a gentleness in her eyes. She knows that Clarke is healing from a loss
and that some of the emotions are being brought up by the intensity of the sex they're having. She
wants to help ease her pain, and decides to share a little about her own.

"Klark. I lost someone too. Once. Costia. I loved her so very much. She is gone now. Her leaving
broke something inside me too. With you - I feel better," Lexa says, and she knows, she knows
that Clarke will not understand all of her words. The sudden softening in Clarke's blue eyes as she
empathizes with Lexa's pain almost shatters her resolve to keep her secret.

Lexa wants more. She wants Clarke by her side, but she cannot. They are enemies, and at some
point, Lexa is going to have to make decisions that will affect Clarke's life, and her people directly.

Clarke blinks softly and is comforted by the language of her lover. This grounder girl who tripped
her up and exploded into her life. She's soft and majestic and has the kind of spectacular beauty that
she's only ever seen in the old Ark vids.

She understands that Lexa is trying to tell her about losing someone called Costia. Someone who
caused a kind of pain that Clarke does grasp, after all, she lost Jake too. To realize that Lexa has
lost someone, someone who's died and has caused an empty aching gap inside with their absence -
this comforts Clarke.

In a weird way. It is the comfort of not feeling alone. It eases the ache inside her which she hadn't
realized she'd been carrying around for so long.

She feels Lexa's strong, long fingers move from her heart to her jawline. They gently pull Clarke to
face her and then travel to her lips to silence the words that look to spill from Clarke's mouth.

Lexa shakes her head and looks carefully at Clarke. No more words. It is a firm, no-nonsense look
that she gives her. And Clarke nods, releasing a gentle sigh of acceptance as Lexa gathers Clarke to
her breathtaking, naked body.
God. This woman is unbearably beautiful, and it's going to break Clarke's heart to say goodbye. Soon. Real soon.

****   ****  ****

The rain has finally settled and no longer patters against the roof of their temporary quarters. Clarke looks over at Lexa who's lying in a tangled mess across her body.

"Hey. I'm going out to look for some of the botanicals that I need for my medical kit."

Clarke talks to Lexa, and it's a hysterical blend of English and the Grounder language which Clarke calls pidgin in her mind. She watches the slow grin that spreads across Lexa's face. Her green eyes were shining and her full lips quirked up at the side to hide her amusement.

Clarke rolls her eyes. She loves to make Lexa laugh. The girl doesn't do it often, but when she does, Clarke feels a lightness inside of her.

Lexa nods and indicates that she'll follow after a visit to the bathroom. The bunker is redolent with the scent of their sex and Clarke swoons at the smell of them, and just wants to pull Lexa back into bed, but it's getting closer and closer to a time when she truly needs to head back home.

She's tried contacting Arcadia a few times on her radio but either no-one is manning the radio points, or she's too far away for a signal to come through. It's disconcerting as Raven had promised that the radio signal would unquestionably reach the bunker and the cave as they are only a few hours journey from Arcadia.

Lexa had stared at it first in wonder then in suspicion at the strange crackling tek that didn't seem to do anything except draw Clarke in to speak to it. Clarke could see her growing concern each time she tried to contact someone.

Clarke had tried to explain to Lexa what she was trying to do with hand motions and basic English, but whatever Lexa was inferring from Clarke's words and actions had only made the green-eyed girl scowl more and more.

In the end, Clarke had just left it. She'd contact them after Lexa, and she went their separate ways. She'd felt a gut-wrenching pang at that thought, but had forced herself to move on.

This time she is experiencing with Lexa has been idyllic in a world that had little time for gentle nuances of care or compassion, or the gift they'd been given to exchange something so meaningful in such a short time.

Clarke's brain is still reeling from it not to mention the confusion it is causing in her heart. She had no idea what Lexa thought about them.

If there was a 'them.'

Clarke shook off her thoughts as she slowly opened the bunker hatch and peered outside. The world was unbelievably wet and green.

Layers of the forest seeped into the edges of the frame of what she could see. Slowly, Clarke moved up the ladder and out of the hatch and back into the world. She took a deep breath. Good. The earth smelt good.

She closed her eyes for a moment and inhaled everything within the area. The scent of moss and
water pooling in pockets of bark and earth slowly creep into her awareness. Beautiful.

She opened her eyes again and looked out onto the most incredible green world as the light seeped through the treetops and onto the forest floor. It was spectacular. She climbed up and slowly made her way back to the ground and started walking towards the edges of the forest that fenced around the bunker.

She can see the leaves of the psyllium bark near by. Good. Something that she can cross off her list.

The rain had changed the landscape from when she had last been here with Raven and Octavia. Slurries of mud and leaves swirled beneath her feet. As she walked to her little pocket of plants, she slid and almost tripped backward onto her backside.

In that moment she can feel and hear the stillness of the forest. In the distance, she heard the sound of birds and raindrops falling onto leaves. And a twig cracking in the dense woods.

Clarke's head snapped up, and she looked around frantically as she rushed back towards the bunker. She felt and heard the thunder of a gunshot before something whistled past her. And then the sound of a frantic voice.

"Clarke?"

Her blue eyes snapped up and looked towards where the trees were more open and saw a figure stumbling towards her, gun in his hand still waving crazily in the air.

She felt a cold chill grab at her throat.

What the hell was he doing?

"Finn?"

"Clarke, Clarke! Oh my God, Clarke." He ran towards her but skidded and slid to a stop when a figure emerged from the top of the bunker.

Lexa. Clarke's eyes widened. Damn. She was going to get herself killed by that idiot. She walked carefully towards Lexa and tried to position herself in between Finn and his gun, and Lexa who had dropped down beside Clarke on the ground.

"Finn!" Clarke's voice was sharp, and his head snapped back towards her and away from Lexa. Good. Keep him distracted.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

She knew she was snarling, but she felt a not so quiet fury at his presence. He was the outside world. His presence here meant that they were at the end of this. This moment in time that she'd selfishly had with Lexa.

She's also sick of telling him to leave her alone. That his attention is unwanted and she hates him beyond belief for putting her in a situation where she feels like she's betrayed Raven.

Raven whom she had so much admiration and respect for. Raven, who was her last tangible connection to Jake. Why hadn't she known about Finn and Raven's relationship? She remembered Raven talking about a boy, and Jake teasing her. But neither of them had ever mentioned his name.
And Finn. Finn never said he was with someone.

She got it. She understood on a rational level as Finn had never truly believed that the Ark would come down to the Earth. Most of them hadn't. But it happened. And Raven was here now so why the hell was he following her?

"Are you fucking kidding me, Clarke? You've been gone for days. Your mother. Everyone. We were all worried."

Finn's brown eyes are wide, his pupils blown as he takes in Clarke's protective stance of the woman who has emerged from the bunker. Their bunker. What the fuck was going on?

"I tried the radio. No-one is responding. You shouldn't be here, Finn. And for God's sake, put the gun down before you shoot someone."

Her voice is a lot calmer than she's feeling. She's angry, and she can tell that Lexa has picked up on her emotions as she quirks an eyebrow at her in silent inquiry.

Clarke shakes her head. Finn is volatile. She's noticed his behavior change after the incident at the Dropship where they killed three hundred grounders. She and a few others had become separated from the group, and Finn had been frantic in his search for her.

Clarke closed her mind to that memory which still hurt her heart. Finn changed after that. Clarke could never quite pinpoint the moment darkness seeped into Finn as Raven came down with the rest of the Ark soon after.

And Finn became off limits.

"Clarke, get away from the Grounder," Finn's voice was harsh, and his eyes had narrowed sharply onto Lexa. Unmoving and furious.

That's what she'd noticed, and it hits her hard. He's furious with the Grounders. He hates them. When once this beautiful boy saw them as people they could learn from - they've now become the symbol of all that's awful about the ground.

Clarke looks at him and realizes how much trouble Lexa is in.

"Finn, you need to go."
"Not when there's a fucking Grounder right next to you, Clarke. Not when I don't know what she's done to you. Not when I don't know if you're safe."

Finn's voice breaks a little on the last word. Lexa turns to Clarke. She notices how unbelievably still Lexa has become as if her whole body is listening to the world around them. She seems to be readying herself for something. At this moment, Clarke can see the warrior in her.

"Finn," Clarke tries again and uses everything in her voice to pull his attention back to her.

"Hey, hey. It's ok. I'm ok. She is a friend, ok?" She uses a voice that she normally keeps for children who need vaccination boosts. It's disarming, and she can see his eyes soften a little.

"Finn, you need to put the gun down, ok? I'm right here, and I don't want you to shoot me accidentally." Clarke smiles and tries to humor him into moving the gun. She can see how much he's shaking.

Clarke holds her breath and eases it out slowly as she watches the gun lower and Finn drops his
arm down to his side. She can see how tight his body still is. The way he's turned away from Clarke and ready to move towards Lexa.

"This is my friend. I helped her, and we're friends now. You can't hurt her, Finn."

"Why? She and all her fucking friends tried to kill us."

He's panting. Clarke can see how he's struggling to catch his breath as rage consumes him. She needs to push down her anger and get him the hell out of here.

"Finn." Clarke's voice is soft and unbearably gentle, "Finn. I know we've lost so many people since we got here. We've lost them to the Grounders, but we landed on their territory."

"Why is it their land!" He almost snarls, his throat works hard, and he swallows so hard she can see his throat moving up and down.

"None of this is ours, Finn."

Damn, she so doesn't have time for a philosophical argument as she can see Lexa's body begin to tighten next to her. She reaches out and moves her fingertips across her back. She knows Lexa doesn't understand the words, but she certainly can tell that something is going on.

"Who is she?" His voice is wobbly with confusion.

"She was hurt. I found her near the caves. I helped her, and we've -" Clarke broke off as she best tried to explain the last few days.

"We've talked as best as we can without words."

Well, that technically wasn't a lie. Clarke blinked rapidly as she caught what looked like a smirk on Lexa's face. Deep green eyes smiled at her and Lexa tilted her face a little. That was not possible. The girl had no idea what Clarke was saying except for simple words.

She looked at Lexa carefully who smiled back as if nothing had happened. Ok. Apparently, the girl was adept at picking up nuance. Or something. Clarke shrugged it off and turned her attention back to Finn who had a scowl on his face now.

"For five fucking days?"

The tenor of his words and the tone of his voice caused Lexa to step forward protectively. Clarke grabbed her and pulled her to her side.

"Lexa was recovering. I've been keeping an eye on her."

The irritation in her voice was apparent to all three of them as they stared at one another.

Finn scoffed and looked at Lexa up and down. His eyes traveled across her body to find an injury, and this cemented the rage inside of Clarke.

She didn't want this. Not Finn. Not her people, not this moment.

"Will you just fucking go already," Clarke snapped.

Finn flinched at her words and took a step back his eyes filling with pain.

"What? Why? Aren't you coming with me?"

"No. I am not letting all of my work helping this girl go to waste. She still needs monitoring, and
I've told you before Finn. I don't want to be near you."

She took a steadying breath as she felt Lexa's fingers tighten around her wrist. Finn's eyes flicked to it and returned to Clarke, a look of panic in them, and he brought the gun slowly upwards again.

"Finn!" Clarke yelled and stepped right in front of Lexa.
"Is she holding you captive?"
"Does it look like she is?" Clarke snapped.
"How the hell can I tell? Is she holding something against you that I can't see?"

Clarke rolled her eyes.

"Look at me, Finn. I'm standing in front of her to stop you from accidentally shooting her. In what world does that mean she's holding me against my will."

Clarke could feel Lexa shift behind her as if she wasn't comfortable with Clarke protecting her like this.

"Stay behind me," she hissed hoping like hell that Lexa would understand. The sudden stillness was enough to tell that her message was received and Clarke breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well in what world has you protecting a fucking a Grounder!"

"The world where you're pointing a fucking gun at me!"

Clarke's voice was deadly quiet, and Finn realized he'd pushed Clarke too far. He knows that tone. It was the one she used when she'd decided to turn him away and back to Raven. The voice she used when she made the decision that had killed hundreds of Grounders and saved everyone at the Dropship. And here she was protecting one. From him.

Finn put his gun back into the holster and stepped back. His eyes were hard and cold.

"Ok, Clarke. No reasoning with you when you're like this."

She barely blinked at him and just stared steadily as if she was willing him to go. To disappear. He could feel the hurt rise in his throat and bring a sting to his eyes. The blue-eyed girl was looking at him with such hatred. Was it because he'd hurt her?

"Clarke if this is because -" She cut him off by waving an impatient hand at him.

"No. I don't know what I have to say or do to get you to understand that I don't feel anything like that for you. You're with Raven, and I totally get it so please, no remorse."

Clarke doesn't see Lexa stiffen behind her nor the narrowing of her eyes as she looks over at this Skai boy.

"Clarke, come on, Princess."
Finn's mouth opens and closes and he doesn't say anything else as he sees Clarke flinch visibly.

"Don't call me that. You don't ever get to call me anything that implies intimacy, Finn. I know you don't get it. Maybe it's a boy thing."

Clarke's voice is sarcastic, and it's Finn's turn to recoil.

"You are with Raven. I'm ok with that. And I don't know whether you think I'm feeling heartbroken or whatever. You need to stop. I'm not in love with you. I've never been in love with you. You have
to stop framing everything I say or do and relate it back to you. You don't mean that - to me."

Clarke knows her words are hard. They are deliberate and clear. She doesn't want Finn to keep following her and pining for her when he spends every night in Raven's arms. She had begun to care for him. She had. Of course, she had. The world had been crazy, and he'd been charming. And there.

"Fine, Clarke." Finn's voice is clipped. "I get it. And no, you don't have to say anymore. But whatever you think about me - just know this. You can't ever fucking trust a Grounder."

He stares at Lexa who is still behind Clarke and dark eyes meet bright green ones that stare back at him with what looks like - contempt.

"See? Just look at her. Watch your fucking back, Clarke. If you want to kill yourself that's fine, but don't you kill the rest of us with your - fucked up choices."

Clarke feels pain lance through her and doesn't realize that she's let out a soft cry that echoes her distress. She feels two solid arms enfold her and pull her against a solid torso and soft breasts. She sees the look of remorse in Finn's eyes that is quickly replaced with anger when he see's the Grounder's behavior with Clarke.

"What the fuck?" There's a look of absolute disgust and then fury on his face. "Are you fucking her, Clarke?"

"Finn! That is none of your God damn business. Get out of here. Just go back to the Ark. Tell my mom I'm ok. I'll -" Clarke struggles to get her breath back. "I've got the radio. I'll find the signal and report back to the Ark when I can. Ok?"

He stares at her for a long moment and then at the strong arms that have enclosed Clarke's body.

"Whatever, Clarke. I'm sure you know what you're doing."

And with that, he turns away and walks back through the forest and away from them.
Clarke and Lexa finally leave the bunker.

Lexa can feel the shiver that runs through Clarke's body when the Skai boy begins to walk away from them. She's itching for her swords or her bow so that she can bring the boy down quickly. She did not like the way he had looked at Clarke. She breathes out slowly to calm herself. This behavior is unbecoming of the Commander. She needs to reign in her emotions. She has been too relaxed. Too happy. Too emotional around Clarke.

"Fuck!"

Lexa is surprised by Clarke's little explosion. The girl almost never swears. Even when Lexa's taking her hard against the bed, her lips all swollen from deep kisses, her body marked by Lexa's sinfully capable mouth; Clarke rarely swears. She says words that are more -- meaningful. Phrases. Words whispered in Lexa's ear that makes her stomach swoop and her center tighten with need.

"He's going to come back," Clarke says, and Lexa picks up on the thread of panic.

"Shh," Lexa whispers against the side of Clarke's neck, but steps back when Clarke spins in her arms and furious blue eyes stare up at her.

"No, Lexa! Dammit, you just don't get it."

Clarke sweeps long fingers through her blonde curls in frustration. Lexa can see that she's annoyed with the language barrier. So is she. She's frustrated with herself for having set this in motion, but she never imagined that she and Clarke would end up in bed. That the Skaigirl would open up parts of her that had not seen sunlight since Costia. She knows that if she tells her now, Clarke might break. And she does not want that. Clarke has suffered enough.

No, and it is best that she does not ever see her again once they part. Clarke does not need to know that she has understood every single word she's said. But she needs her to communicate what she wants to do now.

"Make me understand, Klark. I know you are frustrated. Please, Klark. Take a breath." Lexa's voice is pained as she speaks slowly in Trigadesleng, and she worries for Clarke, who has
tightened her eyes in misery. Clarke looks away as she catches her breath.

"He's going to come back. He's going to bring my mom or Bellamy or the others. They are so not going to understand you. Or me. Or what the hell I'm doing with someone like you." Clarke's words have slowed down.

She doesn't try to use her hands consciously, but she's miming out of habit now. Lexa can see how she's trying to say people, and return, and danger, and you and me.

A part of her feels her heart breaking for this healer who has helped her. She looked after a stranger lying bleeding in the forest and then opened up to Lexa because she thought she could not understand a word of what she was saying.

Lexa hates herself for the betrayal, but her people must come first.

"Klark," Lexa says softly and indicates the bunker with her chin. "We can go back in there and pack our things. We need to get to my people, and I want you to come with me. How am I going to get you to do that?"

Lexa is always so very stoic and to have to use her face and hands to communicate is so alien to her, and she stumbles during her attempt. She knows it is fortunate that Clarke has picked up some of her words. Not enough to be a threat yet but she a sufficient understanding of the language for them to communicate on an instinctual level.

She points to her injury, and Clarke nods understanding a little of what Lexa is asking of her.

"I'll take you to where you need to go. Somewhere safe where your people can come and get you." Clarke's words are a rushed jumble. She visually checks Lexa for anything torn.

They both know that Lexa is more than capable of walking on her own. The last twenty-four hours in bed would have told Clarke everything she needed to know about Lexa's recovery. Clarke looks away as she tries to hide the flush that's creeping up her face.

They are prolonging the inevitable as neither of them is willing to part just yet.

"We have to go. Now. I'm sorry, Lexa. I don't trust him. There are too many things, and he's - he's not stable. Anymore."

The urgency in Clarke's voice has them both propelling forward and into the confines of the bunker. Lexa turns around to try and find her things.

"Over there. I packed what I found on you in the stretcher I made to carry you here. There were some swords and a bow. They're all there."

Clarke's rushes her words as she races around the bunker piling things into her backpack. Water. A quick search in the small galley kitchen and she throws some dried meats into her pack and the pockets of her pants.

Lexa's eyes race around the cabin until she sees the long stretcher that Clarke had used to move her body here. She's amazed at Clarke that she was able to do so. She runs forward and quickly throws on her clothes which are in a jumbled, bloodied heap beside the stretcher. It doesn't matter that it stinks of her injuries. She will need protection to get back to her people if the boy is still nearby.

She will need protection for herself and Clarke. Two thrusts into the back sheaths and she is ready. Clarke is still flying around the bunker.
"Finn is going to come back. And I know. I just know he's going to come in here and he'll probably be here with my mom. There is no way in this life or the next that I'm leaving behind evidence of my sexual activity for my mother to discover."

Lexa is confounded. Why should it matter? It must show on her face as Clarke smiles grimly.

"You don't know my mom, Lexa. If you think a trigger-happy Finn is a problem well, then you should see my mom. She'd eviscerate you with a few simple phrases and then she'd shoot you."

Clarke laughed humourlessly.

"I don't understand why your mom would wish to kill me. Do Skaikru not allow sex?"

Lexa is confused but continues to pack the rest of their stuff. She's strong enough to help Clarke with her frantic packing, and soon, they're both out of the bunker and moving across the forest floor. It's the brightest part of the day. The sun glitters through the treetops. It's not enough direct light for warmth, and their breath comes out in plumes of white condensation.

"My mom is strange. I know she knows I slept with Finn. That was the boy who tried to shoot you. He's the one - I told you about."

Clarke had told her that story thinking that Lexa didn't understand a word she said. Lexa felt guilt lance through her but had to stay strong. She did this for her people. What she felt for Clarke, absolutely could not matter.

"She doesn't like him because she knows he's -" Clarke sighed as she walked along following Lexa's lead. "She knows his actions hurt me. But she's also funny that way because she still thinks she needs to protect me. We were here by ourselves, unprotected. We were careless. That's why your people and mine are fighting now. My mother cannot protect me from that. She thinks I'm still her little girl."

Clarke's voice comes in hushed, hurried words as they move quickly through the forest. Lexa leads as she heads them towards Indra, and Ton DC.

They continue to walk through the mud that is everywhere. Clarke slides, but a strong arm reaches out and grabs her, steadying.

"I'm not. I haven't been that little girl since the day she decided to kill my father."

Lexa almost stumbles at this. It is a shock, but she's learned in life never to show her feelings on her face, and Clarke continues completely oblivious.

"Alright, maybe she didn't kill him directly, but her choices certainly did."

Clarke hasn't spoken of this to anyone. She has barely touched on the subject with her mother. She's tried to about it with Octavia and Raven. She still feels so many things she can't explain. An unbearable rage at the stupidity of it.

"We are all down here now. My dad could have been here, and he's not. And if my mom hadn't told Jaha." Clarke's voice breaks.

Lexa breathes out. She cannot let Clarke expose herself like this to her still thinking that Lexa does not understand. It is too much.

"Klark," she says softly and reaches out for Clarke's hand which she curls into her own before pulling her against her chest. She kisses the top of Clarke's head, and they stay still for a moment.
"Klark. This hurt will go. Not now. Not for a while. I promise that it passes. All pain diminishes with memory. If you let it."

She stumbles a little as she speaks the words and Lexa know that Clarke does not understand but hopes that she can feel what Lexa is trying to convey.

"I wish she hadn't done it. I understand why she did because I've had to make some awful decisions here on the ground," Clarke whispers so quietly into the crook of Lexa's neck. Lexa can feel the warmth of Clarke's breath, the coldness of her nose against her skin. "Klark, please!"

Two words and Clarke looks at her as if she's slapped her. She moves from Lexa and tries to push her away.

"You don't know what I'm saying, but you sound like everyone else. Like you don't want to hear this. If you can't hear me when you don't even understand me; then who on Earth will?"

Lexa looks past Clarke's anger and sees the pain in Clarke's eyes. Lexa pulls her back into a close embrace. Her hands move slowly, comforting as moves up and down Clarke's back. She feels the moment when Clarke releases her pain and lets it go in a low, keening wail. It breaks her heart. It almost shatters her iron will. And Lexa can see that there is so much pain in Clarke. So much betrayal. Fuck. And now she's going to add to that.

"I'm sorry, Klark," she whispers, and these words are ones that Clarke understands.

"Moba," Clarke repeats the word and nods, stepping away from Lexa's embrace wiping at her eyes. Her gaze gentles and Lexa watches as Clarke forces herself to bring her emotions under control as she looks at Lexa.

"You're sweet. I wish your people were all like you. Not trying to kill me. My father. He would have liked you. He would have liked your quiet stillness. He'd say we were the same but different."

Lexa smiles. It is a tentative one, and Clarke smiles back.

"Don't be sorry, Lexa. Just try and not get us killed alright? You seem to have a knack for it. First those crazy mountain guys and then Finn."

Lexa smiled at the attempt to lighten the mood, but it was almost as if Clarke had sent out a message to the universe.

The fletching on the arrow that pierced the trunk of the tree near Clarke's head told Lexa that they were finally in Indra's territory. Ton DC. Soon, her people would be here.

Clarke sighed.

"Unbelievable. You seriously have a knack, Lexa." She went to grab Lexa's hand to tug her to safety, but Lexa held up her palm into the sky and called out.

"I am the Commander. Bring me to Indra!"
Chapter Summary

Clarke and Lexa finally arrive at Ton DC where Lexa confirms some unwelcome news. Clarke is nervous going into enemy territory. Finn finds support in his mad race back to the Ark.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone, thank you so much for the words of encouragement. I have a few more chapters I can upload this coming week, but after that I have to slow down as the next chapters are not yet written. I hope you like this update. It moves the story along. No great reveals yet.

Shoutout to #ashortwhile. I've included your suggestion without taking it to its logical conclusion. ;-) Enjoy.

Bodies drop from the sky, and within seconds they're both surrounded by Grounders. They are all armed and pointing their swords and arrows at Clarke.

Clarke tries not to scream, but her little gasp of shock causes Lexa's mouth to widen; it's almost a grin.

Clarke has yet to notice that all the weapons are directed at her.

"What the hell?"
"Enough! Put your weapons down. She is with me."

Clarke can barely recognize the young woman with her. The timbre of Lexa's voice has transformed from the one that Clarke has known for the last few days.

She looks around in confusion as all of the Grounders drop their weapons and almost seem to bow their heads to Lexa. She can feel Lexa's fingers as they reach across and tighten their grip on Clarke's arm.

"What is going on?"

Clarke tries not to panic, but Lexa's face has altered since the appearance of the Grounders that emerged from the shadows of the trees. Her whole body and posture have straightened, and she looks around at the people surrounding them with an almost regal countenance.

Lexa doesn't respond to Clarke's question, and Clarke is tempted to pull back, but instinct tells her it is better just to follow Lexa's lead at this point. These people seem to know her.

She looks around as they emerge into a clearing which leads to a village. Clarke's eyes widen in
shock, and she feels her heart plummet to her stomach. This place has to be Ton DC. She's heard about it from Octavia and Lincoln, and it's the right distance from the Ark.

"Oh my God. Where are we? Please tell me you haven't brought me to - "
"Heda!"

Clarke gulps as a giant of a man emerges from the mass of people that have started to form a ring around her and Lexa. She can feel the panic rise in her, closing her throat and blocking her ears as blood pounds in them.

The beast that's made up of leathers, bright metal fastenings that reflects the midday light and furs moves towards them. Clarke is shocked at his agility and speed of his approach towards Lexa.

"Heda, we thought we had lost you," he says in the softest tone.

Clarke is startled by the contrasts that this man represents. She doesn't know what he's saying, but it's apparent that he knows Lexa. His eyes shine with what looks like adoration and Clarke wonders who he is to the woman beside her.

"Gustus. You are here. You made it. Where are the others? How many survived?"

Clarke picks up on the relief in Lexa's tone and wonders at the urgency behind it.

Lexa's voice has changed. Clarke recognizes it as the one she'd used on Clarke when she first met. It had made Clarke wonder if all Grounders were so terrifyingly commanding. More and more people come out as they seem to recognize Lexa. They don't call her by her name though, and Clarke notices that they all use the same name over and over when they see her.

"Heda!"

Clarke feels the beginnings of a tremor of something in her gut. She wonders whether Lexa lied to her about her name.

Another grounder approaches them. This time it's a striking woman, her skin the same rich color as Wells. Her eyes are dark, tilted at the edges like a cat.

"Indra. I must return to Polis, immediately. Prepare my horse and some warriors to return with me."
"You were betrayed, commander."

Clarke watches in growing anxiety as she watches the two women talk. As she looks around it becomes clear that Ton DC is a military camp of some kind. Her eyes dart everywhere, and all Clarke sees are warriors.

Her eyes are huge in her head as she takes in everything around her. She wonders what they're saying. Whatever it is has made Lexa furious. Her green eyes are almost black as anger grabs her.

"Indeed. Only a few of us knew." Lexa's jaw is almost like granite now, and Clarke swallows as she feels a rush of heat envelope her. God, not now!

The people that surround them are starting to close in on Clarke, and she finds herself struggling to breathe. Someone shoves at her.

"You hurt, Heda!"
"The Skaigirl used a fire gun to try and kill the commander."
"She has a fire gun!"
All around her she can hear the strange language of Lexa's people. It's confusing. Frightening as someone jostles her and she stumbles forward. Lexa catches her and holds her against her torso.

"Enough!"
Her voice is a roar, and the sounds of the camp drop to a silent hum. The command is sudden and is echoed on each face that surrounds them.

"Lexa -"
"Klark, not now. Just wait."
Lexa silences her by placing a hand on Clarke's stomach, and Clarke relaxes. She doesn't know why, but she just knows Lexa will protect her from these people who look intent on killing her.

"Yes, she is SkaiKru. She is a healer. She helped me when the mountain men used their fire weapons. If she had not stopped to save me, I would not be here."

Clarke knows that whatever Lexa said has quickly changed the minds of the Grounders that surrounded them. They looked at Clarke with wonder on their faces. Some of them smile at her. Others come closer and touch her, but the touches are gentle. They seem to mean something different now.

"Indra. Do not use Gonasleng. She does not know that we speak her tongue. There are still things that I would learn."
Clarke looks over to her and wonders at the sudden sadness in Lexa's green gaze.

"Of course, Heda."
Indra stares at Clarke with curiosity and smiles slowly when she sees how Clarke begins to shift uncomfortably under her intense scrutiny.

"Heda, who is she?"
"Klark Kom Skaikru."
Clarke can see that Lexa wants to say more, but she tightens her mouth and shifts towards Clarke.

Lexa's hand moves until she's placed it carefully at Clarke's elbow. Clarke tries not to panic again when Lexa draws her into the grounder barracks.

Every where she looks, she can see warriors. Talking. Moving. Blades scrape against whetstones, and Clarke can see the dangerous glimmer of their edges. Bodies spin through the air, the sound of skin on skin slapping hard, low guttural grunts as they thrust and parry against each other.

It's a world she had not imagined that she would be walking freely through. Their clothes are practical. Not a single dress to be seen.

Clarke stops suddenly almost causing Lexa to trip.

Children. Older people. They're sitting around a fire and Clarke is shocked. The children are playing. The elders that surround them are wearing simple tunics and cotton trousers while cooking over grills standing over pits with flames curling up through iron slats. The smells are phenomenal, and she can feel the rage from her stomach as it growls its hunger. Everyone stops as they pass. Faces light up.

"Heda!"
Everywhere she looks, Clarke can see the people stop what they're doing. She watches how recognition first hits their eyes before faces brighten, and the same word comes from each mouth.
"Heda!"

**********

Finn runs. His feet pound through the mud and dirt, and he slips several times falling to his knees onto leaves that are wet and treacherous. Finn draws the air in great, sobbing lungfuls that burn at his throat as he pushes himself frantically through the woods. He has got back to Arcadia. He has to save Clarke.

As he rushes through the dense forest, he stumbles and falls. At one point in his mad scramble to go back, he goes flying over a gnarled, knotted tree root that's hidden beneath the decaying leaves that litter the forest floor. He puts the safety back on his sidearm after he almost shoots himself in the eye. Its only sheer luck that the gun doesn't fire, and it forces him to calm down. He slows to a jog and keeps his eyes moving around so that the environment doesn't kill him.

He's terrified for Clarke. He knows she's mad at him about Raven. But he loves her. And he'll do everything in his power to keep her safe. That Grounder. He knows, he just knows that she must have Clarke against her will. Clarke was acting. She must have been. To protect him. Of course.

He almost begins to weep at the sudden realization and stops in his tracks. Should he go back? Had Clarke been trying to tell him something and in his mad panic did he fail to see what it was?

He turns and starts to run back when he hears a shout behind him.

"Finn!"

He spins around and slips to the ground, gun still wavering in his hand. I'm ok. I'm ok; he whispers to himself as he sees Raven and Bellamy emerge from the woods.

Raven stares at him. Her eyes track up and down his body. He knows he looks crazed. There is mud all over him, and he can feel how it's drying on his skin and hair, caking in clumps of dirt and grass. She looks shocked, and he tries to smile to calm her down.

"What the hell happened to you?" she says not pulling any punches. And Finn can see by the glint her eye that she wants answers.

"Jesus, Finn," Bellamy looks scared which means he must look awful.

Finn gulps down the panic and the sadness that keeps throttling his chest.

"We hadn't heard from Clarke. I went looking for her."

He sees Raven roll her eyes and her lips tighten in anger. Bellamy lets out a breath of frustration and Finn can see he's about to interrupt him so he rushes on.

"She's been captured."

He tries to say it without crying but his voice breaks at the end and both Bellamy, and God, God Raven, she's looking at him with such - misery in her eyes. They both stare at him as if he's breaking apart. And he is.

"We have to help her," Finn continues, and his breathing starts to normalize, "I don't know if she's hurt, but Clarke told me to go away. I think she meant to go away and get help. I don't know. I - I panicked. The grounder who was with her looked like she might have been controlling Clarke in some way. I just couldn't see!"

He slams a fist against his leg in frustration. It hurts, and he's glad of the pain. He deserves it.
Bellamy's face has changed into one of cold fury. Raven looks worried.

"We should go back and get help," she says. He can see that she's trying to control her anger. "No!" He doesn't mean to yell. He watches as Raven flinches and just looks at him like he's cut her open with one of her laser machines. "That will take too long, and we'll be too late. I've been running for about forty minutes. We go back now we can surprise her - the Grounder. We can save Clarke."

Bellamy nods and looks over at Raven. He understands her hesitation, but Bellamy's of the firm opinion that Raven's anger at Clarke is stupidly misplaced. "He's right. If we go now, we can stop this Grounder, and get Clarke."

"Shit. Ok. Let's go," Raven growls and pulls out a radio from her pack, "but I'm going to tell Abby so that they know what's happening."

Finn doesn't hear her. He starts trampling back through the way he's come. He feels like the leaden legs that have been dragging at him are lightened, and they run swiftly through the shit fight that the earth has become since the rains came.

He's got help. Bellamy will help him. They'll be able to save Clarke.

When they get through the clearing near the bunker, the sun is at its highest point, and the mud is starting to stink on him. He races towards the bunker but is pulled back by Bellamy.

"Wait," Bellamy whispers harshly, "what sort of weapons does the Grounder have?"

Finn rolls his eyes. Fucking Bellamy.

"She's a grounder, Bellamy. What weapons do you think? She didn't have anything in her hands, but I saw a bow on her shoulder."

"Enough with the attitude," Raven hisses at him, "how are we going to approach without getting our heads split by a God damn arrow?"

"This way," he starts to move towards the back of the bunker. He knows that there's nowhere there for anyone inside to see who's approaching. Whoever built the thing hadn't thought about needing to protect the container once the bombs had stopped falling or when the radiation clouds had swept across the world.

He's up and climbing over the top before they can stop him. He hears Bellamy swear and Raven's frantic call to him not to do something stupid.

His hands tremble as he grapples with the locks on the outside, but after a minute he's got them open. Bellamy pushes him aside protectively and shoves the barrel of his rifle through the opening. "Clarke?" he yells through, "we've got the place covered. You can come out now. You're safe."

Finn's eyes are shining with relieved tears. She's going to be alright. He lets out a long, slow breath of relief.

They wait. After a few minutes, Raven huffs and pushes past both boys and pokes her head through the opening. Both Bellamy and Finn shout out in shock, but she emerges a second later and looks at Finn grimly.

"There's no-one here. We're too late. Clarke is gone. "
Tell Me Sweet Little Lies

Chapter Summary

Clarke discovers the world of Ton DC and sees a different side of Lexa.

Chapter Notes

This is probably that chapter some of you have been waiting for. This one really hurt in parts to write. I hope that what happens is believable. I think strong emotions sometimes drives these girls into the wildest of reactions.

Clarke follows Lexa and the leader of Ton DC into an area that she's come to realize was more significant than she had thought.

They walk quickly into a quieter space away from the people that have converged on them outside. The darkened area is part of a longhouse with lots of rooms that intersect with one another.

Clarke looks around. Her innate curiosity is acute, and her eyes dart around taking in everything. They use dowelling on their chairs. All wood. So. Woodcraft and carpentry are alive and well on the ground. She can smell the scent of timber burnished over time with protective oils. The colors of the wood are golden, and she aches to touch one of them to see if they're as soft as they look.

Two children walk past them. An adolescent girl and a young boy; his head buried in a - book? Clarke does a double take and almost stumbles forward when she sees the old covers. The pages are yellowed with age, but the print is still bright and contrasts sharply with the faded paper.

The boy barely notices them until the young girl at his side squeals.

"**Heda! Heda!**"

That name again. Clarke wonders at its meaning. She never once heard Lexa speak of it.

Lexa looks over at them and smiles. It's a genuine smile that opens up her whole face.

"**Athi. Karola. How is your training?**"

Clarke watches in wonder as Lexa talks to the children. Their voices are bright and happy as they chatter in the strange, almost recognizable language where Clarke can now pick up several words.

She can see the real interest in Lexa's eyes and the adoration in both children. Who are they? Are they siblings? Maybe they are the children of that man, Gustus. He's either a father or a mentor of some sort to Lexa. She had noticed their mutual regard although he'd seemed to be more deferential towards Lexa. Her mind is firing on all pistons, and she's trying to connect dots to fragments of truth.

Lexa waves the children along. The smells in the house are mind-blowing, and the hunger that's
been clawing at Clarke's stomach increases. The scent of meat cooking over an open flame spirals towards her. Spices and sugars. Things they never had on the Ark.

She almost moans and clutches at her abdomen. Lexa's green eyes dart to Clarke, and she laughs before she pushes open a door.

It is dark. In the corner of the room, a single flame burns beneath a glass jar which bubbles away, its contents sending small flurries of heat and musk into the darkened space.

"Where are we now? Dante's Inferno?" Clarke's hunger is making her grumpy as she looks around the small enclosed room. She's intrigued by the jars that line the walls. Incandescent. Pearls that move silently in gelatinous whorls of purple and green. Jar after jar of the stuff. Stuff she doesn't understand. The smells though; that she knows.

She recognizes them from Lincoln's toolkit of herbs and medicinal ointments. She's startled when a man rises from the corner and quietly pushes Lexa onto a cot nearby.

He lifts up her shirt and prods around Clarke's bandaging.

"Hey!" She's furious. She knows her reaction is ridiculous and Abby would say, unprofessional, but she can't help the rise of proprietorial anger which she directs at the stranger in the room.

It's obvious he's a physician. She knows it from the tools and smells in the room. He's opened the shutters that cover the windows to the small chamber which suddenly fills with light.

Clarke gasps. The man is also huge like the one they had met in the entrance to the village, and he's apparently like every single Grounder male that Clarke has ever seen. But Clarke doesn't care. Lexa is her patient, and she's damned if she's going to let this guy destroy all of her work.

"It's good," he says, and Clarke's jaw almost drops. She shakes her head wondering if she's suddenly lost her mind and can now understand the language of the Grounders. It's only been a few days of intense language learning with Lexa. She follows the structure and development of speech, but understanding doesn't happen like that.

"Nyko!"Lexa's voice is full of anger, but from the look on her face, Clarke realizes that Lexa knows that Nyko has spoken out of turn. And it's too late.

And no, Clarke doesn't suddenly understand the language.

"What is it, Heda? The wound is healing. This is exceptional work."

The man is confused, and he turns to Lexa trying to figure out what is wrong.

Clarke watches as the blood drains from Lexa's face. She's staring at Clarke with wide green eyes.

"You speak English?" Clarke finally says.

The silence in the room is intense. Lexa looks slowly at Clarke. For a moment Clarke thinks she sees regret before it's pushed away and the stony, stoic girl that she knows is back in place. Her face is utterly unreadable.

The man, Nyko looks from Lexa and then back to Clarke realizing that he's inadvertently let something out that he should have kept hidden.

He looks at Lexa and begins to speak in the Grounder language.
"Heda. I'm sorry. I did not realize."

"Do not worry about this, Nyko."

Clarke's mouth opens in shock as Lexa responds in English.

Her voice is beautiful. The sounds of the consonants and vowels are strange for Clarke to hear coming from her. She thinks of all the things she said. Emotional content for the confessional. For a therapist, if they'd lived in a past world where those things existed. Mattered.

But they live here. And now. And Clarke feels the rage rise up in her at the betrayal. It's profound and visceral. Layers of skin flayed from her body, and she looks up at Lexa with terrible blue eyes that are haunted and angry; glittering and glassy with tears as she swallows in Lexa's treachery.

"You. Speak English."

She can't find words. Her lips are numb, and she doesn't see what Lexa and Nyko see. How her whole mouth shakes. How she's trying to catch her breath. She doesn't notice the quick look Lexa gives Nyko which sends him rushing out of the room.

"Clarke. I'm sorry."
"Don't!"
"I had to know what you -"
"I said, don't."

The room is filled with the terrible sounds of Clarke's breathing. Lexa watches her and carefully keeps her face neutral. Clarke closes her eyes, and Lexa tries not to respond when she sees a lone tear begin to make its way down Clarke's cheek.

"Clarke, please." Lexa's voice is breathless and filled with her own anguish. She had never meant for Clarke to find out. Not like this.

Clarke doesn't know what to say to this woman who's now speaking in a language she didn't believe she was capable of.

Clarke had delighted in teaching her words and learning from her. It twists her insides to know that Lexa had a world of them already encased in her head.

Lexa had lied to her, and it feels like another awful stab to the heart. A heart that has been wounded over and over in the last six months.

First, watching her mother betray her father. Her father's body contracting into itself, turned to ice and disintegrating, shattering as he was pushed from the Ark.

The earth. Everything. Finn. Charming her. Teasing her and bringing her trust into his world.

The Ark landing and Raven. She knows she's on the edge of hysteria, but Clarke wishes and wishes that Lexa had not lied to her.

"Clarke. I tried to stop you when -"
"Oh God, Lexa. Don't. Please?" Clarke's voice is barely there. Whispered words that are almost invisible in the air between them.

Lexa watches in quiet horror as Clarke seems to collapse in on herself and slowly drops to her knees. She moves forward quickly and catches Clarke in her arms as a sob strangles Clarke's throat.
Clarke can feel Lexa catch her as all the breath leaves her body. Clarke is struggling. Trying to remember what she's said and it hurts. Hurts her throat and there's a pain in the ends of her fingers and through her hands that clench tight against her stomach.

She can feel herself crying, and it is like she's watching a storm from a distance. The swirls of water are her tears and the wind howling is the soundless grief she feels emptying from her throat.

She's crying out in her mind. Dad. Dad. God, where are you? I need you. I can't do this. Oh please, someone. She can feel the tears when they finally come and the muffled sound of her sobs which she's carefully constrained, and it bleeds onto Lexa's shoulders.

Lexa. The girl whom she thought she'd share her dreams and fears because Clarke had believed Lexa didn't understand a word she was saying.

But Lexa had understood. Every, single, God damn word.

Clarke has had to be an adult from the second she's landed on the ground. She's closed down her emotions, her reactions and at times whatever morals or ethics she felt she once had.

Clarke's lashes are dark and wet, and she can barely breathe from the suffocating grip her sobs have on her throat. She's holding it in. Still trying to be an adult, but when she finally looks up into Lexa's eyes, Clarke becomes the young girl she's so efficiently packed away to the back of her mind.

Lexa's face falls at the devastation she sees in front of her. She's holding onto the grief she feels for having done what she's done to Clarke. Her Doctor Clarke.

"Fuck. Clarke. I'm so sorry. I should never -"

But she stops herself and pulls Clarke into her arms. She talks to her in soft, soft tones. Her words are nonsense. Words that she uses to cover Clarke's wounds which lie gaping between them.

If she's ever hated being exactly who she is, then now is the worst of it, and Lexa wishes that she was anyone else. Her regret is acute in green eyes darkened with her own sorrows. And remorse.

"I told you everything, Lexa."

"I know, Clarke. Forgive me. I thought you might mean me harm."

"I stitched your wound."

Through her pain, Clarke could feel her anger, now a bitter blue as it seared her insides.

"I stitched your God damned wounds. I helped you. I dragged you through the rain and the mud until I couldn't feel my fucking legs, Lexa."

"I know." The words are whispered with contrition.

Lexa feels an emotion that she's rarely felt in her young life. Shame.

She wants to undo this but doesn't know how. She knew; she knew she should have stopped. But Clarke had spilled parts of herself, and she'd barely had time to halt her with a kiss or a touch. She'd not wanted Clarke to expose her truths like that.

"If you knew -" Clarke pushed Lexa hard and stood up. She watched Lexa stumble, almost falling but the girl has the grace of a cat and steadies herself. She's looking at Clarke with caution. As if
Clarke will tear open her skin with her bare teeth. The mood that Clarke feels she's in; she wonders if she can stop herself from doing such a thing.

"If you knew, then why? Why would you do this to me? I cared for you. I told you so many things, Lexa. Fuck."

Lexa looks at blue eyes that are steeped in anger and misery. "Clarke, I needed to know if your people meant my people harm."

Clarke scoffs. Her anger has cauterized the sorrow, and she uses it to keep her self upright.

"Well isn't that just brilliant, Lexa. I expose myself completely. I - I give myself to you. I gave myself to you because I thought you were beautiful and kind and sweet. And all that time. You. You were lying to me."

It's an awful sound she makes then. A stifled sob, a cry that holds Lexa's name in it.

"I thought we could find a way to build bridges. Ha. Oh my God, how unbelievably naive."

Clarke blows out a breath of self-hatred. "I thought you could go and speak for me. Tell your stupid leaders that we don't mean any harm."

Lexa straightens and no matter how much affection she feels she must not allow Clarke to underestimate her passion for her people. The battles she's fought have to mean something, and she can't let her feelings, her powerful feelings for Clarke get in the way.

"Clarke. I never meant to hurt you. I tried to stop you from speaking so much about your thoughts, but you needed someone. I could see you needed to feel safe to let it out of you. You were burdened by it."

"Oh what? You were trying to help me? Save me? You thought that by letting me tell you all about what happened to my father..."

Clarke's voice is steadily rising. If Lexa doesn't get her to soften it, she'll have all of Ton DC's warriors in here in no time.

"Enough, Clarke. I know you're hurting and I know that right now you're feeling a lot of things..."

Clarke can hear the words and the novelty of hearing Lexa speak English is still fresh that she watches her lips as she forms the words. She's beautiful. Her lips are full, and Clarke remembers the feeling of them against her body. She blinks hard trying to move those sorts of stupid thoughts away.

"None of which seems to matter a hell of a lot to you." Clarke snaps.

"You are being deliberately obstinate."

"I don't think I've ever hated anyone as much as I hate you right now."

She watches how Lexa's jaw clenches. A hard-line that disappears into a swan's neck.

"Clarke. I am sorry for what has happened. I am." Beautiful long fingers reach out.

She watches Lexa strain for words. She's seen her struggle for words before, but that was a lie. She had been challenged to find a way to pantomime meaning.
"You will be returned to a location closer to your people. I think you will understand that we don't get too close." Lexa has closed her eyes and turned away from the evidence of her own treachery.

Clarke feels blinding pain hit her gut. She swallows hard trying to find a way to stop the hurt from spewing out of her mouth. "So that's it?"

The silence between them is punctuated by their soft breathing. Green eyes open to turn and stare at her, and Clarke feels the tremor that seems to assault Lexa's body.

"No, Clarke. That's not it."

The words are like barbed wire. Innocuous until Clarke tries to touch them.

"There is no it, Clarke. We gave each other solace. You healed me and helped me and for that, you have my gratitude."

Lexa's face has become still, and she tries to contain her anguish.

"Your gratitude."

Words like stones lay between them. The soft, easy grace they had when they had no words have disappeared beneath the debris of lies and anger that sits between them.

Clarke tries to look into this girl's eyes. She looks at the softened skin as the sun filters in through aged shrouds that hang by the windows. The line of her nose which is perfectly straight.

Clarke doesn't see the rapid breathing that Lexa has forced with an iron grip to hide as she steadies her breath. She doesn't detect the anger and hurt that Lexa is feeling, knowing that she has to let Clarke go.

"Clarke."

And finally, Lexa's voice breaks. Her eyes are frightened, and Clarke takes a step instinctively towards her. Her need to protect is there in the flash of blue eyes and strong, steady hands that move to rest on Lexa's hips.

"You meant everything that I have not been able to have. You gave me more than my life back, Clarke. Don't you understand? Clarke. Fuck, Clarke!"

And Clarke knows at that moment that she's not the only one who inadvertently opened up her heart to hurt.

The strangled cry that comes from a tight, sorrow-ridden throat is awful, and Clarke doesn't know if it comes from herself or if the strange alien sound has come from Lexa.

She doesn't care as she pulls Lexa towards her and pushes her mouth against hers. Their lips move without softness or finesse.

Clarke pushes into Lexa's mouth and cries when she tastes her tongue. Lexa groans and pulls her deeper inside of her. All the words they are seemingly incapable of articulating seeps into soft, guttural sounds of need.

Clarke feels Lexa's body beneath her fingertips as she slides them across soft skin. She feels herself being lifted by two powerful arms and she's placed not so gently onto the small cot that Lexa had
been examined on.

She cries out when Lexa stripped her in a frantic rush of stumbling hands and labored breathing. Her jacket is almost torn from her and then Clarke's shirt is lifted quickly and thrown casually onto the floor.

She watches Lexa as she slides down Clarke's bra straps from her shoulders. Clarke remembers the first time Lexa saw them. Her wonder at the design, at the difference to her own bindings. Now, she knows everything about Skaikru apparel. How to slide her fingers to the back and swiftly remove the hooks, which she does in one abrupt movement until the swell of Clarke's breasts are freed, and Lexa's moan invades the small room.

"Clarke." It's one word, and it's her name, but she feels the clench of need from such a simple thing.

"Come here." Clarke's voice is dark and throaty.

Green eyes darken, and Lexa moves forward, eyes darting down to luscious breasts and then back to Clarke's mouth which is swollen red and heavy from their kisses.

"I want you inside me, now."

The words are low and guttural, and Lexa's responding sound is beautiful.

It is the sharp inhalation of breath and a hoarse cry that is quickly silenced by a kiss that is deeper than any they've had before.

Clarke feels Lexa entangle her fingers in her hair and arches backward as she follows the outline of that arc. She can feel Lexa's jacket which she quickly pushes off. Clarke sensed Lexa's hand as it moved steadily against her skin, fingertips grazing her abdomen as it rises up to cup and grasp the swell of Clarke's breast.

The small cries Clarke makes, the low rasp of her voice when she whispers Lexa's name seems to drive the girl into a frenzy.

They fall slowly on to the cot behind Clarke. It's a slow conjoining of their two bodies. The soft hew of Lexa's tunic is gentle against her skin and Clarke quietly lifts her hands and tears it apart to get to the woman beneath.

They both groan and stare at one another with strange, quiet wonder. Clarke notices the frantic pace of both their breathing and how Lexa's irises seem to have disappeared.

"Inside me," Clarke says and then groans when Lexa quickly removes the impediment that is Clarke's trousers before plunging into her.

"Lexa."

It is a long exhalation that ends in a long, low howl and Lexa cries out in return. The pain of need is intense as she responds to all of Clarke's sounds.

The room is silent but for their breathing and the sound of Lexa's long fingers moving in and out of Clarke.

"Lexa, I'm going to -"
"Yes, Clarke. I want you to. For me. Beja!"
Clarke's body tightens so hard around her fingers, and she's coming apart in that low, husky voice of hers as she repeats Lexa's name over and over like a mantra.

"Fuck, Clarke!"

Lexa curses in the language of her people, but Clarke knows precisely what she's saying.

And she cries quietly as she comes.
Chapter Summary

Clarke and Lexa must separate. A truth emerges and a lie of omission is exposed.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone. I posted this chapter too quickly and have since done some edits. Sorry about this if you've already read the previously posted version. It's nothing too drastic. Just cleaning up spelling errors, HTML glitches, and some grammar.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Heda."

The voice comes through the door and both women still. Clarke is aware that Lexa's long, graceful fingers are still buried deep in her. She looks into green eyes which have widened in shock, but even so, Lexa slides gently out of Clarke and kisses her softly before speaking.

"Go away!"

Lexa's voice sounds so different to the girl that Clarke has come to know. Her voice has a certain ring of power. It makes Clarke wonder who the hell her Grounder Girl is.

"But Heda. We have news!"

It is the sound of Indra's voice and Lexa sighs. The woman is one of her leading advisers and greatest general. If she has news, then it must be important.

"A minute."

Lexa rises and looks gently at Clarke as she reaches out to pull her up.

"I am sorry, Clarke. I must go and see what Indra wants. This -"

"It's ok. I understand. You are with your people now, and they probably want to know how you got shot and -"

"No. That's not it."

Lexa touches Clarke's mouth, her knuckles grazing the soft lips and the affection in her eyes are real. Clarke isn't sure what's going on, but she can sense the urgency of the words that have been going backward and forward through the door between Lexa and the woman outside.

"Indra is the leader of this village," Lexa says slowly, careful with how she delivers information, "she has news that I must hear."
"Oh." The furrow in Clarke's brow is sweet, and Lexa wants to kiss it, but she can hear the impatience of her general emanating through the door.

"I won't be long."

"No, it's OK." Clarke has already put on her bra and covered herself with her shirt. She smirks though when she sees the moment Lexa realizes she has no shirt to put back on.

"My shirt. Clarke."

"Sorry. You shouldn't have pissed me off." Clarke cannot hide the wicked grin that's slowly emerging on her face.

Lexa quirks an eyebrow then growls and pulls Clarke into a firm embrace before moving to one of the cupboards in the room. There are several tunics piled on top of one another. There's an array of dark-hued cotton shirts, and Lexa quickly grabs one.

Within moments she's a stranger again to Clarke. Her visage is stern and unreadable. The green eyes are looking inward to a distance that Clarke cannot see. She wonders how the girl does it and whether it is just another cultural thing she hasn't got her head around.

Clarke is not far behind Lexa when she strides to the door and opens it onto an impatient looking Indra.

"Heda. There is news about the mountain men."

The Trigedasleng is rapid, and Clarke can only make out a few words. She understands the words 'mountain' and 'people.' Something about more activity? She wonders why these people keep calling Lexa another name though.

Neither of the women pays attention to Clarke following behind them. Lexa and the local leader are speaking fast in their language, and Clarke cannot keep up, so she looks around at the buildings and this strange grounder world she has inadvertently walked inside.

She begins to worry about her mother. She'll be hysterical by now as Clarke hasn't been able to get through to Raven on the radio.

Clarke stills for a moment as she frantically tries to remember what happened to her backpack. Her backpack with her radio and small sidearm. Shit.

She catches up when she sees that Lexa has stopped and turned to see where Clarke is. The girl's demeanor would be frightening if Clarke did not know her. She's quite intimidating, more so than many of the other grounders, but Clarke sees the little smile on the edge of Lexa's face. The one that isn't quite there but tells Clarke that she's made the grounder girl laugh on the inside.

"Clarke. I am sorry to cut our time short."

Oh. And there it is.

She knows she shouldn't show anything on her face, but she cannot help the disappointment that lances through her. She grits her teeth. She's stupid. Nothing can come of this with her and Lexa.

Lexa is a Grounder and Clarke - Clarke doesn't know where she fits right now. It isn't the Ark, but she guesses she should head back to her people sooner than later.
So she nods curtly, and when she looks into those green eyes, she knows that her own eyes will have the same kind of distant hardness that hides the pain behind them.

"That's ok, Lexa. I'll get out of your hair as soon as you need."

Clarke gulps down the pain but notes the sudden confusion in Lexa's eyes.

"Ah, out of here. Not literally in your hair."

She can see the amusement in those green eyes and stops before she can humiliate herself any more than she already has.

To the right of Lexa, she can see the woman Lexa called Indra looking at Clarke as if she's just drawn her gun out. She's staring daggers at her and Clarke is bemused, wondering what she's said or done to cause such ire on the women's face.

"Heda."

The way she says this word - Clarke can pick up so many things that she is not saying. Why are we still here? Who is this girl? Why is she - what? What is it that Clarke is or isn't doing that has pissed her off so much?

She watches as Lexa notices the other woman's reaction and how her face hardens.

"Enough. There are things that you do not know, Indra. Clarke is permitted to use my name. She does not know who I am."

Indra blinks in surprise and then nods curtly.

"I see, Commander."

Clarke watches the interplay between the two women and wonders at Lexa that she can talk to this woman with such authority. She begins to wonder who the hell her grounder girl is. She can feel the beginnings of nervousness as something pricks at the back of her mind.

"I will find a horse and some warriors to help you get back to your people, Clarke. I will have your pack returned to you when you leave the gates."

Lexa's voice is calm as she walks out into the village. Clarke keeps in step with her and nods.

"Thank you. I-"

Clarke's voice trails away. She doesn't know what to say, and blue eyes look intensely into Lexa's. She wants to say that she'll miss her and her absence is already a pain that Clarke can feel intensely.

The passion of the last five days has wholly turned Clarke's world upside down. She wants to ask, can we meet again? In her heart which feels like its crumbling beneath her chest, she knows they won't be allowed. Not yet.

"It is I who should thank you, Clarke. If not for you," Lexa says, but her voice falters as she thinks about what has happened between them.

Clare watches her as Lexa swallows hard, her full lips pressed tight so that she doesn't betray her emotions.
They are both still walking. Indra is a little ahead of them as she leads them to some warriors lounging around one of the many firepits, their bodies are huge, tired, leaning over each other as they share the meats that have been roasting over the fire.

Clarke is only peripherally aware of them as she's so caught up with all the things she can and can't see in Lexa's gaze.

"I know. It's ok."

"Clarke. You are a good doctor A good person. You saved me."

Clarke laughs softly. She looks down and thinks about the pain she's forgotten for the last few days.

"Actually, I think you saved me."

Her smile is soft, and she wants to say more, but she can tell that she doesn't need to as she sees her feelings reflected in sad, green eyes.

"I am sorry, Clarke. I never meant for you to tell me all those things. About Finn. And Raven. Your father."

Clarke shakes her head quickly.

"Don't. I get why you did it, but I'm still not ok about that. It's going to - take me a little time."

She feels a hand reach towards her and Lexa grasps her arm in the way that Clarke has learned that grounders do. Just a little up the forearm and it's a firm grip.

"May we meet again, Clarke." And Clarke hears the tiny catch in Lexa's voice.

Clarke can't breathe, and she blinks frantically for a few seconds as she tries to stop the traitorous tears that have begun to fill her eyes. She can't believe that this is it.

So she steps away, turns from this girl who is so much more than her enemy and begins to walk away from the one who has opened up her heart in a way that no-one has before.

There is a roar from the back of the group of warriors and a woman, tall and well muscled, her hair tied back in thick dark blonde rows of braids comes rushing through. The next minute Clarke is face first on the ground. Her arm is painfully drawn back, and Clarke cries out.

"Stop! What are you doing, Anis? Let go of her."

"Commander, this is the Skaigirl."

"What Skaigirl? Release her."

Lexa's voice is a roar above her and Clarke listens as her heart threatens to explode in her chest. She feels the pain in her arms release as the body that has forced her to the ground steps away from her. She rolls around and looks up into concerned green eyes.

"Clarke?"

Lexa's hand reaches down to her and pulls her up carefully.

Around them, a storm of words are being thrown at Lexa, and Clarke watches as the girl's face
scrunches in annoyance before she spins around and yells in a very terse voice.

The projection is loud. Commanding.

"*Em pleni!*"

Clarke knows these words. Enough. Pleni. Plenty. Enough. It's fascinating how the words work. Syntactically abrupt. It is language that was created around speed. Verbal shortcuts.

"*But Heda!*"

Clarke twists and looks at the voice. It is the same person who threw Clarke to the ground.

A woman. She's almost crying, but her tears are stoppered and make her eyes seem glassy. She's frightened by something. Someone.

Clarke looks back to Lexa. It is infinitesimal. The moment in time when Clarke looks at the two women and realizes that this warrior is terrified of Lexa. Her Lexa. Clarke blinks and feels her breath disappear. And the slow beginning of knowledge

"*Heda. She is the one. She was the one that made the fire that killed our warriors. She is the Skaigirl that killed my husband.*"

The woman's voice is low. Angry and the words she spits out are fast, and there's no break until she finishes speaking, and as she speaks out, everyone around her hears the harsh sounds of her breath.

The silence is awful, and Clarke begins to tremble when every eye turns towards in her in fury.

Clarke watches as Lexa turns to stare at her. Her face for a moment looks horrified, and there's a flash of fear and concern before her implacable mask is firmly in place.

She watches Lexa as her brow furrows, and Clarke recognizes it immediately from when they used to communicate in the bunker. It's the same face she gets when she's trying to think of how to explain something.

Someone pushes Clarke again, and she looks around her in confusion. Everyone is yelling and trying to get to her. She looks back at Lexa and feels a deadly chill go through her.

Those eyes. Green eyes that have looked at Clarke with affection and desire is suddenly flat and full of tempered rage.

"*Tie her up!*"

Clarke almost stumbles backward at the sudden sound of English. At Lexa directing those words to her.

"*What the hell?*

Clarke steps towards Lexa, but she stops when she hears the sound of swords unsheathing and looks around.

They are all pointed at her.

"*What's going on?* Clarke asks in as calm a voice as she can muster. Her heart is beating madly in her throat, and she can barely swallow at the sudden spike of fear that's coursing through her.
"Were you ever going to tell me, Clarke?"

There is such a look of anger and anguish which is quickly hidden in Lexa's eyes as she looks at Clarke.

"Tell you what? I don't understand."

Lexa takes a long, slow breath as Clarke continues to struggle against the warrior who has come up to bind her.

She watches Lexa pace away from her for a second before she turns back and walks into Clarke's space. They are almost close enough to kiss. Clarke can feel the angry puffs of air as Lexa tries to control her breathing.

She is looking at Clarke as if she cannot believe what she is seeing. Her eyes are angry, flat and looking at Clarke through narrowed eyes.

"You're the one that burned three hundred of my warriors alive." Lexa's words are said so quietly that Clarke almost misses it.

When she understands what Lexa is saying, Clarke almost faints. This girl. This woman. The authority that everyone had bestowed upon her. No. It can't be. The penny drops spectacularly, and Clarke almost laughs at the irony of it all.

"You're the one that sent them there to kill us. You!" Clarke breathed out, and her voice is tight with anger and pain.

"You're the Commander. You - you wanted me dead."

Clarke's voice is hard and full of sudden knowledge. She sees something flicker in Lexa's eyes but chooses to ignore it. She cries out when her arms are forced behind her back, and her hands are bound.

"You wouldn't dare."

Clarke growls and tries to lunge towards Lexa who barely shifts out of her way before turning to another warrior.

"Prepare a horse for her. Ryder, take her with you. Indra, you will need to keep Ton DC safe. The Maunon are free of the mountain. I will send more warriors when we get to Polis."

The silence that falls is immediate as everyone stops moving and looks at the Lexa in shock.

"Commander?"

Indra is still speaking in English and Clarke's fears are confirmed.

The girl that she's spent the last six days with is not the sweet, young innocuous grounder girl that Clarke had thought she was.

She's the leader of her people. She is the woman that has put a bounty on Clarke's head.

And she wants Clarke's people dead.

Clarke tries to hold back a sob as she thinks of everything they are about to lose. Every hope that she'd invested in Lexa speaking to her people.
She's still struggling and tries to call out, but the look Lexa sends to the warrior that's holding her soon has Clarke's cries muffled behind a firm hand that covers her mouth. She screams and kicks and tries to bite him and misses the words that Lexa says next.

"Yes, the Maunon are free of the mountain. I do not know how many, but enough to kill several of our warriors when we were there on a mission to destroy their leaders. And someone who knew of our mission, someone from Polis, has betrayed us."

Clarke hears the roar of the warriors before the man who has her in his grasp lifts her and walks away.

*** *** ***

Lexa can feel her heart begin to beat steadily again. She had impassively watched as Clarke was dragged away, but her heart ached as she watched her struggle and cry out.

She had to stay strong as things seemed to be unraveling amongst her people. Who would have betrayed them to the Maunon? They were the common enemy of all the clans.

And Clarke. Clarke is the one responsible for so many of her dead warriors. The very same woman she'd asked Anya to put a bounty on, to bring her into Polis to face the Commander, and to answer for the deaths she had caused.

She felt her stomach lurch. Two complete strangers who turned out to know each other. And Clarke's face when she realized who Lexa was. The shock. And hate.

Lexa clenched her teeth hard, grinding them so much she felt pain lance through her jaw. She did not want Clarke to look at like that her ever again. She wanted - Clarke safe. And away from here.

She felt her shoulders sag for a moment but forced herself to stand tall as she moved around her people.

She marched over to Indra; the older leader's face bristling with unmitigated fury.

"How do you know it was Polis?" Indra growls, her face has never been able to hide her temper and today is no different. Her dark brows furrow in anger, the rich, darker tones of her skin are even deeper now with the rage that suffuses it. Each word is spat out, hard, spiky stones of vitriol.

"Only a few people in Polis knew that I was going to enter the mountain with a small group of my best warriors."

The silence is awful between them as Indra absorbs the enormity of what she has heard. This can only mean that its Lexa's closest and most trusted advisors. And one of them has betrayed the Commander. Lexa can see the disbelief in her general's eyes.

"I need to get to Polis. Surprise who the traitor is. They won't be expecting my return. Keep your warriors quiet and let none of this get out. Just yet."

"And the Sky girl? What of her?"

"She'll be returning to Polis with me. Do not worry, Indra. I will get to the bottom of this. And Clarke? I will deal with Clarke." She manages to keep her voice stern and steady at that lie. She has no fucking idea what she's going to do with Clarke.

And with that, she's gone in a swirl of thick boots; her heavy cloak flutters behind her and her
swords are carefully repositioned on her back before she reaches up for the reins of the horse that has been brought to her.

"Stay prepared. Keep your people hidden. I do not trust the mountain men. Use the tunnels."

Lexa's voice is steady as she bites out command after command so that her general knew what was needed from her, and her people over the next few days.

There is too much that is not known, and Lexa needs to come up with a strategy.

"What of Anya?" Indra yells out as Lexa rises onto her horse.

"Send her to Polis," Lexa calls out over her shoulder.

Indra watches her leader as she rides towards the warriors who have gathered at the exit for Polis. Her lips tighten with worry.

The idea that one of the Commander's chosen advisor's is the cause of betrayal alarms her. She can only hope that with Anya already heading back into Polis, they will find the traitor and a way to bring down the mountain soon.

*** *** ***

Lexa does not see Clarke again until they're almost upon Polis. She can see her tower reaching up to the sky from where they've stopped to water the horses. Lexa's tired, and the pain in her shoulder and abdomen have made the journey a little uncomfortable. She does not show her discomfort.

"Any news from the scouts?"

She does not turn around as she speaks but can feel Gustus close behind her. She knows his step as much as she knows her own.

"Polis is in an uproar. Nia is there."

"Nia." She is surprised. Nia has not returned to Polis since their last, very loud, very public disagreement. That was almost two years ago.

"She heard that you had been killed."

"News of my death seems to have traveled quickly."

She gets down slowly from her horse and walks along with Gustus.

"Heda!"

"Yes?"

She is impatient. Her voice is tight, but still holds the calm austerity of the Commander. She can see Clarke from the corner of her eyes. It is evident that the girl is not someone used to horses. Her legs are shaking, and there is pain reflected on her face.

Lexa grimaces. She's determined to ignore the feeling to rush to Clarke and look after her.

"Has she been fed or given water?" Lexa's voice is sharp. Whatever Clarke did in the past; she still saved her.
"Yes, Heda. She does not know how to ride."

Ah. This will mean that Clarke will have to ride into Polis with someone or be strung along beside one of the horses, forced to walk or run beside them. The situation in Polis is too much an unknown for them to have anyone holding them back.

She nods curtly. Ryder is one of her guards and part of her immediate protection. To have someone riding in front of him on the saddle will compromise what he can see as they ride in. It also makes Clarke a sitting duck to anyone who wishes harm to the Commander.

"She rides with me."

"Sha Heda."

"Heda. Do you think this wise?"

Gustus is one of her most loyal warriors. He's been alongside her since her arrival in Polis when she was still a child. His response is immediate, and she watches his face as he thinks of all the possibilities. It takes him only a moment to realize that it is the best position for Clarke. She will cover most of Lexa's body. She can enter Polis as the Commander's captive.

And Lexa is sufficiently skilled in moving around the girl should an attack arise.

"Do you need my answer?"

He shakes his head grinning, and Lexa smiles. It is confident, and it is enough to infuriate Clare who yells through the material that covers her mouth.

Lexa moves to her horse and removes a water skin. She's thirsty and she does not have to breathe through her nose and the tightness of a gag.

Lexa turns and walks towards Clarke, sliding a knife from her boot in one fluid motion. She stops when she sees how big Clarke's eyes become and the involuntary step backward that she takes. Her stomach clenches at Clarke's automatic action, but Lexa tries to show no emotion on her face.

Lexa tilts her head and stares into Clarke's blue eyes, slowly moving forward and reaching up to the girl's cheek. In the end, Clarke shows her true spirit and two furious blue eyes stare at her stubbornly even as she expects Lexa to plunge the blade into her.

Lexa smirks when Clarke gasps after she slices through the gag, the material falling towards the ground, but a swift hand snatches it up and pockets it into her long coat. It would not do for any spies to find it and come to any conclusions.

"You - bitch!"

Clarke tries to lunge towards her, but she's too close to Lexa who adroitly sidesteps Clarke and pulls her to the side of the track before pushing her up against a tree.

"Drink, Klark."

Lexa observes Clarke. She watches how she swallows with a dry throat and tries to control her breathing. Lexa stares as Clarke tries to calm herself and not to show fear or panic.

The girl is far from home. She is about to go into the heart of enemy territory and has no idea what is going to happen to her. Lexa is amazed that the kind, beautiful Doctor Clarke, is the same person
who killed three hundred of her warriors.

"You killed my people."

"You sent them to kill me! If you hadn't done that - I wouldn't have had to! You gave me no damn choice, Lexa!"

There are tears of fury and pain in Clarke's eyes. Lexa can see the regret in them. She knows Clarke well enough to know that killing Lexa's people would have been a last resort.

"Yes. I did. But everything we knew about your people told me that this was the right thing to do. We did not know that you had that kind of tek. I did not know you then, Clarke. And if I had, maybe my choices would have been tempered. Different. But then, you were the enemy. And it was war.

"Could you not have sent someone to come, and damn well just talk to us?"

Clarke's voice has risen and the anger in it has several of her warriors spinning around to face them. Lexa moves forward and does the only thing she can think of to silence Clarke and to stop her warriors from killing her.

She pulls Clarke into her arms and whispers into her ear. She can feel Clarke's shiver.

"Do not yell at my people's leader unless you are ready to die today, Clarke."

"You bit -"

"Do not say that word again, Clarke," Lexa warns, and her voice is low and sharp.

"God damn it, Lexa," Clarke whispers. Her lips are a tight, crimson line.

She can feel the surrender in Clarke's body as she sags against her and how Clarke's body begins shaking against hers.

"What the hell are you doing? I helped you. Damn it."

"I know, Klark. I understand what you did. I would have done the same if I had been in your position and I've had many years to get used to making such decisions."

She pulls Clarke closer to her when she hears her stifle a sob against Lexa's cloak.

Lexa looks out at the forest. She holds Clarke as she shakes in her arms. Lexa's eyes are narrowed slits as she looks over her warriors, the coat of their horses' legs are slick with mud from the unseasonable rain that stopped - was it only this morning?

This morning when that Skai boy had almost shot her and Clarke. She sighed softly against the top of soft, blonde hair. Clarke had saved her. Again.

"I do not understand you, Klark. First, you kill my warriors. Then, you find me, and you drag me to your cave to stitch up my skin and save me. Why?"

"I am a doctor," Clarke whispered. Lexa nodded against the top of Clarke's head and pulled her closer.

"Then you listen to me, Doctor Clarke," Lexa whispered in Clarke's ear, and she felt the girl shiver again. "You are surrounded by my warriors. They could kill you within seconds of my command. 
Do you understand, Clarke?"

Clarke moved away from Lexa's chest to look into green eyes trying to discern how intent she was with her barely veiled threat and trying to figure out where she's going with this conversation.

"My warriors also revere me, Clarke. Above all. You must not insult them by insulting me or challenging me in any way in front of them. Do you understand?"

Lexa's breathing was steady, and she stared at Clarke patiently as she waited for an answer. Her fingers stroked the bark of the tree that Clarke was against.

She saw the second that Clarke acknowledged the question in her eyes. The fury and determination in those blue eyes calmed somewhat, and Lexa let out a small breath of relief.

"Good. Now. You will not cause me any problems going into Polis?"

"No." Clarke's voice is also calm now, and the deep rasp of her voice makes Lexa clench her jaw, resisting the pull to have Clarke in her arms against the side of a tree in front of all her warriors.

She does not say anything else and mounts her horse again before reaching down for Clarke who lifts her bound hands before her in confusion. Lexa laughs softly to herself at the sudden yelp Clarke lets out when she raises her onto the saddle and positions her in front of her.

The arm she moves across Clarke's stomach is strong, and steady and there is no way in heaven for Clarke to move from her grasp. The journey to Polis is short from where they are, but Lexa can already see the problems that will face them.

The constant movement of Clarke's backside against her, right there - it is too much, and it will take all of her self-discipline not to respond. She leans forward in the saddle so that she can speak softly into Clarke's ear.

"To my gona, my warriors, you are in front of me as a form of body armor. Anyone who wishes to kill me; they will have to go through you first."

"Shit." Clarke swallows audibly, and Lexa laughs right into Clarke's ear.

"Do not be afraid, Clarke. I will guard your life as if it were my own."

"And how the hell are you going to do that?"

Lexa's mouth moves across Clarke's ear, a gentle brush of lips against the soft tendrils of hair at the nape of Clarke's neck.

"You have never seen me fight, Klark." She smiles at the soft moan Clarke inadvertently makes.

There is a shout from the back of the group of warriors. Lexa immediately stiffens and puts her arm protectively around Clarke while her other arm swiftly moves a sword from its sheath.

"Commander!"

Lexa recognizes the voice of Indra's new second, Oktevia and maintains the sword by her side as the young warrior and Lincoln ride up beside her.

"Oktevia kom Skaikru."

Lexa realizes that this must be someone who knows Clarke and she has yet to notice the captive in
She is focussed on Lexa, ready to impart her news but the girl is a natural warrior. She eyes everything around her before she speaks. Lexa watches her with interest when brilliant green-blue eyes see Clarke's stiff figure riding in the saddle before her.

"Clarke?"

"Octavia." Clarke murmurs and tries to be nonchalant about exactly where she is sitting, and the fact that her hands are bound before her.

Lexa watches how the girl's eyes move from Clarke back to the Commander. Lexa tries not to laugh at the next words that come out of Octavia's mouth.

"Clarke, does your mother know you're here? She is so going to kill you."

"It doesn't matter what my mother thinks, Octavia. I'm not going back to Arcadia. She'll have to deal with it."

"Clarke. I left Arcadia this morning. You didn't see her, I did. I don't know if you've used your radio to talk, but you may want to think about talking to her. And Finn. I thought you had broken things off with him."

There's a note of judgment in her voice which makes Clarke stiffen.

Lexa watches with interest at how quickly Clarke's face whitens.

She straightens in her saddle and uses all of her training to stop herself from pulling Clarke against her protectively.

Octavia's face reflects her feelings openly. She's looking at Clarke like she wants to say so much more, but her eyes flit to the Commander whom she's still in awe and feels threatened by.

"Clarke, please." Octavia closes her eyes and huffs impatiently. She knows how stubborn Clarke can get.

"Everyone is looking for you because of what Finn said."

"Jesus Octavia. Just tell me what the hell is going on." Clarke finally snaps the words out. It hurts Lexa to see as she knows Clarke to be something entirely different from this. Soft, gentle and caring. She knows she's partly responsible for creating this version of Clarke and hates herself for it.

"Commander. They're all looking for Clarke. Finn returned from the bunker and said that Clarke had been kidnapped."

Octavia has decided that it's better to speak with Lexa and has moved all of her attention to the other woman.

"Oh my God, that idiot!" Clarke snapped in fury and Lexa could feel how all of Clarke's muscles tensed before the little explosion of anger. She tightened her hand against Clarke's abdomen.

"They think -" Octavia stopped as Lincoln cantered up to them. The smile on her face is reserved, but Lexa could see that the young Skai girl had given away her love to one of her warriors. Lincoln's response is soft and immediate, his smile wide before turning to nod respectfully to Lexa.
"Commander. Clarke."

Ah, so he knew Clarke as well. She wondered at this and how little she knew of her warrior's activities since the Skai ships had fallen to the earth.

Her six months traveling in the south and western plains working on treaties with the last two clans have made her miss out on too much. She reminded herself to find out more from Lincoln later.

"What news, Linkon?"

"The Skai Kru are preparing to search for their missing leader."

"I'm not their leader." Clarke's voice is hard, and Lexa takes note of the tension in Octavia's face.

"They are preparing a war Kru, Commander. They have long faya gons and tek that carries many people across the ground. As fast, if not faster than our horses," Lincoln says quietly.

Lexa watches Clarke stiffen in confusion.

Lexa keeps her outward demeanor still and shows nothing of what is happening inside. She cannot afford to fight many battles at once. To have both Skai Kru and the Maunon on her doorstep with their tek will stretch her armies thin. They can keep them at bay, but she's not sure for how long and at what cost to her people.

"Take a message back to the Skai people," she finally says looking at both Octavia and Lincoln, "tell them that we have Clarke. Tell them that there is no need to negotiate for her release as Clarke wishes to explore our capital. She is with us voluntarily."

She ignores the blatant scoff from Clarke and continues.

"She will represent Skai Kru to our council and will answer for the crimes her people have committed."

She can hear the quiet intake of breath from Clarke and watches as Octavia's face whitens.

"Commander, please. Clarke has done nothing that any leader in war would not do," Octavia says.

Lexa can see that she's terrified of the Commander's reaction but overcomes her fear to fight for her friend. It is a good thing to know that Clarke has such loyalty even though the girl is unaware of her power and influence as a leader.

"I understand that Oktevia, but my people will need a demonstration of my commitment to them. We are being fought from within and without. I bring the leader of the people who killed three hundred of my warriors. They will expect retribution. But Clarke will have a plan for us to bring down the mountain."

Clarke visibly flinches, and Lincoln stares in surprise at the young blonde. Is this possible?

She can see that Octavia wants to say something else but the look the Commander gives her forces her into silence.

Throughout the whole of the conversation, she can feel the hard, iron form of the woman in front of her. She nods to the two in dismissal and waits for them to move their horses around to head back to Arkadia. When they're out of earshot, she speaks softly to Clarke.

"Clarke."
"Go to hell. And how the hell am I supposed to bring down the mountain?"

Clarke does not struggle in her arms, but Lexa can feel the rage pouring from the young woman.

"I know that you and I have only known one another for a short time."

Lexus tightens her hands on the thick leather of her reins but does not pull. There is no need for her to take her irritation out on her horse.

"You are brilliantly resourceful. You've used our weaknesses against us, so I have every faith in you, Clarke, that if anyone can bring down the mountain, then it will be you. I need you to trust me, Clarke. I do what needs to be done for my people. But I also believe that we are destined for more than war. We are meant for more than mere survival of this world. I have seen thousands of my people die, Clarke. I will find a better way. And you Clarke, I hope that you will help me make this happen."

Lexa's heart is considerably lighter when she sees the imperceptible nod in front of her.

Lexa's still adjusting to the gait of her horse and is trying desperately to ignore the constant pushing up against Clarke's backside. She's painfully aware that Clarke is not immune either as she gasps whenever Lexa is forced hard against her.

Now that she knows Polis has a traitor, Lexa must assume that there are spies even in this camp. She leans forward to speak softly against Clarke's ear. To distract. To ensure that time is on their side.

"I first heard of you after your starship burnt through the sky and landed by Ton DC." Lexa's voice is relaxed and soft. It is deliberate, meant to allay fears and encourage calm.

"My General Anya sent word back to me about it. About the Skai people who littered the forests near Ton DC. Her warriors kept an eye out for me."

Lexa's eyes look over the landscape as they move, noting the thinning out of the forest as they head to one of the old, broken roads that lead into Polis.

The ground is gray and broken up with large fissures and cracks. She prefers the roads through the forest instead of these old highways which were torn and melted from praimfaya, but they need to approach Polis from a direction for the element of surprise.

It will give her time to think before she decides on what to do and how to handle the situation.

"I was Anya's sekon for many years before I ascended to Commander."

"Ascended?" Clarke's voice is curious. She's still very quiet as she takes in everything around her. Lexa understands that Clarke needs to absorb all the things she's learned today.

From her discovery that Lexa could speak her language to finding out that she'd been sleeping with the Commander of the Twelve Clans.

Her mind was reeling from the knowledge of who Clarke was. But Lexa was a leader. She had been trained to take opportunity wherever it was cast.

"Each Commander must rise from the enclave - fight and kill other Naitblidas like me to be ready for the Spirit of the Commander to enter their body."
"Naitblida? Night blood." Clarke muses aloud, working out the words and the context of the black blood she saw from Lexa's wound now makes sense.

"Your blood is different. It's black, isn't it? That wasn't my imagination when I stitched up your wound the first time. What I don't understand is the Spirit of the Commander."

"Good," Lexa smiles at how quickly Clarke picks up the nuances of the language. She's too smart and Lexa will have to be careful of what Clarke hears as she learns more of their words.

"Yes. My blood is different. There aren't many of us."

Clarke scoffed.

"That's hardly surprising, Commander; if you're all hell-bent on killing each other to get some mythical title."

Lexa pushed down the irritation she felt at Clarke's words. She did not understand their world yet.

"Every generation produces more or less the same number of Naitblidas. The enclave is necessary to attain the Spirit of the Commander, which is pushed into the base of the neck and merged with the current Commander. Me, to be exact. To not fight to the death means that the Commander's leadership would always be under threat."

"How does a Commander retire?"

"Retire?" Lexa does not understand the word in the context that Clarke is using.

"Stop and let someone else take over the leadership when they get too old or injured. Our chancellors are chosen too: by the council. When a chancellor becomes unable to perform their duty, the council reconvenes and votes in a new chancellor. The previous chancellor then retires."

"I see. We don't retire; we die, Clarke. That is the only way for a new Commander to come into the position."

Clarke stiffened when she heard the words uttered so softly against her ear. Was this world so bleak that even the highest position held so little hope?

"In that case, let's do what we can to avoid that, shall we?"

Lexa laughed. It is a soft and pretty sound. Entirely at odds with the upright figure and the mask of stoicism that seemed to be indelibly etched on her face.

"Indeed, Clarke."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the reviews and kudos. Each comment helps build my confidence in storytelling, and your ideas and thoughts do influence some parts of the story.
We Can't Build Our Dreams On Suspicious Minds

Chapter Summary

Octavia and Lincoln return to Arcadia to deliver the news about Clarke.
Raven faces a painful truth and makes a decision.
Thelonius shows himself.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys,
Thank you so much for the kudos and comments. It is always so refreshing to read them first thing in the morning.
You are helping me come up with ideas even though I've outlined this to the nth degree, Virgo that I am. Your suggestions will help me on plot points I'm stuck on which will help me finish this. Thank you so much!.
Cheers and happy reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Octavia can feel the energy pulsing through her body. After landing on the ground, all she has wanted to do is soar across the earth and horses; are the closest thing to that feeling.

She can feel the wind cut through the hard leather of her jacket and the trousers Lincoln recently gifted her. She's glad of it right now as the weather has turned surly again. Dark clouds seep across the horizon and riding through the forest feels almost as if the sun has gone completely. They're riding at breakneck speed, and it thrills her.

She is no longer living under the floor on the Ark. She's alive, and she can barely get her breath sometimes at the wonder of it. She looks across at Lincoln, the grin on his face is probably as mile wide as hers.

She throws her head back and laughs. They can see the dirty silver-grey of the Ark's fence on the horizon. They'll have to slow down as they get closer as it's highly likely Bellamy and his group of guards would shoot first and not apologize later.

Octavia's mouth thins at the thought of her brother. His hatred of those who live on the ground was a poison that seemed to have short-circuited his sensibilities.

She was the one that had always walked like a powder keg ready to explode out into the world, but Bellamy had been constant. Reading his books on Homer and his passion for history.

Now, he was like a viper continually consuming his tail; his hatred seeping out into the world whenever his eyes looked at Lincoln.

Octavia had learned to reconstruct herself so that whenever Bellamy and Lincoln, or any other Grounder for that matter was in the room, she became insanely still in the hope that it would
quieten the ugliness inside him.

"Slow down," Lincoln's voice snapped her out of her thoughts.

She immediately tightened her legs and leaned back in the saddle, and felt her horse slow to a canter. She looked over at Lincoln. She saw his gentle face watching her closely.

God, she loved his eyes. Forever dark and soft. She'd only seen him enraged when the blood of the Reaper ran through him.

She would be forever grateful to Clarke for working out how to save him. They'd been on their own, trapped in a cave miles from the Dropship when they'd found Lincoln's wasted, demented body.

He'd been severely dehydrated, and a ravening mess collapsed in on himself on the verge of death. Clarke, the medical genius that she was, had combined Grounder medicines and what she knew of psychotropic drugs, had created an elaborate medical cocktail which she'd injected into his arm.

It had been a horrendous twenty-four wait, and Octavia had been ready to let him go as his respiration had became weaker and weaker. Lincoln had stopped breathing, and she'd begun to howl gathering him in her arms and sobbing hard.

Clarke had gently pushed her out of the way before slamming a syringe of adrenaline directly into his heart. His reaction had been immediate, choking and gasping as his spirit returned to his body.

She blinked away the image. Her world had changed on a dime up in the Ark, and then she'd landed on the ground. It had taught her that life wasn't this vast opportunity waiting to be mined. It was a constant threat that she kept an eye out for over her shoulder, waiting for every potential new twist of fate. Even if fate had sent her love; she knew that it could just as easily take it away.

She would do everything in her power to ensure that her brother did not destroy her life with his constant compulsion to keep her safe.

For what was there to keep her safe from Bellamy and his hatred? And she would kill to keep Lincoln safe.

"Your brother is already waiting," Lincoln stared up into the guard's towers that protected the mouth of Arcadia's entrance.

"I've already warned Raven. She's going to make sure Abby is waiting for us," Octavia responded with a sly smile, "Bellamy can chill his ass for once."

Lincoln laughed softly. He hated it that Octavia and her brother were at odds, but he was not foolish enough to get caught in the crossfire. Bellamy may not have the strength of many men born of the ground, but his access to guns and rifles made such things of little consequence.

The gates were open as they pulled to a stop in front of them. Octavia leaped off her horse and strode with determined steps towards Abby who had run out to meet them. Octavia grinned when she spied Raven slowly walking to catch up to Abbey.

"She's alright," Octavia quickly interrupted Abby before she could start asking a million questions. "We found her, and she's safe. She went to Polis."

"What do you mean she's gone to Polis? She was meant to come back days ago. She was meant to keep up radio contact."

Octavia listened to Abby's panic. She also noticed the flicker in Raven's eyes, the slight look to the
left as if she was hiding something.

"Clarke said she tried to radio but couldn't get a signal or response."

There it was. Raven's jaw tightened, and it didn't take much for Octavia to work out that Raven had interfered somehow with Clarke's communications. She'd get to that later.

Her eyes flicked back to Abby. The woman's gaze held a desperate need in them. Abby Griffin was not used to losing control of her life or that of her daughter's. It did not matter that this daughter was now the unofficial leader of the Sky people.

"Where is she? Can we get to her?"

"Abby, I don't think that's a good idea -"

"Octavia, I don't care. She's my daughter, and she needs to come home now."

Octavia shook her head and went to argue, but Lincoln's calm voice broke through, interrupting the approaching conflict between the two women.

"No, Abby Kom Skaikru. Clarke is with the Commander. She will be her guest in Polis as they discuss how to bring down the mountain."

The silence that met his words was awful. Out of the corner of her eye, Octavia saw her brother reach the bottom of the guard's stairs and stride towards them.

She saw the gleam in Raven's eyes. Damn. She was going to have to knock some sense into that girl. Finn is broken. Only Raven couldn't see it.

"What's going on?" Bellamy did nothing to hide his belligerence, "where the fuck is Clarke?"

"And hello to you too, dear brother."

Bellamy's lips compressed. It was the same straight line their mother would get when Octavia came out from beneath the floor. Tired. Angry most of the time. Always wearing a bittersweet happiness beneath the mask.

"Clarke's in the Grounder capital," Raven said and looked at Bellamy to see how he'd respond knowing exactly how well that would go down.

"How the hell did she get there?" Bellamy spun around, glaring at Lincoln as if it was all his fault.

Lincoln just ignored him and kept his eyes on Octavia.

Octavia wasn't a diplomat, and she should phrase her next words better, but she just didn't have time, and she needed the Arcadians staying put while Clarke dealt with the Commander.

"Apparently, your boyfriend lied," Octavia is blunt when she looks towards Raven, not surprised when her friend flinched at the words.

"From what I could see, Clarke is more than happy to go to Polis. She certainly doesn't look like she's a captive."

Ok, a little lie but she figured Clarke would get herself out of the situation she was in as only Clarke knew how.
"I think Finn probably stumbled on them in the middle of fuc-" her eyes darted to Abby's growing
look of shock, so she amended her sentence, "enjoying being stuck inside the bunker for several
days and getting herself some well earned, ah, rest."

"Are you kidding me?" Raven's voice was terse, eyes wide with shock.

Octavia wasn't sure if this was because Clarke was sleeping with someone other than her boyfriend
or because Finn had reframed reality. Again.

"So you're telling us that Clarke went willingly with a damn Grounder?" Bellamy's face reddened
as he spat out the words.

Octavia shrugged.

"Damned if I know. You know Griffin - if she can find herself in trouble; she will."

"So how do we get there?" Abby interrupted the group.

"No, Abby." Octavia shook her head, "We have to wait to hear from Clarke. You definitely can't
go anywhere near Polis without an invitation. No matter how much firepower you take with you.
Clarke's got this."

Abby swallowed hard and blinked back the tears of frustration and fear.

"Is she here? Did you find her?"

All eyes spun around and watched as Finn burst through the small group. His eyes were frantic; like
Abby's had been only moments ago.

"Why did you lie, Finn?" Raven's dark eyes were almost obsidian as she stared at her boyfriend.

"What?" He looked around in confusion.

They watched as Raven bristled with rage. Her fingers had curled tightly into fists that she held
tight over her stomach. She'd hunched her shoulders, and dark eyes stared across at Finn who
looked at her with a growing awareness that he'd finally pushed Raven too far.

"You fucking lied about Clarke. She wasn't being kidnapped. She was there with that girl. Why did
you say she needed saving?" Raven's questions were relentless, and they watched Finn's mouth
work, his lips opening and closing as he tried to move the muscles there to speak. To breathe.

"Because she does," Finn whispered, "she needs me - us!" he quickly changed, "she was sending
me a message, but I just didn't see it until it was too late. Until that girl took her away. I was - we
were too late. Where is she?"

Bellamy stood uncomfortably as his friend began to unravel before him. He looked around and saw
the absolute grief in Raven's face and felt the rage inside him grow. If the Grounders hadn't been so
damn hostile; none of this would be happening. Clarke would be here. Maybe she and Raven
would have worked it out with Finn. Finn would be sane. And Raven wouldn't look so God damn
sad.

Raven just stared at Finn, and she knew then, that there wasn't anything that she could give him
that would bring him back to her.

She'd lost him in a world where Clarke Griffin made Finn Collins safe. A world that didn't exist;
only in Finn's mind.

She swallowed the sob that grabbed at her throat and looked at Octavia, eyes wet with sadness, and her mouth twisting in pain. She feels the beginnings of guilt that gnaws at her insides after what she's done not responding to Clarke's messages on the radio.

Octavia starts forward trying to move towards her until a voice cuts across the closed in square near the gate.

"Abby," Octavia physically flinches at the sound of his voice.

"Thelonius," Abby's voice has calmed significantly since Octavia first arrived, the steel in her voice reminds her where Clarke gets that strength. "We have news of Clarke. She's with the leader of the grounders and Octavia -"

"What is your daughter doing with them?" His voice is arctic, forgetting for a moment that he's no longer chancellor.

Abby stares at him for a long time, and it's like watching two dogs about to tear each other to pieces. Thelonius is still furious, but Abby cannot afford any more mistakes; and any more lives.

God, she's so sorry when she thinks of Jake and her blind trust in a man she counted as a friend.

Abby turns her head deliberately ignoring him and begins talking to Octavia as she strides towards the medical bay.

"Was she alright?"

Her voice is hushed as she leans closer to Octavia who breathes out in relief. She's aware that Abby has done this on two fronts. To diffuse any escalation of tension between Octavia and the old chancellor; the pain of her mother's death still lies dormant beneath her skin, and to remind him that he cannot exert his power over anyone. Anymore.

"Abby!" Thelonius Jaha's voice is strained with anger as he calls out her name.

Octavia watches as Abby's jaw tightens. God, she looks so much like Clarke when she's about to rain destruction. Abby keeps walking.

"This is not your concern, Thelonius. My daughter is negotiating a peace agreement with the Commander, and that's all you need to know."

It isn't a blatant lie, but it's not quite the truth either. Octavia shrugs. Politics.

"She's fine, Abby. Lincoln and I will head back tomorrow after we've rested the horses."

"Ton DC?"

"No. Polis."

Octavia isn't surprised by the set look that comes over Abby's face.

"I'm coming with you." Abby's fingers tighten on her communication unit, the knuckles whitening as she presses hard against the rubber material.

"I don't think that's a good idea. Please, just let Clarke do what needs to be done. Give her a few days."
Octavia knows Abby. Knows that she'll push despite the knowledge that it will have possible repercussions that may hurt Arcadia. She cannot see straight when it's about Clarke.

"This isn't up for discussion."

Octavia feels her own face fall into determined lines.

"No. You have to trust her."

"The last time I trusted her, Octavia - my daughter disappeared for almost a week when she was only meant to be gone for two days, and she ended up in the middle of - she's surrounded by our enemies!"

"They're not the enemy," Octavia snapped back.

Abby rolled her eyes in impatience.

"These people have been trying to kill us since we arrived."

"We took over their land. We killed their people with our flares, our guns, our broken parts of the Ark. They retaliated."

"And Jasper?"

"Invaded their territory. We are the enemy until we prove otherwise, Abby. And that is what Clarke is doing. And that is why you should not be going anywhere near her until she's laid the groundwork and spoken with the Commander."

Abby sighed and quickly looked back over her shoulder sensing someone close by.

Thelonius had disappeared, but Finn was following them and stood a few feet behind them.

Octavia looked to see what had caused the woman to pause. She almost growled in fury when she saw who stood there. Lincoln's soft touch on her back stopped her from leaping forward and smacking Finn hard.

"What is it, Finn?" Abby asked patiently.

"I want to know where Clarke is. We need to go and get her."

"You don't need to know anything about her, Finn," Octavia hissed, and she's so angry, but she knows some people thrive on the ground, she's one of them after all, but Finn - Finn has nowhere to go here. Except inside his head where the world there is perfect and very different to the world on the ground.

"She was with that girl! That grounder girl. She was holding her hostage."

Octavia rolled her eyes.

"Finn," she's not going to pull the punch even though she can see Raven in the corner of her eye, "she stopped being with you when she found out that you were with Raven. You know, Raven, your girlfriend?"

"Raven," he whispers, and his eyes drift sideways. Octavia is tough and feels like her spirit was always meant for the ground, for the forests; perfect for Trikru. Seeing Finn like this breaks her resolve to break his connection with Clarke. Finn should have stayed up in the skies.
"Raven," Octavia repeats the name, and she turns to look at the girl behind Finn this time. She sees the distressed look in her eyes and the quiet sob that she's sucked in before it escapes her lips, "get him away from here, and keep him away from Clarke."

*** *** ***

The light has mostly gone out of the sky when Raven returns to her workshop.

Finn is gone. He was rocking and muttering words that only made sense to him and one of Abby's colleagues had to inject him with something to calm him down.

She doesn't feel anything anymore. The hurt is too much and too big to deal with. Instead, she's back at her table to deal with real things. Things that she can fix. Things that she can repurpose to fit this world.

Her head jerks up when the door of the workshop slams open.

She'd been expecting her, so she's not surprised when Octavia comes stalking into her room, all burning glory and righteous anger. Before Octavia can say anything, she holds up a hand and speaks.

"I didn't respond to her messages. I didn't tell Abby she'd called through. Are you happy? I'm an ass. I know it. Do you want to kick me from here to Polis?"

"Jesus, Raven." Octavia breathes out the rage in her eyes dimming as she realizes how fucked up her friend has been. She wants to kick Finn's head in, but she knows that nothing she can do would make it any worse than whatever is going in the boy's mind.

They stare at each other for a long while before Raven crumples and Octavia is reaching for her and pulling her into her arms.

"Clarke's my friend. How could I do that to her?" Raven's mouth is set in a rictus of grief and guilt. Her eyes are shut tight, and her chest heaves trying to get her breath back.

"Hey, hey. It's ok. It's going to be ok. It's Clarke. She will know what to do. She always knows what to do. You should have seen her riding with the Commander," Octavia says remembering seeing Clarke riding stiff and angry before the leader of the twelve clans. Sharing the same saddle. She grins. She also remembers the strong embrace the Commander had across Clarke's abdomen.

"No prizes guessing what she was doing in that bunker," Octavia grins trying to raise the other girl's spirits. And it does. Raven smiles through her tears and scoffs.

"Fucking Clarke Griffin. I can't believe she's spent the last week having sex with the Commander."

They both laugh, Raven through tears and a blocked nose, and Octavia with her head thrown back and full of admiration for the Skaikru leader.

"So what are we going to do?" Raven finally asks.

She tries to pull apart one of the old oxygen purifiers from the Ark, tugging at parts that can be used on the ground where the air is in plentiful supply.

"I'm going to Polis, now. I - " Octavia's voice wavered uncertainly, "are you going to be ok?"

Raven closed her eyes and breathed out slowly through her nose. Clarke was in Polis. Finn - Finn
was lost, and she was probably never going to get him back, and now Octavia was going. She got on alright with the other kids. Bellamy was good to hang out with, but his murderous rages against the grounders were starting to wear thin. None of her friends would be here.

"Can I come with you?" she asked looking up quickly into Octavia's worried eyes.

Octavia blinked in shock for a moment. Thinking. Weighing her options.

"Are you going to be ok with Griffin?" Octavia responded, her voice tight as she tugged at her clothes and pack, already preparing to leave.

"Yeah. She needs an apology. If it weren't for me, she wouldn't be in this mess. I have to go - " Raven swallowed hard, "you know. Amends, atonement and all that. Clarke will need us. She shouldn't be there on her own."

She shrugs and sniffs as if its nothing.

Octavia nodded. Her smile was grim and her eyes flat and hard.

"Well hurry the hell up. We're going now."

*** *** ***

Thelonius Jaha was always meant to be the Chancellor of the Ark.

His father was before him, and he'd been schooled and groomed for a world where his authority would be the last word for the last surviving humans.

And when he was on the Ark, no-one doubted his word. Abby had trusted him, and he'd sent Jake into hell.

He breathed out, not willing to let his mind go there. If he'd listened to Jake would they all be alive? The Ark had survived re-entry.

They'd lost two sections leaving ten of the twelve stations intact. They had made it to Earth. Jake had been right, but he couldn't take the risk. How was he to know that the Ark would make the trajectory coming into the Earth's atmosphere? Ten stations. Eight hundred people.

And they weren't the last humans. He'd been shocked when the radio call had come through to him late on the bridge before finalizing the coordinates for re-entering the Earth's atmosphere.

He'd just spoken with Darius Meade about the situation with the Griffins. Darius had been his usual self. Stoic, supportive and willing to provide advice to Thelonius, his oldest friend.

He remembered the sinking in his gut when Darius had left. Darius had unequivocally supported his decision to remove Jake which would delay the issue of the oxygen situation.

Thelonius knew he'd need to control the message and Jake had left him with no choice. No choice. It was Jake's own fault, and he'd been forced to have the man floated; a man who had been close to his heart for most of his adult life.

And now Abby. Abby who had wrested control of the Ark once they go to the ground. And Clarke. Clarke who led the insufferable youth of the Ark. Symbolic of all the things he loathed. Chaos. Sheer, unmitigated disorder and he would not have it.

He'd removed the problem of one Griffin. The rest of the family - the women; would have to go
too. He grimaced. He didn't want to, but they were the makers of their own destiny.

The call from the ground from Mount Weather had been a shock.

He'd been sipping on an aged whiskey. The burn of it; singing as it moved into his mouth and then down his throat. There had been a sudden burst of static and then a voice that came through in sharp, short bursts of clarity.

"Mount Weather to Space Station. This is Dante Wallace."

And that had been it. Thelonius had spoken for the length of time they had before the Ark moved behind the shadow of the moon where no transmissions could get through. Three minutes in total.

Three minutes for Jaha to confirm who he was. To discuss the potential of an alliance should the Ark reach landfall. And then there had been nothing. No more radio communications. There were moments where he wondered if the whiskey had caused him to hallucinate the whole conversation.

And then he'd had to send Clarke Griffin into solitary when she threatened to tell the Ark what her father could not. Abby had almost killed him then. He could see the rage and the betrayal in her eyes.

Clarke was lucky that she'd been two weeks shy of her twenty-first birthday or she'd have followed Jake out into the void.

Thelonius had to do what needed to be done. No-one compromised his authority. No-one.

His head lifted at the sharp knock that came from his bedroom door.

"Enter," his voice still had the ring of authority, and he leaned back in his desk chair as the door swung open.

"Sir," Darius Meade still deferred to him as if he were still the Chancellor making his heart swell, "President Wallace has left a message for you."

"The marrow transplant worked. Wallace's son and several key members of his team are now able to move freely out in the open."

Jaha released his breath slowly. Yes. And now his alliance would come through, and the Griffins would need to submit to his authority again.

Abby Griffin would regret taking the chancellorship from him. Kane, Deakin, and all those others on the council who had voted him out, all of them would need to show him their loyalty was absolute or they would follow the same path as Abby Griffin. And Clarke if she ever left the grounder capital.

"Good. And what news of Wells? Has he and his friends arrived at the mountain?"

"Yes, sir. They have expressed their wonder at the world they've found there."

The skin around Darius' pale grey eyes crinkled as he spoke, "your son was in good spirits and wanted to know about his friend, Clarke."

Jaha's mood immediately soured. Clarke. He sighed deeply. Clarke had been like a second daughter to him, and for a long time, he'd wondered if Wells and Clarke would - but no.

They had been the best of friends and as Wells had pointed out one too many times to him and
Abby; they were too close. Like siblings.

He did not wish to harm Clarke, but the girl was garnering too much attention from the sheep who didn't always make the right choices for survival.

He needed to make sure that they came back into the fold under his direction. Like good pastors of old, he needed to find something that would frighten them more than the living hell that was the reality on Earth, and provide hope.

Clarke was too close to the Grounders. The primitive hordes barely kept in check by the Ark and the mountain's more sophisticated firepower.

This alliance with Wallace and his people would serve them well, and by providing the bone marrow that would help them live out in the open; that would seal their alliance and forge a better position for his people.

With him at the helm.

Thelonius Jaha smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr where I sometimes get my thoughts together and post ideas on this fic.
@underneaththecovers-au
Clarke and Lexa enter Polis and find themselves facing Lexa's tormented past.

Hi everyone. Thank you again for commenting. I will reply as soon as I can. I'm focussing on writing at the moment and need to get my head into it so that I can give you some lengthier chapters.

I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Her legs are sore. She can feel the burn on the backs of her legs and her inner thigh where she's been gripping the sides of Lexa's horse. Polis has been getting closer and closer, the towers and buildings looming hugely against the sky with each mile.

She can smell the salt of the river mouth and the sounds of people shouting and calling out to one another in the distance. It's almost dusk, and the flare of flames intermittently dapple the landscape.

"Clarke, we will be going through the back of Polis. I do not know how I will be received. My people have been told that I am either dead or captured," Lexa's voice is soft, and Clarke hates that she still keeps thinking of her like that.

Her mind is filled with so many questions. What was going on in the Commander's world?

"You do not realize it Clarke, but your actions have had consequences."

"I'm assuming that's a thank you," Clarke's tone is a little acerbic, and she's shocked when she feels Lexa vibrating behind her. "Are you - mocking me?"

"Mockery is not the product of a strong mind, Klark."

Clarke twists her head to look at Lexa and is shocked by the small grin on the young woman's face.

"Clarke, I thank you for healing me. Without you, I most certainly would have been captured or killed by the Mountain Men if my people did not find me first. I - I am glad that you found me."

Clarke feels herself softening at the words. God, this woman. She's unbelievably sweet and nothing like she had imagined the vicious, ruthless, cold-hearted Commander to be like.

"I'm glad too," she finally says. She's confused. Too much has happened too quickly, and she remembers her words to Lexa in the bunker. How she knew she really shouldn't trust her. And yet she did.

Clarke is still painfully aware of Lexa's position behind her. She can feel Lexa shift occasionally to
alleviate her own discomfort and wonders if her nerve endings are on fire too. She shifts a little and inadvertently rises up, moving hard against Lexa who stifles a groan before pulling Clarke into a position that does not inflame them further.

"Klark! Please."

Clarke smiles grimly at the moment of discomfort she's inflicted on the Commander. Lexa. It is a small victory but hardly makes up for the last eight hours of her life. Or for the days they've spent in bed, wrapped around each other, mapping each other without words in a world that divided them.

Clarke's mind is still reeling. This woman. This girl whom she'd trusted. She'd gone from the sweet and almost shy grounder girl who didn't speak English, to someone who wasn't that at all.

Clarke bit her lip hard trying not to let the melange of emotions, regrets and anger, and the bitter disappointment to cloud her capacity to think and plan. She'd been in worse situations. Clarke pursed her lips not realizing how much like her mother she looked like at that moment.

All thoughts of desire and need receded as they enter the tunnels that run deep beneath the city. Clarke looks all around her, her eyes absorbing everything that she sees.

There are old concrete blocks that have fissures that are so deep she wonders how it holds up the ramparts above them. She shivers as they move into the dank, coldness of what appears to be the old canal ways that ran below the city before the bombs. She doesn't understand how they're still here.

She can see the rubble of smashed and destroyed structures. Ancient graffiti colors the tunnel walls in dying luminescent tones that war with the torch sconces that have been built into the old walls.

She can hear the echo of water as it drips down and splashes into the water below them that pools around the horses as they walk through the tunnels.

There are twenty of them including Clarke, who is not a warrior. She wonders what lies at the end of this journey. Will she die in the next few minutes with this woman buttressed up against her, her warm, solid muscles a constant threat, a constant source of protection?

She's not oblivious to the irony of this.

Of all the women on Earth, she had to stumble across the one woman she needed to stay away from. The one who had ordered Clarke's death if she could not be brought to Polis alive.

She can feel her lips compressing with these dark thoughts. Now is not the time.

Any second now she's expecting the hiss of an arrow to fly through the air and straight into her heart. Lexa must sense her tension as she feels the hand that lays on her stomach stroke her softly. Grounding her in the most visceral of ways. They cannot use words right now, and the silence is broken by the gentle splash of the horses making their way through the water.

Clarke can feel the tension rise in all of the warriors that surround her as they get closer and closer to the exit. She's aware that she's almost holding her breath which she finally releases as they come out into a courtyard behind what looks like a marketplace.

The place is filled with people. Torches light up the way, and several fires are burning with food cooking over them. Clarke's nostrils flare at the onslaught of smells, meats browning and grilling over low embers, smoke flurries upwards in small spirals of heat and fragrances.
She watches how the people slowly respond to what they are seeing. They cannot see Lexa yet, as she's sitting close behind Clarke. The murmurs are like a low growl and sweep through the marketplace, alerting several guards further up the street. They turn and take in the warriors that have emerged out of nowhere. Within seconds they're racing towards them and reach out for the reins to pull each horse aside.

"Trikru warriors." The leader of the guards recognizes the tattoos of several of his clan's people and nods curtly, "The Commander is gone. We wait for another."

"On whose advice?"

Clarke doesn't recognize Lexa's voice which has been lowered to a soft, dominating growl. It's husky, and she feels her body's response immediately to the sound of it. She can sense the tension between the two groups, and she hears the word, Heda. A word she certainly now knows.

"Fleimkepa gave the news today. They are still looking for her -"

There is despair on the man's face as he speaks and Clarke doesn't understand that he is talking about his dead Commander and the body that is missing. But she can feel the disbelief in their eyes and sees the shell shock on their faces. She can see that they're speaking of a tremendous loss.

Clarke can feel Lexa moving behind her before she lifts Clarke over the side of the horse and onto the ground. She hears the collective gasp of the warriors that have circled them. It makes Clarke's stomach do strange things when she sees all of them bow their heads. They don't speak as it's obvious now that the Commander has stolen into her own city.

"My warriors, it looks like the Fleimkepa may have been a little too quick to make assumptions."

Lexa's voice is strong. She's using it carefully to pitch to those closest to her so that everyone else in the marketplace is oblivious to what's going on.

Children run screaming behind them, unaware of the events that are unfolding right before them. The warriors clutch at their weapons, knuckles whitening as comprehension slowly sweeps across the group.

There is despair on the man's face as he speaks and Clarke doesn't understand that he is talking about his dead Commander and the body that is missing. But she can feel the disbelief in their eyes and sees the shell shock on their faces. She can see that they're speaking of a tremendous loss.

Lexa speaks again, her voice low and harsh and Clarke gulps at the animal ferocity behind the Grounder words.

"Do not act yet," she stops the warriors who were about to start clamoring for blood, she could see it in the stance of their feet, the snarls that leaped to some of their faces, "I must enter by stealth. I would know who wishes me dead."

Despite her warnings, there is a low, soft hiss that emanates from the group of warriors. They need to move. There are too many of them clustered, and already they're drawing the attention of the people setting up the marketplace for the evening.

Children have stopped running and are now staring at them with curiosity.

"Then go that way," a woman steps forward, and Clarke tries not to flinch when the woman's eyes sweep over her. She's noticed the grip Lexa has on Clarke's arm and assumes that her Commander has brought a prisoner to Polis. She moves towards Clarke to take her from the Commander but steps back in surprise when Lexa steps in front of Clarke protectively.

"Why that way?" Lexa says, her voice is a soft growl, and she's switched to English. Clarke watches the warrior as she visibly swallows.
"The Fleimkepa is in the front of the tower with Azgeda. Their Queen is here."

Lexa nods.

"Good. We will enter by the markets. I want them to see me arrive."

Clarke can see Lexa's thinking rapidly, going through strategy after strategy until she finds one that she can work with.

"I'm sorry, Klark."

Clarke closes her eyes. She can guess what's coming and she doesn't want to hate her, but it's hard to not want to slap this girl so hard right now.

"Let me guess. I'm your prisoner?"

Lexa doesn't smile at her, so she assumes she's guessed correctly that she is going to be a part of some strategy the woman has just constructed in her head.

"Not quite," Lexa finally says, "but it will require that you play a part. I can only ask that you trust me."

Trust. Clarke tries not to deride her for those words. She wants to scream, I already gave you that and look where the hell that got me?

But Clarke is a survivor, so she merely nods and looks into eyes that have become cautious with tension.

Clarke can feel the heat of the fires nearby, and she wishes that she was a little closer as the evening air is starting to bite. Unlike Lexa, she doesn't have a thick coat to cover her.

Lexa moves closer to her when she sees Clarke shivering, a strong, muscled arm goes around her waist to share what warmth Lexa has. Clarke closes her eyes at the sudden proximity. At the rush of heat which is part Lexa, part desire.

She is conscious of the crowds that are milling past further up the street. She's amazed at this place. Already she's seen a world that she'd not expected. There are buildings. People dressed in cotton and softer fabrics and not the frightening leather armor of the warriors she's seen.

There aren't skulls of dead animals hiding the faces beneath. They're just people.

"What do you need me to do?" Clarke asks as she looks into deep green eyes.

Lexa motions quietly to the warriors who had surrounded them, and they walk carefully away from the Commander's group until there's only Clarke and five of her warriors from Ton DC left behind.

They're walking along the side street and keeping to the shadows. Clarke's noticed that Lexa has covered her hair and face with a scarf the moment they came out into the open. She looks ridiculously beautiful, and Clarke wonders at the sudden hitch in her breath when long, dark lashes flutter and those eyes are staring at her again.

"I need you to be you, Klark Kom Skaikru. I need you to be the leader of your people and ready to form a treaty with me. I need you to be ready with a battle plan to bring down the mountain with me."

Clarke stares at her in shock and wonders at this woman who has turned her life upside down in
less than a week.

She's gone from being her patient; one who Clarke had stumbled about trying to communicate with to this fierce, commanding creature.

A beautiful, strange and delightful grounder girl who Clarke had finally allowed herself the freedom to just be Clarke. And yes, she knows damn well the only reason she did that was the belief that she'd never see her again after their time in the bunker.

Maybe, just maybe, Clarke was a complete lunatic for trusting the girl she'd opened up her thoughts and feelings since coming to the ground.

The hurt of losing her father, her mother's betrayal, and finding out about Raven and Finn. She'd done all of that, thinking that Lexa didn't understand a word she said. She could feel the blush creeping across her skin just thinking about it.

But she'd come this far and prevailed. If Lexa was asking her to trust her, then that meant that there was a part of Lexa that was putting a whole lot of faith and trust in Clarke.

She pushed down the fears and doubts about her mother and the rest of the Council, and how much they'd fight whatever decision she made with the people on the ground.

The world that she was seeing was very different to the world that she had come to understand in the last year she'd spent on Earth.

All those swirls of blue and white that she used to see through thick, reinforced windows on the Ark, is now very real. And it has people. Real people like the children she saw in Ton DC, and now the ones here in Polis. Every day children just like Arcadia's, running around chasing each other and escaping the clutches of worried parents.

The prejudices she'd held because of the horror these people had cursed them with; it was hard to let go of right and wrong, of not seeing the world in such black and white terms of 'us' and 'them.'

If she had to look for the bad guy, she wouldn't know if she wasn't one of them.

She had to look for another way, and if she could find it with Lexa, then she'd take it.

Clarke sighed as she looked into Lexa's expectant face, her eyes wandering to the enormous tower that stretched up into the sky behind her. The wind had come up, and she can feel the edges of it sweep across her body. Her arms dimpled with cold.

"Alright. But I don't know how much of what we come up with will hold with my people."

"That is enough for now."

Lexa's grip on her arm tightens, and Clarke looks up to see what's caused this and sees the group of warriors standing at the base of the tower.

There is a look of shock on all their faces. Clarke's eyes sweep across them. Images imprinted in her mind. There is a range of emotions that she sees across the fronts of the people that Lexa pulls her towards.

There is a contained fury in the tall, bald man who stands imposingly at the forefront. His face is sharp and his mouth so downturned, Clarke cannot imagine him ever smiling.
Next to him is a stunning woman dressed in furs, her cloak looks like it's made of snow and ice. Her face is more closed off than the man before her, but Clarke would swear there's a look of relief behind the arrogant tilt of chin. Beside her is another woman, equally stunning contrasting starkly with obsidian curls that fall around a face that is chilling with quiet beauty. She's dressed for travel, her leathers worn and dusty and there's tiredness in her deep gray eyes.

Clarke hears the almost inaudible gasp from the woman who's holding tightly to her arm. Clarke is immediately aware of Lexa and watches at how this young woman turns her body until she's facing Lexa directly.

"Lex!" the woman whispers and almost steps forward towards Lexa. Clarke blinks. "Heda!"

The silence of the strange tableau is interrupted by the harsh voice of the man who seems to be leading the group. Clarke flinches at the sound of it. It is a remonstration. As a father with a child and Clarke can see that the tone does not please Lexa in the slightest.

"Fleimkepa." Lexa's voice is loud, brittle and every inch the Commander. Clarke watches with interest as the man draws back instinctively protecting himself from the impending wrath.

"Lexa! What the hell happened to you?"

A tall woman moves from the shadows of the tower and strides forward. She stops suddenly when she sees who the Commander has firmly in her grasp.

"You!" she snarls and almost lunges towards Clarke but stops when Lexa raises an infuriated eyebrow.

"Lexa?" The woman in the furs moves towards them, "we heard that the Mountain had you."

She pulls Lexa into her arms, and Clarke watches with absolute fascination at Lexa's stiff response. She doesn't reach out but holds herself still until the other woman releases her.

"Nia. Costia. I did not expect you in Polis," Lexa says, and her voice is cold like the wind that's currently biting through Clarke's thin cotton shirt.

"We received news of your fall," Nia says, and smiles when she continues, "it is an immense relief to see you alive and well."

"An immense relief," the woman next to Nia whispers in shock.

Lexa does not respond but merely nods before moving to the side and drawing Clarke forward. Clarke is momentarily stunned as she realizes that a dead woman is standing in front of her.

Evidently, she's misunderstood Lexa's words.

"This is my savior. Klark Kom Skaikru. She is not to be harmed," Lexa says, and her voice bounces around the forecourt of the tower, "anyone who harms her; harms me."

Any glares at Clarke who stands her ground and stares implacably back at her.

"You blew up the bridge. You killed our people."

"You were going to come and kill my people and me. What did you expect me to do? Just sit back and wait for you to come and let you do it?" Clarke responds, and it is evident that the day has
taken its toll on the girl as she snaps without thought at Lexa's most powerful general.

Lexa smiles but forces her face into its usual impassive look.

Clarke ignores Anya's seething glare. She notices Costia's eyes taking in the look Lexa has given to Clarke's response. Her heart stutters for a moment when Costia searches for Lexa's eyes and their gazes lock.

Lexa's mouth thins in displeasure, and she forces herself to not show her emotions. It is too late as already Costia has seen her reaction to Clarke’s snarky response to Anya, and the woman steps back involuntarily.

It has been almost two years, but the sting is still there. It does not hurt as much, and Lexa looks to Clarke who is staring at her.

Everyone is as they await her instructions. She sighs inwardly.

"Enough. We need food. And rest. Clarke, you will come with me to my quarters as I have more things to discuss," Lexa's voice is sharp as she looks around and people quickly respond.

Guards come forward to take away their horses, other people rush into the tower to prepare whatever food they can, and the group before them separate.

"Lexa," Nia steps forward and reaches to touch Lexa's arm but from the look on Lexa's face decides against it. "We must talk."

"Not now, sister. I appreciate you traveling such a distance, but as you can see, I am alive and well. I will speak to you tomorrow."

Lexa strides forward, her eyes flicking to Clarke to check that she's not far behind before she enters her home. At last. And now she needs to find the vipers who would strike the heart of the twelve clans from within.
A Loaf of Bread, A Jug of Wine; and Thou

Chapter Summary

Clarke learns a few things about Lexa.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for all your lovely comments. I am taking many ideas on board and am having a ball with this whole experience. I have edited this chapter, but it's purely formatting and grammar. Nothing that radically changes the storyline. I won't be able to respond to all comments which I have tried to do as I now have to knuckle down and actually write fresh new chapters. The posted chapters to date were already writing so things will slow down a lot. I will probably only update once, maybe twice a week from now on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke has to run to keep up with Lexa who strides across the ground floor of the tower as if she's been chased by a Pauna. As they reach the base of the elevator Clarke stumbles, but Lexa's reflexes are fast, and her arm quickly reaches out and stops Clarke from tumbling to the ground.

Her eyes dart towards Lexa's which are steadily looking forward. She can see that the woman is upset and knows with certainty that it's because of the woman, no, women that she met outside. Costia.

Clarke is still reeling as she thought Lexa had said she'd died. Or Clarke had assumed she had from the way Lexa spoke the Trigadesleng in a halting, despairing tone that had broken Clarke's heart.

But then, Lexa had lied about who she was and about speaking English. She felt a flare of anger at the deception but remembered how much anguish there had been in those green eyes.

Whatever Lexa had intended by lying to her about speaking the same language, she knew at that moment that Lexa had been doing her best to comfort Clarke using a piece of her life that had caused her a lot of pain.

And for that, she would remember that Lexa was human. A terrifying warrior and leader yes, but a woman who had shared something deeply personal to make Clarke feel less alone.

Lesa may be one of the most pragmatic people Clarke has ever encountered, but she understands this behavior on so many levels as she's had to do so many things herself to keep safe her delinquent friends and the rest of her people.

Lexa pulls her into the lift behind her and Clarke can feel her body tightening with anxiety. Was this secure? How the hell was it going up? Did they have electrical systems in place and if they
were, then the Grounders she thought she knew were a hell of a lot more complicated than she realized.

Lexa's face was still implacable, but Clarke caught the slight twitching of the other girl's lips as she tried not to show a reaction to Clarke's darting eyes, and twitching fingers. She could see that Clarke had a hundred questions and that her hands wanted to trace and explore the insides of the elevator that took them to her floor in the tower.

She would have happily supplied these but for the guards, and Titus glowering in the background. She nodded to Titus curtly. He was the Fleimkepa and her mentor of so many years, but there were times when he needed to learn that Lexa was the Commander of the twelve clans and not the child that he had trained. She did not like reminding him of it.

"Titus," she says, and her voice is clipped and tight. The animosity is barely restrained.

"Yes, Commander," he replies and looks at her steadily.

She can see that he knows he over-stepped outside. She wonders if it was because of his fears for her safety that he let his emotions get away from him or whether it was something more. In either case, it was not reason enough to disrespect his Commander before her people.

"I will see you early tomorrow in the command room," she instructs, and Clarke watches the interaction with interest.

Lexa looks like she'd like to do to him what Clarke would like to do to Finn. Nothing either man would find pleasant, she thinks grimly and cannot help the visual of punching Finn in the face. She's startled out of her thoughts when the elevator stops and the guards pull back the metal grill to let Titus exit onto his floor. He mutters a terse 'commander' and stalks off into the dimly lit corridor.

Clarke can't see what's creating the ambient light, but she's itching to find out more about this place. She realizes that now she will have time enough as she's finally been brought to Polis and though it was against her will, her curiosity is piqued.

The elevator is steady as it moves up yet again and her heart slows down from its erratic, panicked beating. If Lexa feels safe in here, then she has to trust that it's not going o plummet back to the ground. Lexa must see something in her eyes as she smiles gently.

"We have mechanisms, Klark. Should the elevator falter, a spring lock goes into place and jams the apparatus until we can winch it to the closest floor."

Clarke's eyes widen. Lexa is more than just a warlord it seems. She's explained the machinery's mechanism and Clarke could only assume she has more than a working knowledge of it.

The guards pull back the railings before she can question Lexa, who is now staring straight ahead with quite the most terrifyingly beautiful face Clarke has yet to see.

Her stomach tumbles for a moment, and her breath catches. She sees how Lexa stiffens at the sound, her eyes darting back towards Clarke, widening a little as she sees something on Clarke's face. Something that Clarke quickly tries to hide, but it's too late. The Commander has seen it. The flash of need that Clarke hates herself for feeling.

Lexa's head turns back slowly towards the corridor and Clarke can no longer see her face, so she turns back to her environment.
The low light is coming from a panel along the floor. Clarke can't see the source, but she's sure it's something strange. The glow almost seems to move and burst in places with a higher luminescence. There doesn't seem to be open flames or sconces. What the hell is making that light?

She crashes into the back of Lexa as she's been too focused on the floor, and hears a quiet but distinct 'oof.' Clarke lets out a small, nervous laugh.

"Sorry," she whispers and looks awkwardly at the guards who stand before Lexa as they go to open her rooms. They move through, looking around before allowing their commander to enter.

Clarke follows Lexa into what appears to be the girl's quarters and Clarke cannot help the gasp as she looks around.

The room is huge with high ceilings. There are lit candles scattered throughout the room, and in the far corner, Clarke catches sight of a huge bed that seems to stretch indefinitely into the shadows of the room.

Clarke knows she's gawking but cannot help it as it doesn't make sense in the world that she had imagined for the enemy.

The enemy that had once been faceless, ugly in its atrocity and brutality. An enemy that had no life outside the world Clarke and her people had constructed for them. She feels ashamed at the arrogance of her people as she can see the evidence of a culture far more sophisticated than they'd given them credit.

"I see you have many questions," Lexa's voice is a little on the smug side, and Clarke turns to her in surprise. She'd forgotten where she was for a moment.

"Well, that's just a slight understatement," Clarke says, her voice is steady even though she's feeling very shaky inside.

The room disturbs her, as do the people she's seen in Polis and most significantly, this very confusing Grounder Girl who she had mistakenly opened herself to in the bunker.

Lexa raises an eyebrow and waits for Clarke to speak.

"How do you have the lights? Where is the mechanism for the elevator? How do you power it? How come it's still all intact? I would have thought the bombs would have destroyed most of the electrical infrastructure." Clarke's questions tumble out of her mouth as she slowly spins while looking around the room as if she's trying to find the answers there.

When she turns back to face Lexa again, she's shocked at the open smile on the other woman's face. Lexa rarely smiles, and when she does it's usually after - Clarke quickly clamps that thought down. She feels her insides reacting to the woman that she knows she shouldn't.

"Why are you smiling?"

"I like your curiosity, Klark. You remind me of a young child who has just been let out into the world."

Clarke stares at her for a minute before replying. She's noticed how Lexa keeps picking at her cloak which she's still wearing.

"Well, I guess I am. By Earth's standards, I've only been alive here for less than a year. I've traveled through a lot of the forest, but I've never been to a Grounder city before. Now, I've seen
two in one day. And what the hell is wrong?"

Clarke snaps out the last part as Lexa's fingers have started twisting the edges of her cloak. Lexa's face has been in repose, silently contemplative and not entirely listening to Clarke who has picked up on it. Lexa startles and looks over at Clarke in confusion.

"What? Nothing. I am fine. Please, keep going. Did you travel our lands? For how long and where did you go?" Lexa's brow forms small lines as she looks at Clarke with curiosity.

The time Lexa has spent traveling forging new bonds with the clans were productive, but she's coming to realize that she had left too much in the capital to others. And she's missed too much.

"Lexa," Clarke says, and her voice has an edge to it. Its been a long day and she wants some answers. "You're deflecting. What the hell is going on? Costia. I - I thought she was dead from the way you spoke of her."

Lexa's eyes widen as she realizes Clarke's misunderstanding.

"No! No. Though -" Lexa closes her eyes and sighs before moving to sit on a low chair, "she may as well have been. The pain I felt at the time," she shakes her head at the memory, "Nia may as well have cut off Costia's head and placed it in a sack by my bed. I was younger. And stupid for trusting that a Commander could have a love and still be there for her people. My training was right. Love is weakness. My love for Costia weakened me."

Clarke watches the emotions that play across Lexa's face. The short time they spent together has taught her many of Lexa's nuanced feelings. The light tightening of her lips when she's curbing her anger. She listens to the words, and it touches on so many things that she's trying not to believe about the world. She resists the temptation to give into beliefs like these.

"I don't believe you think that," she challenges, "love is what makes us stronger together. Our love for each other helps us survive a cruel and stupidly dangerous world."

Lexa's eyes shutter and Clarke watches as the girl withdraws inward. An emotional retreat, but Clarke wants answers today even though she's starving and tired and her legs are on fire; she needs to know who this Lexa is and whether she's going to get killed in the next few days. Or worse.

"You are more naive than I thought then, Klark. We're both leaders, and you will soon find out that leaders can have only one interest. To keep the people, we lead safe. That can be our only interest. Anything more and you make yourself and the people you care for," her eyes dart to Clarke, and she lifts her head imperiously her nostrils flaring with anger, "you put those people you care about in a tenuous position."

Clarke's eyes narrow as she watches the sadness and anger wage a battle on Lexa's face.

"And what of Costia? Did your love for her make her a target of one of your clan's ambitions?"

Clarke's voice is quiet, controlled but she feels a surge of something in her stomach and realizes with distaste that it's jealousy. And she hates it quelling it as quickly as she can, "do you still love her? Is that why you - "

"No!" It's a quiet explosion, and Lexa's face has lost its implacability. Her green eyes have darkened, and she's fierce with her quick denial. "Its been a long while since that time. And I - I have been busy with the Kongeda."

Their eyes strain as they look at the other and they're both breathing faster. Both angry. Both skirting around the issue of what they are to each other.
"Then explain to me what -"

They are interrupted by a knock on the door and a soft "Heda. Your evening meal."

Clarke releases a breath and watches as several people walk into the room and begin to set down dish after dish onto a table by Lexa's door.

She watches as a tall woman sets down a large clay pitcher next to the steaming food. Her hair has been pulled back into a tight braid, and she looks over to Lexa who nods before pouring two glasses of what looks like red wine.

"Eat, Clarke. We can talk about this some other time. I -" Lexa waits as the last of her people leave the room, "I am tired. The journey has caused some discomfort, and there is too much going on in Polis. I do not have time to argue with you."

"Lexa," Clarke's face falls into a stubborn look that Lexa knows all too well, "we can eat and talk. We're not -" Clarke's lips twist into a self-deprecating grimace, "savages."

Lexa sighs and drops into a chair by the table. She moves some fruits and slices of different cheeses onto her plate before picking up the wine that has been set down. She picks at her food before she notices Clarke and the way her eyes have widened, her mouth slightly parted as she looks at the selection of food before her.

Clarke is mesmerized.

There are plates of roasted fowl, venison steaming in a thick, rich sauce as smashed blueberries leave tendrils of purple across the browned meat. There's bread with a crusted loaf that has been sliced into pale golden slabs of perfection. The fruit is a riot of color as apples, dark sweet plums, and peaches that have been halved tumble across the plate. And cheese. Four different kinds of cheeses from hard to one that is ridiculously soft and warm, oozing out of its skin. Clarke isn't aware that her fingers are creeping towards it, a look of wonder on her face.

"Is that - is that cheese?" Clarke whispers. Her nose is almost reaching the plate before she jerks back when she hears Lexa's exhalation. Its a noise that's strangely loud and Clarke looks over at her, eyebrows furrowed as she tries to make sense of the sound and the look in Lexa's eyes. It is one of cautious pity mixed with something else. It's almost a glare as if she is making a promise inside her head.

"Klark," she whispers as she looks at her - and this is the girl that Clarke remembers. The one with the soft, green eyes and a smile that's affectionate as she reaches out to take some of that rich, fat cheese that's spilling everywhere - to place it on a sliced piece of apple before bringing it to Clarke's lips. "Try it."

The tip of Clarke's tongue peeks out, and she's too absorbed in the food and the smells to notice the sudden stillness in Lexa's body. She opens her mouth and leans forward to take the offering from Lexa's fingertips, her tongue grazing the skin of the other woman's fingers before her mouth fills with tastes she can barely comprehend. She lets out a long, soft moan before closing her eyes and chews.

Clarke doesn't see how Lexa is leaning forward, her eyes following the movement of Clarke's lips and mouth as she eats. She doesn't notice the long, hard swallow as Lexa becomes entirely intoxicated by what she's watching.

"Oh, my God. This is unbelievable," Clarke murmurs before opening her eyes to the table. She
watches breathlessly as Lexa slices through golden colored meat and slides it through the rich sauces beneath before putting it on Clarke's plate.

"Now try this one. It is a favorite, but I find it hard to eat so late in the day," Lexa explains, and Clarke dives into the food again as Lexa finds herself captivated as she watches Clarke's responses.

She's forgotten her food as she watches the Skaigirl eat well-prepared foods for the first time since arriving on the ground.

"You did not have - food on the Ark?" Lexa's brow is lined as she tries to understand Clarke's reaction to the food.

She wants to tear the clothes off Clarke and drag her to her bed. Every sound Clarke makes creates a responding surge between Lexa's legs.

"We did, but it certainly didn't taste like this. We took a lot of supplements and food that was constructed from wheat by-products. It all tasted the same. And when we landed - none of us knew how to cook."

Clarke eats neatly despite the obvious hunger on her face, "I don't want to swallow. I just want to keep the flavors in my mouth. I've never tasted anything like this before," she says in an ecstatic rush.

"God, the first time we killed a deer and ate real protein - it was amazing, but it was mostly raw on the inside and charred beyond belief on the outside. We ate with our hearts in our mouths because we didn't know if it was poisoned by the radiation. We didn't know what was safe."

Lexa shudders at the imagery. Of Clarke when she first landed. She looks at her with new eyes when she realizes how much of the Earth would have seemed inhospitable merely because they did not know everyday things. Common knowledge for her people was a blind journey for the displaced youth of the Skai people.

Clarke looks up from the food, her hunger has diminished and she's slowing down as the rich food assaults her senses. She can feel tiredness seep into her limbs and the ache in her legs from riding horses all day is an agony of screeching muscles. She shifts as she tries to get comfortable.

"I still want answers, Lexa," Clarke eventually says, and she notices how Lexa tries to hide her smile when Clarke looks up through bleary eyes.

"I know you do, Clarke," Lexa says softly through a tired smile, "I have asked my handmaids to prepare a bath. You may have mine, Clarke. It looks like you'll need it more than I will. I can see that traveling on horses is still very new for you."

Clarke is so tired she can barely manage to roll her eyes, "I have ridden before."

"I am sure you have, Clarke. Come. Your legs will feel better if you do this."

Clarke stands and moves to where Lexa has walked to in an adjoining room. She can smell the scent of heated water and salts. Steam furls in large whorls, and Clarke wonders how they get the hot water up here.

She has visions of nubile handmaids walking seductively as they sway with steaming buckets in their hands. She glowers at the image.

"Are you alright?"
Clarke can feel those long fingers as they move down her arm. Lexa has removed her heavy cloak; the steam was creating a light sheen of moisture on her face and Clarke wonders at this girl who has rained down disaster on her people and now, on Clarke's emotions.

She blinks and looks into those lazy, green eyes. She knows that look. Lexa is thinking about Clarke without clothes. And no, that's not going to happen. Not till she gets some answers.

"I'm fine," Clarke responds and slowly removes her boots. She winces as the muscles around her knees, and her thighs clench with pain. She tries to hide it, but Lexa sees.

"Klark, it is not shameful to hurt from using muscles you have not used before. I have been riding since I was ten years old. You have only been riding for how long?"

Clarke stares at Lexa as she slowly removes her trousers. She watches the other woman's face flush, and she notes how Lexa doesn't look away, her gaze steadfast as she stays connected with Clarke.

Lexa bites her bottom lip, and there's a growing line across her forehead as she thinks about their situation here in Polis.

"Klark, while you are here we cannot -"

"Lexa, until I get answers you're not coming anywhere near -"

They both speak over the top of each other and stop when they realize what the other is saying.

Clarke's body is screaming for that bath, so she ignores Lexa and strips before stepping into the water that has been prepared for the Commander. By nubile handmaids who probably take turns in her bed.

Clarke doesn't know why she can't get this image out of her head and she hates her jealousy for being petty, and useless when there are so many other things she needs to be worried about at this time.

She groans out loud as the heat seeps into her bones.

"What do you mean I am not to come near you?"

Clarke looks up into two frustrated, emerald eyes. Those eyes are doing all they can to look at Clarke's face and not drift below the steam and soapy water.

"Why? It seems like you do not want anyone here to know about me. About us." Clarke's voice is sharp and doesn't look at her.

She stares intently into the water and begins to soap the dust and smell of horse from her body. She hears the sound of boots falling to the floor and looks up just as Lexa pushes her trousers and underwear down before stepping into the bath next to Clarke as she pulls off her tunic, then her bindings from her chest.

Clarke watches as long legs sink into the water before she is shifting backward to make room for apparently, the Commander of the high seas, as the water rushes to the rim of the bath and spills over.

Lexa's face has that stillness again, but if Clarke didn't know any better, she'd think Lexa was sulking. The pout of her mouth is inescapable, and her brows have met in the middle to scowl down
at the milky colored water.

"Klark, I want -" Lexa presses her lips tightly together as she stares at the bath water until she realizes she can see the outline of a pink nipple pushing through the surface of the water. Her eyes shoot up, and she blinks rapidly.

"Lexa, I want the world to stop spinning for a moment so that we can see what this is between us. But I get it. I really do. You have no time for emotions and won't be held to ransom by them," Clarke's voice is steady as she feels the silk of Lexa's foot as it glides behind her back.

She's desperate to concentrate and not let her emotions get the better of her. She wants Lexa to understand her position before they go any further.

"I want to know who Costia is. Why she's here. And - you have a sister? And what is going on in your city that you had to sneak in the back?"

Clarke watches the color drain from Lexa's face. It is several moments before she's able to speak.

"You know who Costia is," Lexa finally says. Her voice is deathly quiet.

"I know she was someone you loved. And now you don't?"

Lexa slowly unbraids her hair, taking her time with each one as she carefully separates them from each other. She starts to speak, and it's evident to Clarke that she's shut off the girl that Clarke knows and is channeling the Commander to tell her story.

"Costia was my first love. My first lover. My first in many things. I had returned to my father's home in Azgeda after I'd ascended," Lexa breathed out as memories flashed through her.

"Your father and that other woman's?"

"Yes, Nia. She is my older sister by seven years. My mother was Trikru and when she died my father took me back to his homeland."

The words seem straightforward, but Clarke can see the ones that are not said as Lexa shakes the last of her braids out and shakes wild, dark chestnut curls away from her face. It's the first time Clarke has ever seen Lexa without the braids framing her features. She's stunning.

"Did Nia do something to Costia?" Clarke ventures and is shocked by the anger that blazes from Lexa's eyes.

"You could say that," Lexa's response is steely, but before Clarke can ask anymore the girl dips her head forward so that she can splash water on her hair.

Lexa does it several times before finally lifting her face upwards to drain the water. Clarke's breath stops, and she's caught by how beautiful Lexa is as rivulets of water gimmer before falling from her face and neck.

Clarke moves forward tentatively and slides her fingers into that thick, lush hair. It feels beautiful, and she wants to pull Lexa into her, but she can't. She wants to know what position she's in that Lexa has created.

"Ok, do I need to worry about an enraged wife who is going to kill me in my sleep?" Clarke asks jokingly. She feels an immense relief when she sees the soft smile on Lexa's face.
"No. You do not, Klark. And I will have guards on your door so you need not worry about anyone killing you in your sleep," Lexa's voice is softening and the anger from before has abated a little.

"I'm sleeping somewhere else?" Clarke can't help the disappointment that colors her voice.

"I am sorry, Klark. I am surrounded by - people whom I no longer know who to trust. And my people, once they know who you are and that you are here - they will want justice for those who have been killed by Skaikru. If they find out that you have been sharing my bed - I cannot keep you safe. Do you understand? They will not trust that I will be capable of separating my emotions from my duty."

"Are you going to have to kill me, Lexa?" Clarke's voice is a whisper between them, and suddenly their legs are entangled with one another's, and Clarke feels the muscles of Lexa's biceps as she pulls Clarke forward.

"No, Klark. And I will kill anyone who tries to do so in my name, or the Kongeda's," Lexa's voice is low and fierce, "I will keep you safe. But I can only do that for now if you are seen as a political alliance."

Clarke nods. She can smell Lexa's skin, and it's heady and distracting.

The fear in her stomach subsides as she trusts Lexa. She knows she's mad to do so. The girl lied about so many things to her. And yet Clarke can feel the truth in her words. Her instincts have got her this far she hopes that they don't let her down now.

"Ok. You can't lie about anything, anymore Lexa. I - I can't do that to myself. I know you have to protect your people. I do know that. If you cannot tell me the truth, then don't say anything. Ok?"

Green eyes close and Clarke looks at those thick, dark lashes. She wants to kiss her so badly it hurts.

Lexa nods and then opens her eyes to a storm of blue. She can see the desire that Clarke isn't hiding and so, she pulls her forward.

And she kisses Clarke deeply until Clarke's body feels like its melting into the water that surrounds them. Clarke's stomach tilts, and she feels the ache that quickly grows between her legs. Lexa's tongue is warm and soft as she explores Clarke's mouth and her hand drifts till it is soft against Clarke's neck and she's pulling her ever closer to her mouth.

"Oh God, Lexa. You can't do that!" Clarke's breathing increases and she wants more despite her words.

"Klark. I am the Commander," Lexa's smile is a little arrogant as she quirks an eyebrow majestically, "I can kiss you in my bath. I cannot have you in my bed for my handmaids to see - "

She stops speaking when she sees the abrupt scowl that appears on Clarke's face.

"What is it? Has one of them offended you?"

Clarke rolls her eyes and refuses to tell this woman of her stupid jealousy, but it only takes seconds before Lexa works it out. She lets out a small, snort of laughter.

Lexa takes Clarke's hands into her own and kisses the tops of each knuckle to punctuate her words.

"I am not fucking my handmaidens. They are my close, personal bodyguard assigned when I am
living in Polis. I have no interest in them nor do they have any interest in me. Most of them are married to guards in the tower or craftspeople or merchants within the city. They are the best warriors in Polis who have chosen to keep close to their houmon. They only go onto the battlefield at my command."

Lexa is amused, and Clarke hates it. Now she wants to bite the hell out of her, but evidently, that's not on the cards as they have to separate. But at least the nubile handmaidens aren't a threat. Clarke grimaces. Well, not in the bedroom at least.

"And Costia?"

Lexa looks at Clarke in frustration.

"Costia is my past. My love and my trust for her disappeared the night I walked into my quarters to find her between my sister's legs."

Chapter End Notes

Always up for an ask on Tumblr. Come say hi or post a question you may have about this story.
http://underneaththecovers-au.tumblr.com/
**The Ice Inside Your Soul**

Chapter Summary

Lexa faces her demons and finds herself stronger for it.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone,
Thank you so much for the ongoing support for this fic. The kudos and hits are such a shock sometimes as I really didn't expect to get too much attention for this story. It was just something I had in my head and now it's raging out of control at over 55K words. I so need to edit!

This chapter holds quite a bit of backstory. I hope it doesn't slow it down too much. The next chapter is not far behind and we have our two favorite girls together. I've edited this chapter due to a continuity issue I picked up after another read through. Sorry about that.

Lexa wakes, and she can feel how heavy her heart is before she's fully conscious.

Even the thought of Clarke sleeping in the closest room to hers does not lift her spirits. She remembers waking in Clarke's arms when they were still in the bunker. The absence of her is terrible. Was it only yesterday that she was moving against Clarke's skin as they slowly woke?

It is time to meet with Nia.

She knows she's put this conversation off for too long. It has been almost two years since it all happened. Two years since she's seen the sister who protected her as a child.

For a time, Nia shielded her from the woman who had filled Lexa's life with unbearable suffering. She suffered at the hands of the woman who hated the ground that Lexa walked on. Treal, Queen of the Azgeda. Cruel. Vicious. Unkind with words laced with loathing.

She hated Lexa's skin, the green of her eyes, her Trikru ways that Treal was determined to beat out of her. And she particularly hated Lexa's mouth, a constant reminder of her houmon's betrayal as this more than anything reminded her of the woman Edmon had loved more than her.

And Costia.

Costia who would whisper words to her and say little things that would have her heart hammering beneath her ribs. Costia who had been confident, but too shy to speak to her when she first arrived at Ronto; Azgeda's capital.

Costia who broke her heart and taught her that the world was not simple or easy.

When she had entered her quarters on that awful evening, Lexa had expected Costia to be away on
a scouting mission for the mountain.

A task Lexa has asked Costia and several others amongst her guard and scouts to look into to help her prepare to bring down the people who had been stealing and killing her people for years. They had turned them into Reapers, destroyed their humanity to perpetuate their subterranean lives.

Lexa sits up in her bed and watches as the sheets fall from her naked body.

She remembers how she had been weary from being in the saddle for over twelve hours that evening and Lexa had not paid attention as she moved through the closed doors. Lexa had not heeded the lit candles, nor the meal abandoned at her table.

When she had finally looked at her bed, it was too late, and the image of the two people closest to her heart entwined in each other's arms was indelibly inked in her mind.

She had stepped backward without making a sound. The shock had numbed her body completely, and she'd walked softly to Titus' rooms and told him that she needed Nia and Costia out of Polis by the morning. She did not care what reason he gave.

She had ignored the look of pity he had given her. And then she had gone to Anya and had spent the night drinking the rich, complex wines of the western plains.

And then she had taken one painful step after another to make the Kongeda a reality.

With a determination that reflected the life of sheer will and self-discipline, she has forced herself to live for the last year; Lexa made herself move through her rooms.

She could feel the coolness of the bare, wooden floors beneath her feet as she slowly prepared herself for the day ahead and the sounds of the tower as it quietly readied for a new morning.

She would meet with Titus first and then have Nia summoned to the Commander's war room. She felt that would be suitable.

Lexa washed her face in the basin in her bathroom, dried it and began the act of turning herself into the Commander, from her underclothes to the outer armor that she always wore when in public in Polis. Her pauldron went last, and she tightened the red sash that flowed from her shoulder.

By the time the sun had risen beyond the horizon and streaked the skies with intense oranges and crimson, Lexa was sitting in her room waiting for Titus.

Her body was stiff and upright and ready for battle which did not take long to happen. Within minutes of waiting - the doors flew open, and he strode in with menacing, restrained fury.

He stopped short when he saw her sitting in the dark shadows of the Commander's throne, its wooden roots intertwined and moving upwards to create a sense of someone reaching up towards the skies.

"Commander, I had not expected your presence till later," Titus did not hide his surprise.

"I was shot Titus, not turned into someone else. My habits are still the same," her response was sharp and fast, relayed in the cold, steady tones that belied the torment beneath her skin.

She watched as he flinched visibly at her words.

"Do not speak of that as if - as if it is meaningless, Commander," his voice is soft and his eyes
shuttered before turning away from her gaze.

Lexa stares at him and watches him for a long time, exhaling finally in a long, low soft breath of air.

His pain is evident on his face. She wonders if he is upset that she is still alive. She does not want to believe that this man who has looked after her every waking moment since her tenth birthday could be responsible for her death.

She feels the pain of this potential loss at the back of her head, a steady thrum of blood pounding behind her eyes.

"My apologies, Titus. My experience has left me a little less comfortable in my own city. What news do you have?"

The silence between them is broken only by the soft shuffle of the Fleimkepa's robes as he moves closer to the Commander's throne.

"Lexa -"

"I am your Commander right now, Fleimkepa. Do your duty and separate your emotions and do what must be done."

Lexa's voice is low, harsh and unremittingly cold. She can see the dark circles beneath her mentor's eyes and the silent look of anger that passes across his face.

"How did the Maunon know of my presence?"

"I don't know, Commander," Titus whispers and bows his head, "I only spoke of this to you, Gustus and Ryder. Some of the Tower staff were informed, but all - all of your people are beyond suspicion."

They can hear the sound of guards changing outside of the room. The soft murmurs of voices as they pass the doorway.

Lexa feels the beat of anger that burns at her throat, and so she reaches forward and drinks from a steaming clay cup to give her time to breathe. To think. To not erupt from her seat and throw both her daggers in rage towards the wooden doors of her throne room.

"Who would you suggest then, Fleimkepa? Who has betrayed me? Who benefits the most from me being dead?"

Her green eyes are almost black in the shadows of the room, and she watches as Titus swallows slowly. She can see the fear in his eyes.

"The Conclave? Do you want another in my stead, Fleimkepa?"

"No!" Titus almost surges forward but stops himself as he sees the unbending form of the girl he has helped construct to be the finest Commander of all.

She has already done what no other Commander has been able to do. Lexa has brought the warring clans under one leader to fight a common enemy and forged trade partnerships. She's created a world where each group protects and is protected. From the aggression of another clan or outside forces.
And she's given each of these clans agency. The power to rule themselves and only accountable to
the Kongeda for border disputes and trade treaties.

She has been unequivocally beyond his expectations.

"Alright then," Lexa's voice softens as she sees the truth that burns ever strong in her teacher's
eyes, "One of my generals? None of the clan leaders knew of this so it cannot be any of them. Does
the Tower have ears that I am unaware of, Titus?"

"There is Marthe who presides over your handmaidens."

Lexa dismisses the suggestion as Marthe has looked after her since she was a child. She is a
surrogate mother. The woman who cared for her when she was first brought into the Conclave. She
has known Marthe as long as Titus.

"As I said before, Gustus and Ryder who brought the warriors together that you would need for this
mission. The scout leader who was in Polis and reported back on the Mountain," Titus continues to
list potential suspects, his deep brown eyes looking upward as he remembers each person who was
part of the mission to bring down the mountain.

Lexa can no longer put off the inevitable so she stops him as Titus continues to recite the people
who could have potentially betrayed her to the mountain.

More importantly, who in the twelve clans would have a way to talk to the mountain. The idea of
this is far more terrifying than the death of one Commander.

It is the absolute betrayal of their culture. The betrayal of thousands of lives that have been stolen
for generations to keep the Maunon alive.

Whoever has done this will not live long once they are found. And their death will reflect the pain
of her people. Lexa's mouth is set in a grim line when she looks back up at her mentor.

"Go and find any and all connections to this. Report back to me once you have it," Lexa sighs and
leans back against the soft wood of her throne, "and Titus, be careful. They will know we are
coming for them. I want them to know that I will not let them live, that they cannot escape my
wrath."

He nods quietly, understanding in his eyes. He will need to find answers without asking questions.

"Send for the Queen of Azgeda," Lexa says quietly, "I believe she wishes to speak with me."

Titus looks at her but tries not to show his surprise.

"Of course, Commander. Have you eaten yet? Shall I send for something?"

He knows her well. He knows that she would probably not eat again till her evening meal. Lexa
goes to shake her head but then remembers Clarke. She stills before responding.

"Send food to my rooms. I will be there within the hour."

He nods and goes to leave but then stops. His hand reaches out to touch her but then stops mid-air,
and he lets it drop to his side.

"I am fine, Titus," Lexa acknowledges the fear and relief on his face. He nods curtly before
sweeping out of the chamber.
She can feel her body slump for a moment. The muscles in her neck and shoulders have tightened with tension and Clarke's stitching has begun to itch. She shifts for a moment before reaching for the cup and draining the hot tea that was prepared for her.

When she hears movement outside Lexa's body immediately straightens, and she prepares herself.

The doors swing open, and her sister strides into the room a scowl on her face before she sees Lexa.

She watches a myriad of emotions cross Nia's face. Her skin is a lot darker than Lexa's as she favors Edmon's coloring. Long white gold hair is pulled back in the tight single braid of Azgeda, the scalp showing on the sides so that the marks of Azgeda are seen.

Her eyes, a pale arctic blue-green are almost gray in the light of the room. And they are wide with trepidation as Nia pulls herself to a stop.

"Nia," Lexa says quietly. It is not a welcoming tone, and she watches as her sister tightens her mouth to curb her natural volatile temperament.

"Lexa." It is her name but the way her sister says it hurts. There is an apology. Regret.

"You wished to speak with me?"

She sees the flash of anger in her sister's eyes.

"You did not give me a chance when you sent me from Polis." It is typical of Nia. A biting accusation as if it is Lexa's fault.

"I did not wish to hear you speak then. Time enough has passed, sister. So say what you need to say and go."

Nia's eyes recoil in shock. Lexa has never shown the visage of the Commander to her older sibling. She's always backed down in fights. Lexa will always defer to her knowledge and age.

"I'm sorry - " Nia finally whispers, and the look of devastation on her face is real enough, but it does not assuage the quiet anger that has lived in Lexa's heart for so long.

"I am sorry, Lexa. I would never have - it was not something I wished for you to see."

"So it was something you would have had behind my back?"

"No! No, Lexa. I meant," Nia's voice catches, and she looks away from Lexa, shame deeply etched on her face, "I meant that I would never have had you find out like that. I would have told you. Spoken with you. Costia never meant -"

"Do not!" Lexa interrupts her sister's apology, and she can feel how much her face has reddened, "let this be your moment where you explain yourself, sister. Do not speak of Costia and her intentions."

She watches Nia's shoulder's slump. It is disconcerting. She's always stood tall even when she would lie to her mother and take a beating to protect Lexa.

"Lexa. Please know that I had not intended to harm you."

"What did you fucking think sleeping with her would do other than cause me harm?"
Lexa is unaware that she's risen from her throne and moved towards Nia until they are only feet away.

She's unaware of the fury that blazes from her deep green eyes or that her voice has risen and caused the guards outside to shuffle, wondering if they are meant to enter.

Nia steps back and gulps down her own emotions. Her eyes are huge and her beautiful features distort with tension.

"I know. I know. I am sorry."

Strong dark hands reach towards Lexa.

"I have no words. There are no excuses. I thought to show you that she was not worthy of you. I did not know you came back to Polis that night."

Lexa's rage coils and sits beneath her breast in a dangerous latent state of waiting. She stares at her sister. At the pain in her eyes. At the need for forgiveness. But she's said something that registers and flickers in the back of Lexa's mind.

"What do you mean you wanted to show me that she was not worthy of me?"

Lexa watches as her sister's face whitens.

"I - I. I was wrong."

"What did you mean?" The last word is a roar, and she's grabbed Nia by her tunic, her fist tightening the material as she pulls Nia close.

"I thought she had been sleeping with others when you were with the Kongeda. I wanted proof."

"So you decided that the best way to do that was by sleeping with her?" Lexa's smile is mocking, and she looks at Nia as if she cannot believe how foolish she is.

"No!" Nia's eyes are large, and Lexa can see that she does not wish to say the next words. "I was wrong. But -"

Lexa breathes deeply. Her whole body moves with the way she's trying to steady her breath.

Lexa finally releases the material that has almost torn beneath her tightened grasp and moves backward. Back to her throne and she reasserts the mien of the Commander. There is nothing on her face. Nothing that can help Nia guess at her emotions.

"But what?"

Her question is ever so soft, and deadly. It takes all of the training Nia had to be Queen to not stumble to her knees.

They stare for a long while at each other and Lexa knows what's coming.

Her heart is ready as she's known deep down for almost two years. She's hidden these truths from herself, and she needs to be stronger.

Love cannot weaken her, but then she remembers Clarke. The softness of her fingers as she tried not to hurt her when she stitched her skin together. Clarke's whispered cries. Her belief that they can create an alliance that will make them stronger.
She does not remember Costia's cries. Costia who had been withdrawing slowly from her as she put the Kongeda together.

And so she takes pity on her sister.

"Costia fell in love with you when you came for the treaty meetings. Didn't she?" Lexa's voice is steady until her voice breaks at the last word.

"Yes." Nia's voice is tight with pain.

It is a release. A weight that Lexa has been dragging behind her for too long and now that it is in the open she feels lighter.

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

Lexa doesn't see the tears that threaten to fall from her eyes. She is only aware that the world has suddenly blurred.

"Are you - happy?"

She hears Nia's strangled cry.

"Jok! Lexa, must you be so good? We do not deserve your goodness. I don't deserve it. My mother almost destroyed you and if not for the Fleimkepas and that you were a Naitblida," Nia's voice breaks and the sound of it is as awful as the pain Lexa has nursed for far too long.

There is tiredness in Nia as she remembers the beatings. Her mother's enraged face when their father left for that first hunt, and he went leaving Lexa behind.

When he returned home and saw what had happened to his daughter, he never went without her again, but it didn't stop the hidden slaps, the cruel words that cut the young Trikru child who had been transplanted into the icy north.

Nia looks at the young woman who has become the Commander. She sees how regal she sits on her throne and does not feel the usual flare of jealousy.

It has been more than a year. Almost two. And it has hurt knowing that Lexa sent her away because of what she walked into her room that night. Her heart aches and wants to undo it all but cannot.

"Forgive me, Lexa. If I could undo what I did that night, I would."

Nia whispers the words, and her cries are silent as she's learned to do in her life. Treal's threats that a Queen never shows emotion were always reinforced with her belt or slaps on the face in front of the court of Azgeda.

Lexa's heartbeat almost stills as she watches this woman who has been so much to her. Mentor.

Savior.

The one who always intervened when Treal would take a fist to smash against Lexa's back if she'd been tardy, or took too long to do something.

The one who would sneak into her room and tell her stories at night to distract her from the misery of losing the life she had with her father and mother in Alexandria; the Trikru town she'd been born in and named after.
Nia is crying, and Lexa knows that her sister has her own weaknesses.

There are things Nia cannot help because of her mother. Things she cannot help because of their father who always favored Lexa and ignored the seventeen-year-old he'd left behind when Nia had been Lexa's age.

Nia was the oldest-born of the Azgeda Queen and had borne the weight of her regency before she'd held her first sword, and she'd been honed to be like her mother.

But Treal had failed to fashion Nia into her image for Nia had loved her youngest sister.

Nia had adored the girl who had come in from the green forests of the south. With her strange accent and her bright green eyes and her unwavering faith that her older sister would protect her.

Nia loves Lexa; she knows that in her heart but she also knows that her sister struggles with the jealousy that torments her. For she never had her mother's love and never gained her father's attention.

"Nia," Lexa whispers her sister's name.

She cannot name the agony inside. It is not something as simple as a betrayal. She knows why her sister does what she does, and she can understand.

She does not know how not to forgive her, but she cannot say the words just yet.

They stay quiet for a while, and enough has been said. The darkness between the two sisters has lightened, but it will always be there lingering between them now.

Lexa rises from her throne and slowly walks to the exit. She places a hand on Nia's bicep as she passes, quietly squeezing it before leaving the room.

*** *** ***
Clarke walks around the tower and has encounters of the unpleasant kind. Lexa does not fare better, but Clarke comes to the rescue.

Hey guys,
This is a shortish chapter. It's a little to help move the story along. I hope you enjoy it as I kind of rushed writing this. I will most likely go back to edit.

And now, for your reading pleasure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke rotated her neck and stretched her legs. The pain in them had been a shock when she'd first woken up despite the bath, but now that she's been walking for more than fifteen minutes around the tower they'd loosened up a little.

Light filled the rooms of the Tower, spilling across floors and stippling across walls. She can see the repairs on the concrete and tiles of these barriers that stand tall, a testament to survival.

So many things she'd assumed had been lost, skills, knowledge, and expertise; on display around her smashing yet another idea that they had been dealing with savages.

She feels shame the more she walks around. What had they been thinking assuming so much of a people based on their soldiers?

She shook her head as she approached the elevator at the end of the floor. The same oner she'd come up the evening before with Lexa.

She looked around looking into the shadows and found the stairs that led down to the floors below.

She wondered where Lexa is as she'd not been in her rooms when she'd gone past earlier. The guards were quiet sentries who merely stared at her as she tried to peer past them.

As Clarke moves along the stairs, she can hear the sounds of the Tower floating up through the stair shaft.

The chatter of people working and moving through Lexa's monolithic home.

She can feel her heart beat faster. She would be able to meet and talk to the people of Polis. Her excitement rose up in her as she'd wanted to have this contact since the moment they entered the Earth's stratosphere and realized that human's had survived the catastrophic nuclear blasts almost one hundred years ago.
She moved further down the stairs, following the trail of old banisters and thought about all the things that this building may have been in a different time.

It's around thirty stories high, and from Lexa's balcony, she could see all of the city below including the lights on the water of the river.

Clarke had so many questions to ask the Commander. Lexa. She's still reeling about that revelation. She starts to run a little as her mind gets caught up in her ideas. Clarke had always been liked this. Her mind spinning with possibilities and connections. She wished the old Finn could have seen this. He'd believed so much in the Grounders; until he didn't.

Clarke is so caught up in her thoughts she doesn't see the immovable force until she's smashed into it. Her eyes dart up in shock, and she puts her hands out to stop the other person from falling.

"Skaigirl," the words are hissed with such a level of venom Clarke takes a step back.

"Oh my God, I am so sorry. I didn't see you." Clarke is quick to apologize to the terrifying man she recognizes from the night before. Titus.

"You do not see us as people. Why then would you see me at all?" Titus says, and he looks down at her with contempt.

"That isn't fair," Clarke responds her hackles already rising at his tone. Who was this man?

Titus scoffed and stepped into her space, forcing her towards the concrete walls behind her.

"Fair? Was it fair when you burned alive three hundred of our people? Was it fair when your flames from the sky scattered and fell and burnt down our villages? Was it fair when you took down one of our most important bridges - a most important pathway for trade? For food?"

Clarke can see the saliva as it flies from his mouth during his tirade.

She's frightened. She doesn't have her gun, and she's here by herself far from everyone.

"We never meant to burn villages. That was an accident; we were just trying to communicate with our parents."

The words sound so ridiculous now as she says it and she can see it reflected in his eyes.

"I do not know why the Commander has brought you here," Titus' voice has lowered and he's moved so close that Clarke is backed up against the wall.

"You are a distraction, one she cannot afford at this time."

Clarke looks at him in confusion.

"What are you talking about? I came to help her with the mountain and to broker peace with my people."

He rolls his eyes and completely ignores her words.

"She cannot afford another Costia," he hisses at her.

"I still don't know what you mean. Look, I know you're some sort of mentor to Lexa - so you need to understand that I'm here to help. Not to cause problems."
They both move their heads when there's a sound behind him.

Clarke looks around Titus to see Anya. She rolls her eyes inwardly.

Well, this day certainly just got better. Between the two of them, she's pretty sure they can come up with a good reason as to why she went tumbling down the stairs. Accidentally.

"Titus, should you not be taking the Naitblidas for training now?" Anya says, her voice does not give anything away. It is her usual terse, angry sounding self.

Titus looks between Anya and Clarke and takes a deep breath. Clarke can tell that this isn't going to be the end of this discussion. He nods curtly towards the general and walks past them and back up the way Clarke had come. She'd apparently interrupted him on his way to training.

Clarke's eyes moved back to Anya who was staring at her with a quiet intensity.

"How the fuck did you meet the Commander? How the fuck are you here in Polis and not dead at the end of her sword?"

Clarke has had it. She's here because she wants to be now and Clarke is sick of people like Anya and Titus making her feel guilt for things she did to protect her people.

"I guess she's the Commander for a reason, and you're not," Clarke snaps waspishly.

Anya's eyes narrowed.

"That does not answer my question, Skaigirl."

"And I don't have to give you one. I'm here because Lexa wants me here."

She watches as Anya scoffs, her eyes rolling with contempt.

"What? What is that supposed to mean?" Clarke's hunger is getting the better of her, and her patience is slowly getting shorter by the second.

"Lexa just wants to fuck you."

Clarke flinches at the blunt statement.

Anya's eyes narrow when she sees blue eyes cloud in confusion and darken with hurt. She laughs when she realizes she's not far from the truth.

"Oh, she's already fucked you! The girl who kills her people - I guess that's one way to vanquish the enemy and make you surrender," Anya's smile is cruel as she watches Clarke flounder.

"What do you want?" Clarke finally asks.

"I want to know why you are here?" Anya snaps, all pretense of socializing disappearing.

This girl caused the death of her warriors. Ones who were under her leadership when the bridge was destroyed. She still remembers the blast burning across her skin, watching the bodies of her people flying apart and disintegrating across the remains of the bridge as it collapsed beneath them.

Clarke takes a deep breath. She knows that this woman is good at what she does. A leader of one of Lexa's armies. She's bright, ferocious and loyal.
She's able to toy with Clarke easily, sensing her weaknesses and Clarke can feel a small frisson of frustration at this woman's intrusion.

"If Lexa hasn't told you yet, then I guess you're not meant to know."

Clarke sees the fury ignite in Anya's eyes and there's a part of her, possibly the less mature part, that feels an inordinate amount of satisfaction in causing that flicker of doubt to cross the woman's face.

Anya snarls and pushes Clarke hard, and she ends up smacking against the concrete behind her. It is enough to hurt Clarke and leave her breathless, but she doesn't stop eye contact for one moment.

"Tell me!" Anya snarls.

"Make me. I don't care who you are, but I'm not telling you what you don't need to know."

Oh, she knows she's playing with fire but the last few days have finally caught up with her.

Feeling so powerless and being swept up in this world's dramas.

She is heart sore and sick of it. The time and moments she had with Lexa have been sullied with how Lexa had played her.

She'd felt minuscule. Taking this moment to regain some power over her own life was probably foolish. It was. She knew it was rationally. But, she didn't care.

She watches the fury in Anya's eyes flicker, and then there's a sullen silence as the woman takes a step back.

Clarke takes a deep breath and prepares herself for whatever comes next, her stomach muscles clench waiting for a fist, but the determination in her eyes makes her hold Anya's gaze until the other woman finally exhales.

"I hope Lexa knows what she's fucking doing," Anya eventually says.

Clarke looks at her and just shrugs.

"Damn it, and I was just looking for breakfast, not a God damn war ok?" Clarke's voice is a low rasp, but she continues to stand her ground.

"Why, Clarke? Why did you blow up that bridge?"

She can see the pain that is in Anya's eyes and Clarke hates herself. And she hates her people for the things they've done.

She and Anya had parlayed, and they had been so close to an agreement. Anya had promised that she would take her to meet the Commander.

It was Jasper who took the first shot causing the mad panic on both sides. The delinquents had been so terrified and trigger-happy, and Clarke had been furious.

Clarke hadn't known about Bellamy's backup plan. One where he'd used Jasper and Monty's skills with chemistry to create a bomb.

She can see how stupid they were now. How young. And it kills her that they had been so close to getting a meeting with Lexa before all hell had broken loose and she'd had to scramble when
Bellamy's backup plan had kicked in. He'd dragged her backwards as she screamed.

She remembers the look of shock and pain, and horror on Anya's face as her people died around her. She remembers locking eyes with her and the betrayal in the woman's eyes. And Clarke finally feels the impact of her people on the lives of Lexa's people and she is breathless with what a disaster they've been.

She sighs and blows out a breath of air before crossing her arms.

"I didn't. I didn't know about the God damn bomb."

"You are the leader of your people. How could you possibly not know what Skaikru were going to do?" Anya's voice is still accusing, but she's less savage in her tone as she steps away from Clarke.

Clarke closes her eyes and tilts her head back. She remembers her anger at the time. The furious fight she'd had with Bellamy. It was another thing that seemed to sever his relationship with Octavia and one of many things that pushed a wedge between him and Clarke.

"They - Bellamy didn't tell me. He knew I would have said no. But that doesn't matter - its on me. I should have known."

Clarke's eyes are bleak when she finally opens them to look at Anya.

"I'm sorry about what happened at the bridge. I wish we had more time. I wish we hadn't been so scared of you. But it's done. We need to find a way to move beyond this constant - "

Clarke waves her hands around trying to find the words to describe this ongoing impasse between the two cultures. It is reminiscent of her time with Lexa, always trying to explain things through her hands and her face.

Anya's eyes widen at Clarke's wildly flailing arms and smirks. She tilts her head and looks at Clarke impassively.

"Wind? Bomb? Falling from the sky?"

Clarke blinks and then looks down at her hands and realizes she's talking like she did for Lexa. She smiles softly.

"This constant need to kill the other is what I was trying to say. I want to find a way for all of us to survive together."

Her words are grave but her smile is a little more open to this warrior she's learned is an integral part of Lexa. For that, she'll make an effort.

"Alright," Anya responds and nods, "then that is why Lexa has brought you to Polis. The clan leaders have been called to discuss the Kongeda and the mountain. You Skaigirl must be part of her plan," Anya said slowly.

She looked at Clarke trying to work out what it was about the Skaigirl that Lexa trusted so quickly.

"Clarke," Clarke finally said, a smile on her face but then she winced as her stomach made a loud growl.

Anya looked at her and smiled cruelly.

"You should know, Clarke, that Lexa has probably ordered food for you in your chambers. You are
her guest, and she would not have left you alone to eat first breakfast."

Anya watched as the Skaigirl's skin began to flush a deep crimson which crept up her neck and spread across her face.

"So the lovely encounter with Titus was uncessary?" Clarke raised an eyebrow at the other woman who just smiled secretively.

"I would hurry up if I were you, Clarke. The Commander does not like to be kept waiting."

Anya's grin was spontaneous when she saw the glower that appeared on Clarke's face.

"Well, she's going to have to wait for me." It's a reaction Clarke regrets when she sees the look of understanding on Anya's face.

Clarke rolled her eyes at her, but Anya merely smiles and shrugs as she looks at Clarke as if she had just given away a great secret.

*** *** ***

Lexa's steps are slow and measured as she walks back to her rooms although every part of her is screaming to run.

The line of her posture is absolute, and her guards quickly look away as she passes, the grim look on her face is terrifying.

People working around the tower run scurrying out of her way, but she's utterly unaware as she feels something in her breaking. Again.

She cannot do this. She has to. She is stronger than this. The thoughts churn in her head as she gets closer to her doors.

She wants Clarke. She wants to hold her, and the thought of this is frightening. Clarke feels like the only comforting presence in a world of dissonance. Polis. Her people. The world she knows.

It all feels like its breaking and Lexa is unprepared for the hollow, empty feeling inside of her. She breathes out and moves towards Clarke's doors.

One look at the guards tells her that Clarke is absent from her rooms. Her brow furrows, and she turns to walk across the hallway to her quarters when a shadow separates from the hangings that cover the windows on this floor.

Lexa almost stumbles when gray eyes look at her. She's not ready for this and she feels her stomach clench, and she strides past Costia who has been waiting near her room.

"Lexa, please!"

Her voice is still beautiful, and Lexa's heart lurches. She comes to an absolute standstill and waits by her doors. She looks at her guards, and they open up the room for her.

She continues to move and hears the sound of Costia following her.

The guards are still and wait for her command. Lexa nods imperceptibly, and Costia walks in cautiously. She tries a smile. It's soft. Gentle. Like she's approaching an injured animal.

Lexa's eyes are wet with tears that don't fall.
She stares at Costia and doesn't move far from the entryway, preventing Costia from coming further into her room. Their room.

"Will you let me explain?" Costia asks, and Lexa sees that she still looks unbearably beautiful with her jet-black curls, her skin that is so familiar glistening a sun-bronzed rich brown that tells Lexa she's spent most of the summer on the plains scouting.

She looks good. Healthy.

"What is there to explain, Costia. You fell in love. We cannot help where our hearts take us."

Lexa swallows the sadness that is causing her throat to close, but she refuses to cry in front of this woman who took her innocence, her belief in love away from her.

"I'm sorry, Lexa. I wanted to tell you."

Costia's eyes are kind, and Lexa hates her for it. She's holding onto her emotions with all her strength and reinforces it by pulling her arms behind her, clasping her hands behind her back to channel the Commander into every inch of her body.

"You were so in love with me I did not know how to-"

"I do not need a dissection of the past, Costia. You came to apologize, and I thank you for it. You can go now."

She turns on her heel and moves to go but feels a strong arm reach out to her shoulder.

"Hey, I want us to be able to speak again."

Costia's voice is affectionate. She acts as if nothing untoward has happened. In this very room.

Lexa feels the rage she was unable to express with her sister begin to split open at the seams and tumble onto the floor around her.

She stares out the balcony and onto the sky which is starting lose its wondrous morning colors to an ugly, pale shade of watery gray.

"You cannot always get what you want," Lexa's voice is hard.

And she slowly remembers the things that she did not like about her lover of four summers.

"Lex, come on," Costia's voice is low and soft, and Lexa recalls how she used to use this tone to cajole her into doing whatever Costia wanted.

"We had our time. I am sorry for how it ended -"

"Costia! You need to go. I have no desire for a friendship where I feel none. When I look at you, I only feel ." Lexa stops and she's breathing hard.

Neither of them has noticed Clarke who has walked along the corridor and into the waiting area of Lexa's quarters.

Her blue eyes are taking in the tableau before her, and she's looking at Costia like she would like to peel back her skin with a flaying knife slowly.

She sees how Lexa is trembling, her fingers shake as she tries to release the guard on her pauldron
and the whites of her eyes are reddening with the tears she refuses to shed.

Clarke will not allow this woman to do this to Lexa.

And so she does what Clarke always does. She walks into things without thinking. Her only desire is to save Lexa.

"Lexa," Clarke calls out as she walks to the leader she is growing to like and respect, and she reaches up for the pauldron that Lexa is still struggling with anxious fingers.

"Let me. You shouldn't be doing this. You'll pull your stitches."

Stitches that dissolved days ago. And they both know it.

Clarke talks in the no-nonsense voice she's learned from working with her mother in the surgical rooms on board the Ark and from being on the ground. It is deliberate. A show of power in a place where people do stupid things when they're in pain or watching someone they love writhing in agony from wounds that cannot be healed quickly or easily.

Lexa is struck dumb for a moment as she watches Clarke sweep in and start to remove the trappings of the Commander. Clarke's long, slender fingers make quick work of the lacing around her shoulders and Lexa breathes out in relief as the weight is moved from her body.

Blue eyes stare into hers, steadying her. They tell her to breathe and to calm down. And so Lexa does.

Clarke's brow has a tiny furrow as she concentrates and Lexa wants to kiss it and say so many things, but she's suddenly incredibly aware of Costia's eyes staring at the two of them.

"Costia. I would like you to meet my doctor. Clarke Griffin of the Sky people."

Costia watches as the gorgeous young blonde turns and looks towards her.

Her blue eyes are stunning - framed with thick dark lashes and there's a look in those eyes that Costia would like to know better.

Costia smiles. It's a charming smile. One that a youthful scout in the lands of Azgeda learned to master quickly determined to make her way in the world.

"Doctor Griffin," Costia murmurs and nods quietly to Clarke.

She doesn't see how Lexa is watching her. She knows Costia. And now she knows Clarke. Clarke will hate this charm, but Lexa is shocked when Clarke turns a disarmingly brilliant blue-eyed smile at Costia.

"You must be the woman I thought Lexa said was dead," Clarke's smile is still bright, "forgive my confusion as she was speaking in your language at the time. I didn't realize that she meant you were dead to her. Not dead, dead."

Costia's smile falters as Clarke sweeps on.

"You need to leave right now. I want to look at Lexa's injuries, and I can't have treacherous ghosts from her past distracting her."

Lexa stifles a laugh, and both women's head turn swiftly to look at her. Clarke's is pleased. Costia's is shocked.
"Are you going to let this Skaigirl talk -"

"Yes," Lexa's voice is strong, and she's more than proud to say the next few words.

"She's my healer. She saved my life. If not for her, I would be dead. If she says, I need to remove - " she cocks an eyebrow at Clarke and smiles softly, "what was it? Treacherous ghosts? Then so be it."

Lexa turns to face the woman she once trusted and loved.

She can see how her skin is deepening in color as rage slowly fills her face. Lexa's eyebrow lifts, and she stares at Costia who cannot believe that the young Commander she had left behind, the woman who had loved her is now this strong, confident woman who is standing up to her.

And Lexa is - mocking her. She can see it in the tilt of her green eyes and the slight upturn of her mouth.

Costia backs away from them slowly, her eyes moving between the two women and she's taking in everything.

The position of Clarke's hand on Lexa's hip. The affectionate look in Lexa's eyes as she stares at the Sky girl who is still glaring at Costia.

She can hear Lexa's quiet voice when she leaves the room and walks away from them down the corridor. She can feel her heart fill with anxiety.

Clarke is the sole reason that the Commander is still alive which will give her enormous favor amongst their people. And she does not doubt in her mind that the two are sharing a bed.

She smiles. Whatever reprieve Lexa thinks she'll get for Clarke saving her life - that will be lost when they know that the two women are fucking.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the lovely kudos and comments. It keeps me going and encourages me to stretch my imagination to see what I can come up with next.

Cheers!
Clarke gets a personal tour of the Tower from Anya.

Clarke and Lexa have conversations that need to be had if Clarke is to survive Polis.

Hi everyone,

Thank you so much for all your comments and words of encouragement. I am sorry this took a little longer to post. I've struggled with it and re-written it a few times. I hope you like it. It does move some of the plot along, but honestly, it's just gratuitous sex. :-)

Clarke's feet are sore, and her eyes feel like they're going to fall out of her head. The muscles around her knees are quivering with every step she takes.

She's spent a significant amount of her day with Anya who Lexa had given strict orders to ensure her safety while showing her around the tower and its immediate vicinity.

Anya had taken great delight in climbing up the stairs and then down again showing Clarke the different parts of the tower. Anya could have gone level by level, but no, she'd decided that Clarke had to see the top of the tower first. Apparently, this was where Lexa and her Naitblida's trained on what looked like an old helipad area.

Anya then took her right back down to beneath the tower where ancient, rusted automobiles decayed in an old car park; their parts stripped and laid bare as the machines stood in haphazard rows in the darkness.

They had gone up to the second top level and then back down. They did this several times before Clarke finally exploded and told Anya that she knew precisely what she was up to.

Clarke had then pushed her hard till she hit the concrete wall behind her and then snapped a litany of sharp words before Anya burst out laughing. Clarke had tried to hide the smirk on her face but failed when she began to laugh alongside her.

Anya had been both impressed with the Skaigirl's patience and humor. In the end, she had finally taken pity on Clarke by showing her the medical floor where Lexa kept an infirmary of fisas.

Clarke had stopped in her tracks. She had been bedazzled by the old machinery. In a world that apparently no longer had electricity, Clark was intrigued by how Lexa's people had found a different purpose for the machines.
She still wasn't sure about electricity as the lighting in the tower continued to confuse her.

Clarke had spent a good hour with Lexa's fisas talking at length about procedures and equipment. Syringes in containers still gleamed, and instruments had been kept pristine, and Clarke wondered how they were used by the people from the ground.

She'd seen the glazed look on Anya's face and had decided to make her endure it for a little longer than necessary. Her petty revenge felt even better when Anya caught her eye and Clarke had smiled at her. It wasn't a pleasant smile, and Anya's body had jerked into a hard line, her posture straightening when she realized just exactly what Clarke was doing.

They had eventually left with Clarke asking if she could come back. The head of the fisas had smiled beatifically inviting her to come back whenever she liked, her eyes already glimmering with more questions.

That had been an hour ago, and Anya had finally taken her back to her room a few minutes ago after Clarke had said she needed to rest. The woman had left with a smirk and dangerously narrowed eyes, promising Clarke to see more of the capital tomorrow. Clarke had rolled her eyes and pushed the woman out of her rooms. She'd never admit it, but Anya's fierce loyalty to Lexa and her cruel humor shifted Clarke's opinion, and she had begun to warm to the woman.

Clarke shuffled into the large bedroom and leaned against a wall as she teetered for a minute while pushing her boots off one by one. She ached in every possible way after Anya's stunt with the Tower stairs and the horse ride from the day before.

Clarke felt a pleasant kind of tiredness. The kind you get where your body and mind are tired enough to seem at peace without completely shutting down.

As she began to remove her outer jacket, Clarke wondered if it was possible to have a bath in Lexa's rooms and what she needs to do to get food. She guesses that she'll either have to find Lexa or one of her handmaids. She's kicking herself for not asking Anya, but knowing the woman, she would have traipsed across the city before bringing her back to one of the Tower floors for an evening meal.

Her eyes cast over to the balcony doors and she watches how the evening light diminishes across the sky, the first stars appearing above the horizon. The air outside has cooled down but her room seems to have retained its warmth, and she snuggles against the furs on her bed after removing the tunic that one of Lexa's handmaids had left her with that morning.

Her eyes narrow as she remembers the look the young woman had given Clarke when she'd laid out the fresh clothes onto the bed. Her eyes had raked Clarke's body up and down a few times, and Clarke had felt her early morning bad-temper grow until she'd realized the girl was checking her size against the clothes.

She'd felt stupid and tried to make it up by thanking her in Trigadesleng. The girl had beamed before leaving the room, and Clarke's heart had lifted a little.

She wonders how Lexa is when she hears footsteps outside her door and a quiet voice on the other side.

"Klark?"

Clarke can't help the sudden butterflies in her stomach, and all the things she's told herself to keep Lexa at arm's length, seem to disappear. She calls out for Lexa to enter and moments later the
young woman is walking towards her. Her green eyes are bright and a lot less miserable than she was this morning.

Clarke smiles at that. She knows Lexa lied to her, but she's met Titus, and she sees Polis for what it is. So much of Lexa's character was formed by all that she can see, and she's not surprised. The weight of a whole culture sits on this woman's shoulders, and now Clarke understands some of the darkness in her eyes when they'd been in the bunker.

Clarke feels a surge of anger at Costia. The way she had behaved around Lexa as if she owned her. Clarke had not liked that one bit, but Clarke hated the look of unbearable hurt on Lexa's face even more.

She was beginning to realize that Lexa had unfailing politeness even in the face of Costia's cruelty.

"Hey, how are you?" Clarke asks quietly.

She's still lying on the bed, and she's mostly dressed although she's now barefoot and without her overshirt. She can see how Lexa's eyes trail down towards her stomach to the patch of bare skin between her shirt and the top of her jeans. Clarke shifts until she's sitting up.

Lexa smiles and Clarke can see the tiredness reflected in her eyes, her fingers rubbing absently at her temples. Clarke reaches up and takes Lexa's hand before pulling her towards the bed.

"You have a headache."

Clarke pulls Lexa down towards her. She can feel how Lexa resists instinctually and then she falls gracefully to sit beside Clarke on the bed. Clarke feels her proximity acutely.

"I have met with several of my people to find out why we were betrayed at the mountain," Lexa's voice has a particular tone as she recounts her day.

Clarke can see that she's battling pain behind her eyes and just wants her to feel better.

She's still savoring the sound of Lexa's voice as she speaks English and how she says specific words, the pronunciation and stress a little different to Clarke's. She connects the dots and sees how the accent reflects Lexa's native tongue.

She sees the tightness around Lexa's eyes and her mouth. Clarke wants desperately to shift that a little. Even for a moment. She guesses that Lexa probably never allows herself a time to release this tension.

"Come and sit here," Clarke commands as she shifts backward onto the bed and pats between her leg.

Lexa's eyes widen.

"What?"

Lexa's look of shock would have been comical if not for the fact that her mouth has made the most ridiculously beautiful shape and Clarke just wants to kiss it.

"Don't be frightened, Commander. I promise - I won't hurt you," Clarke says, and Lexa sighs at the teasing in her voice.

Clarke can sense the shift in Lexa's mood when a soft smile flits across her face as she moves her
body so that she's sitting between Clarke's legs.

Clarke reaches for the long, chestnut braids and moves them to the side before pushing her thumbs against the base of Lexa's skull. The sound that Lexa makes is sinful. It's a startled intake of air released in a low sigh that turns into a whimper.

Clarke can feel her body react to it immediately, but she focuses on the soft curls on the nape of Lexa's neck. She's careful not to pull them as she pushes into the base of Lexa's skull with her thumbs while her fingers massage the soft skin around the woman's temples.

"Jok, Klark. This feels incredible. I just want to melt into you."

Clarke can feel how Lexa is softening and leaning against her hands. She pulls her closer and holds Lexa with her legs which seem to have lost their leadenness from before. She kneads and smooths all around Lexa's neck and shoulders until she can feel how her body thoroughly begins to relax.

"Are we going to talk?" Clarke finally says quietly against Lexa's ear. She notices how soft the lobes are and wants to suck them into her mouth. She blinks and curses her inability to stop herself from touching her grounder girl.

Lexa sighs.

"Yes. I need to explain what's going to happen when you come before the Kongeda. You need to understand some of our laws."

Clarke laughs bitterly. Of course. She should have known better.

"So, you brought me here so that I can get torn to pieces by your people? How do you deliver justice, Lexa? Will you be the one that ultimately has to kill me?"

Lexa twists around and looks at Clarke with concern. Her hand moves to Clarke's face, but she quickly withdraws it when Clarke shies away from her involuntarily.

"Klark, no. Please, let me explain."

Clarke is tired. It's stupid to have this discussion now. She knows it but the last two days have taken their toll on her. She wants to believe Lexa. She wants to trust those green eyes that stare so intensely into her own. The ghost of a memory slips into her mind - Lexa's eyes staring into her own as she's pushing deep inside her - Clarke has to separate that girl with the woman who had her tied up and brought to their capital.

She senses a cautious hand reaching for her own, and slender fingers intertwine with hers. Clarke looks up and waits for Lexa to continue.

"The laws of our people have changed. When I became Commander, there was so much conflict."

Lexa's voice was quiet as she began to speak. Her eyes darkened as she looked somewhere into the distance and Clarke pushed down the anger and fear that had risen inside her.

"We were forever in battle. We were never able to be more than our individual clans. Separated villages. I knew that if we continued like this - then my people were divided and easy to conquer. I saw how the mountain kept picking us off. One by one."

Lexa breathed out and reached up to Clarke's face and began to gently trace the outline of Clarke's eyebrows with her thumbs, her fingers sliding into the blonde curls that fell around her face.
"Our system of justice was brutal, and retaliation was fast and cruel. That's how I lost my mother," Lexa says, and her voice is steady as she speaks, but Clarke can see the sorrow in Lexa's eyes in the way that hers does when she remembers her father.

"She was killed because she was Trikru and Trikru had killed Azgeda warriors the week before."

Lexa's lips thinned as she spoke, "She was not responsible for the original crime, but it did not matter to Azgeda."

"I'm sorry, Lexa," Clarke says, and her voice is soft as she pulls Lexa's hands from her face and into her lap, "I didn't know."

"How could you?" Lexa's response was gentle, and she squeezed Clarke's hands as she continued.

"When I became Commander I outlawed the system of justice that we had. Jus Drein Jus Daun. Blood must have blood. No clan who wanted to grow under the Kongeda could use vengeance as their claim for justice anymore. I had put forward the idea of the Kongeda. One group. Many clans. One system of law with the Kongeda's leaders to decide the fate of those who commit a crime against the clans or each other."

Lexa sighed and leaned forward to tuck a stray strand of Clarke's hair behind an ear. Fingertips caressed the edge of Clarke's ear, her eyes preoccupied as she thought about what she wanted to say.

Clarke could see that carefulness before speaking that Lexa always used when she was in the bunker. Weighing her words. And Clarke's heart softened.

"It took a long, long time to bring together. I have traveled hundreds of miles. I have spoken to clan and village leaders till my voice almost disappeared. I fought battles and small wars until my people were able to see the wisdom of not fighting each other. Not when we had an enemy who took the lives of all my clans without impunity."

Clarke watched as Lexa spoke. She saw how her hand fisted and her breathing increased as she spoke of the people inside Mount Weather. The people who had shot her.

"When you speak for the crimes of Skaikru before the Kongeda you will have my full support, Klark. I want you to know that I - I am sorry for betraying you. For lying to you. Bringing you here was not just for my people, but for yours too. I want your people to be my people. I want you safe, Klark."

Clarke's mouth opens in quiet shock. She knows she's been feeling the intensity between them and at times those feelings for Lexa choked her. Yesterday she could barely speak for the rage that kept sweeping through her, but something in Lexa's eyes, something she couldn't quite discern with all the things happening around them kept her anger in check.

"You planned this even when you had me tied up."

"Not planned. I had to make a decision quickly, and it had to seem real, Klark. I made sure that Ryder kept you safe and comfortable with him. I am sorry - I forgot that you were unused to riding, and how much pain that would cause you."

Lexa's eyes are troubled, and Clarke can see she's waiting for a reaction. It doesn't surprise Clarke. She can see Lexa's actions for what they were now.

"Why?" Clarke shakes her head trying to understand this girl who was still sitting between her legs,
her eyes drifting to Clarke's lips before blinking and hiding her emotions yet again.

"I wanted to keep you with me," Lexa finally breathed out, "and I wanted a way to bring Skaikru into the Kongeda. I believe you and your people can help bring down the mountain."

Clarke feels something like hope flare up in her. Could they do this? Bring down these mountain people who had been stealing the lives of Lexa's, and then unify the Arcadians with Lexa's? She knows she can speak with her mother, but would her mother agree to this and would she defer to Clarke?

And then Clarke realizes what Lexa had said.

"You wanted to keep me with you?"

She watched the flush creep up Lexa's face as she struggled to keep her face still and implacable.

"I wanted - you were going, I -"

Clarke watched with quiet, mild amusement as Lexa struggled for words.

"I didn't want to go either," Clarke finally says and reaches over to Lexa's face before cupping a strong jaw against her palm. She watched as Lexa breathed out slowly.

"I need you, Klark. I trust you. I do not have many people I can say that about and you were kind to me. You saved me knowing that I could hurt you once I woke up from your Skai medicine. You -"

Lexa's voice caught as she remembered Clarke's words, "you promised to be there for me when I woke up."

Her voice is solemn and steady as she speaks. It's quiet, but Clarke hears every word she says.

"I swear that I will keep you safe and we will make my Coalition understand that we must ally with your people to bring down the Maunon."

There is a look in her eye that is fierce and borders upon adoration, and Clarke feels her heart aching for this beautiful girl who has compromised everything because of her.

Clarke can feel the ache rise in her and her gaze strays over to Lexa's full lips. Lexa notices and her eyes seem to grow heavy as she stares back at Clarke's mouth.

"Take off your shirt," Clarke says quietly, her smile becoming a little wicked as she sees the blush that grows on Lexa's skin.

"Klark, we cannot. I warned you that we must -"

"Don't be so arrogant, Commander. I am not asking you to sleep with me. Lie face down on the bed and let me help you. Ok?"

Clarke's voice is firm, but she's also teasing as she can see how flustered Lexa is becoming.

Lexa stares at Clarke for a moment before she finally submits and removes her shirt. She leaves her bindings on before turning to lie face down on Clarke's bed.

Clarke stares at the muscled shoulders beneath her and holds in her reaction. She wants to pepper Lexa's skin with soft kisses, but instead she moves and straddles the girl's backside, smiling gently at the soft inhalation from Lexa.
"Klark! What are you doing?" Lexa's voice is a little panicked, but before she can turn Clarke has moved the long, chestnut braids to the side and slides strong fingers through tight musculature and flesh.

The sound Lexa makes is long, and low. It takes everything in Clarke to not move forward and bite the soft skin on her neck; her head nestled over crossed arms.

Clarke focuses on the skin beneath her fingers and tries to ignore everything else. The scent of Lexa's hair wafts up towards her. It is sweet smelling, reminiscent of the oils and salts that were in their bath the night before, and it is absurdly soft. She wonders what Lexa would think if she bent her head and inhaled her.

Lexa moans again when Clarke finds a particularly tight spot which she works on, moving through the muscle until it softens beneath her touch.

"Jok! Klark - please."

Clarke feels her stomach tilt at the timbre of Lexa's voice, those words a thrilling reminder of their time together in the bunker.

She moves and whispers into Lexa's ear as her hands continue to work the muscles in the woman's shoulders.

"What, Commander? Please, what?"

And Clarke knows she's pushing Lexa beyond the line they've committed to, but it's hard especially when Lexa lifts her ass so that it grinds directly against Clarke who cannot help the soft sound she makes.

She pushes Lexa back down so that she's flat against the bed.

"Stay still!" Clarke hisses into Lexa's ear, and she watches with fascination the sudden beading of flesh as the hairs on Lexa's arm stand upright.

Clarke rocks slowly against Lexa's body pushing her in such a way knowing that Lexa's center is being pressed against the bed.

"Klark. What are you doing?"

Lexa's voice is breathless, muffled as she's buried her head in her arms.

Clarke likes this Lexa.

"Turn over," Clarke whispers.

Clarke sits up so that her legs are no longer pressing down on Lexa, and she waits.

It doesn't take long before Lexa turns and her green eyes stare up into Clarke's. She looks a little terrified.

"Do you want me?" Clarke asks her softly, and her voice is grave. She needs to know that Lexa is willing to fight for whatever is growing between them.

"Yes."

It is a simple answer and Clarke can see the tightly controlled breathing and the way Lexa holds
herself so still that this is something that Lexa does not hold lightly.

"And what if your people find out? About us?"

Clarke moves her face closer to Lexa's. She still shifting against Lexa causing her to choke on air whenever she brushes against her there.

Clarke continues to stare, and she watches how Lexa's face moves. Green eyes fiercely narrow as if she's battling her warriors one on one to fight for Clarke, and then her mouth softens into a smile and the look she gives Clarke, oh the look is sweet and lovely, and Clarke wants to push her lips against them.

But she holds and waits for Lexa.

"I want this, and I will find a way, Klark. I will find a way, please. Do not doubt -" And Clarke does not hold back anymore for it answers enough for now.

She kisses Lexa drawing in the cries she makes, swallowing them whole as her tongue fucks Lexa's mouth ever so slowly.

She loves the taste of her kisses and how Lexa opens up to her so that she can kiss as intensely as possible. She smells Lexa's skin and feels the warmth of her breath and the touch of her tongue as their lips move against each other.

She wants this. She wants to take Lexa so hard that it will be as if Lexa is the one who has ridden a horse for the first time in her life.

Clarke moves her hands until her fingers have intertwined with Lexa's and she's holding both of Lexa's hands on either side of her face.

"Don't move," Clarke commands again, and she feels brave as she watches this woman slowly crumble before her. Lexa's eyes darken, and they look bruised, falling as she looks into Clarke's eyes.

Trusting.

Clarke looks down at nipples that have hardened; two perfect outlines beneath Lexa's bindings and she slips her hand behind Lexa. Clarke gently unties it before pulling the soft material away from the Commander. From Lexa, whose breasts fall free and Clarke feels her insides swoop and her mouth fill with need.

Clarke doesn't hear the sounds of the wind that begins to pick up outside. She can only hear the softly whispered breaths that Lexa takes when Clarke bends and moves her tongue against sweet, salty skin before she swallows a small, perfect caramel-colored nipple into her mouth, sucking it gently then licking hard before playfully nipping at it. Lexa's soft groans begin to fill the room.

Lexa cannot form words as Clarke slowly undresses her. Clarke pulls off her boots clumsily and they clatter in a noisy clump to the ground before she tugs down Lexa's pants, and underwear as she kisses against skin that is flushed with warmth wherever Clarke traces lazy patterns with her tongue and mouth.

Lexa wants Clarke inside her now. And she speaks softly, slowly as Clarke keeps her gaze firmly on Lexa's who is looking more and more frantic as Clarke tortures her with her teeth that graze against a foot, a calf and then upward as she bites a tender pathway towards Lexa's center.
"Klark, beja! I beg you - I want, I need -"

Clarke knows what Lexa needs as she can see how slick she is between her legs.

The hunger inside Clarke torments her, and she can barely swallow when she moves above Lexa, inhaling her heady, tangy scent before moving between Lexa's legs.

She wants her inside her mouth, and she swallows and tastes and breathes her in all at once. She hears Lexa's muffled growl and fingers that tangle into soft, blonde curls pulling her deeper and deeper into her.

Clarke groans against Lexa's wetness. She wants to please her.

Clarke remembers all the things that Lexa did to her in the bunker and wonders what it would feel like to push Lexa the way she'd pushed Clarke.

Her stomach fills with crazy somersaults, and Lexa's sounds are enthralling. She looks up and sees deep green eyes locked onto hers.

Clarke moves her hand down, leaving featherlight strokes against a hardened abdomen, gentle where the remnants of Lexa's stitches protrude from tanned flesh before traveling further down and she can feel the silkiness of Lexa's opening beneath her fingers.

"Klark," Lexa calls out. Her voice is tight, and her eyes are wide and beautiful as she looks down at Clarke who continues to move her mouth against her, sliding her tongue against tightly bundled nerves.

"I want you to -" Lexa struggles as Clarke moves her fingers until she's pressing them against her slick entrance and Lexa jerks her hips trying to find the pressure she wants.

Clarke feels like she will faint. Her heart feels like it's pounding in her mouth and she wants more. She wants to swallow and suck and take, and by the insistent pull of Lexa's fingers in her hair, she can tell Lexa wants more too.

Despite everything that they've said about not doing this. Of staying safe. Of being political and smart.

Lexa is making a sound that is deep and low in her chest, and Clarke knows she wants to ask her to do something but Clarke doesn't know what as Lexa appears to be too overwhelmed by the physicality of their actions.

But Clarke wants to know.

And so she lifts her mouth, her chin glistening with the beautiful, sticky essence of the girl beneath her.

"What do you want me to do. I'll do anything you want. Please, Lexa." Clarke whispers the words and watches as Lexa groans.

"Your fingers. You. Inside of me -"

Lexa gasps when Clarke slides a finger inside. She moves and watches Lexa's reactions. How she throws her head back and her mouth, lips reddened now, parts as she utters soft, soft expletives in Trigadesleng and Clarke's name over and over again.
Clarke's heart aches when Lexa spreads her legs wider, and this is too much, and she can't hold back the things she imagines will please this woman. She pushes in another finger, stretching Lexa and watches as she holds onto a scream as one hand clutches the furs on the bed and the other in Clarke's hair.

Clarke lowers her mouth and looks up with dark indigo eyes as she begins to swallow and lick and thrust fingers that are warmed and held by strong walls which clench around her.

She needs to do more and explores Lexa. She likes seeing what makes Lexa thrust her hips hard against her, and what makes her pull Clarke's head down hard against her center.

But Clarke can't think anymore as she loses herself in the sounds that Lexa is making.

There are quiet sobs of emotion that explode in Clarke's room as Clarke fucks Lexa hard.

Outside Clarke's room, there is a change of guard, but neither woman hears the clatter of booted feet and armor, nor the metallic clank as blades are sheathed and the soft grunts as men and women change places at the door.

Clarke moves faster. Her hand aches deliciously, and Lexa has coated it with a glorious wetness that Clarke revels in.

She pushes with her whole body as Lexa begins to buck against her face, one hand holding Clarke's head down so that she can barely breathe, and Clarke takes lungfuls of air whenever she's permitted, and this kind of captivity builds an ache inside her stomach.

It makes her want to come.

She loves it that the Commander of the twelve clans is completely naked before her and that Clarke remains clothed.

She loves it that Lexa's legs are wrapped around her head, and the world is muffled, and all she can hear is Lexa's soft gasps and the guttural sounds she makes when Clarke's fingers slam inside her.

She can feel the tightening around her fingers and then a sudden stillness before Lexa comes hard. She's choking and crying out Clarke's name who cannot stop swallowing her into her mouth until Lexa's legs drop to the sides, and strong hands pull her up until she's lying on top of the Commander.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispers in a daze, "I'm not sorry at the same time. I know we were meant to stay apart. I know I said you weren't to come anywhere near me."

Lexa smiles, her green eyes are so soft and out of focus when she looks at Clarke. She is unbearably calm; sensuous in the afterward.

If Clarke could, she would paint Lexa at this moment. The light embellishes the high cheekbones and the strength of her jawline. Tanned skin glowing a beautiful coppery glow, lush lips have dried out a little, and tiny fissures split it after all the sounds she has made in this room. She looks intoxicated and beautiful. So beautiful.

It doesn't take long for the Commander of the Twelve Clans to reappear.

"Klark, Clothes off." Lexa's eyes narrowed playfully, and Clarke swallows hard.

She likes the Commander, a lot.
"Now," Lexa's voice is a growl and begins to tug at Clarke's soft trousers. Adept fingers quickly unbutton her and Clarke can feel the heat of Lexa's hands as they glide across the softness of Clarke's belly before pushing down the offending garments.

Clarke laughs softly and gets up to quickly remove them before throwing them onto the floor. She moves back onto the bed and straddles Lexa as she slowly peels her shirt from her torso. She looks down onto a face that stares up at her unabashedly. Lexa's lips are swollen from their kisses and Clarke almost swoons when the tip of a crimson tongue slides across them before biting down on her bottom lip.

"Damn, Lexa - " Clarke breathes out slowly as she takes in the young warrior who is staring up at her with such unadulterated lust.

She feels two strong hands move to her hips. They slide up until they reach Clarke's bra. Lexa's eyes are bright, and there's that same arrogance to her smile that is now gracing her lips. The same one she had in the bunker.

She deftly unhooks Clarke's bra before sliding it off her shoulders and onto the bed. Those hands move to cup Clarke's breasts, graceful fingers move softly across her nipples until they've hardened and Clarke pushes forward, but Lexa keeps her still and stares at her, eyes dropping down to Clarke's soft, creamy flesh encased in her hands.

"Lexa. Commander," Clarke says but her voice is throaty and it breaks when Lexa squeezes her breasts, she's gentle at first and then it becomes a little harder until Clarke's head is spinning.

"Beautiful. You are so beautiful, Clarke," Lexa says as she looks into Clarke's eyes.

She feels energy roaring through her as Clarke's body sits above hers.

Her orgasm has filled her with a need to see Clarke spent before her. She quickly moves until Clarke is pinned beneath her. She takes Clarke's wrists and holds them tightly.

She leans down and there is a wicked, wicked gleam in those green eyes.

"Now, Klark. Try and escape me."

Clarke's pupils dilate until black edges the blue of her eyes, and she gasps against Lexa's lips. She bucks upwards trying to dislodge the woman above her, but it's like moving against granite and steel.

Lexa laughs and moves her mouth towards the creamy expanse of a supine neck; a bared throat ready for conquering.

She bites hard, and Clarke cries out. The sound is exquisite and Lexa wants more.

Chapter End Notes

Come and chat @underneaththecovers-au
She Loves Control

Chapter Summary

There's trouble brewing between the mountain and Arcadia.

Chapter Notes

Oh my. It's been a really long time and I am so sorry. I got caught up in Clexa Week 2018 and became seriously sidetracked.

This chapter is dedicated to my wonderful wife who helped picked the song title by Camila Cabello. I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lexa knows what Clarke wants. She knows it in the way Clarke trembles whenever Lexa exerts a little pressure on the back of her head when Clarke is between Lexa's legs, or when she weaves long, soft blonde curls into a tight twist around her clenched hand.

It makes her blood pound with power as she is incredibly aware of what Clarke wants. She knows as it resonates and reflects a corresponding need in her. Lexa is frightened of it and a little unsure as she's never explored this with Costia. Or the lovers she took to her bed after a skirmish or fight to contain the outbreaks of clan dissension. But deep within Lexa, there is a slow uncurling as these darker desires emerge and she feels a beautiful breathlessness at what Clarke is bringing out inside of her.

And she wants Clarke to have this. It makes her feel the ache between her legs roar. It is a fire inside her that builds and spreads from her stomach down to the hard, driving want within her core that wants to explode up through her throat. She wants to scream one long and loud howl. Mine.

Lexa feels her heart rage, and she wants to say it over and over. You are mine whenever she pushes Clarke forcibly down her body, and Clarke groans in response. Clarke's eyes darken so much that the blue shines like obsidian and Lexa wants to press her tongue against Clarke's skin and slide it across the soft dent in her chin and up and into her mouth.

Clarke is beautiful. She is exquisite when her voice cracks and cries Lexa's name, and it fills Lexa with an immense sense of control and transcendence of the world that surrounds them.

She is used to the mantle of authority, but she's never experienced her power like this. Every touch, every searing glance, and every inhalation of Clarke's scent drives ice and fire through her mind and body, and she wants to tear her apart with her mouth creating a clear pathway across her skin.

She is acutely aware that the Tower is still awake and moving around them. It is only early evening, but she wants Clarke in the worst possible way. The hunger in the Skaigirl's eyes amplifies the need between her legs even though Lexa has just experienced the most powerful orgasm wrought from Clarke's tongue and fingers.
Lexa wants Clarke to feel her command over her body because she knows that this is what Clarke wants.

She rises to her knees and places them on either side of Clarke's torso. Lexa notices the look Clarke gives her as she raises her body before her, the sheen of sweat glistening on her naked form.

She watches the rapid rise and fall of Clarke's firm, creamy breasts, her nipples flushed a dark pink, taut and puckered tight after Lexa has engorged herself on them, devouring the perfect crimson tips with her mouth and rolling them between her fingers.

"Lexa, what the hell are you doing to me?" Clarke whispers.

Lexa drops a little so that her arms are on either side of Clarke's face and she moves to that her lips are so close to Clarke's that she can almost taste the breath from her. She groans softly and whispers words that are disastrous for Clarke's equanimity.

"I wish to command you in my bed, Klark."

Her voice is soft, almost a groan and Clarke is made dizzy from the words. Lexa is asking permission for something they both know that Clarke wants.

"Then do it," Clarke whispers, her blue eyes are barely visible as she's narrowed them tightly, but Lexa can see the small frisson of fear in them. She kisses her softly and then moves back to sit on her heels.

"Up, Klark. Face the other way. " It is the Commander's voice, and Clarke shivers at the power in her tone.

"On your hands and knees."

Lexa watches with quiet intent when she sees how the breath seems to leave Clarke's body at her words.

She smiles grimly at how Clarke tries to scramble backward when she's not fast enough in responding to the command. Lexa feels her body clenching at the soft groan Clarke makes when Lexa bends down to pull Clarke up forcibly towards the flat of her stomach with one strong arm firmly grasping beneath her back. Clarke almost faints at the overt show of power and strength as Lexa's biceps tighten beneath sun-bronzed skin.

"I said up, Klark."

Her voice is a low growl, and she feels the thrill when Clarke's pupils narrow to a pinprick before twisting her body around so that she's facing the carefully crafted wooden panel of the headboard. Lexa is pleased that she'd let her people gift her with it as the woven wood provides Clarke with the best possible place to grab onto as Lexa slowly moves behind her.

"You will bow to me, Klark."

She pushes Clarke forward so that her head lowers to the bed and creamy buttocks rise into the air. She feels her mouth dry at Clarke's perfect, unmarked cheeks and runs her hands over them before squeezing tight. She feels the flare of hunger burst at Clarke's low groan, and the softly whispered words she utters in a low growl.

"I will not." Clarke's voice strains as they play their little game. She groans when Lexa pulls her closer to her body and damp curls press against a warm, rounded buttock.
"Be careful, Prisa." And Lexa plunges her fingers into Clarke causing her to cry out with an aching sob.

"Lex - Commander. Oh, God. Please."

Lexa smiles as she watches Clarke disintegrate before her. She growls into Clarke's ear all the things she's going to do to her. She talks in a calm, steady voice and speaks of what she will make Clarke endure and she can feel how much slicker Clarke gets as she pounds into her from behind.

She can feel the burn of their skin against each other. Sweat shines in the low light of the room, and she feels Clarke as she becomes slick and tight with the building pressure of her growing orgasm. The heat of Clarke around her fingers is breathtaking, and she wants to fill Clarke until she's bursting with her. She moves so that she can reach around to Clarke's front.

She takes Clarke's chin and pulls her into a searing kiss. Lexa feels Clarke's choked whimpers against her tongue and swallows her slowly. A hand slides across taut abdominals before slithering down to touch nerve endings that are silky and wet with Clarke's essence, and Clarke almost screams into her mouth.

Lexa is unrelenting, and Clarke is taking everything that she's giving her. From the fucking from behind to the inescapable fingers that move through slick folds and touches Clarke right there. She can feel her heart constrict at how much Clarke has opened up to her. Clarke's arms strain as they move up and holds onto the intricately carved headboard of Lexa's bed.

She feels a thirsting ache for this Skai doctor who has reminded her of the heart she shut down after Costia. She drinks her in, and their kisses have become messy.

Lexa is profoundly conscious of the sound that her fingers make as they slide in and out of Clarke. And then Clarke is coming, and she quietly screams against Lexa's tongue when the Commander pushes deeper into Clarke, her body contracting sharply around Lexa's fingers.

Lexa watches as Clarke almost slides down the bedhead and turns her so that she can pull her up into her arms while she's still kneeling. Lexa pulls her so that when she turns to sit down Clarke is cradled in her lap and she takes deep lungfuls of her scent into her.

"Jok, Klark. You are beautiful," she says and feels the lift of Clarke's lips against her own when she begins to smile.

Clarke does feel beautiful and perfect in her arms, and as Lexa moves into a more comfortable position, she watches as Clarke tries to regain her breath.

"Jesus. Lexa. That was. Insane. I don't know what that was, but I've never felt anything like that before," Clarke says as she stares up at her shyly. Her neck is arched as she looks up into Lexa's face.

Lexa smiles at the sudden bashfulness especially after what they've just done.

Their breathing is softening. Slowing down.

Lexa feels the cooling air around them and reaches to pull up the blankets to cover their nakedness. She sighs and falls back against pillows, blankets, and furs. And the warmth of smooth skin that moves against her body presses softly against her breasts and nuzzles into her neck. Clarke. Just Clarke and Lexa takes a quiet breath before she rests her chin on soft, soft hair.

"Are you alright, Klark?" Lexa says, her voice is gentle and filled with worry for the girl who has chosen to drape herself over Lexa's body. She smiles.
"Yes," Clarke bites back a yawn and presses herself in closer to the side of Lexa's neck. "How is your headache?"

There's a grin behind the question, and Lexa laughs as she realizes that all traces of her headache that she'd walked into the room with has disappeared.

"It felt as if the Clan leaders had pushed poisoned spikes behind my eyes. What they have put in Klark, you seem to have taken away. Is this a method you use with all your patients?" Lexa teased.

Clarke rolled her eyes and moved a lazy hand over Lexa's hip, pulling her closer so that their legs tangled. She can feel the softness of Clarke's calves as they shift softly against hers.

"Hmm, not every patient," she teases and yelps at the soft pinch of a nipple. Lexa looked at her menacingly, but Clarke can see right through her. Lexa feels an explosion of what feels like happiness somewhere deep within her, and she wonders at it. But the world sits outside just beyond Clarke's doorway, and it must be addressed.

Lexa sighs and leans heavily against the cushions and pillows that scatter across the back of her bed.

"I spoke with the clan leaders today. Tomorrow we must meet with them to present you, Klark."

Lexa's voice is grave and Clarke looks to her, blue eyes straining to see past the steady voice and calm visage.

"I haven't got the faintest clue on how to bring down the mountain, Lexa. These guys have technology like us. Like my people," she corrects herself, "and we don't know the extent of it. But we have several advantages over them. The air kills most of them bar the few you saw when you got shot. If we can get into the mountain..."

Lexa watches how the crease forms between Clarke's brows as she starts to think of solutions. The lines of her face are still as she thinks through several options in her head.

"If we could get someone in there with a -"

The room crackles with sound, and there's a noise that Lexa cannot identify. She jumps, her whole body flinching when a disembodied voice bursts into the room.

"Clarke?"

Lexa watches as Clarke's body stiffens. Her head twists and turns as if she's looking for the source of the voice. The voice says more words. A jumble at first with hisses and popping sounds but Lexa distinctively hears her title. Clarke jumps out of bed frantically looking around the room.

"What is it?" Lexa follows her out and quickly slides on her tunic.

"My pack. Where is my pack?"

They both look and finally find it on a chair by the doorway. Clarke leaps forwards and grabs that thing she used in the bunker. The 'radio.'

Clarke pulls it to her mouth.

"Raven?"
"Clarke is going to kill him. Probably after she kills me first," Raven says quietly as she, Lincoln and Octavia approach the outer walls of the citadel of Polis.

"She's not going to kill you," Octavia doesn't have time for Raven's dramatics, "she will kill Jaha though, but I don't think she'll get back to Arcadia in time before Abby kills him first."

Raven's eyes dart over to Octavia's and worries about what's happened since they tried to leave Arcadia last night. There had been an almighty uproar just as they'd been walking towards the horses when they heard Abby and Thelonius yelling at each other just outside the canteen area. They watched with growing fear and Raven had felt her stomach drop when they heard what the Ark's old Chancellor had done. Abby had immediately put him into confinement alongside that creepy assistant of his, Darius something or other. It had been unnerving and yet, wonderfully satisfying to see the guards grab both men before shepherding them towards the Sky Boxes.

She can feel her nerves prickling beneath her skin, her lungs strain and her breathing has become fast and labored. They've been riding for hours, and her body is on fire. She's not like Octavia who has been riding horses far longer than she has. She still wishes she'd stolen one of the motorcycles that she and Sinclair had cobbled together; the spare parts and machinery of the Ark that are no longer needed now that they're not orbiting the Earth.

"Who is going to tell her?" Raven finally breathes out.

Octavia sighs and looks at Lincoln who gives her a steady, calming smile.

"Whatever you have to say, will need to be said in front of the Commander. She must know immediately, or you put your leader into a terrible position," Lincoln says. His voice is firm, and Octavia nods in response.

"I'll do it," Octavia finally says, her voice is not happy at all. "I swear, Raven, if you don't apologize to her - "

"Don't Octavia," Raven is not happy with the constant badgering from her new friend, "I've got this. I was an idiot, and I let my jealousy get in the way of friendship. I screwed up. I get it. I'll talk to Clarke," her voice softens, "I promise, ok?"

She scrunches up her brow, her nose crinkling at the sides, "I've got this."

The words are whispered, and Octavia looks at her carefully before deciding to just leave it alone. She nods curtly, but there's the edge of a small smile at the corner of her mouth that makes Raven feel a little less of the asshat she's been. She has hated herself for her behavior towards Clarke. God. Finn. What a fucking mess and she needs to get her shit together and talk to Clarke.

As they approach the city gates, Lincoln moves forward and speaks to the guard in rapid Trigadesleng. Raven hears the words Commander and Skaikru, and within minutes they're being escorted through the gates and towards the Tower. The urgency of their mission must have been well communicated because it's not long when they find themselves being brought into the Commander's throne room.

Both Raven and Octavia cannot help gawking although Octavia is a lot more subtle about her scrutiny.

"Holy fuck, guys. Why didn't you say something?" Raven rotates as she takes in the room with its high ceilings and long benches, tables are scattered throughout the room all before a raised dais where the most ass-kicking throne Raven has ever seen sits, majestically looking out over its
"I've never been, so I didn't know. Well, I've heard stories, but I didn't realize," Octavia's voice stops when light spills into the room as the doors open and a tall man, his head as bald as Lincoln's shaven head, strode into the room.

"Why are you here?" his voice is sharp and he looks over them, his eyes lingering on Lincoln in recognition, "Linkon? We thought you dead."

Lincoln doesn't show any emotion, his face is calm as he stares quietly for a few seconds before speaking.

"Fleimkepa, we have urgent news for Clarke and the Commander. We need to see the Skai Prisa as soon as possible."

"Linkon. You have much to explain," his brows bristle and he stares down the young warrior before him. "What is your news and I will deliver it to the Commander. You cannot enter Heda's tower and not follow protocol."

Titus' voice is deliberate as he speaks only looking at Lincoln. His fingers twitch and tug at his cloak, and Lincoln's eyes flicker at the Fleimkepas hands before looking back at a drawn and impassive face.

"There is no time for protocol, Fleimkepa," Lincoln's resolve to stay calm is compromised by Titus' intractability. Lincoln is acutely aware of the urgency for the Skai people, but this has ramifications for his people too. They do not have these moments to waste to placate the older Fleimkepa's need to follow tradition and protocol. Lincoln knows in his heart that the Commander would not want this either.

Raven watches the interchange with growing frustration.

"Fuck this," she whispers and digs into her pack before pulling out one of her many radios. Titus flinches when he sees it thinking it is one of the Skai people's guns. He stumbles back in horror at the sacrilege of Mountain tek being brought into the heart of the Commander's tower.

"Clarke! We are in some kick-arse room with a throne. There's a guy who looks like a bald eagle who won't let us see you or the Commander. It's urgent. Clarke!"

She watches as the man steps towards her in growing anger. His hands are already reaching out to grab Raven's tek from her hands, but Raven walks backward keeping just out of his reach. She repeats her message a few times before a familiar voice breaks over the radio.

"Raven?"

Its Clarke and Raven feels a rush of relief flow through her.

Raven stumbles as the man before her lunges and grabs at the radio but tenacity has been drilled into her since birth, and Raven Reyes was not letting go for any bald-headed bloke in monk's clothes.

"Fleimkepa!"

The sharp voice from the doorway is frightening in its ferocity, and Raven looks up in shock
almost releasing the radio which has been pressed to transmit as she continues to struggle with the idiot before her. He steps back glowering and turns to the woman who's dressed in grounder armor. Raven stares at her as she walks into the room.

"What is going on?"

They all speak at once with Raven swearing the loudest at the Fleimkepa.

"We need to see Clarke, and this idiot won't let us!" Raven snarls.

"She has Maunon tek!" Titus is not happy at the Skai girl who has walked into the Tower without any sense of the place she's in which compounds his belief that these potential invaders of his people's lands have only contempt for them.

"I have no idea what the hell that means," Raven grounds out but points the radio to the woman who's walked into the room.

She's attractive in that terrifying, Grounder kind of way all kitted up in leathers, and metal, and - rubber? Raven angles her head to see if she's looking at vulcanized tubing that has been stitched across the woman's outer armor. High cheekbones and hazel eyes that are looking deadly serious at her right this moment.

Raven looks at Octavia and Lincoln who are just staring at her, both of them with their hands close by their sides although she can see that Octavia is itching to put her hands on her sword.

"That. What is that in your hand Skai girl?"

Raven almost laughs out loud when the woman flinches when Clarke's voice comes out over the scratching hiss of the radio.

"Raven? Where the hell are you?" Clarke's voice is low and quietly frantic. Raven can feel her tension through the radio waves and rolls her eyes.

"Don't go all 'I must save my people' on me Clarke. We're in the - " Raven says before cocking an eyebrow at the woman before who is looking at the radio with mistrust.

"The Commander's meeting room."

Well, holy shit. She can see that Lincoln is sweating a little despite his cool outer demeanor and Octavia looks like she doesn't know whether to kick something or run her blade through the tall, Fleimkepa guy that she's been grappling over the radio with.

"Raven. Octavia?" Clarke's quiet voice is bemused, and Raven looks to the doorway.

Clarke. A very disheveled looking Clarke with her hair pulled back in a messy bun, and she's wearing grounder clothes. A light blue tunic and leggings and those kick-ass boots the grounders like to - kick ass with.

She doesn't realize she's been holding her breath until she releases it slowly. Thank God.

"So now you're answering your radio?"

It's not what she meant to say. She didn't intend to be snarky, and she sees how Clarke's blue eyes darken. She raises her arms up in apology and goes to say sorry when someone else appears in the doorway. Her mouth drops open a little at the woman who strides into the room. Her face is
typical of the grounders with almost no emotion, but the dazzling green eyes give away the quiet anger beneath the mask.

Raven gulps as the woman walks up and takes a seat on the high backed wooden chair at the head of the room. This must be their Commander. The one who wants to kill Clarke. She looks to Clarke who is staring at the grounder leader, and her face has the strangest expression on it. It almost seems like Clarke wants to devour her. She smiles. Octavia was right.

"Commander," Lincoln bows his head as he approaches the dais. Raven can't help but think that courage and bravery must be ingrained into them at childhood because all she wants to do is turn tail and run.

"Linkon. Explain yourself."

She sounds as intimidating as she looks and Raven is not surprised that this young woman is the leader of her people.

"Commander, we have news from Arcadia."

They all hear Clarke's quiet intake of air and watch as she rushes towards Lincoln. Her blue eyes are wide with growing fear.

"What's happened? Is my mother -"

She doesn't finish her sentence and just looks at them as she struggles to hide her anxiety. Raven doesn't miss the flinch of the woman in the seat above them who seems to move towards Clarke before she stills and holds the armrests of the throne. Tightly. Raven's eyes flicker back to Clarke and she decides to step forward.

"Abby is fine Clarke," Raven says and watches the subtle slumping of Clarke's shoulders as relief floods through her, "she imprisoned Jaha though as we just found out he sent about thirty of the delinquents to Mt Weather. He's been going behind your mom's back talking to the people there and offered an alliance."

She watches as Clarke's face whitens and she staggers backward. And then white turns to red as fury creeps up her face.

Raven really doesn't want to impart the next piece of news and looks over to Octavia who nods curtly. Raven blows out a soft burst of air in relief.

"Clarke," Octavia steps toward her, but her eyes flicker over to the Commander who is staring with quiet anger at all of them, "Clarke."

Octavia's voice is soft, and it makes Clarke's body still. Octavia is not the quiet one. Nor the soft or gentle one.

Clarke's eyes are full, wide open and terrified.

"What, Octavia. Just tell me."

"It's Wells. They have Wells. Jaha sent his son and Jasper, and Monty, Harper -" Octavia lists some of the people that she and Clarke have had to survive the last nine months with. Raven can see the shock as blue eyes widen in quiet horror.

"Why? Why would he do this?" Clarke asks in complete confusion.
"He made a deal with them. An alliance. But he made that alliance when he was on the Ark. When he was chancellor, and he sent Wells as a show of good faith." Octavia's eyes are bright, and she's staring at Clarke with the intensity of someone who knows her well. It's in the way her body almost leans toward Clarke as if to placate her.

"Is he mad? Does he know what these people have done?"

There's a note of hysteria in Clarke's voice which is disconcerting for Raven who's only ever seen this girl endure everything that had been thrown at her. Including herself, after she'd found out about Clarke and Finn. The line of Clarke's jaw looks like it could crack as she grits her teeth so hard.

"And your mom wants you to come home. She wants you to help get them back."

Clarke breathes out, and Raven watches as she looks over to the Commander. Clarke's eyes are filled with fear, and the Commander finally has cracked the implacable facade and looks like she is ready to destroy the planet with eyes that are full, bright green and terrifying in their intensity. Raven swallows hard - she's not easily frightened but this woman - holy fucking Amazon Queen.

"Enough. Fleimkepa, call my warriors and send them to keep watch over the Arcadians. Find Gustus and Ryder and send them to me."

Raven watches in awe as the young woman snaps out command after command.

"Anya, you will keep guard over Clarke."

Raven feels a tightness in her gut. She's startled and blinks away at the anger that rises sharply. So, they are keeping Clarke a captive here, and maybe Octavia was wrong about them being lovers.

"Clarke doesn't need anyone to guard over her. Or is that grounder speak for a prisoner?" Raven says tersely as she walks over to the Commander.

"Raven," Clarke looks at her, and her eyes are wide with shock, "it's fine."

"No Clarke," Raven snaps, "why did they take you? Are you going to be tried for what happened at the Dropship?"

"Raven," Clarke's voice is sharp, and the look in her eye is enough to tell Raven that she seems to have transgressed some boundary.

"Stop it!" Clarke hisses and Raven recoils.

"Klark, we do not have time for this. Tomorrow grows closer, and we need to find a solution to the mountain," the Commander looks at Raven as she speaks and her voice is deadly.

Raven swallows and looks to Octavia who is staring at the Commander in awe. Ready to do her bidding. Well, Raven is not a grounder and not one of her followers.

"What now about the mountain?" Raven's voice is cutting, and she looks between Clarke and this - Commander.

Green eyes continue to stare at her, and Raven feels like her insides are curdling. She wishes that she'd kept her mouth shut, but someone had to ask these questions. It may as well be her.

"I have to go before the coalition of clans tomorrow. To answer for our mistakes. The only way
around this -" Clarke pauses, and her hands move gracefully through the air as she tries to explain, and her eyes tighten with stress as she fumbles for the correct words.

"I have to find a solution for Mount Weather. I had hoped to find a way to fight their tech with ours but this news - it's going to have consequences." Clarke's eyes close for a moment, and she breathes slowly as she's trying to get her head around what's happened.

Clarke's voice is tired, and there's sadness in her eyes as she looks at the Commander who sits like a statue on her throne. Her face is impassive, and Raven cannot for the life of her discern what the woman is thinking.

Raven thinks about the last twenty-four hours and the mad rush to get to Polis after they'd been delayed by Abby's discovery when she started talking to Wells in Mount Weather. He'd been calm, but Abby had almost blown a gasket.

"Ok. Well, you can stop freaking out about having to be the savior, Clarke. That's why we're here." Raven nods. "I mean, if we're going to be blowing the hell out of them, then you chose the right people for the job."

Raven grins, and for a moment the tension in Clarke's posture lightens as she laughs.

The Commander turns her head and stares at Raven so hard before speaking.

"Speak, Revon Kom Skaikru. What do you mean about blowing the hell out of them?"

Raven grins. In space, all she'd ever wanted to do was build things, make things better. She was always improving designs with Jake.

The water filtration system. She had come up with a way to extend the lifespan of their oxygen systems and helped Monty crack the porn channel parental passcode. Those were all of the things she'd done. It was natural for her to think outside the proverbial box because that's what she did. If she could separate hydrogen from oxygen without blowing up the space station, then bringing down a mountain would be simple.

Raven smiles, and it's slow as it spreads across her face. The look of hope that Clarke gives her fills her with energy, and she knows they have to talk at some point but right now, they're two women with specific strengths and they both need to get over whatever residual shit they had over Finn and get on with surviving.

Well, she has to.

Clarke's been surviving for almost a year now. And she's led The Hundred and got them out of situations where so many more lives could have been lost. It's been Clarke's fast thinking and her medical skills that have saved them over and over again. Now, Raven thinks grimly, it's her turn to step up.

"Well first things first. We have someone on the inside. Wells has a radio. That's how Abby found out last night just as we were leaving. She walked past the comms room when she heard Darius talking to someone inside Mount Weather. Your mom," Raven's voice hardened, "she heard Wells saying that the Mountain was amazing. He was worried though. Some of the kids have been disappearing. He's been talking to Darius instead of his dad as Thelonius was carefully watched. We need to know what they're armed with and how to get in. He plays a cool game with all that calm and cool Mr. Wells things he does but Clarke, he's scared," Raven says as she's thinking through options in her mind. "You and Wells learned morse right?"
They all had. It was part of the communications module they'd had on board the Ark. Semaphore. Morse. Clarke looked at Raven, a little confused until her eyes sparkled.

"Yes! We had a code we used if we didn't want our parents to find out what we were up to," Clarke's eyes gleamed. It had been short and their own kind of code. One that only she and Wells knew.

"Cool. I'll talk to Sinclair and Wick, get them to increase the range. You need to use your code until Wells responds."

Raven watches as everyone in the room reacts differently. The woman who had saved them from the bald eagle strides towards the Commander on her throne and looks at Clarke as she starts to use the radio. Octavia and Lincoln edge closer to Raven and she relaxes a little not realizing how tightly wound up she had been.

"Clarke needs to contact her mother," Octavia says in a soft voice so that only Lincoln and Raven can hear.

Raven looks at Clarke and smiles.

"Looks like our princess has been busy - forging alliances." A dark eyebrow lifts enquiringly, and they watch as a rich crimson flush starts to crawl up Clarke's face.

Octavia can't help herself and snorts.

The mad monk turns towards them and delivers a glare that makes both Octavia and Lincoln flinch. Octavia quickly removes all signs of feeling from her face and Raven cannot help but think how quickly the girl has integrated with the culture on the ground.

Sitting above them all on her throne is the Commander. The woman with startling green eyes and a terrifying countenance. Raven stares at all the knives strapped to her legs, the black markings on her face that make the green of her eyes contrast sharply. She watches long fingers slowly play with a knife that the Commander is turning over and over on the arm of her throne and Raven gulps.

"Jesus fuck. She's -"

"The Commander," Octavia warns before Raven can say anything more that will get her head lopped off before she can be of any help.

"I know who the fuck she is, Octavia. But she's - there's nothing on her face. No emotion. Except when she looks at Clarke. Does she want to kill her? I can't figure it out. Who's the other one with the crazy cheekbones?"

Octavia looks over, and her brow furrows into a grim line.

"That's Anya. She's been in Ton DC working for the Commander. She was sent to keep an eye on us after we landed in the Dropship. She -" Octavia's eyes dart quickly to Lincoln's, and she sighs softly before speaking, "she's the one that found out about Lincoln and me. She told the Commander about the time he went to warn me about an attack on the Dropship. Lincoln was almost thrown out of his clan for being a traitor but Indra. God. Indra saved us. She made me her second."

Octavia let out a shaky breath. It had been close. If Indra hadn't called blood kin as the sister to Lincoln's father she doesn't know what would have happened. She just remembers the angry glint
of amber colored eyes of the woman across from them. The same woman who was looking over at them now. Nothing in her bearing gives away what she is thinking. It doesn't surprise her that she was the Commander's first - the woman who trained Lexa before her ascendancy.

"Ok. So, the woman's a bitch then." Raven's lips tighten, and she shakes her head, "we have to help Clarke. This thing tomorrow that she's got to do. Can we help her?"

Octavia laughs softly. She's leaning against Lincoln who's arms are firmly crossed over his chest. Raven tries not to stare at the muscles that ripple and flex on his biceps.

"Clarke has got this."

Octavia has never been sure about much in this life. She knows Lincoln loves her absolutely, and she knows that the daughter of the Chancellor is the real leader of Skaikru because Clarke knows her own people, and she knows the Grounders. Abby is a strong and fair leader, but she's shooting in the dark and is just as likely to hit someone with friendly fire.

Raven rolls her eyes.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Is there anything we can do to help her?"

Octavia quirks an eyebrow at her, and there's a grim smile on her face.

"Just stay out of her way."

Chapter End Notes

A thousand apologies everyone. I had real difficulties with this chapter and kept re-writing and cutting, and editing. I'm still kind of - oh shit, what now? But I've planned and written the next few chapters so the wait will NOT be as long next time around. Thank you for being so patient.
Clarke appears before the clan leaders and must convince them not to kill her. Lexa is terrified.

She feels sick.

The terror in her stomach is something she has not felt since her first battle at the Conclave where the acid in her stomach threatened to rise up her throat and choke her.

The last of her markings have been pressed into her skin around her eyes, and she can smell the charcoal and fat as it seeps into her. Lexa tries not to swallow and breathes out in slow, soft puffs of hair. The silence of her room is terrible, and already she feels the absence of Clarke.

She is terrified that she will lose Clarke today and that there will be nothing she can do to stop this. She wills her nerves away through sheer determination and continues to breathe and thinks of how they can and must succeed.

This alliance between the clans must stay strong. The union she's created between them has to survive the downfall of the mountain. She feels with all of her heart that they cannot let their enemy be the only thing that ties them together.

Food, shelter, work. Learning to thrive and become more than what each clan has been. Communities that can share knowledge - knowledge that was passed on to each group and jealously guarded in the past; they must now share this with one another.

The winemakers of Broadleaf can work with the farmers of Shallow Valley. The fisherman of Floukr who harnessed the lightning squids for illumination and the carpenters of Trikru - can trade with Azgeda who live in one of the harshest terrains of all her people yet have the most diverse animals not affected by Praimfaya. Where there was one way; now there can be many.

It is their innate mistrust and prejudice that she must fight. And Clarke.

Jok, Klark!

Lexa closes her eyes and presses her lips tightly together, nostrils flaring as she sweeps the blood red sash from her shoulder before leaving her room.

She will have her accord.
She will make sure Clarke survives this. That after her appearance before the Twelve Clans of Lexa's people, Clarke will survive and Skaikru will help Lexa bring down the mountain.

She swallows hard and can feel her boots beneath her feet as they move across the stone floors of her tower, the tightness of the left against her heel not quite rubbing, but an irritation.

Her face is implacable. This she knows as she walks past those who serve the Commander's Tower, their eyes darting away as she strides forward.

The doors to the room where she holds her meetings and listens to her people are open. Her room. Already, she can hear the sounds of the ambassador's voices as she approaches. The quiet rumble is broken up by the high pitched laughter of a woman. They are sounds that make no sense to her as she walks into the room her head held high and her back unbearably straight. She does not look to the left or right but aims for her throne, and nothing else matters until she gets there and turns around where all ambassadors and their support people have risen in respect for their commander.

She looks around the room and meets the eye of every clan leader nodding once before sitting down. She sees her sister and clinches her jaw when she sees that Costia has accompanied her to the meeting.

"Bring in Klark Kom Skaikru," she says, and her voice does not waver.

There is a soft gasp of quiet shock when the leaders hear the name and then a soft burgeoning of whispered sound as they move their heads conferring with one another. The chatter is rising as they wait.

She watches quietly and notices the grim look Costia is giving her. Nia is staring at her in confusion before she leans across to Costia speaking in hushed, hurried whispers. Lexa's face is unreadable, but her stomach lurches as she watches how Costia strokes her sister's cheek before speaking against her ear.

What she sees between her sister and Costia does not hurt, and Lexa feels a quiet elation and lightness at this new knowledge.

She hears Clarke before she sees her. The movement of her boots as they strike against the old tiles and her soft voice as she questions one of her guards. Lexa is aware of the keen gray eyes that bore into her as they all await the entry of the woman responsible for the deaths of so many of her people.

And then she is there. Hair bright gold in the morning light, braided and pulled from her face. Clarke is stunning, and Lexa tries to remember to breathe. She rises from her throne and steps forward to introduce Clarke to the highest powers of the twelve clans.

"Klark Kom Skaikru."

Her voice resonates loudly through the room, and she watches as Clarke visibly pales when every single eye in the room turns towards her. Lexa wants her to not be Skaikru right now and not show her emotions, and Clarke is perfect as she keeps her face resolute and impassive, not a single feeling is reflected on her face except for one quiet release of breath as she takes in the room.

"You are here to answer for the deaths of my people."

She watches as Clarke reaches for something inside her and she sees the flash of anger in the blue eyes.
"How do I answer for them? They were sent to kill my people and me. We did not want this war that you sent to us. We were sent to the ground by my people. We didn't know you existed until we arrived." Clarke's voice is calm and steady. Despite the words, she carefully uses a tone that holds no anger or recrimination.

"You fell from the sky, and since then your people have waged war against ours. You have burnt alive three hundred of my warriors, and destroyed a bridge on one of our busiest trading routes."

Lexa's voice is resolute and stern. She must hold Clarke accountable to her people but walk a fine line between accusatory and still be open to Clarke's defense.

The look she gives Clarke is one of quiet ferocity as she still feels the anger and overwhelming grief of such a loss. But she knows Clarke now. She knows that it would have been the last possible option and Clarke would have wept as she chose the only path to save her people.

She watches quietly as she sees Clarke's pale throat move when she swallows. In her periphery, she sees the movement and soft sounds of her clan leaders. She can feel the anger which she must be careful to keep contained while she denounces Clarke with crimes against her people, and allow her to speak for her own actions.

"We didn't know."

Clarke's voice is soft and low with a silent agony threading through her voice. She stands firm, and the line of her posture is straight. Her eyes are an intense blue as she looks from face to face measuring each one with some kind of internal assessment.

"We were the first ship that landed. All of us were young and not considered adults yet by my people." Clarke concedes and looks around the room at the people gathered there.

"And yet, we were sent down to the Earth to see if we could breathe the air. If we could live. Survive. The youngest of us was barely twelve years old."

The bitterness in her voice is clearly heard by all in the room. Bodies shift and lean forward as they look at the Skaigirl with interested eyes.

Lexa can see that they're curious. Not forgiving but there's a change in how they're looking at her. She observes how her sister's eyes have narrowed and she's leaning back in her chair as she takes Clarke in. She's looking at how Clarke speaks, how she holds herself, and how she every so often turns to Lexa.

Nia's green-blue eyes flicker up to where Lexa is sitting, and she deliberately keeps eye contact with her. She sees how Nia's brows furrow for a second in confusion before a hint of understanding appears but quickly disappears when her head swivels back to Clarke in shock at the girl's next words.

"They threw us out of our home without killing us with their own hands," Clarke looks around at the gathered clan leaders and takes us a deep breath, "for crimes against our own people. For theft, for treason, for insubordination, for walking in space, for telling the truth." Clarke's eyes glittered, and Lexa wondered if Clarke is thinking of her father and her mother's betrayal.

"They locked us up for whatever the hell they wanted to lock us up for. Our chancellor at the time was not a good leader. He killed - " Clarke's eyes close, and she draws in on the strength that Lexa knows abounds in the young woman.

Clarke's quiet words have the whole room enthralled as she tells the story of the hundred young
people that were sent down to the Earth as an experiment for her clan's leadership.

Clarke tells the story of the ailing space stations that were floating and traversing the Earth in a lazy orbit as they slowly lost the capacity to produce oxygen. She sees the confusion in many of her leader's eyes until Clarke moves her hands around the room.

"Air. It's all around you, and you'll never know what it feels like to not have it, but we did. After we were sent to the ground the air on the Ark became worse, and people started to die or get sick."

Lexa tries not to feel the steady thrill of pride as she watches how Clarke has the whole room captivated by the story she's telling. She's using her hands to explain like she used to do with Lexa in the bunker and Lexa feels a sudden stabbing pain of longing. To go back. To have that time again with Clarke.

She blinks as Clarke turns towards her as if she's looking for approval. Lexa tries not to panic or let the blankness in her mind be reflected in her eyes. She tightens her jaw and lifts her chin to look Clarke square in the eye. She watches as Clarke falters for a moment.

"My people are not from the Mountain. We are not the same although we have our own technology. We do not wish to wage war on you or take your people from those who will feel their loss every day for the rest of their lives. The mountain has taken your people. They turn them into Reapers. They destroy what is inside that makes us human. Like Lincoln Kom Trikru."

Lexa stiffens and turns to look at Clarke in bewilderment. What is this? How does she not know of this? How is this possible?

Lexa looks around the room and sees him. He stands at the back of the room with Oktevia. They are both standing tall when Clarke looks towards them.

The entire room of people, from guards, clan leaders and the tower staff who continue to serve food and drink, they all swivel around to look at the young warrior. Some mouths are agape and others are looking on with a hint of derision, their disbelief visible on their faces. Nia's is one of those; the skepticism apparent, but Lexa cannot fault her as she looks to Clarke in a quiet bemusement.

"Klark?"

She does not realize she's whispered her name out loud but she must have for Clarke turns to face her. There's a hint of fear in her eyes as if she's worried that she's doing the right thing. The next few words are directed to Lexa, and she watches as Clarke's nervousness increases.

"Lincoln is the bond mate of my friend, Octavia kom Skaikru," Clarke's voice breaks as she looks back towards Lincoln who's eyes are staring straight ahead and not at anyone.

It is evident to Lexa that Clarke has spoken to her friends and discussed this with them. Without her. She feels a surge of anger but waits to see how this plays out.

She listens with growing worry when Clarke explains to the waiting room how Octavia had come to her three months ago telling her how Lincoln had disappeared since his last trip near the mountain to collect the plants he needed for his poultices and remedies. She had waited at their allocated meeting point but more than four days pass without his return.

Octavia cannot tell Indra, as she fears it will cause further disruption to Ton DC who have recently been over run by Reapers, so she goes to Clarke.
The room bursts into flurries of whispered voices as they all look to Lincoln and Clarke as she continues to the story. Many of them notice how Lexa has moved to sit stiffly on her throne as she watches Clarke with wide, wary eyes.

Clarke tells the story of their journey westwards. How they left the vast canopies of the Trikru lands following Lincoln's trail before entering the mountainous region of Blue Cliffs. They'd struggled for days with Clarke dragging along the med kit she'd salvaged from the Dropship with its emergency vials and medications.

"We found Lincoln on the fifth day of our travels," Clarke looked around, and Lexa could see that the room was still waiting to see what she would say next.

The Broadleaf clan leader is staring at Clarke with venom in her eyes and looks like she wants to rise up and throttle the girl, as her hands fist by her sides, and Lexa remembers that the woman's oldest son had been taken by the Mountain when he was only thirteen. He had been on the brink of everything that a child could hope for with his life seemingly on the precipice of possibility. And the worst nightmare a mother could envisage for her child had happened. The Mountain.

Everyone in this room had lost someone to the mountain. Even Costia whose mother had been taken soon after Costia's entry into the scouts when she turned fifteen summers. Her gaze drifted over to her. The look of contempt and anger in them shocked Lexa a little, and she straightened even more.

The way Costia was looking at Clarke was with such disbelief, her full lips curling in disdain and her foot tapping against the other in impatience as if she wished to propel the storyteller to get to the point. Gray eyes shifted and caught her stare.

The smile that spread across her face held a knowing look in that particular way Costia had as if she were the only one who knew Lexa as if she knew Lexa's mind more than Lexa did.

She'd hated that look.

She kept her gaze steady on Costia, letting the other woman know that there was nothing left in her heart for her. She watched as Costia's jaw tightened, her eyes flicking back towards Clarke before returning to Lexa's. Her head tilted, and it was just a slight gesture, but Lexa knew what it meant.

Costia was not a fool, and if Lexa were not careful, she would cause harm to Clarke.

But Lexa was no fool either, and she kept her mouth impassive as she stared into eyes that once made her heart beat faster. Lexa wanted Costia to know that whatever she threw at her, Lexa would smash it down and if she could not do that, she would send Costia to the ends of the Earth where she could not harm Clarke.

"He was in a severely damaged physical condition. He had no water or food, and he'd been days without the drugs that the Mountain Men give your people to make them Reapers."

There was a shocked gasp from Nia. Lexa remembers their brother Roan. Roan who was always away searching for other lands, other people. He'd believed that there was more than just the known twelve clans and he'd used his work in Treal's scouts to further prove his theory.

On his last scouting mission near Polis - Treal had been told of her son's capture at the hands of the mountain and how he'd last been seen as a Reaper tormenting the edges of Ton DC.

It had been devastating news, and if the Fleimkepas had not arrived days later, Lexa firmly believed that the woman her father had first married would have killed her with nothing but sheer
brute force and the grief that was destroying her from within.

She looked over to her sister and saw the pain in her eyes, and it took all of her training to remain in her throne and not move down there and clasp her hand as they listened to more of Clarke's words together.

As Queen of Azgeda, Nia could not show any reaction. As Commander of the twelve clans, Lexa had a duty to ensure that they both stood firm in the face of this.

"We had to bind him. He was too weak to run, but he could still hurt us," Clarke's voice was getting dusky as she spoke and Lexa motioned quietly to one of the nearby Tower servers indicating that their visitor would need water.

"I used a plant known for its power against drug dependency. The drug that makes a Reaper also causes them to - hunger for it." Clarke closed her eyes and Lexa could see how she was gathering her memories, her thoughts.

"I had found a lot of the white flowers we needed near Ton DC. When we found Lincoln, he was miles from anywhere. He'd been dropped off far from any of the known places near Mt Washington. The mountain," Clarke corrected herself and swallowed as the room's buzzing reached a frighteningly loud crescendo when the clan leaders realized what she was telling them.

"I tried everything. I made a solution from the plant for Lincoln to drink and we watched over him for several hours."

Clarke let out a slow breath as she relived the moment in her mind. The heartache. Octavia's terrible ululations of pain and the incredible sense of bereavement.

"He died. I brought him back using our tech."

Clarke pulled out the EpiPen that was in all of the standard Ark medkits and raised it up so that everyone in the room could see.

The room became silent, and Lexa had to admit that she was pulled in wanting to see this thing that Clarke held in her hand. She wanted to believe Clarke more than anything.

Why had she not told her this?

"I used this to bring him back." Clarke moved so that the clan leaders could see the tool in her hand. It was theatre, Lexa could understand that, and she admired Clarke for how she had moved the tension in the room to be quietly intrigued instead of ready to rip her head off her shoulders.

"And what does this matter? You bring back one man, and yet you killed hundreds of others?" Costia stood up, her voice a low, angry snarl.

"If I can bring back one; I can bring back many."

Clarke stares her down and is not in the least bit perturbed by the scout who is staring at her with quiet but overt hostility.

Lexa's hands itch, and she can feel the tips of her fingers brush against the knife strapped to her thigh. Lexa blinked furiously when she realized what she had done and eases the blade slowly from its sheath and began to twirl it slowly between her fingers as she stared at Costia who was still looking at Clarke with undisguised disbelief.
"What is your proof? How do we trust your word? You are Skaikru, and he has betrayed his clan for this Skaigirl. How do we trust any of you?"

The clan leaders looked at Costia and began to nod their heads in agreement. The noise in the room was still a low, steady hum and Lexa waited.

She looked to Clarke to see what she would do next and felt her stomach dip a little when she caught the blue eyes flicking towards her in a fury. She wants to rage at Costia for her hypocrisy, and it is obvious Clarke is on the edge of her temper too. She wonders at Costia's animosity.

"I don't think someone like you should be pontificating about betrayal, Costia." Clarke's words are soft, but the whole room quietens as Costia's body becomes rigid.

It is apparent to Lexa that Costia had not expected Clarke to stand up to her challenge. She watches as Nia shifts uncomfortably at the direction this has taken. Her eyes flick to Lexa's, and Nia swallows hard before tugging at the back of Costia's shirt.

Lexa's eyebrows rise when she sees how Costia shrugs off the gentle rebuke and takes a step towards Clarke. She watches as the blood creeps up Nia's features.

"I am Azgeda. I am of the twelve clans. You came and destroyed what you did not understand. You killed our people without remorse. You sleep with our Commander and show no respect for her or for the people of this land."

The room erupts.

Several of the clan leaders rise to their feet and begin to yell questions at Clarke, and at Lexa. She can feel her rage tightening around her throat as she watches all of this implacably, but when the Broadleaf leader lunges towards Clarke and Lexa's guards move forward to protect Clarke she rises, and her voice cuts through the room like a newly sharpened blade.

"Enough."

Her voice is terrifying, but she does not allow any of her anger to seep through.

She walks down from the dais towards Clarke and stares at Yuma, the Broadleaf leader who still looks like she's going to kill Clarke until she finally decides to step away. Lexa turns to look at Costia whose fists are clenched tightly by her sides, and her breathing is a little more rapid than usual.

Now it is Lexa who tilts her head as she stares at the woman who once shared her bed and held her heart. The look she gives is one of deliberate confusion. It is a look that says; why are you speaking and what is your reason for doing this?

Lexa sees the fury rise in Costia's face, and she's not used to it. This pure anger and animosity directed at her as Costia had always been careful to be playful, sweet and overtly sensuous. She watches Costia swallow whatever words she wants to say and steps away from Clarke when Nia pulls her back down into her seat.

Lexa looks over at each of her leaders. Her gaze is steady. She knows them all so well after spending so much time with every single one of them. She knows their favorite foods, the names of their children, she knows the shape and direction of their lands, and she knows that every one of them has been chosen because their people trusted them. And she needs to believe in them now. She looks over to Clarke and nods.
"Klark kom Skaikru, to bring a Reaper back is -" she wants to say unbelievable, but the look in Clarke's eyes tells her that she needs to use her next words with caution.

She turns to look at Lincoln who is standing tall, his eyes utterly facing forward but she can tell that there is no subterfuge there. She wonders how Indra did not know that her brother's child had been taken by the mountain.

"It seems like Skaikru tek is able to do what our medicine has not done, and I would like to know more about this when we take down the mountain. We have brothers, uncles, and fathers trapped in monstrous bodies. If you can free them - " she shakes her head in wonder.

Clarke's blue eyes glisten for a moment before she nods and moves on.

"The young people of my clan have been taken by the mountain," Clarke stares around the room, deliberately omitting the fact that it was the foolish decision of an Ark leader that had put them there in the first place.

She watches as their expressions change to one of surprise and their faces barely move but the sense of unease grows amongst them.

"They're doing something or taking something from my friends that allow the people of the mountain to walk freely upon the Earth."

There's a moment of silence as the leaders absorb the news before all hell breaks loose and this time, Lexa lets them roar their outrage.

"How do you know this?"

The strained question comes from the leader of the Delphi Kru. He's massive. A tall man where the muscles of his body can be seen beneath the supple Delphian leather armor that is famous amongst her people. His long blonde hair is pulled back in a tight queue bound with strips of leather. His eyes are very similar to Clarke's, but they are framed by white gold lashes and eyebrows that are a stark contrast to his sunburnt face. He ripples like gold beneath the sun.

"The Maunon ambushed me outside the mountain," Lexa says, and her eyes stare into the leader who has stood up. She's still high up enough on her dais that she doesn't have to look too far up to reach his gaze.

"I had been shot by them when the Skaikru leader found me. She carried me to safety and saved my life by using her skills as a healer and her people's tek. She knew I was the enemy and yet, she still saved me."

Clarke's blue eyes meet her own and Lexa allowed the respect she felt for the Skaigirl to reflect in her stare before looking slowly at her people who now stared at Clarke with varying reactions.

Most of the northern tribes who were affected the greatest by the Maunon stared at her in quiet wonder and Eriksson who is still standing nods towards Clarke with respect at her answer.

"You have our thanks - Klark kom Skaikru," the giant of a man smiles at Clarke and Lexa does not like the sudden tilt in her stomach at the way his eyes crinkle and stare down Clarke's body.

It doesn't seem to bother Clarke who smiles back. It certainly bothers Lexa, and she feels that roar inside, that need to cry out 'mine,' but she tamps the emotion down and breathes out only when Clarke turns back towards her with a soft look that tells Lexa she knows precisely what is going on in her head.
And is amused by it.

In the background, Lexa can hear the sudden scrape of a chair and a flurry in her peripheral vision before Costia is moving towards her. Her body is trembling with anger.

"You were shot by the Maunon? And you did not think to tell me?" she whispers harshly and moves to grab Lexa's wrist before she's suddenly aware of where she is and exactly who she is talking to.

She stops and stills her body before looking down at her feet. Costia gulps visibly before she finally says, "Commander."

Lexa stares at her for a long moment. She can see the worry in the older woman's eyes and Lexa looks over at her sister - her brows furrowed as she too stares at Costia.

This is not something that Lexa wants to be paraded in front of the leaders of her people. Costia has caused enough shame for the Commander before her people, and she will not tolerate anymore. Nor will she tolerate it from her sister but she can see that Nia is just as perplexed as she is. She stares at Costia - not blinking or responding until Costia steps back and bows her head in supplication.

Lexa moves back to her throne and sits. It has been a long morning, and she can feel the fatigue press at the back of her eyes. She's barely slept, worrying and wondering over Clarke who seems to have swayed the majority of her leaders. Lexa looks around, and despite the fact that the questions been thrown at Clarke are unremitting, she can see her handling them all as she answers each one succinctly and quickly.

Azgeda still has not said anything about this, and she looks to her half-sister who has yet to ask a question.

Maybe because she's still perturbed by Costia's behavior. She can see the half-lidded look she gives Costia even from here. It's the same look her mother had when she was assessing everything around her for threat. Right now, Lexa can only see her mother's daughter and not the sister who saved her so many times. Blue-green eyes are narrowed, and the aquiline nose is pointed downward, her wide, full mouth so similar to Lexa's and to their fathers is not a happy one. They're pressed tight in a thin ribbon of distaste.

"Enough. We need to discuss strategy on how to bring down the mountain," Lexa looks around the room and tries to find something, anything that will help her find the person who betrayed her. Whatever they decide in this room will need to be reconfigured later but have enough truth to it that the traitor will talk to the Maunon and provide the wrong information.

She is not going to get caught again. She looks over at Clarke who's eyes are wide and blue and staring at her unabashedly. Clarke's smile is gentle, and Lexa feels something inside her soften. A need to hold her rises up, but she cuts the feeling down immediately. Her focus must be in the here and now, and not on Clarke.

They had discussed last night that they would not tell all the details of the Skaikru's presence in the mountain. The traitor amongst her people cannot know that Clarke's friends have radios and can communicate with the rest of Skaikru. This is crucial.
Her heart aches that someone amongst them is betraying their whole culture. For what though? She cannot imagine any reason that would be sufficient to overcome almost a hundred years of stealing her people's lives, turning them into monsters and continually destroying the smaller villages near the mountain.

"We will bring down the mountain this time with the help of Skaikru. We have their tek and their Revon - a woman who has the skills to fight the Maunon's fire with even greater fire."

Her voice is loud, and she can feel the energy rise in the room.

"For too long we have suffered under the mountain. No more. We will rain down the rage of our people. We will take back the lives that were stolen from us!"

Lexa leans back and closes her eyes as the room erupts with roars and battle cries.

"Kom war!"

Clarke has done it. She's managed to convince Lexa's people that they can win a war with the mountain. Lexa can only hope that Clarke is able to do the same with her own.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has commented and helped me get through this writer's block. Each one of you inspires me to keep going even though I'm losing the plot. Ha. I do so love hearing from each of you and look forward to hearing your thoughts on this chapter.
On The Road Again

Chapter Summary

It's the aftermath of the council meeting. Clarke has to forge relationships. Abby has to hold the fort and Lexa and Clarke try to hide their growing need for one another.

Chapter Notes

Hey, I'm a day behind my schedule in updating. I hope this chapter is ok. It's a bit rushed but it's meant to move the plot forward.

Clarke can feel the energy of the room still radiating through her, but it's nothing compared to the quiet anger that has been building since the Commander challenged her in there.

She had been blindsided, and for several moments Clark felt breathless until she'd remembered Lexa's words from the night before.

"I cannot be seen to show you favor over my people. I will be the Commander tomorrow. I trust you, Klark, to show my people your strength. My people will need you to stand up for your people without challenging me. That line is a fine one, Klark. Make sure you do not overstep it."

But still. Clarke had not prepared herself for the terrifyingly cold, green gaze that had swept over her. She'd felt the twinge of need at the power the Commander exerted but quashed it as soon as it rose.

And so she'd fought like hell to get the enemies of her people to hear her. The smile on her face was grim as she thought back on how she'd shocked the Commander with the story of Lincoln's recovery.

The way Lexa had stiffened and pulled her arms behind her as she walked down the podium, disbelief, and fear quickly shifted from her countenance and her implacable facade was firmly back in place. But Clarke had seen her initial reaction.

Yes, she'd felt a little spike of fear about surprising Lexa like that. She wished she'd had time the night before. Time to talk to Lexa about Octavia's idea to use Skaikru medical technology as a bargaining chip with the Reapers.

Instead, Lexa had given her a brief few moments with her warnings on how to prepare for the Kongeda before she'd turned and disappeared into her rooms leaving Clarke with Octavia, Raven, and Lincoln. And a lonely bed.

She inhaled quickly fully aware of the armored woman who followed her close on her heels as they left the roars of the Commander's room behind them.
She could hear the swish of Lexa's cloak as it swirled behind her and the sounds of swords sheathing as Lexa's guards stepped back to let them through. They were both walking fast, and Clarke could feel the rush of anger rise in her chest as she pushed the large wooden doors of her room open. Both Raven and Octavia had their separate quarters, and she was glad that neither of them was waiting for her to find out what had happened.

She heard the doors slam shut behind her and closed her eyes. Alright. If Lexa wanted a fight then a fight Lexa would have.

Clarke spun around to face the woman who held her life in her hands. The woman she'd trusted to come into the Grounder capital. The person who had opened her eyes to the culture of her people.

She breathed hard when she saw how close Lexa was and stood her ground though every bone in her body screamed at her to step back from the green eyes that seemed to flare with inhumanly quiet savagery as they stared at her.

Clarke narrowed her eyes and pushed her head forward into Lexa's space and shoved against the armor on her chest. She felt a little shock run through her when Lexa barely moved. It felt like she was trying to push against granite but it didn't stop Clarke from snarling at the woman she'd come to like and believe in.

"What the hell was that?" Clarke's voice cracked in the awful silence of her room. There were no muffled sounds from outside. No breeze coming in through the balcony doors, just the harsh breaths of two women coiled and ready to spring towards one another in a fury.

"You dare ask me? After you - you spoke of Lincoln and the Reapers without warning me?"

"And when could I have done that? You were the one that walked away last night with just one damn instruction."

Clarke knew that wasn't fair as they'd spent most of the evening talking about how to approach the Kongeda, but she had wanted Lexa to stay.

"Would you have allowed me to speak of it? Would you have allowed me to have an advantage in that room? It didn't feel like you were going to let me do that, Lexa. You looked like you had cut your losses and were leaving me to hang out to dry."

She saw the flicker of confusion on Lexa's face before it cleared as she understood Clarke's words. Clarke felt her stomach flip when she heard the low, angry growl at the back of Lexa's throat.

"I told you what to expect. I told you that I could not appear to favor you, Klark. What did you not understand ."

The look of surprised shock on Lexa's face was worth it, and Clarke felt a jubilance as she managed to push Lexa hard enough that the warrior was forced to take a step backward.

Clarke didn't understand the source of her anger. She knew Lexa had warned her the previous night, and the sudden darkening in Lexa's eyes told Clarke to tread carefully.

Clarke wasn't always smart, and sometimes she let her emotions get away from her. Especially it seemed if Lexa was involved.

"I don't care. Don't ever do that to me again. You have lied to me, betrayed me and you almost delivered my head to your people."
The heat in Lexa's gaze softened as she looked at Clarke.

"Klark, I would never - "

Clarke looked at the other young woman and saw the anxiety and fear that Lexa had kept hidden behind her barely constrained rage. She watched as they slowly crept across her face.

She felt something in her ease, and she went to touch Lexa's smooth cheek but stopped herself at the last moment. Conflict and confusion worried at Clarke's blue eyes, and she bit her bottom lip which didn't seem to help whatever was going through Lexa's mind.

Clarke gaped when Lexa slowly dropped to her knees before her. Her green eyes were huge as she looked upward to Clarke who struggled to take in what was happening.

"Klark, I would have it that you were my people. That we were one people and that all of the clans lived in peace and we had could live and thrive and build a world so much better than this short one we are left with now."

Lexa's voice caught, and her hand reached out to touch Clarke's hip bringing her closer to Lexa's kneeling form.

"Lexa I'm sorry - I didn't mean to lose my temper."

Lexa shook her head slowly.

"No, Klark. You are right. I threw you to the wolves, but I did that because I know you," Lexa's mouth is a firm line as she presses her lips together.

"I knew that you would rise and show them exactly what kind of leader you are. I wanted them to see what I see."

Lexa whispers the words, and Clarke feels an ache replace the foolish, nervous rage that had been thrumming through her body before. She shivers when Lexa's other hand comes up and reaches behind her to tentatively cup her backside before Lexa rested her head against Clarke's abdomen.

"Klark, our lives are so short here. No Commander has stayed in the position for more than seven summers. I've already had five of them. I cannot; I have not - been able to see beyond this year. The more I brought the clans together; the Mountain became worse. The Maunon destroyed whole villages. I had only one way to keep them safe. Bring them together to make us stronger as a people. And then you - Skaikru arrived."

Clarke watched in fascination as Lexa let out a low, slow sigh and her eyes glittered with remembered pain.

"You were yet another blow to the civilization that we have struggled for so long to keep. And I am sorry Klark. Sorry for putting the bounty on you. I am sorry for lying about speaking Gonasleng. I am sorry about trying to keep my people - "

Clarke leaned down and gently placed her fingertips against soft lips.

"Stop, Lex. No. Don't. Don't be sorry. I told you I understand."

Lexa shook her head and gently pushed away Clarke's fingers.

"You understand, but you do not feel it Klark. Our ways are different, but you think we have no morality in the decisions that we make."
Clarke swallowed hard. Was that true? Did she think the Grounders were primitives in a state of nature where it was kill or be killed? A dog eat dog world where they constructed a world of absolutes?

"I don't think that now. Please, Lexa. Get up. Your knees -"

Lexa laughed softly. Her smile was such a shock to Clarke she felt her stomach flip.

"I am not prostrating myself for absolution, Klark. I am vowing to keep you safe. I am vowing to be true to you and to bring your Skai people into the clan kinship that we have formed so that you are no longer an alien in these lands."

Clarke's blue eyes stared down in confusion, and then the slow glimmer of understanding seemed to seep through her mental fog.

"Vowing to be true to me?" Clarke repeated, her voice soft in her surprise.

"To always be honest, Klark."

It's a gentle clarification and Clarke wonders at the disappointment she feels in her chest, but she needs to be more rational.

How can the Commander of the Twelve Clans vow to be hers when they've only just met? Clarke knows what Lexa sounds like when she has an orgasm, and she knows what she'll do to keep those she serves safe no matter what the cost.

She has absolutely no idea if Lexa gets menstrual cramping each month and has to nurse a hot water bottle. Clarke doesn't know if Lexa prefers the morning to the night. Whether she reads, and if she does, what does she like to immerse herself in; battle tactics or romances?

Clarke's breathing increases as she's bombarded with these thoughts until she feels the press of fingertips digging into the flesh of her buttocks.

Clarke can feel the instant rush of want, and she instinctively pushes herself forward only to find her body brushing against an incredibly strong, and purposeful mouth.

"Klark, I wish for you to take command of me," Lexa's voice is soft as green eyes stare upwards into Clarke's, and her vulnerability is laid bare.

Clarke feels her stomach swoop, and she aches for this woman who is on her knees before her.

"So be it," Clarke says, and her voice is steady as she pulls Lexa towards her with fingers that thread through tightly woven braids.

***

"God damn it!"

Abby Griffin almost snapped the communicator in her hand in two.

She stared into the glassed-in room where they were still interrogating Thelonius Jaha, and Abby found that several deep breaths were required so that she didn't throw the damn thing at the glass that separated her from him.

She had needed to leave and let Kane take over the questioning as she could feel her whole body shaking with suppressed anger and frustration at the amused responses he was giving her.
The man was a monumentally pompous ass who had no idea about the ramifications of what he'd done. She knew that the Grounders would be up in arms if they find out that their group had aligned in any way with the Mount Weather people.

From what Clarke had said, the Mount Weather inhabitants had become more insular with their lives trapped within the mountain.

Their bodies had not adapted to the world outside, and the consequences to the generations that followed the original inhabitants had been catastrophic.

Now, they stole children and young adults from the villages that surrounded them tapping their blood to mitigate their issues around infection and disease.

Abby had been horrified. Who was more monstrous? The Grounders who had battled to keep what they had fought hard for over the years or the Mountain Men who subsisted on a bizarre parasitic process that destroyed the lives of the families who lived on the Ground.

"Are you aware that they're killing those kids you sent?" Kanes' voice came through the speakers, and she watched them through the glass paneling.

"Nonsense. Wells has kept up communications with Darius since he left with his friends. They are enjoying the sophistication of the last survivors of the civilized world. Art, music, food, and drink that far surpasses what we've tried to do both here and in the sky. And certainly a damn sight more than those savages."

Thelonius' voice is smug, and he stares at the glass as if he knows she's watching and most likely fuming.

Abby takes a deep breath and tries to think of what to do when the door to the room bursts open. She quickly shuts off the audio from the other room.

"Major Byrne?" her eyes widen as the recently promoted woman enters the room. Abby looks at her carefully, and despite the woman's incredible poker face, she can see that she is not happy to be in the position she's in.

Abby understands why when she sees who it is that follows the Major into the room. Diana Sidney. Abby stiffens immediately.

Between Jaha and Sidney she's hard-pressed to choose the more significant threat to Arcadia, but where Jaha was entangled in his own hubris - Diana Sydney was a quietly dangerous threat to them all.

A zealot of the same ilk that destroyed the planet the first time around with their hatred of those who refused to believe in the same ideology. Abby has never been interested in Diana's kinds of politics where the lines of difference between class are made evident through the worst kinds of rhetoric. It's tawdry and not in the least bit useful when they have so many things to worry about already.

For Abby, there is only the now and the spectrum of injuries and illness between life and death; death not particularly giving a damn about class.

Diana's rhetoric had inflamed the Arcadians around the Arks' old hierarchies and ignited hatred between groups of people where there had been none. Or maybe, Abby is just realizing, there had been, and she'd been too caught up in saving lives to notice the widespread discontent beyond mere survival.
Now the distinctions between the groups on the Ark have become worse as they struggle to find food to augment the supplies that had survived Earth's re-entry and landfall. A lot of their electrics are malfunctioning including the machinery that provided the primary source of all their meals.

The awful irony is they've landed in a bountiful terrain, but they have no idea how to hunt for their food.

"What's going on?" Diana's hazel eyes are glittering with an almost manic ferocity as she stares into the interrogation room.

Abby wants to snap that it's none of her business but she can't. As a member of the council, Abby has a responsibility to inform them of any drastic changes or immediate danger to Arcadia. She would have liked another hour before delivering the news.

"We need to call the other members of the council," Abby doesn't quite answer.

Light hazel eyes return to Abby's after she's confirmed that it is Jaha that's in the interrogation room, and Kane is the one doing the interrogation with Bellamy Blake. Her lips twist, and she's struggling to hide her displeasure.

"What's happening? Why are you questioning Thelonius? What has he done? Why haven't you called the council to meet before interrogation?"

Her questions come fast, and they're issued in a tight voice as Diana tries to curb her curiosity and her natural inclination towards the adversarial.

Abby wonders if she'd been a lawyer in a past life.

She lets out a long, slow breath and wonders how Clarke ever kept her temper when she held the rabble-rousing delinquents together and alive for as long as she did.

Abby had admired her daughter's abilities for doing the impossible. When the delinquents survived the Earth without the protection of their elders, it was Clarke who brought them through one disaster after another, and she's now got a healthy respect for Clarke's ability to keep her head under so much pressure.

Abby has only been on the ground and chancellor for what feels like five minutes, and already she wants to go all Red Queen on them and lop off their heads.

Particularly, Diane Sidney's.

"Diane, we will wait until the council convenes before discussing this further. Major, if you could ensure that no-one enters this area for the next hour, I would appreciate it. Diane, please convene the council, and Kane and I will meet you all in half an hour."

She's managed to get the higher ground but at what cost. She can see the quiet anger in Diane's eyes and knows she's going to pay for it in the council, but she needs to assert herself and allow Kane the additional time to get through to Thelonius. She turns back to the glass barrier between her and the man whose put so many of their children's lives at risk. Again.

"Yes, of course, Chancellor."

She hears the Major's voice as she leaves the room and Diane's barely concealed exhalation of ire, but already her mind is on the interaction before her.
As the door closes, she hits the audio button and listens in to the developments in interrogation.

"Wells said today that several of the kids haven't come back after a medical. Do you know anything about this?" Kane asks.

"What do you mean?" Thelonius looks up in confusion and Abby leans forward to hear what he says next. "You've spoken to Wells today?"

Kane leans back in his chair, and Abby can only see the thick black waves of hair as his back faces her. To his left, she can see Bellamy's brows furrowing in worry. It's obvious the boy had believed Jaha that the Mount Weather survivors were going to save them from the barbarity of the Grounders.

"Yes, we spoke at length. Wells is worried as he said that Fox hasn't come back and she's been gone for almost two days. He said that there's something not quite right. They are only allowed in certain spaces in the Mountain, and he strongly believes that they're hiding something from them."

Kane's voice is steady, and Abby watches as Jaha's demeanor changes from a laconic arrogance to one that's bristling with disbelief.

"Like what, Marcus? What can these people of the mountain, who are so much like us, what can they possibly be doing that is so much worse than these barbarians who have been picking us off one by one, or shepherding us so that we cannot sustain ourselves with the wildlife that teems in this area?"

"They're hardly savages when we've invaded their lands, Thelonius. But that's beside the point."

Abby can hear the growing irritation in Marcus' voice.

"Of course they're savages. Look at what they did to us -"

"Bellamy, you're here to assist with the interrogation. If you cannot do that, then leave and call Abby." Marcus Kane's voice is sharp, and Abby watches as Bellamy scowls before leaning back, his lips compressed into such a thin line of hatred.

She thinks of his difference to her daughter. They've had the same experiences, but Clarke has emerged with a resilience and drive to find a way to achieve peace. Despite everything.

She's beginning to think that for Bellamy, it's more to do with Octavia and the loss of her has wholly taken from him any perceived control he has of his life. He's still a kid which she can see in the sullen pout of his lips and the agonizingly naive way he has of seeing the world only in black and white. He's a natural leader, but his tendency towards anger and aggression does not allow for peaceful negotiations.

"Come on Marcus. The boy is right."

"I'm hardly a boy," Bellamy snaps, and she watches as Kane struggles to keep calm.

Thelonius scoffs and looks away, but the patronizing look on his face doesn't do anything for Bellamy's temper.

"We believe that they are using our young people and the Grounder's they've abducted to help them with radiation sickness."

Thelonius takes a moment before he tips his head back and roars with laughter.
"Oh, Marcus. What the hell have you been reading since we landed? Bram Stoker?"

Thelonius laughs. It's an incongruity that is palpable in the confines of the small room. Abby watches distress rise in Bellamy's features as he thinks of all his friends who are now trapped in the mountain because of this man's actions.

She can see how his hand becomes white-knuckled as they tighten on the shock stick by his side.

"What the fuck did you do, Jaha?" Bellamy asks, and the restrained violence seeps out through the speakers.

She can see that he's on the precipice of something. A decision was forming in his deep brown eyes. It's time for her to intervene and she rises, but before she can enter the room, Kane raises his hand, staring Bellamy down.

"Thelonius. Your actions have had disastrous consequences. Your son is in danger. Your son," Kane stresses this again, and it seems that it is finally sinking in as Thelonius slumps in his seat. His bravado was disappearing quite quickly as the ramifications of what he may have set in motion is starting to hit him.

"They promised me an alliance. They said we could fight against the leader of the Grounders. Bring her down. That if we helped bring her down, we could reassert democracy. The rule of law. Bring back the old ways. The proper way of doing things through a system of governance."

Abby wants to scream and rage at him. The old ways destroyed the planet - a thousand cultures gone in the blink of an eye. Languages dead and new ones that have emerged as part of an evolutionary resistance to the past.

The survivors on the ground endured the horrors of an annihilated earth.

The elite of the world had been compressed into their bastions like Mount Weather, hidden from the horror and trauma that was happening outside. Their bodies had not normalized to the brave new world that was evolving outside their mountain, and no matter what she thought of the people that kept sending armies to destroy Arcadia, they were the inheritors of the Earth as they persevered through hell.

Not Arcadia. And most certainly not those still wanting to exert their power using ancient means of force and control like Mount Weather.

Clarke said the Commander was not like that. She had to believe Clarke because if she didn't - then what monsters were they being forced to lie in bed with?

She rose. It was time to go in. Time to bring Thelonius before the council and to come up with a strategy to get their children out of the mountain.

***

It has been almost two weeks since Clarke has seen the outline of her home. Since landfall three months ago the metal is already beginning to corrode from the oxygen and salt in the air around Arcadia. She can see long streaks of rusted ochre by the panels of the western wall where the rains come in hard and violently the winds often sending the water into sharp horizontal lines.

Clarke is tired. And angry. So very angry at the situation they're in. She's not resentful of her mother, but there's a part of her that clamors for blood wondering why the hell the adults of the Ark did not see this coming.
She breathes out slowly and tries not to show just how pissed off she is. Her body is tightly wound, and every extraneous sound that doesn't quite fit the environment of creaking leather stirrups and the soft swish of grass beneath the horse's hooves has her flinching every other second. She's gotten over her anger and hurt with Lexa at the council meeting.

Now she needs to figure out how to get the Arcadians on board with their plan to bring down the mountain.

At least she has her own horse this time around, and she doesn't have Lexa pushing up against her with each movement of the horse. That would have been just too hard at this point.

"Klark." Lexa's voice is quiet, and a gentle hand reaches across her own horse to smooth across Clarke's thigh.

She lets out a breath and looks at the warrior beside her. Lexa, here in the full glory of her position as the Commander.

Her face is darkened with charcoal markings that make her green eyes so bright and hard not to look at. Her curls have disappeared into the long braids that have been pulled back from her face, making the young woman vanish entirely leaving only the hardened battle-ready warrior.

Lexa's cloak and pauldron set her aside from all others, the red sliver of the sash is like a rivulet of blood. Not like Lexa's. Not the pitch that pours from her veins and Clarke gulps as she remembers their bodies twisting in bed as the world fell apart around them.

It has been five awful, long days that she's spent in Polis. Five days where she's discussed, planned and fought against each clan leader. She's cajoled and wheedled and used every scrap of knowledge she has of Skaikru technology to bribe the clans into allowing an alliance with them.

Trikru is already in agreement, and it takes barely a five-minute talk with Nia, Lexa's half-sister before the politics is out of the way and Nia wants to learn everything she can about Clarke and her sky people.

That had been - disconcerting, and illuminating as she discovered so much more about the girl they called the Commander.

She's also had five wondrous nights where she's tumbled into bed with Lexa, their mouths meeting, teeth pressing into skin and hands clamoring for pressure as legs entangle.

They have not stopped pushing and pulling at each other's insides. Clarke knows how her heart hammers and her breath stops when she sees Lexa walk into her war room. The tug at her abdomen as she watches the Commander walk into the room leaving her Lexa behind.

Clarke knows that she's doing something similar to Lexa when she sees how her eyes travel up and down Clarke's body in her borrowed clothes before the tip of a dark pink tongue traces the bottom of Lexa's teeth, and she slowly exhales when Clarke enters her war rooms.

They can barely stand to look at one another throughout the long meetings they have with the clan leaders as one look feels like it will turn their insides out as their breathing stutters and their imagination and memory take over.

Clarke, despite the unbearable physical longing that often feels overwhelming, finds Lexa's mind extraordinary. Lexa looks at maps and talks about entry points and exit strategies and higher ground until Clarke's mind is spinning. She discovers that each clan has particular weaponry that they've become adept with since this world began to evolve.
Weaponry that reflects the immediate environment they find themselves in. Trikru is unbeatable with the bow and arrow, all clans are good with the sword, but no-one can beat Azgeda for swordplay and horsemanship, and Lexa is the ideal combination of both her tribes.

Clarke discovered this one afternoon when she stumbles upon her and Anya in the training yards. Lexa's body is still recovering, but she's fast and efficient on her feet even with an abdominal wound and a shoulder that's still healing.

Clarke could see where the dust has covered Lexa's body, long strips of sweat had streaked across her face and arms in the low light of the afternoon. Her boots come up to her ankles covering the thick leggings she trains in, and she's wearing a soft tunic instead of the hardened leather armor Clarke found her in.

She's never seen Lexa fight and Clarke feels her mouth dry at the way her muscles had contracted in her arms as she raised two swords up high to fight against Anya. She had spun in the air and landed with one sword pressed against Anya's neck and the other tapping the back of her knee before the other warrior conceded defeat.

Lexa had turned lazily towards her, green eyes staring as her breathing slowed down. Clarke had wanted to run over and tackle her to the ground and kiss her so deeply that she'd never want to breathe again.

Anya had rolled her eyes and tapped Lexa on the back of her head with the hilt of her sword causing Lexa to instinctively flinch destroying the stoic and impassive look that she always maintained when she was amongst her people.

She'd growled something at Anya which had caused the other woman to pale quickly before stepping back, but Clarke had caught the sly grin Anya sent her way before nodding and saying a quiet 'yes, Commander' as she slipped away and went back to training the warriors of the Polis guard.

Clarke shifts as she remembers what Nia had said in her quiet Azgeda drawl. She was so different to Lexa in many distinct ways.

Where Lexa moved with a caged ferocity and feline grace, Nia was contained; every movement she made seemed to be carefully constructed and thought out well in advance as if she were playing an elaborate game of chess. She had seen their similarities too. The shape and tilt of their eyes were the same as were the wide full mouths. Kissable lips Clarke had thought of Lexa, but in Nia, there was a hint of dissipation in them.

The way Queen Nia spoke was typical of Azgeda and Clarke soon learned that the language of the people in the north was a strange patois which Nia slipped into whenever one of her warriors came into the room to interrupt them during their meeting.

Clarke quickly worked out that the language like Trigedasleng, was a dialect that had been shaped by the people who had survived in that area with fast verbal plays that had shortened over time, but this one Clarke began to understand quickly as she realized it was a modified French. Very different from what she'd learned on the Ark but intelligible.

And she understood every single word Queen Nia, and her warriors exchanged without giving away her comprehension.

She'd learned her lesson well from Lexa to not divulge knowledge if it would keep her people safe.
And Clarke could immediately see the benefits of listening in on these conversations especially when Costia had entered the room on quiet feet before bending toward's the Queen's ear to utter a few words before looking up at Clarke warily.

Her gray eyes were troubled, but she had kept her face mostly impassive as she nodded a greeting to Clarke at the time. It had taken one of her skills as a doctor, the one she'd learned by her mother's side as she delivered terrible news to people when she hadn't been able to save the one they loved. A tortured impassivity where she let her features rest as she waited for the grief and rage to wash over those who had been left behind.

She'd let her features drop to a curious look of trying to understand a strange language, but it had been hard when she'd interpreted the hurried words of Costia as she spoke with her Queen.

"We cannot trust her judgment right now when she's fucking this girl," Costia's voice had been even-tempered and if Clarke hadn't understood she would have thought the message being delivered was innocuous.

"My sister's bed partner is none of your business anymore. If you remember."
Nia's voice had also been still and calm although the words had held a slight edge to them.

"Regardless, we cannot trust her. You must not form an alliance with them."

"Remember who I am, Costia. I would suggest caution as you walk a tiredly thin path. No more of this and leave us. I have already agreed to the alliance."

Clarke had watched and had kept her face deceptively impassive as she waited for their conversation to finish. She'd seen how Costia's hand had tightened into a fist and how she'd rubbed raw the skin around her thumb as she repeatedly pressed it against the hard leather scabbard tied around her waist.

Costia left but not without giving Clarke a long, curious look as if she wanted to say something to her.

And then Nia had been a gracious leader telling her a delightful story about how she'd trained a young Lexa to be the best sword fighter at the age of eight and how the girl would practice with her two wooden swords which are the way of Azgeda warriors.

Nia had been proud that by the time Lexa was taken to be trained as a Naitblida, she would have been well ahead in that area.

Clarke had noticed how the older woman's eyes had tightened in pain, not saying the words that she'd been so glad to have helped her sister become a stronger warrior. For all the aches and pains and bruises of the brutal Azgeda training; Lexa had survived the Conclave and as far as Nia was concerned that was all that mattered.

Clarke had liked her despite the overtly cold exterior. Clarke could see that Nia had warmed to her when she found out more about how Clarke had helped stitch Lexa's wounds and apply the Skaikru tek. She'd seen the scars that were already almost healed and had been impressed with Clarke's skills.

That had been yesterday and what now feels like a lifetime ago. Clarke moved in her saddle and smiled back at Lexa.

"It's going to be a debacle when we get there. I'm not looking forward to -" Clarke closes her eyes and thinks about Bellamy and how he's going to react when he sees hundreds of Grounders at her
Clarke turns to look into those terrifying green eyes and smiles.

"He's going to take one look at you," she murmurs almost to herself before shaking her head.

"I am going to go ahead with Raven, Octavia, and Lincoln. I think you and your people should wait further up the hill while I go and talk to my mom and the council. Raven's already talked to them on the radio, so they know we're close and not to shoot."

She's impressed with how Lexa keeps her face absolutely still as she listens to Clarke. There's a tiny lift of her right eyebrow, but that's the only thing that gives away any kind of reaction.

Clarke hates it that she wants to pull this woman to the ground and kiss her deeply. She hates it that she's become so obsessed with her every movement. The only thing that stops her is knowing that hundreds of eyes are on them including one incredibly pissed off Costia and the curious gazes of Raven and Octavia who are just a little behind them.

Raven has not taken to horses at all. She doesn't understand why Octavia loves it so much until the warrior explains how close it is to feeling like she's flying. The connection to the horse beneath transforming them into ancient myths of centaurs and Pegasus.

Clarke can see the slightly terrified look in Raven's dark eyes as she sits high above the ground with no safety net beneath. She'd fallen after the first few meters, and in the end, she was placed with Gustus who now sat behind her.

She hoped that Raven survives that experience a lot better than she had with Lexa.

"Raven, you'll have to share with Lincoln or Octavia now. We need to head down to the gates on our own," Clarke says quickly, and both Octavia and Lincoln jump to the ground quickly to get Raven from her precarious perch. She slithers down the side of the horse and would have fallen if not for Gustus' firm grip as he lowered her down.

"Fuck this, I'll walk the rest of the way," Raven's voice is sharp, and she starts walking towards Arcadia but stumbles after a few steps.

The muscles in her legs are on fire, and Clarke smirks a little as she remembers how much pain she'd been in after the first few hours on a horse.

"We don't have time, Raven." Octavia stares down at her friend and holds a strong arm out for her to pull on to get back up from the ground.

After a little tussle with Lincoln who tries to help her up on his mount, Raven is ready to never set foot anywhere near a horse again which Clarke gathers from the muttered curses.

"Here. Keep this on you. You know how to use it now, right?" Clarke passes over her radio to the Commander who stares down at it grimly.

"Yes, Klark."

Clarke can see that Lexa is exerting all of her self-control at this moment not to roll her eyes at Clarke.

Clarke grins.
"We will wait to hear from you before approaching. I hope that you are able to show your council that we work stronger together."

If it had been anyone else, Clarke would have bristled at an implied threat, but now that she knows Lexa better, she understands that the woman speaks with no subterfuge. She's direct and says what she needs to say so that Clarke understands.

Lexa doesn't use her hands or her face like Clarke does. She uses her words so that Clarke knows precisely what is needed.

"I hope so too," Clarke finally responds and looks into deep green eyes that stare into her own. Clarke knows she won't show any emotion in front of her people. That the stunning line of jaw and cheekbone that has been sculpted to deliberately make Clarke's insides ache will remain steady while Clarke's insides apparently decide to crumble.

She breathes out and tries to keep her emotions from her face like Lexa, but she's pretty sure that anyone with eyes can see that she has feelings for the Commander. She hopes to God that this doesn't compromise the Commander's authority.

Clarke straightens her body in the saddle as she, Octavia, Raven and Lincoln head down into the vale where Arcadia sits lazily in the mid-afternoon sun. Her fingers had itched to take Lexa's into her own, but instead, she had merely nodded before leaving her behind.

Chapter End Notes

I don't think I can maintain weekly updates for this story over the next few weeks. A thousand apologies in advance, but work is going to be a nightmare as several projects are heating up for me. Also, pray that I don't get stuck on jury duty which I have to go and appear for next week.

Thank you so much to all of you who keep commenting and keep me going with your wonderful words of inspiration and support. Every one of you helps me keep going and inspires me to find the next word, the next phrase and often, give me great ideas for the next plot line.

cheers,
Underthecovers
Papa Can You Hear Me?

Chapter Summary

Battle lines are drawn on the Ark and Clarke walks into a hornets nest. Costia is more than we understand. Lexa tries to not be distracted by her desires.

Chapter Notes

Oh, my God! It has been so long and I'm so sorry. Thank you to so many of you who emailed and messaged me on my whereabouts and health. Your words kept me going when I truly wanted to throw the towel on these fics. I had a few hiccoughs including sharing a few chapters of this story with a friend who kind of made me doubt myself, but then I remembered how much I loved writing these and thought - oh well, it's not for everyone. For those of you who asked, I am ok but jury duty not only sucked, it sucked the life out of my desire to write. :-(

My work also got seriously crazy. I hope to be a bit more regular now that I am on holidays and can catch up on all the writing I've been dying to get back to. I wanted to get this out as quickly as possible. There will be some grammar mistakes which I apologize profusely for. I will go back later to fix these. Thank you so much for your patience.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I was a better friend to Jake than Thelonius ever was to you. You cannot, must not keep protecting him!" Diana said, and her words were like bullets beneath Abby's skin.

"Damn it, Abby. Did you learn nothing from what he did to Jake?"

Abby felt her stomach turn at the words so carelessly thrown into her face. At that moment she hated Diana with a passion that almost propelled her to move her hands to the other woman's throat and slowly strangle her.

"I'm not protecting him."

Abby's tone of voice is sharp, but she doesn't allow Diana to see how much she's hurt by her words about her husband. God, there isn't a moment since she pushed Jake to go and see Thelonius that she hasn't regretted.

Abby hated her heart for that moment of insecurity where she thought Jake took too much faith in Diana's word and never listened to hers. And she'd been wrong.

No one could have known how much Thelonius's need to maintain and protect his leadership had affected his ability to reason. It's a bitter taste in her mouth, and it has taken all her training and the belief to 'first do no harm' that has stayed her hand against her old friend, Thelonius.
Diana is a different story. She's nothing like Abby. Nothing like Thelonius or Kane or any of the others that made up the elite of the Ark. She was also Jake's best friend before her. The one he grew up with and always went to when he needed to bounce ideas off. Someone who had the same politics as him and often they had joked they would shake up the 'hegemonic' powers of the Ark's barely hidden caste system.

Even after Jakes' death, Diana had never turned on Abby to say - I told you so. And this made it infinitely worse as Abby, discovered too late, that Thelonius was too corrupt by his position to look after the well being of the people of the Ark. Too corrupt to not see past Jake's desire to get them all to safety as anything other than an ambitious attempt at power and a challenge to his leadership.

They stared at each other and Abby finally breathed out a sigh of exasperation and defeat. Her animosity to Diana was based on stupid, petty jealousy. Jealousy that had gotten the man who had made her heart sing killed. She owed this to Jake.

"Thelonius has done something. Something stupid. Something that jeopardizes the lives of some of our children including Wells, and we're trying to come up with a way to fix it."

"What do you mean?" Diana says, and her voice has just a hint of frustrated asperity that it makes Abby's hackles go up again. She watches Diana bristling with her righteous anger, and she's had more than enough of it. This posturing that Diana is so good at.

"I mean he's sent off twenty of the one hundred kids we sent down here in the first place to the Mountain," Abby snaps out her voice sharp with tension at the delays this conversation is causing. She needs to get to the council. She needs to come up with a plan. She needs Clarke. In her rage, she doesn't see how Diana's body sags in quiet horror.

"Why? Why would he do that?"

The tremble in Diana's voice is awful, and Abby remembers the sorrow this woman has had in her life. She remembers the husband that Diana has also lost early in their marriage to an untreatable illness which Abby had helped her through. She'd never re-married. Never had children. The things Abby took for granted was another point of dissension between them. Diana had always treated Clarke like a daughter. Abby felt guilt knotting on her insides again. She knows what Diana is not asking.

"Clarke is with the Grounders."

Diana's body stills with tension. It's not something she was expecting, and there is something that passes between the two women for a moment as they hold each other's gaze.

"What in heaven's name is she doing there? Is she safe? Why did you let her go?"

Diana's voice is quiet, but Abby can feel the sharp edges of her words cut at her. Abby should never have been the Chancellor. She hates it. There are too many things to think about. Too many people to placate. Clarke is so much better at this, and she realizes now with a sudden start - that Clarke was made for leadership. Abby was made for the glint of scalpels and the thrill of finding a solution to medical conundrums. Not this constant stress to balance everyone's needs for the greater good.

She wishes that Clarke would hurry the hell up. And she hopes that the guilt in her heart every time she sees Diana's hazel eyes bore into her own would just - stop.
"I thought you knew Clarke better than that?"

Abby doesn't mean for the words to come out of her mouth. It seems that she can't help this continuous desire to cut at Diana. Her need to reclaim ownership of her daughter is still at the forefront after she had run to the woman when Abby had convinced Jake to go to Thelonius. After Clarke decided that her mother was the reason her father was killed.

"Clarke does exactly what Clarke needs to do. She's not always right, but to date, she's always got every one of those kids out of trouble. I know my daughter."

And there's the final barb, and she watches as it stings as Diana's face hardens and closes off.

Once upon a time, they could have been friends.

Before Jake. Before Clarke. They should have been friends as their principles and ideals had been so similar. But Jake did happen, and the love he had for his old friend was a constant pain in Abby's heart who never felt she deserved his love.

And then Clarke happened, and Abby's heart had been consumed with love for her bright, beautiful daughter. So like her father in looks. So stubborn, like her mother according to Jake. She smiled, but it was almost a rictus of agony as she realizes, not for the first time, what she's lost from a moment of insecurity.

"Diana," she tries, and she hates herself for the ongoing pain she wants to keep inflicting on Jake's old friend. "I'm sorry. There's not a hell of a lot I can do about what happened to Jake. It's a regret I will take to my grave. You must know that."

Diana has been looking inwards, her light hazel eyes have drifted to the side as if she remembers something that hurts. Her mouth is pulled downwards, and her lips have thinned into a straight line, and Abby can see that she's pushed her a little too far with her words. With the life she could have had and the daughter that could have been hers.

Those eyes look up into Abby's, and the sorrow in them is so acute Abby feels breathless for a moment.

"He loved you so much," Diana's voice is just a whisper.

"I know. I didn't deserve it."

Diana shakes her head and looks up angrily, her body bristling again with raw energy.

"God damn it, Abby. He loved you so much. And it doesn't matter what we deserve. What matters is what we have and what we do with it!"

Abby nods. What else can she do? Diana is right. All the things that have been unsaid between them, spilling between the cracks of friendship and cementing the bonds of power and leadership. Abby has won hers by default whereas Diana truly wants to lead her people to better things. For all people and not just a few. She feels a sudden burst of shame for squandering Jake's love. For not listening to him or Clarke when she should have.

"Whatever is happening, Abby - we need to get out there and tell our people. This secrecy is just so
idiotic. The people have a right to know."

"Diana, we need to be careful with how we -"

"No, God damn it, Abby. When will the Council ever learn? If we don't talk to people, they imagine the worst. When you go and talk to them when it's too late their minds will be shut down, and they will not listen to you. And you will not be able to get them to understand," Diana's voice is strained as she speaks. Her eyes are intense, and her gaze never wavers from Abby's who is scowling now.

"No, Diana. Will you listen for one minute?"

Diana looks askance at her before folding her arms slowly across her chest. Abby can feel the tightening in her jaw and slowly breathes out trying desperately to calm herself. She's not acting reasonably, and she knows it.

"The kids, Wells - they've been duped by the Mountain Men. These people aren't who we thought they were," Abby says, and she tries to slow her voice down to get Diana to understand the complexity of what is going on.

"Those kids are in grave danger. The people of Mount Weather - something happened to them since the bombs fell, and they're not right anymore. They can't walk in the open air."

She watches as understanding starts to fill Diana's eyes.

"It's medical isn't it?" Diana's eyes narrowed in quick understanding, and she paled when Abby nodded quickly to confirm.

"Well, fuck!" Diana's voice cracked as she looked towards the doorway and the waiting people of the Ark who were all wondering when they were going to ally with the people of Mount Weather.

Diana looked towards Abby, and her face bore the tired lines of someone who had seen all of this before. The constant betrayal of the Ark's elite had shaped and hardened her so that she could fight for the rights of all inhabitants of the Ark and not just a few.

"We need to get out there and tell them something," Diana finally said, and a hundred different emotions raced across Abby's usually stoic face.

She didn't know that Diana had always been able to read Abby's thoughts well before the moment Jake had started seeing her and had broken her heart. Abby had no idea that Diana always knew precisely what Abby was thinking, and that at this moment Diana knew she was being unfair in her estimation that the Ark's Head of Medical felt that she could control everyone and everything around her from her husband to her daughter. Diana believed that Abby foolishly thought that by controlling them she could save them. It had been heartbreaking to see all of Abby's choices destroy everything around her.

Abby watched as Diana sighed. To date, Abby knew that Diana had not been wrong about any of the things she'd warned Abby about, but still she resisted her on a subconscious level as the woman always managed to rub her the wrong way, and she refused to listen. Abby had no way of knowing that her misplaced jealousy would irrevocably change the trajectory of both their lives or that Diana had wished she'd said something to her - that she'd never loved Jake like that, and that it was his wife she'd lost her heart to.
And Jake could have walked the Earth he'd imagined instead of disappearing into the vastness of space as his final burial ground.

"Lead the way, Chancellor."

The look Diana gave her then was an odd one. It was part grimace and something else that Abby couldn't quite put her finger on. But she didn't have time to think before she was turning on her heel and walking out into the Ark's primary gathering place.

***

Clarke had felt a strange ache in her heart when she'd left Lexa behind with her army that seemed to be growing with each mile they took towards Arcadia.

The feeling inside is a bizarre mix of emotions that she feels in her gut which is confronting and its something she doesn't wish to investigate.

Yet.

This unbearable need to return to the other young woman's side is so out of character for her. Clarke has to go back to Arcadia. She must, and she knows that she needs to do this for her people, but Lexa is a stillness in the forefront of her mind.

Clarke sighs knowing she needs to do this also for Lexa, who had not said a word as Clarke rode away from her. Clarke had seen the sudden shuttering of those deep green eyes. The calm and implacable face that quickly repressed any signs of feelings towards the Sky Girl before her people.

Clarke had not been able to help the sudden hurt inside at the dismissal even though she understood Lexa's behavior. Then she had seen the movement of Lexa's fingers against the side of her saddle, the whitening of knuckles as they fisted tightly and Clarke realized that Lexa was not as impervious to the sudden absence of the woman who has been by her side for almost two weeks either.

Two weeks. That is the sum total of their time together, and Clarke feels like her world, this world, will never be the same again since meeting this young warrior who is not much older than herself. This woman who commands the known world that they live in.

She can feel her heart rate increase at the enormity of just who Lexa is and just what she's slowly coming to mean to her. Her mind shies away at the thought of that. It's too soon to think anything. Finn was a grave mistake that is still costing her. Lexa is so much more. She is the entirety of her people on which all hopes seem to rest, and Clarke doesn't know where her head is let alone her heart.

The gates of Arcadia loom above them but barely seem like they can keep the elements out let alone a whole world full of people and danger and war.

Clarke hates it and everything it represents. It is the prison that had incarcerated both her and her father, and it is the world that forced her mother to betray them both. It looks stark and awful, a blight on the verdant fields and the forest that surrounds it.
Clarke's head swivels upwards, and a panicked voice cries out at them to drop their weapons. Clarke tries hard not to roll her eyes, and Raven merely scoffs.

"Are you kidding me, you moron?"

Raven has no issues about asserting her opinion and just snarls up at the guards who are positioned around the gated entryway. The guards. Clarke thinks she recognizes Taggart and looks up at him through the hair that has fallen out of its braids and is now cascading around her face since she's been riding all morning. Apparently, he recognizes her too.

"Clarke? Shit. Your mother is looking everywhere for you," he sounds relieved and begins to open the gates but his fellow guards lunge towards him trying to stop him, and there's a bit of a tussle between them before the gates open enough for them to slip through.

Clarke stares at them in bewilderment wondering at this overtly aggressive display towards two of their own.

"What the hell is going on?" Raven yells at them in confusion but then stops in her tracks when she sees what is before them in the courtyard of Arcadia.

On one side of the quadrangle are the engineers, doctors, administrators and higher level Ark members. On the other side, with their faces drawn into tight and angry lines are the mechanics, technicians, teachers, and agriculturalists.

At their forefront is Diana Sidney who is staring daggers at Abby who's face is tight and furious. Clarke recognizes that look and knows that her mom is now operating entirely on reaction and emotion, and none of her innate rationalism that makes her a good doctor.

This Abby, is the Abby that got her father killed, and Clarke thrown into a three-meter band of titanium, ceramic and glass; imprisoned in the Sky Box before being sentenced to go to the ground.

She needs to do something quickly before her mother sends them into an internal conflict they'll never get out of.

"What is going here?" Clarke's voice is deadly, and its strength bounces off the metal walls that pen the Arcadians in from the outside world. She watches quietly as every head swivels towards the gates and stares at the voice that has cut through the clutter of unbridled dissonance.

"Clarke!" Abby's face lights up for a minute before she remembers the situation she's in, and her brows crinkle a little before she turns and sweeps her arms over Diane's followers.

"We have a situation," Abby's terse response generates a low murmur of anger from the men and women who are not of the Ark elite.

"We are not, a fucking 'situation,'" someone in the crowd shouts over the general murmur. It is not a good sign when more people begin to make their feelings clear.

Clarke steps forward slowly and looks at every face before her. She can see the tension and anger, and most of all the fear. The fear of losing power. Of never having it. But Clarke knows something that none of them seem to.

Power isn't stable, and it's never consistent or the same. It changes every time different people
become involved. Like right now. For all of the power Abby has in her position; right now she's got almost none as the people from Arcadia's less known areas step into the light for their moment to be heard.

Clarke understands. A part of her approves in a strange sense. She'd hated the dynamic of the Ark and Jaha's absolute power and the peculiar status quo that had formed years after the bombs dropped and their ancestors struggled with watching their planet go up in toxic flames. They had battled with how the Ark and the generations to follow were to survive the next hundred years in orbit.

Clarke saw the faces of Raven's friends and family clustered near the Collins and Blakes who were all of the tech class. Their faces were angry. And fed up with the continued secrets of the ruling class.

Clarke felt her exasperation rise. They so did not have time for this, and now her mother represented all that was bad on the Ark to these people. People she would need to convince to go to war and get back the young people of the Ark.

"Explain."

Clarke turned and looked at everyone there, from Diane who had been Chancellor so successfully for many years before Jaha had supplanted her. Her eyes are shuttered, and Clarke can see the bated power and quiet anger suffusing her face with reddened cheeks, her hands were clenched and lay stiffly against the side of her long coat and Ark cargo trousers. Patched. Dirty and ripped in places from the hard labor her and the Arcadians had been doing over the last three months. Her face is coated in a light sheen of sweat. One of the residual effects of the controlled environment on the Ark that had seriously made it difficult for many of the older woman to cope with Earth's humidity.

"The people need to know exactly what is going on," Diane snapped, and her voice sounded harsh, and the dull murmuring of the crowd around them rose in response to her anger, "your mother, the Chancellor, doesn't seem to think they have the right to that knowledge."

"Mom?" Clarke looked back to her mother who was still bristling as she stood on the ramp outside the medical quarters of the Ark.

"We don't have time," Abby's voice was tight with frayed tension.

"Right, because you have the time to do this? This elegant impasse where no-one does anything because you refuse to communicate to a side you don't think deserves to know? Come on, mom. We are better than this."

Clarke's voice is calm as she keeps looking around at everyone, watching their faces. Their eyes. Trying to see what it is that they see. She can hear Raven huffing behind her, Raven who loves politics as much as riding a horse. She hopes to God that Raven stays quiet when everything is a virtual tinderbox around them.

Clarke walked forward carefully and swept her eyes across everyone. At the group of guards who stood behind Abby, and the ones who stood beside Diane including a very belligerent looking Bellamy who was scowling at his sister and Lincoln.

"What is he doing here," Bellamy growled out.
Clarke sighed slowly and wished that this anger that Bellamy held onto would just leave. She was tired of it. Surely he must be worn down with all the hate in his heart.

"He's with me," Clarke answered conversationally and looked at Bellamy in the eye before nodding towards the rifle he held in a tight grip, "what's with the arms. Are you here to kill your friends? To kill anyone who disagrees with you?"

She watches as his lips tighten and his deep brown eyes hold his usual contempt before he scoffs impolitely.

"Mom, this has to stop now," she says softly as she walks up to her mother's side, "all they want to know is what is going on. Give it to them. We need to work together. We cannot afford to be like this."

Clarke looks down towards the ground that is littered with the debris of years of technology that has no purpose now that it's not in space. She looks up into the eyes of the people and sees the righteousness of those who'd felt they'd been voiceless since the rise of Jaha on the Ark.

She can feel Abby's body slump beside her and Clarke looks up at her and finally notices the tiredness around her eyes. The fear and the anxiety are well disguised behind the veneer of rage.

"Clarke, where have you been? I've been worried sick."

"Not now, mom. There are more important things for us to focus on and as you can see I'm fine," Clarke says softly, "let's say - I've been getting the cavalry."

Clarke turned from her mother and looked out at both sides of the quadrangle. At the bodies that were tightly wound and the mouths drawn close and tense with entitlement. On both sides.

"Arcadia," Clarke spoke out across the sea of heads, "we have an enemy. It isn't this planet Earth that we've all unceremoniously dropped onto although it hasn't been too kind after the ravages of radiation."

She took a deep breath and gazed slowly at each person from each side of the divide.

"It isn't the Grounders that we've battled and fought after we fell onto their land without a please or a thank you."

Clarke raised her hand as the voices around the enclave rose in response to that.

"I know. I know. It wasn't as if we had much of a choice."

Clarke's voice softened, her body moving slowly as she walked around the small space on the stairs near the medical bay.

"Some of us had to survive faster than others. Those of us who were sent to the ground first because of our crimes against the Ark had to get used to it quickly or die. The crimes we were convicted of really hold no meaning down here."

"Yes, and wasn't it your own mother who did that?" A voice from the crowd yelled out, and Clarke nodded.
"Not exactly," Clarke smile was grim as she looked towards Abby whose eyes had darkened with sorrow at those words, "my mother thought she was doing the right thing. She trusted Jaha to be a good leader. To be a good man. She trusted him to be my father's best friend."

She saw several heads look at Abby in shock as the realization that Jaha had betrayed one of the elite slowly became apparent.

"Jaha betrayed my mother. My father. Me. And now he's betrayed all of us," Clarke swallowed hard as both sides stepped closer towards her.

She felt Octavia's fingers brush against her back and she breathed in the strength of her friend's support. She could see the change in the eyes of all the Arkers.

"We have a chance. A second chance to live. Jaha told you not to worry about the oxygen. He lied. He told you that we, the 100, betrayed the Ark or stole from it or committed crimes against you," her mouth quirked up to the side as she looked over at Monty, "Ok, well some of us probably could have been a little wiser in our decision making."

She smiled at the spatters of laughter as everyone remembered Jasper and Monty's experiments with their disastrous cocktail that had almost caused an explosion in the lab they'd commandeered.

She could feel the tension ratchet up behind her as the anxiety rolled off Raven, Octavia, and Lincoln who were desperate for her to get to the point. Sometimes the point needed to be set up carefully so that those who had to see it were open to the possibility.

"Some of us have dared to seize this world by their hands. We've met and integrated with the world that is around us."

Clarke smiled at Octavia and Lincoln who shuffled quietly, on edge knowing that the Commander and her forces were waiting outside the gates in the woods. Clarke looked over at Diana Sydney and stared into the deep hazel eyes of her mother's nemesis and smiled at her.

"Diane, I know that you think this is a time for a socialist revolution but it's not. We are all one and the same here. This world, this environment has become the greatest equalizer there is, and it is up to us to each one of us to rise up to be the best of ourselves. You're right though," Clarke's smile is grim as she stares at Kane, her mother and the other council members who headed up engineering, medicine, and astrophysics.

"There is no elite anymore. Everyone here has the right to become whatever they want. We are stronger together. We need to build a much better Ark on Earth than what we were when we orbited this planet."

Diane looked at Clarke, and Clarke can see the rage in Diane's eyes shift and become the misplaced passion from the years of frustration on the Ark when she and her people had almost no influence on what happened to them.

"Christ, Clarke. When did you grow up?" Diane said gently and shook her head slowly in quiet amazement.

"A year on the ground without parental support or - guidance... will certainly shift one's adaptability."
Clarke felt the huff of indignation from her mother before she heard her mutter something that sounded suspiciously like 'you think?'

Diane laughed, and the people closest to them relaxed. Clarke could feel it as well as see the tension leave their shoulders. Now was the time to hit them with the truth.

"Jaha didn't just betray my family. Or yours by putting your children in cells for crimes on the Ark. He betrayed his son by sending him and several other members of our one hundred into the mountain."

There was a rush of shocked voices, and a sudden slight surge as parents moved forward. Voices began to clamor and hammer out questions. Clarke raised her hand again and looked at each of the affected families.

"We have to get them back. Jaha betrayed us to the Mountain Men who he spoke to before the Ark came down. He made a deal with them, but we don't know what it is. I only know that he's done this to get his power back that he had on the Ark. He wants to rule you like he's always done and he's using your fear against the Grounders to do this."

"The Grounders are savages!" Bellamy said his voice an angry, frustrated growl as he stared at Lincoln.

The hatred from his eyes was awful as he moved his gaze between his sister whom he'd loved and protected all his life, to this man who had taken his purpose and meaning from him.

"The Grounders live their lives with the Earth. They don't hide from it behind steel walls or deep beneath the mountain with enough tech to blow everyone back into the sky. And Bellamy, watch that your prejudice and ego doesn't get everyone here killed."

Clarke's eyes are a deep blue as she stares him down. She's moved forward unwittingly, her breathing a rapid rise and fall of her chest, hands stretched and open as she weaves them through the air as she speaks.

And everyone stares at the two of them. The young woman who has learned to be a doctor on the ground in the worst way possible has emerged as a woman capable of so much more. She can feel Raven behind her wanting to snap something at him but she reaches behind her and Clarke stills Raven with a subtle touch of her hand.

"Leave him, Raven. He'll get there."

Clarke's words are soft so that only Raven, Octavia and Lincoln can hear her.

"Clarke," Bellamy's voice is sharp, but he's looking at her as if she's got the answers he needs, "what exactly is your plan?"

Clarke smiles.

"Well, seeing as how we've stopped fighting amongst ourselves," she looks around and raises her eyebrow at her mom and Diane who both shift uncomfortably beneath her gaze, "we need to go and get back our friends from the mountain."
"And how are we going to do that?" someone from the crowd yells out. Clarke looks over and realizes it's Jasper's mother who still has a skeptical look on her face, but there is desperation to it as she wants to believe in Clarke.

"I just so happen to have an army outside who are willing to help us."

Clarke leans back at the roar of sound as everyone begins to talk and yell and both Abby and Diane pepper her with questions. She looks across at Bellamy and nods for him to move forward and join them.

"What the hell, Clarke?" he says quietly as he moves next to her, "what have you done?"

"She's besties with the leader of the grounders," Raven says, and her voice is straining to tell him more but stops at the subtle nudge Octavia gives her from behind.

"I've negotiated an alliance, Bellamy. What did you expect?"

She tries not to laugh at his open-mouthed shock. He's speechless, and the usual vitriol that spills out of his mouth is curbed.

All of the missing are their friends. Jasper. Wells. Harper and Fox. She doesn't know who else has gone, but when she gets her hands on Thelonious, there won't be a star in the sky that can save his duplicitous hide. She'll carve him a new skin where he can't hide behind the trappings of the power he wasted on the Ark. Wasting his life, her father's and anyone who had the decency to believe in a different world to the one he'd manufactured without their consent.

"I thought the people of Mount Weather were like us?" Bellamy finally says, and the confusion and pain is evident in his face. The hopes he'd invested that there were people like him and not these monsters they've had to battle since landing on the ground. Not these monsters that his sister has joined with and given herself to.

"We're all fucking human, Bellamy."

Raven's voice is a quiet snarl, and she stares him down. This boy that she thought that she might feel a little something for and she kicks herself for her vulnerability. For Finn. For Clarke. And all the fucking stupid unnecessary hurt.

"And Mount Weather, they're no more human than anyone else on the planet just because their fucking ancestors were the wealthiest and most powerful on Earth before the bombs," Raven breaks and steps up towards him. Snapping with pent-up frustration and anger.

"Raven, enough. Bellamy can't hear what he's not ready to see."

Clarke's voice is soft as she stares at him for a long time. His eyes break away first, and he rolls them as another show of contempt, but she can see the worry in them as he's forced to rethink everything he's come to learn. Clarke isn't stupid, but she doesn't have time for this. She knows Bellamy needs to find his own feet and soon before the tide of his prejudices and fears drown him.

"Open up the gates," Clarke finally says and turns towards the council members of the Ark. She nods to Diana Sydney who looks around at her people who cluster closer to her. Most of the guards and military are part of her group, and they slowly move around the compound and on the ramparts that have been erected in the last three months, guns lowering and the gate widening in a
slow agonizing arc.

Clarke has her back to the gates and observes with a quiet caution as she sees the look of shock that moves across the Arcadian's faces.

She knows what's behind her, but when she turns to face the opening, she's not quite prepared for the visual of thousands of warriors that are lined up outside dotting the slopes and the forests that surrounded Arcadia.

"Well, holy fuck."

She can hear Raven breathe out slowly at the numbers that defy their imagination.

All this time they were there at Lexa's mercy. All this time and no matter how smart Clarke was in using the resources she had at her disposal - there would have been only a limited amount bullets and bombs to keep these numbers at bay.

She blinked several times before finally picking up her radio. All this time the Commander had this force at her disposal and she - she only sent three hundred to bring down Clarke and her friends. She tries not let the reaction show on her face, but there is an uproar beneath her skin as she realizes that Lexa must have had a very good reason not to send the full force of her army against them.

A reason she's going to make sure she finds out, and soon.

"Commander?"

Her voice catches, and there must be something in her voice that Lexa picks up on.

"Klark. I'm here."

Her voice is calm, but Clarke knows the different tones of Lexa. There's steel behind her voice which she only uses when she's in full Commander mode, but there's also a gentleness as if she knows exactly what conclusions Clarke must be coming to.

"We are ready."

Clarke looks around at the Ark and speaks before the level of panic rises, and someone does something stupid.

"The Commander will enter with her generals and some of the leaders of the different clans. I know it looks frightening out there, but you need to trust me. You have nothing to worry about."

"How can you promise that, Clarke?"

Abby steps forward, and her face is furrowed in growing fear. She's looking around at the guards who are stationed at the gates then looks towards Bellamy.

"Do we have enough firepower if anything goes wrong?" Abby's voice is troubled. Bellamy's lips thin and he shakes his head.

"No way. Have you seen outside? Clarke. Clarke, what have you done?"
Bellamy's eyes race around the compound looking for options, but it takes seconds before he deflates when he realizes there are none.

"Calm down, Bellamy. Mom. I expected more support from you -" Clarke's blue eyes look over at Abby, but she realizes that everyone is scared. And why wouldn't they be when the whole vista outside is painted with the bodies of thousands of warriors.

"Now is not the time to panic. The Commander is here to help us. To support us. She needs us to help her bring down the mountain."

Clarke looks around, but every face that surrounds her reflects a rising level of panic at the sheer numbers of grounders outside. She can see the small group moving towards them on their horses. Lexa and her generals.

"Support?"

Bellamy can barely control himself, and Clarke has to wipe away the spittle that flies across her face as rages at her, "you've fucking killed us all, Clarke. You've fucking brought the enemy to the door -"

"Bell."

Octavia's voice is sharp as she cuts across her brother's rising panic. "Stop it. You've seen the numbers outside. The Commander could have sent them any time in the last year. And she didn't. She is not the threat. The mountain is. And I have to say - your arrogance and stupidity is phenomenal, but right now, you have to calm the fuck down."

He's breathing heavily as he stares at her and Clarke watches as his throat moves as he tries to swallow.

"Take his gun from him, please."

Diana Sydney motions her head to one of the other guards and before Bellamy realizes what's happening both his sidearm and rifle have been removed by two of Arcadia's soldiers.

"What the fuck?"

He spins around, but it's too late.

"You're too jumpy, kid," Diane says, and her voice is soft and calm.

"None of us want to die today. All it takes is one headstrong, jumpy kid to destroy negotiations. We all know you've got a very low tolerance for the people whose lands we've landed in. And we can't afford any mistakes. I'm sorry Bellamy."

He doesn't know what to do with his hands as he stares at her and he looks around at everyone who's now staring at him in worry instead of the thousands of warriors outside. Instead of the group that has fast approached the gates and have dismounted their horses. He shakes his head in frustration and holds his hands by his side, clenched tight until the knuckles are visibly white.

Clarke watches in silence as the tallest of the generals heads the approach of the Grounder
delegation. There are thirteen of them who saunter into the tense environment of the compound, and the sounds of their boots on the earth can be heard even though they move softly through Arcadia's main meeting ground. Not all of the Ark are outside yet. Many of them are still at lunch in the canteen area. Clarke's aware of that, but she knows that Diana would have alerted her security throughout the remainder of the Ark to keep everyone calm. And in place.

She watches as everyone on the council looks towards the group as they come to a stop. She watches as many make the assumption that they're looking at the Commander when staring at a woman before them. She towers over most of the Arcadians. Her muscles are taut, and her thick, blonde plaits are pulled back from her face where the tattoos of the Rock Clan creep down her neck. She steps to the left and Clarke finds her breath catching when Lexa moves forward and away from the protection of her warriors.

She's stunning.

Her eyes are a piercing, bright green and the darkness of her war paint brings out the gleam in them, and the menace behind those eyes is right in the foreground. Clarke takes a few steps forward and moves her arm to reach towards her which Lexa pulls into the grip that Clarke now knows is the grounder equivalent of a handshake. Clarke stares into her eyes and can see nothing of the woman that she's come to know in her bed.

***

"Commander, I welcome you and your people to the Ark. I acknowledge that these lands are yours and we the people of the Ark are subject to your laws."

Lexa feels her heart surge with pride. Klark's voice is clear, and she looks around at her people who are now spilling out in the open area, all of them moving forward to hear what was going on.

She sees the startled look on some of the faces of those who must be the other leaders of Klark's people. Lexa can see that Klarks' words are ones that they were not expecting as it totally subjects them to the Commander's rule of law, and not theirs.

Lexa nods and moves carefully as she stares at the people on the platform before her. It only takes her moments to recognize Clarke's mother from the set of her jaw and the steel in her eyes as she looks towards Lexa with mistrust and fear. Both are carefully veiled, but Lexa sees through them quickly. She can recognize Clarke so clearly in the way the woman holds herself and the set of her mouth. They look so different but their mannerisms - it is clear where Clarke has learned some of these.

"This is the Chancellor," Clarke looks towards her mom and smiles, encouraging her to step forward, "and also my mother. Abby Griffin."

Clarke watches how Lexa's body straightens just a fraction, and how her mask falls across her face until it is utterly unreadable as she steps toward Abby who has yet to move.

"Chancellor. It is good to meet with you. Finally."

Clarke observes her mother. The sudden thinning of her lips is not a good sign, and Clarke steps forward thinking that Abby is about to jeopardize everything. Before she can interrupt whatever
her mother is going to say, Abby gives her a look and Clarke is silenced.

"Commander," Abby says, and her voice is clear enough that every Arcadian within the vicinity can hear her, "I assume that your presence here means that the bounty you had on my daughter's head is now removed?"

She's not insulting. Not quite. The tone is simple and clear, and it's evident that above all others Abby is still concerned with her daughter's safety.

Clarke can feel her cheeks flush. She'd completely forgotten about the bounty, and her eyes darted swiftly to green eyes which looked a little amused.

"Yes. It has." Lexa's voice carries, and Clarke notes the little quirk of her eyebrow.

"My clan leaders and generals have all been updated by Klark of what is happening to her friends. To your young. The message has gone out to my Coalition that anyone who harms the Skai Heda harms me, their Commander."

There is a rush of murmured words when she makes this announcement, and Lexa notes the sudden intake of breath from Klark's mother.

She feels a twist of unexpected nerves in her gut when she sees how the woman turns to stare at her. The look in her eye is the look of a mother. One who sees things. Recognizes things without words being said. Lexa moves around and looks at all of the Skai people. She can see the tiredness, the dirt and the fraying clothes that hang from them. It is clear to Lexa that these people are struggling as they learn to live on solid ground.

"Klark may not have had time to tell you what the people of the mountain do to my people. Or how my people have been torn from their families, and their blood drained so that the sicknesses of the Maunon maybe eased by our blood which is stronger than theirs. Their children taken and turned into monsters only to return to families to terrorize them," Lexa says and pauses when she hears the shocked gasps from the people who are watching intently.

She sees the hope in some eyes die as they realize the saviors they'd hoped the mountain people would be is not going to be fulfilled. She also observes the disbelief reflected in some like the tall young man who is looking at her with such loathing and barely hidden anger. His eyes moving between her, Klark and Octavia.

She does not like the way he looks at Klark.

"I am here after talking to your leader who has helped us with advice and strategy on how to use your tek to bring down the mountain."

Lexa can feel the heat of the glare coming from Clarke's mother, Abby and hears the snort from Raven at how the Commander has just redefined the leadership of Arcadia.

"You misunderstand," Abby started to say but stopped when Lexa's hand rose into the air, and it was clear she wished for Abby to stop talking.

"There is no misunderstanding Abby kom Skaikru. I am the Commander of these twelve clans," her arm reaches up and outward encompassing the thousands of warriors that can be seen through the gates, "and I recognize Klark Kom Skaikru as the leader of your people. I understand that you have
a leadership structure within your community and I respect that," Lexa says and her voice is firm as she speaks in careful, measured tones that refuse to be corrected.

"But Klark is the one that came to me. Klark is the one who has negotiated with myself and my clan leaders."

The implication is obvious. Klark is the one that they know and respect and will listen to. They don't know Abby, and Lexa hopes that she understands this.

"Clarke is a child," Abby's voice is sharp, but she quickly retracts it when she sees the flare of anger in her daughter's eyes.

"Clarke is my child. Yes, she's had to lead the others while we were still in orbit, but she no longer needs to do that as we're on the ground now. Our experience is greater, and we've had to make tough decisions for a long time. Clarke is still working those things out."

"And what is your basis for this?"

Lexa tilts her head and looks at Abby carefully. She notices the tension around the woman's eyes and mouth, and the quick looks she's giving Clarke who she can see is taking deep breaths to keep calm in the face of her mother's inability to relinquish control.

"No," Clarke says, and her voice is curt as she moves towards her mother.

Lexa feels her hands itch to take Clarke's into her own but stills her body instead as she watches the two women confront each other.

"No?" Abby's eyebrow rises as she looks at Clarke in exasperation. A mother with her recalcitrant child.

"No, we do not have this discussion here. No, you don't treat those of us who have survived as if our experiences count for nothing. And no, you may be the leader of Arcadia, but you are not the leader of Skaikru."

"You're right, Clarke," Abby replies, and Lexa is intrigued at how quickly Clarke covers her surprise at her mother's words which she seems to think is too quickly won. Lexa sees the immediate mistrust at these words and Clarke's doubt is confirmed when Abby goes on to say, "now is not the right time to discuss this."

"Abby."

One of the other elders from the Skaikru, a woman with honey blonde hair, very different to Clarke's golden curls, moves to intervene between mother and daughter.

"You have appalling timing. Clarke is trying to do the best for us. I would suggest that whatever reservations you may have you put that on hold for now. Clarke is the only one here besides Octavia who has made connections with the outside world. If there is a war coming and if we need to get our children back, and if Clarke has made friends with the right people then we need to believe in her and get moving. Abby, what the hell else do you need before you trust that your daughter knows what she's doing?"

It takes everything in Lexa's arsenal of self-discipline to not break into a smile at the almost
identical looks on both mother and daughter.

She chances a glance at Anya who merely rolls her eyes at the wasted time the Skai people have created. She can see how she's itching to burst through what seems like petty dramas between these people who seem so different to them.

Clarke had seemed different but similar enough that Lexa felt their differences could be bridged. Right now, she could see that the differences mattered little. Mother's still tried to protect their children and daughter's always rebelled against their mothers.

"Klark, it is time," Lexa says.

Both women turn to face her at the quiet steel in Lexa's tone. Clarke nods once, but she can see the mutinous look in Abby's eyes which Lexa quickly shuts down.

"It is always important to provide a unified front for those who have entrusted you with their leadership," Lexa's voice is gentle enough to temper the coldness of her voice, and Abby involuntarily stepped back before looking away and back to Clarke.

"Clarke - " Abby's voice was strained as she began to speak to her daughter and Lexa watched as Clarke's face shut down.

"No mom. This is war now, and we don't have time to argue about it. And there is no time for mistrust. If you'd trusted dad maybe he'd be here with us on the ground. I'm surprised you still think you're always right."

She sees the look of shock on the Chancellor's face, the raised eyebrows of the older blonde and her quickly hidden smile of pride, and the slight flinch that Clarke covers swiftly at the ugliness of her words. Lexa can see in those blue eyes the sudden look of regret, but Clarke turns on her heel and starts to walk towards the gates and out to Lexa's waiting army.

She doesn't say anything but slowly follows Clarke towards the exit and can feel the moment when her generals turn and come after her, the sound of the Skaikru leaders not far behind them.

***

She's terrified that she will get caught.

Her heart is hammering hard in her throat, and she can barely swallow as the sounds of war drums beat around her. Her legs are hurting as she navigates the trampled fields and hillsides around the Skai people's compound.

There is hurt and doubt in her heart, and not for the first time she is caught between the darkest of places and a terrible clash of cultures. The love of her father and his people. Her passion for the Commander who now stands between her brothers and sisters, and the light of the sun.

Costia pulled out the battered radio hidden in the sheath beneath a blade oh, so cleverly crafted so that the silver of her tech matched the knife so well.

"Papa?"

Her voice is strained and barely a whisper as she hides behind a clump of trees - their barrier instantly muting the sounds of war behind her.
"Can you hear me?"

There's a crackle of static as the radio frequencies are bounced and deflected, moving away from the Skaikru channels so that Costia is a ghost; unseen and unheard.

"Costia. Why are you on this channel?"

Her father's crisp voice is clear for a moment, and her heart hurts. She has to choose. Family first. Always first. His words entangled and embedded in her head.

The Earth is ours. Our destiny is to live under the sun again so that we can inherit the Earth.

She knows it. She's heard it since the moment she was born. Born to bring her people back to the ground and out of the mountain.

Costia grits her teeth and swallows hard. She remembers Lexa's words so easily repeated from Titus's teachings. Head over heart. Love weakens resolve. Head over heart. But oh, how her heart hurts.

"They're coming for their children. You should not have taken them," she says quietly and waits. She knows all too well what his response will be.

"They are the key. The Space station may have been filled with the brightest minds a hundred years ago but their time in orbit has weakened them. Their naivete is astounding," his voice is clipped, and there is not the slightest hint of remorse in them. Why would he? He is the descendant of the last president, and his destiny is to take back what was lost during the long years of radiation storms.

"I thought I was the key," Costia tries to hold down the bitterness in her tone, but it seeps out and crawls from her mouth to cross the radio waves, but barely touches her father's heart.

"You are. And we will rise because of the work you and your generation have brought. It is time, and these children hold the key to the light inside their bones."

She hates it when he's cryptic, but she understands. They're on a channel that can be intercepted now that the Space Station has come back down to Earth with all of its technology. Some of it will be similar to theirs, but most will far surpass what was left on the ground for the last president, his family, and the families of his generals and Whitehouse staff.

The space station tech would have been more cutting edge than those who had gone underground. It didn't help that the people from the Space Station had found the caches of weaponry at the base of the mountain in their first weeks on the ground.

Who could have predicted that the only map they had was to Mount Weather? To the wrong side. The route was old and directed them to the old section of the mountain's entry from before the war. And her father had made a strategic error in letting them walk away with the rifles and guns and bullets.

Over and over - like Lexa, like herself, he had underestimated Clarke Griffin.

"You should negotiate with her. They will give you what you need. Why can't we live in peace with them?"

She tried again. She had to.
"Costia. Enough. And get off this damn channel before you're discovered," Dante Wallace's voice is terse and he's angry again that she's trying to ensure that the clans aren't wiped out.

"If you kill them all who will do the work you do not want to do?"

There's a silence, and she knows he's thinking about it. She knows her father. Knows him well enough to manipulate his fears and most significant weaknesses.

"Don't worry. We won't kill them all. Just the ones we need to."

And she knows what he means by that.

Lexa.

He's going to cut the head off the snake and watch the body die beneath as it loses direction. And he will step in. She doesn't feel the tears until they're moving over her lips and the pain in her eyes is too much that she has to tighten them so hard it hurts.

"Please, Papa."

"Do your duty, Costia. Your mother awaits your return."

And there it is.

The veiled threat that has been a constant in Costia's life. Do as you're told, and your mother thrives. Don't, and she ends up in a cage with all the other Grounders they've captured. Draining them of their precious blood until their lives seep out of them.

Their bodies are merely vehicles to supply her father's people with enriched blood that helps them survive infection and disease. It was her father who had seen the potential of combining the DNA to bring into the world a new breed. Mountain and Ground. Her. And those born from other mothers. Other fathers. Littered throughout the Twelve Clans.

Lexa had no idea of the Trojan horse that lay dormant within her domain.

"You need to be prepared father. She comes with an army of thousands. Many of us will be in that army. You kill them; you kill us."

She doesn't know why - but she chooses not to tell him that the Arcadians will be alongside the Commander. Not yet. She waits to see what he says next.

"With victory, there will always be losses, Costia."

Not the answer Costia wanted, but she always knew that no matter how much she loved her father, no matter what the sacrifice - Costia caught back the gasp of sorrow that almost choked her as she thought of Lexa and the pain in her eyes.

None of these sacrifices would make him love her as his need to walk under the sun and wrest control from the Commander over-rode everything else.

"Then this is goodbye?"

"Don't be so dramatic," and his voice is sharp, "we have our cameras, and we'll be able to pinpoint where she is at all times once you are within range. You just need to make sure you're nowhere near her."
Costia inhaled sharply, careful to keep the radio silent so that her father could not hear her reactions.

"And Evan? Tully? The others?"

Some are her half brothers and sisters. Others are not, but they are all bound by the fact that their mother's are all captive to the mountain. And they are hostage to the love they hold for both their parents.

Costia feels a raging rise up inside her that makes her hands shake.

"We'll keep an eye out for them, but there may be losses. You have to harden your heart, Costia. It does not suit a daughter of mine to be so weak when we are so close to our triumph."

Your victory, she thinks. Not mine.

"Of course, father. I will see you soon."

Her voice holds nothing of her emotions. She sounds like the Grounder she's learned to be; one of the primitives that her father hates.

She is neither one or the other. Neither from the ground or the mountain and the displacement always feels worse after one of these conversations with her father.

Costia pushes the radio back into the sheath on her leg. She has to decide what to do.

Head over heart. Kill or be killed. Only the strong survive, and there is nowhere in this landscape that allows for weakness.

She feels the tightening in her chest build as she thinks of the wasted years of her mother and others like her caught and trapped by men like her father.

She hates him. She also loves him, and this hurts the most. Knowing exactly who he is and what he is and she still loves him. Yearns for his approval. It leaves a sick feeling inside of her; a loathsome self-hatred that seeps out of her skin and colors everything in her life.

_Lexa._

Costia blinks back the tears and clamps her jaw tight as she walks back towards the amassing troops of the Grounder armies. And alongside them will be the Arcadians that she didn't tell her father about.

Maybe, just maybe they will tip the balance and help all sides find peace and survive.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all of you wonderful readers who caught up with me via email, through commenting and on Tumblr. Your constant feedback and kind words were the exact things I needed to get over myself and my terrible writer's...not block, more like resistance.

I really want to get back into this but I'm a little scared I've literally lost the plot. I'm
spending a lot of time reviewing my original outline and rethinking bits and pieces.

I also want all of you to know that my wonderful wife worked wonders in the background as my work (damn everyday life!) literally took over everything. I was working up to sixteen hour days at one point and she just kept replenishing the cups of tea and gave me lots of shoulder massages. She's my version of Lexa with her dark curls and green eyes and a very Dutch accent. Thank you, lieverd.

I look forward to seeing what you think of this chapter.
Cheers,
Underthecovers.
Lexa can feel the warmth of Clarke's presence beside her as they walk into her tent which has been transformed into a war room.

She feels the heat of Clarke's skin as she inadvertently brushes against the exposed flesh on Lexa's arms. Lexa can barely find the strength in her to not draw in a breath that shows her need to everyone that is following them into the tent.

It is only the training she has had under Titus that helps her keep her face steady and implacable, but her eyes look up for one moment, and she sees Costia's gray eyes staring at her. There is a flicker of recognition in deep gray eyes. It fills Lexa with dread.

For anyone to suspect that she may have feelings for Clarke; could be a death sentence.

And that she will never allow.

She stares for a long while at Costia and watches how her old lover startles in surprise at the steady gaze of green eyes. Lexa is aware of Clarke's look as she watches the interaction between the two women while both the council and Kongeda slowly flow into the room.

The Ark's council is made of only six members but the twelve clan leaders, some of whom are Lexa's generals, swell the large tent within moments and fills it with the tension of competing needs coming together for one cause. The soft murmur of their voices barely makes it through her consciousness.

Lexa's eyes drift away from Costia. She knows she has made it evident to the woman that whatever she is planning will be fiercely watched over.

Lexa watches as the woman she has loved, her first love; silently looks away.
But Lexa knows her, and she can see the nervousness that is just beneath the veneer of complacency and arrogance. She will need to keep an eye on her.

Her thoughts are interrupted when she spies Clarke in her periphery. She lets out a slow, soft exhalation and meets deep blue eyes that look into her own. Clarke lifts one eyebrow very gently, and this is enough for Lexa to understand that Clarke has watched the whole interaction and that she's curious.

Lexa holds in the smile that wants to widen across her face as she can see the intensity of Clarke's gaze barely hiding her animosity towards Costia.

It is the sound of Anya's soft cough behind her that reminds her to look up and out towards the gathered group of people before her. Her eyes reflect none of her emotions as Clarke's does. Clarke is staring around her with avid curiosity. Her mouth has tightened, but Lexa can still see the soft curves of her bottom lip and forces herself not to remember those same lips moving across her body.

The emotions she is beginning to feel for this woman troubles her.

Her experience with Costia reinforced Titus's doctrine that love is a weakness. That emotions clutter and destroy the focus needed to lead.

A Commander's feelings for another compromise the structure of leadership. Lexa swallows as she remembers just how much Clarke has learned to compromise her body, to destroy her will with a single stroke of her tongue, and how the assiduous efforts of her fingers deep inside Lexa's body decimates her focus absolutely.

She notices an argument fomenting between Abby and another of the Ark's Council. The same blonde woman from before who was arguing with Abby. Apparently, they have not stopped their disagreement.

She can feel Clarke stiffening beside her. She does not quite catch their words as both women are whispering, the barbs going back and forth as their faces redden. The only thing she can gather is that they're discussing Clarke.

"Enough!"

Lexa's voice holds steel as she calls out across her war table. She watches at how Abby flinches and looks over at her with the same defiant look that her daughter often has when she is not willing to compromise. Before she can speak, Clarke intervenes.

"We need to focus on what needs to be done. Nothing else matters at this point. Not even our differences of opinion," Clarke says, and her voice is clear, the strength of her words are punctuated by the way she moves sharply from the table and walks closer towards Lexa.

"We need to bring back our people."

Clarke turns and stares at her mother, daring her to speak. Lexa lifts her hand to hide the smile at the courage of the beautiful, young doctor who seems to have ensnared her every waking thought. She needs to step back from Clarke. Just for now, when everyone they know is within their vicinity. She is not willing to gamble on Clarke's life and if that means she needs to back away from the woman, then so be it.

"One of Skaikru has betrayed us, and now the young people from the Ark are trapped within the mountain alongside yours."
Clarke's voice penetrates the room and yet she does not shouting. Lexa frowns when she can see that Abby is about to interrupt Clarke despite the strong warnings the young doctor initially gave her. Lexa will not allow Clarke's mother to take away from the Sky leader's momentum.

"The leader of Skaikru speaks the truth. Now it is our time to save those who have been taken from us."

Lexa speaks over the top of whatever Abby was going to say. She sees the sudden but quickly hidden smile that appears on Clarke's face and feels a sudden rush of pride for putting the tilt to soft lips on the young woman who had been glowering only moments before.

Lexa is also aware that someone among this group is the one who betrayed her to the mountain in the first place.

She has spoken with Clarke about it in the early hours of the morning as they watched the first light began to seep into the day. Murmured words and Clarke's fingers trailing along the lines of ink that are embedded in her skin. Clarke had whispered plans of laying traps and planting false information that would lead them to the traitor.

Now was not the time for the final denouement as they had no idea who it was, but it indeed was time to lay down the traps for the wolf in their midst.

"We will enter the mountain through the Reaper tunnels. Raven Kom Skaikru will disable the - "

Lexa looked over at Clarke as she tried to remember the words they had used to describe the small dark rounds of glass that glittered in trees along the lake and forest paths towards the eastern side of the tunnels.

"Cameras," Clarke filled in, and it felt like they'd been working together all their lives as Clarke fluidly moved in and out of Lexa's speech adding the correct tek words where necessary.

Lexa does not see how Costia's eyes open slightly with worry, nor the harried look she passes onto one of the warriors who sits across the room behind Lexa.

Questions were thrown around the table and maps were looked over. Paths were marked. Clan leaders were given rolled parchments with specific instructions for their armies.

This was Clarke's idea - to give each unit specific tasks crucial to bringing down the mountain. And to provide general instructions to all clan leaders with one single element that would be false. That had been Lexa's strategy, and she'd received a long, deep kiss for the idea.

Lexa watched at the excited gleam in most of her clan leader's faces. The idea that they would finally be able to stop those who had been feeding on their people for so long - and to have it so close within their grasp seemed almost impossible to everyone there.

"Commander - the mountain has been quiet recently. Why risk this to agitate them?"

Nia's words are an unexpected surprise in the quiet hum of sound in the room. Lexa's eyebrows rise in surprise as do most of the people in the confines of the tent. The silence lasts for a moment too long, and the sudden rise in tension is noticed even by the Ark Council as they quieten in the unexpected absence of chatter.

Lexa has never addressed Nia as a sister in these meetings, always choosing to keep their family connection out of negotiations so that none of the clans can accuse them of collusion or nepotism.
She is aware that her lips have parted slightly such is her shock at the situation. She realizes that the predicament she had with the Skaikru is not the only thing that she has ignored for the last twelve months. The simple realization that she has not spoken to her sister as she had done with all of the other leaders hits her stomach which begins to churn. And she understands too late that this could harm the coalition's gambit to bring down the mountain.

"Kwin Nia," Lexa says, and her voice is cool as she tempers the anger that rears up again in her, "even though Azgeda has not experienced any recent losses, surely the treachery against our brother is enough to warrant your participation in this - effort?"

She watches as Nia's arctic-colored eyes blink in confusion at her, and at the sudden reference to family. To speak of their brother whom they both lost to the Mountain so many years ago.

The same loss that had sent Kwin Ronto into such a rage of despair that had almost killed Lexa at the time. It was only Nia's interference and the sudden arrival of the Fleimkepas that Lexa was able to continue to walk the earth in one piece.

"Heda," she replies and her voice is soft within the stillness of the room, "our participation is not an issue. I will always have my blades crossed to protect your back."

She can feel everyone's eyes on her as she nods slowly in her sister's direction. She swallows quietly, and it is only Clarke and Costia who notice the slight tightening of her throat that indicates the strain she's feeling. Lexa can still see Kwin Ronto as she strides to her younger self, and Nia pushing her behind her only to receive the beating that had been intended for Lexa. She knows her sister will always fight for her.

Despite Costia.

"Why now, Heda?" Nia asks, and her voice is carefully neutral as she too has noticed Lexa's contained stillness.

"Because now we can!"

Lexa snaps and hates it that she does this to Nia. Nia who always saved Lexa at the expense of herself. She breathes and calms the rage that had risen up, and looks around the room to ensure that every eye is on her again.

"Because for the first time - we have the power to stop them. We have Skaikru tek, yes. But this is not the only reason. This is the first time in almost one hundred years where we work together to bring them down. When we were divided, we were not enough. And now. Now we are one, and we are unstoppable."

There is an excitement in the room as she says this and she observes how the Skaikru Council are taking all of this in. She can see that they are confused and surprised at the way the clans have worked together and how she and Clarke have mediated this.

She watches Abby who is staring at Clarke with something that looks like affection and bemusement as she shakes her head. To Abby's left Marcus Kane has followed every argument and spoken with as many leaders as possible. His curiosity with their culture is encouraging, and Lexa makes a point to catch his eye and nod quietly to him. His smile is kind, and for a moment she feels warmth for these people that Clarke has come from.

And when her eyes land on Diana Sydney, she realizes the woman has been watching her for quite some time. The older blonde is also looking at her with interest, and then her eyes flicker back to
Clarke's before returning to her again. Deliberately.

Lexa can feel her body instantly stiffen, but she keeps her eyes calm and her gaze steady on this woman. Could this woman have picked up on her and Clarke's connection?

This is the woman that Clarke had quietly confessed was her second mother. They had given pieces of their own past to one another. In the snippets of time where she and Clarke slowly unfurled those locked parts - when they were not exploring the possibilities of each other's bodies.

Clarke had spoken of how she had spent many times weeping in this woman's arms after her father had been killed, and before she had been sent to the sky prison. She saw the clarity of understanding begin to enter light hazel eyes and the small 'oh' of shock on the woman's features.

Before she can do anything, she feels gentle fingertips press into her arm and a soft voice murmuring in her ear.

"Are you ok?"

The pressure in her chest subsides, and she instantly feels her body begin to relax as Clarke gently rubs her thumb across Lexa's shoulder as she moves to sit beside her. The movement is discreet, and Lexa is grateful.

"Yes, Klark. I am the Commander of the Twelve Clans - "

"Seriously?"

She does not smile, but there's a small tilt to the side of her full lips and Clarke quietly laughs at her.

"I know that now is not the time, so I'll ask you again later," Clarke says, and her voice is quietly amused.

Lexa looks up at her aware that now it is not just Clarke's second mother who is looking at them, but Abby is staring at her daughter with keen eyes.

"Your mothers are watching us Klark," Lexa says softly and feels how Clarke immediately stiffens beside her.

Clarke looks at her in confusion and then at Abby who she now sees is staring at the way she's swaying towards Lexa. Clarke almost never swears, and when she does, it is usually when she is beneath Lexa's body so when she lets out a quiet expletive, Lexa feels her stomach clench in response.

"Damn. My mother is going to kill me."

Lexa turns in her seat to look at Clarke more closely trying to understand the subtleties of Skaikru culture.

"Why?"

She wants to ask a hundred other questions. Questions that would surely show Clarke that beneath the stoic facade that Lexa must wear as the leader of her people, she also has the insecurities of a young woman.

She watches quietly as Clarke's eyes darken, the blue intensifying as Clarke considers what is happening around them.
"Because -"

Clarke's voice is tired, and there is a hint of thick honey in the lowered timbre of her voice, "she still thinks of me as a child. One that she has to protect. I can see Diana has already clued into what's happened?"

Clarke groans when Lexa merely nods in affirmation.

"We have more important things to consider right now, Klark. Surely your mother would put that before all else -"

Their whispered conversation is rudely interrupted by Abby pulling on Clarke's arm trying to tug her to a corner of the tent, but Lexa raises her hand. The woman is smart enough to stop when she sees the quiet and steel infused gaze that is directed at her.

"Abby Kom Skaikru, is there something you wish to raise?"

Abby looked at her and Lexa could feel the burn of how Abby looked between her and Clarke. Before she could speak, and Lexa could see exactly what words were on her mind, Diana Sydney walked up behind her.

"Clarke, I see you're enjoying the delights that this Earth has to offer."

It is a deliberate dig to get a rise out of Abby which it certainly does as the woman's face immediately suffuses with a dark blush.

Lexa's eyebrows are almost to her forehead as she watches the interaction and Clarke's response to it. The young Skai woman lets out a breath of frustrated air and rounds on her mother.

"Whatever you have on your mind that you want to say to me, mom - you can just stop right there. Diana, you need to cease baiting my mom and just ask her - whatever it is you want to ask. This world is determined that we learn the lesson that life is finite, and you're both impossibly stuck in a world that does not exist here. Stop wasting the time that you have!"

Both women step back. Diana's face is almost white, and Abby's brow is furrowed in confusion. She turns to look at Diana.

"What is she talking about?" Abby's voice is terse, and there's a tightness to her body.

"Nothing."

Diane's voice is sharp and the look she gives Clarke shows both shock and a terrible fear that Clarke will betray the knowledge she has in her hands.

Lexa watches as both women stalk away to the other side of the tent. Several of her people are now observing the interactions of the Sky people.

"That was - deliberate. And provocative," Lexa finally says.

"It was a bit unkind, but my mom was about to ignore the fact that you're the Commander of the Twelve Clans, and possibly ask you questions in such a way that would have destroyed all the work we've done today with all of your generals ready to push a sword to her throat."

Lexa nods and watches silently as Clarke's eyes roam the room before they're resting on Nia and Costia.
"I've sorted the problem that was my mother. What are you going to do about your sister? And Costia can't seem to keep her eyes off you."

There is a sharpness to Clarke's voice at the last part of her statement, and Lexa's stomach tilts as if a hundred butterflies have erupted in there.

Could Klark be - jealous?

She presses her lips to stop herself from asking, and her gaze moves over to her sister who is talking animatedly with Anya whose eyes have narrowed to slits. Jok! Anya is her greatest general, but she's not always known for her tolerance. After what happened in Polis with Nia and Costia - she has threatened on several occasions to decapitate both women after seeing the absolute heartbreak their actions had on Lexa.

"You are right, Klark. I need to get over there before Anya forces Azgeda to leave the coalition."

"Well, you better hurry. Looks like Nia is ready to draw the knife from her boot and stab Anya repeatedly. Something I can quite relate to. Your general can be jarring at the best of times."

Lexa turned to look at Clarke who just smiled sweetly at her. She does not see that Costia is not the only pair of eyes watching their every action.

***

"Nia," Lexa says quietly when she finally makes it to her sister's side.

"Sister."

Nia's voice is almost unrecognizable from the calm, cultured tones she frequently uses.

"Your General steps into waters that are too deep for her to navigate."

"Lexa!"

Costia's voice is soft, and if Lexa didn't know any better, she would have thought the woman sounded - terrified. Lexa looked at her with worry threading across her forehead.

"Heda," Anya corrects, and her voice is hard and the look she gives Costia tells her in no uncertain terms that she oversteps. Lexa's eyes narrow as she sees the flash of fury that crosses Costia's face.

"Heda," Costia amends but the look she gives Lexa is not one that she recognizes. It is almost beseeching.

"Anya, perhaps you can take Costia for some air outside?"

It is not really a question, and both women know this as they nod quickly and leave the two sisters to speak in private.

"Lexa."

"Sister."

Lexa closes her eyes and breathes out slowly. Her back is to most of the room, so she knows she is quite safe to show some of her feelings.

"I am sorry that I have not come to see you and talk of the coalition. To talk of my plans for the
Nia's blue-green eyes, so similarly shaped to Lexa's, blink once before she straightens up. Lexa watches as her sister's lips thin, and it's the only sign that her sister is angry.

"I understand why you sent me away, Lexa. I do. But to leave me out of such a discussion?"

Nia's voice crackles with an intensity that shows Lexa just how much she is hiding her anger.

"My army is the largest in the coalition. Why would you commit to such a thing without talking to me first?"

They are speaking rapidly in the language of Azgeda, the soft tones of the patois now sharpened by their words. Lexa can see Clarke's eyes from across the war table - the way the blue gaze darkens with worry. She resists the need to alleviate the apparent disquiet on Clarke's face.

"I am sorry. I - I meant to come to Azgeda sooner, and then my plans changed when Skaikru first fell to the ground."

"Skaikru fell one year after I left Polis," Nia says quietly, and there is no judgment in her tone, and Lexa feels the guilt rise up in her.

"What did you expect, Nia?"

Lexa's voice trembles and she takes in a quick breath to settle herself and lifted her chin a little defiantly. She hates the way her sister looks at her. The sadness mixed with guilt that glitters in her eyes.

"I never meant for -"

"Do not," Lexa responds quickly and the language of Azgeda is harsh on her lips.

"Not here. Not now."

Nia nods her face blanching quickly at the Commander's tone that is directed at her. It is something that Lexa has never done to her before.

"Other clan leaders have benefited from your wisdom and words about how and why we bring down the mountain now. I would like to have this knowledge too. I understand that by working together for the first time, we have an opportunity. But you understand, Lexa, both Trikru and Azgeda are close to the mountain. Sometimes, I think they see us. Know our plans as we know them. How can you stop this?"

Lexa pauses and takes in her sister's words. She nods and feels her body begin to relax.

"You are right. The Maunon have always seemed to know of our activities closer to the mountain. These are the kameras I spoke of during the meeting."

The tek word falls clumsily from her mouth, and Nia narrows her eyes in bewilderment at the unfamiliar term.

"Klark says they are glass circles set into the trees and rocks around the mountain. They help the Maunon see us - Klark explains it as watching us from far away and yet to be as close as being inside the mountain."

Nia's eyebrow lifts and the movement is almost identical to the one that Lexa often uses when she's...
quietly amused.

Lexa huffs when she sees it.

"What?"

Nia shrugs one shoulder as it to say that she has said nothing but there's a delighted smile on her face.

"She's beautiful. When she looks at you, it seems like she wants to place the sun at your feet."

Lexa feels the muscles of her abdominals tighten and the rise of red-hot rage surges up her throat.

She is acutely aware that she is surrounded by the most important people of her coalition. She remembers the words she had shared with Abby earlier that day, and so she continues to put forward a strong, united front before the people of Skaikru who are also watching.

Before she can say anything, she feels a presence behind her and soft fingertips that gently touches the side of her arm.

"Nia."

Clarke smiles, and Lexa hates how she wants to throttle her sister who steps forward and reaches for Clarke's arm.

"Klark, your words were interesting today. Heda was explaining a little bit about some of the tek around the mountain," Nia says, and her smile is strained.

She's picked up on Lexa's distrust and quickly removed her hand from Clarke's arm.

"Let me guess. The cameras? Yes, disabling these will be key in blinding Mount Weather from seeing our approach," Clarke smiles at them both, and Lexa breathes out slowly.

She's acutely aware that Clarke has deliberately interrupted them to stop any potential screaming match. She is amazed that this woman who has only known her for a few weeks can infer so much from her body language as Clarke would certainly not understand the rapid patois that has been going back and forward between her and Nia.

They have deliberately used Nia's language to keep their words private.

"Yes. The eyes that are set around the mountain that comes onto my land. And Trikru's - for many years we wondered how the mountain knew when we were close. Now, I understand all too clearly how so many of us were taken by them."

Nia's words are said softly, but there is an undercurrent of anger at the years of unrelenting theft of her people. Of her brother.

"They think of us as less than savages. We are simply mere animals that inhabit the lands around them. We are not human to them for there is no other reason I can see why they would be so cruel as to send our loved ones back to us as Ripas."

Lexa watches Clarke as she nods with compassion towards her sister whose voice has cracked a little.

"Terra nullius. Some civilizations in the old days before the bombs - they did that to lands they wanted to take for themselves," Clarke replies and her voice is gentle.
"They said the natives were not human and classified them as being animals of the land," Clarke explained at the bewilderment on both sister's faces.

"It meant they could take the land away from them as it was 'nobody's land.' The mountain has made you so apart from them they don't see your humanity anymore. Maybe they've lost a little of theirs by doing so?"

***

Clarke knows she's rambling, but she's doing everything she can think of to distract Lexa from potentially killing her sister in front of the Kongeda.

She may be wrong, but after hearing the tense words being exchanged by the two siblings, she's willing to risk looking like an idiot so that Lexa has time to calm down.

She feels her heart warm at the look that Lexa gives her. It's amused. Soft. And not as quietly furious as it was a few moments ago.

She turns a little to smile at Nia who is cautious in her response to Clarke.

That was - interesting.

Clarke tries to look at Lexa from the side to see what the hell happened to make Nia stiff and formal in her responses when she'd felt they'd built the beginnings of a rapport in Polis.

"I know Lexa has not been able to come and see you," Clarke is careful with her words to show that she doesn't know what happened between the sisters but the look in Nia's eye tells her she's not succeeded terribly well, "but the mountain must surrender to the force of the twelve clans."

"And you, Skaikru?" Nia says quietly.

"Oh, we'll be there," Clarke responds.

"And if your friends were not in the mountain?"

Nia's voice is a little sharp, and Clarke hides the warmth she feels at the protective glare Lexa sends her sister.

"But they are," Clarke says confidently, "and we would have come if Lexa had asked."

Clarke knows she's been played when she sees the little twitch at the side of Nia's full mouth. So very similar to Lexa's but different.

"We? Or you?"

Clarke smiles, and the look she gives Nia is a little mischievous.

"Both."

Nia throws her head back and laughs. The gleam in her eye tells Clarke that she's amused by her and Clarke breathes out a slow breath of relief.

"So?"

Lexa interrupts, and there's a definite glower in her eyes that confuses Clarke. It's only as she watches the staring contest between the siblings that she realizes that Lexa is claiming ownership
of some sort over her.

Because of Costia. Of course. She almost kicks herself when she sees the hint of vulnerability in Lexa's eyes.

"Azgeda will be there, Lexa. We avenge our brother. And if -" Nia's voice falters as if she's trying to keep herself steady by sheer force of will. "If we find him -"

"It has been years, Nia. He - Roan will not be there. He will not be the same man you and I knew."

Clarke looks away to try and give them some privacy in their shared grief.

She's heard about Roan very briefly from Lexa. How he'd been seen tormenting warriors close to the south-eastern villages in Azgeda. How he had escaped with other Reapers back to the mountain. Roan had disappeared too many years ago, and Clarke is reasonably confident he would have died by now as the Reaper's lives were limited by the cycle of violence that they led.

"So, Klark Kom Skaikru."

Clarke jerks back towards the conversation before her, and she realizes that Nia is looking at her in the way of all older sisters.

She feels her breath catch and looks to Lexa who's face has paled as she realizes what her sister is about to do.

"What are your intentions with my -"

Clarke can feel how her eyes slowly widen and she inhales sharply when Lexa's hand shoots out to grab Nia's arm, but Nia only smiles. It's a sly smile. It's the smile that siblings get when they're about to embarrass younger sisters.

"Do not dare!"

Lexa growls, and she's reverted to the language of her childhood. Clarke watches, and she's pretty sure she looks stupid with her mouth slightly parted as she takes in Lexa's white-knuckled grip.

"It is my duty to make sure that this woman is not blinding you with her beauty; that she's not using her sexual skills to demolish whatever is left of your brains," Nia responds in the patois of Azgeda, and looks at Clarke strangely when she notices the blush creeping across her face.

"Listen you two. You need to stop. My intentions are to survive and to win. And to help the Commander win this war and bring down the mountain."

Clarke would have laughed as two heads snapped towards her in shock. The collective murmuring of the Commander's generals and the Council in the background, and the subtle movement at the entrance of the tent as Anya and Costia return is distracting, and starts her heart hammering against her chest. She tries to be casual and shrugs carelessly at the two women who are staring at her in shock.

"I learned several languages on the Ark. French happens to be one of them. Your dialect is not hard to learn as it is a simplified version of that language."

"You know the language of my people?"

Nia's eyes narrow and Clarke realizes she remembers their time at Polis when Clarke had
understood several private conversations she’d thought she’d been having.

Clarke's eyes flick across to Lexa who is staring at her - the deep green acknowledging past mistakes as a hint of regret threads through them.

"I learned from a particularly skilled and wise woman that it is always important to keep your abilities and knowledge hidden when caught in unexpected situations."

She doesn't realize that the smile she gives Lexa is full of affection and a hint of something else which Nia can see even if the two women before her do not.

Clarke can feel the moment when Costia sidles up behind her as she sees the sudden tightening of Lexa's shoulders and the way she looks away averting eye contact with the woman as she approaches them.

"Lexa," Costia starts but stops when she hears the barely contained growl from Anya beside her.

"Commander. There are more Skaikru outside demanding to be allowed in. You should teach them better manners, Klark," Costia says.

It takes everything in Clarke to remain quietly calm when everything inside her wants to roll her eyes. She doesn't like Costia's tone and the deliberate baiting before the other women.

"I'm afraid you don't seem to know much about our culture, Costia. Did you at least find out what they wanted? Generally, I find that if a group of people is trying to communicate to another during a time of war, it often means urgency. And pertinent information that might help us with the rest of the planning today."

Clarke's voice is steady as she turns to face Costia. The grin on the other woman's face falls at Clarke's words. She steps towards Clarke her hand going to the knife that should have been at her hip but was removed when all the warriors entered the Commander's tent.

"Your culture, your ways - are of no significance, Klark. Now that you are here you will need to learn our ways. Or you will not last very long on the ground," Costia says, her voice thick with anger.

Clarke nods in agreement as she looks into deep gray eyes that are so startling against rich, dark skin.

"You are right, Costia. Skaikru ways are from the sky and from a world that was lost a hundred years ago. But I've been here for almost a year, and my friends and I have managed to escape capture from your people, the mountain, and I - " Clarke turned and quirked a delicate eyebrow at Lexa who's face was implacably giving away nothing of her feelings. Clarke could see a glint of something in those green eyes of hers that showed that the Commander was quite interested in what Clarke had to say next.

"I have managed to evade the kill order your Commander put on my head."

"It was never a kill order," Lexa interrupted her eyebrows furrowing, "it was a capture and bring to Polis immediately order. I wanted to meet this person who was dancing around my best generals."

Clarke tried not to roll her eyes at the semantics but grinned when she saw how Anya snapped her head towards Lexa.

"Dancing?" Anya grimaced. "She was responsible -"
"Enough. The past is best left where it is. Behind us. We have more urgent things to discuss. What did Skaikru want?"

Anya stared at her old second for a moment before her gaze moved to Clarke's.

"Your friend Revon and Oktevia. They wanted to bring news of the boy in the mountain. I do not know more as Costia had already sent them back to the metal ships."

Clarke's body stilled. She looked at Lexa quickly trying to indicate the need for silence with a subtle shake of her head.

"I will go and see what they need," she finally said. She took a deep breath and turned to Costia who was still trying to step into her space.

"Don't ever do that again, Costia. If my people need to see me; assume there's a damn good reason why."

"You dare tell me -"

"Enough, Costia. You have caused enough delay already with this foolishness," Nia interrupted and pulled the woman to the side and out of Clarke's way.

They watched for a moment as Clarke strode towards the tent's entrance where she paused before looking back towards Lexa who nodded once before following after her.

***

His breath catches as he watches her small, lithe form walk through the doors that separate the young people of the Ark from the rest of Mount Weather. Her dark hair falls around her shoulders softly, and there is something about her that makes his heart yearn and feel just a little foolish.

And Wells Jaha is never foolish.

One of the key things he's learned playing chess and dealing with his father is that you need to be several steps ahead of your opponent.

And your opponent must never know that you are a threat.

Wells smiles sweetly at the girl who precedes the prick who follows her into the room. He keeps his eyes on her so that his enemy doesn't see the anger and fear in his eyes. Eyes that quickly flick over to Jasper who giddily moves forward towards Maya.

Wells allows his eyes to flash jealousy. He lets the prick see his uncertainty. Wells makes sure that the man understands adolescent resentments and jealousies are at play.

Wells has never been allowed to be a child. Why would he waste his time on the angst of adolescence? He makes sure that he lets him see the flare of anger through a deliberate tightening of his lips and a narrowing of his eyes.

He doesn't have to pretend too hard. There is a kernel of truth to his behavior as he is attracted to the beautiful young woman from Mount Weather. Maya. Her dark eyes are enormous in her face and hint at an etherealness that is magnified by the transparency of her skin which is almost luminescent in the lamplight of the room.

"Sir."
Wells smiles and nods at Dante Wallace, President of the Old World. He is the inheritor of his ancestor's titles and an 'A-one' asshole. If Wells had a gun, he would have overcome his pacifist leanings and put it very close to the man's temple.

And willingly taken a shot.

"Wells!"

Dante Wallace's voice booms in the close confines of the luxurious quarters of the guest rooms of Mount Weather.

"How are you this evening? Are you and your friends ready for the evening meal?"

Wells smiles and focuses on the man's pale blue-gray eyes. He doesn't allow anything to betray his feelings and doesn't let his gaze stray to the empty bed where Fox had been only twenty-four hours ago.

"Of course."

His smile doesn't betray the absolute terror in his heart which beats like a timpani - stretched tightly and banging hard in his ears.

Dante Wallace is not a big man, but his charisma and sense of self is enormous. His broad shoulders are strong and make him look a lot younger than the sixty years he carries.

Almost thirty of it has been as the leader of Mount Weather where he's terrorized the people around the mountain, ensuring not only the survival of his people but finding ways of allowing the people of Mount Weather to finally walk beneath the sun.

He can hear the soft whispering of Jasper and Maya in the corner and allows his eyes to drift over so that the President sees him watching them.

He knows he's playing up the jealous young teenager but its the only way he can think of distracting this very observant man from what Wells is up to.

His observations and his understandings over the last few days have led him to believe that the mountain is far, far more dangerous than Clarke had predicted. Far more dangerous than any of them had understood. His heart hurts as he knows that he's only here because of his father's arrant stupidity, and the Ark's inability to believe in the judgment of their youth.

"Fox has been away for a while?"

Wells nods towards the young woman's bed area on the other side of the room to his. On his periphery, he can see Jasper, and some of the other delinquent's shoulders tighten. It's a gamble, but Wells needs to hear what Dante's answer is. He needs to know if she's dead or whether they can still save her.

"Ah, young Miss Fox. What an absolute sweetheart. It's such a shame she became so ill the other evening."

Dante's words are kind, worried. Supportive. Wells knows a manipulator as he's lived his whole life with one. He keeps his body still as he turns towards the older man who thinks he's so fucking smart outwitting a group of teenagers.

"Can I see her?"
Wells tilts his head and puts on just the right amount of quiet concern mixed with self-deprecation as if he's not worth such a consideration.

He watches as Dante drags the tip of a dark crimson tongue across flattened lips and smiles his big teeth smile before tilting a condescending head.

"I don't see why not, young man. She's still a little under the weather, but we've got her on a saline drip, so her vitals are improving according to Doctor Tsing."

Wells doesn't know what it is that Dante isn't saying. He has an awful suspicion that if he gets to Fox, then he won't see anyone else ever again. But she's alive at least. For now.

He smiles gently and changes the conversation.

"Have you heard from my father? From the Ark at all?"

Dante Wallace's eyes shutter, and there is a sudden flare of anger that the man can barely contain before he smiles again, but the lines of his mouth are tight and hard as if it's killing him to force his face into a socially correct response.

Wells can feel the strain of keeping his own face outwardly calm, the lines of his smile are gentle, and he softens his gaze.

"Sir?"

Wells's voice is gentle, and he takes a small step away from the president whose body has tightened beside him.

"I am sorry, son. We have not heard back from your father. We have tried several times to contact the Ark, but to date, there's not been any response."

Wells nods slowly forcing a look of worry onto his face. He knows exactly why there's been no contact between the president and the people of the Ark, or his father.

His father who is now in the Sky Box that he'd committed so many people to for their real or imagined transgressions.

After speaking with Kane, things had moved very quickly. He still feels the guilt rise up - for betraying his father, but it had to stop. His father's continued manipulations and scheming as the Ark and its inhabitants had tried to integrate with the world it had landed on. He'd watched how everyone struggled to fix things, to make things work while Thelonius Jaha frantically weaved lies and hid deals behind closed doors and secret conversations.

His appetite for power was never-ending, and Wells' heart had broken when he knew that his father had traded his son, and his peers to the people of Mountain Weather. All just to reclaim the Chancellorship that had been ripped from him when the rest of the Ark had found out about his dealings behind their back.

His father didn't understand. He was very much like the President. Dante Wallace was a man who believed that he was entitled to inherit the Earth because of who his ancestors had been. Just like Wells' dad who had assumed that he would be like his own father before him, and achieve the mantle of the longest-serving chancellor.

But he'd been ousted after only eighteen months in the role that he'd stealthily taken from Diana Sydney by backdoor dealings with Kane, and Abby who'd believed his truths.
They learned too late the kind of man his father was. After Jake. After sending the 100 down to the Earth. After that, did they finally realize that Thelonius Jaha was not a leader but a power broker willing to do whatever it took to maintain his position.

His father was a monster subject to his aspirations, and not a man of honor or decency. And yes, he felt guilty, but that never outweighed the satisfaction of knowing he'd saved the rest of the Ark from Mount Weather with their arrogance and their greed. They didn't just want to walk in the air again. They wanted every damn last thing. And Wells was going to do everything in his power to prevent them from achieving that.

"Hey, Wells!"

Jasper's voice carries across the room with quiet excitement. His goggles still hang around his neck and what was once an affectation on the Ark, has now become synonymous with the boy himself. Wells grinned.

"Are you coming up for dinner?"

Maya's smile is pretty as she asks and Wells feels his own gaze soften as he notices that her eyes never leave Jasper's.

Wells nods and smiles at them both before turning to Dante. He notices how the man's eyes are taking in what's happening with the two young people who are so obviously in the first part of falling in love. He watches nervously at the slow smile that spreads across the man's face.

"Let's all go up now, shall we?" Dante Wallace says.

His voice has an unkind thread to it as he continues to stare at Jasper who is completely oblivious as he stares across into Maya's equally blinkered eyes.

They move from the quarters where the Ark kids are stationed and walk towards the elevator. Wells still continues to marvel at this world they'd built for themselves to protect against the impending holocaust.

A world where they didn't take into consideration the repercussions of never being exposed to radiation. And now this bastion of protection is their prison. Wells breathes in the stale smell that is so reminiscent of the Ark in space. Metallic and dry. A constant pain in his sinus and right eye which dried out too quickly in the steady flow of dead, recycled air. They've planted a lot of greenery throughout the complex which filters the worst of the build-up of carbon monoxide.

"So, Jasper."

Dante's voice breaks into his musings and Wells looks over carefully at the man beside them in the lift. Jasper turns to smile softly at Dante. The look of growing love in his eyes is heartbreaking, and Wells knows exactly what Dante is going to ask Jasper to do next.

"I see you and Maya are enjoying each other's company."

The man smiles, and it looks fatherly. Almost avuncular, and both Maya and Jasper respond with the look of innocence. They are unknowing of the beasts that lurk in the world.

Wells has lived with one all of his life. He recognizes the self-centered shells that cover the almost idiotic drive for power.

"I was wondering if you would like to visit our medical area tomorrow. We still would like to have
a look at all of you individually to check our differences from living in such extreme environments. You - up in the vastness of space and so unutterably exposed to the purest forms of radiation from the sun. Us. Down here in the depths of the earth with not an iota of radiation near our skin."

Jasper blinks and nods unthinkingly.

"Sure," he says and looks back at Maya whose looking at him with a little less innocence now, and a little more concern. Her eyes dart towards Dante, and he smiles at her. Wells can see her mouth the word 'please,' but it falls by the wayside of Dante's intention as he grins at the two.

"Fabulous, young man. You'll see some of the wonders that our technology had to evolve towards. Things we had to invent over time as different machines failed or new problems arose. Most of our evolution has happened in the lab you'll be visiting tomorrow under the Tsings who have always been the medical officers of Mount Weather. Good people. Excellent people."

His voice has the mellifluous tones of a politician. Of a man who is used to being heard. Wells barely flinches when Dante slaps Jasper hard across the shoulders.

"Actually, I was wondering if I could go instead, sir."

The lift doors open onto the communal eating area and the buzz of sound is loud as they step into the whirling mass of flattened noise; plates being placed on tables and the errant knife scraping against sleek white porcelain.

The sounds are now muffled by the loud buzzing in his brain. Wells has no idea why he's done this, but he knows he has to buy Jasper and Maya more time together. He sees the swift look she gives him. A mixture of horror and relief that completely goes over Jasper's head.

He doesn't miss the surprise and slight chagrin in Dante's pale blue eyes. His lips have aged, the outline seeping into the skin around his mouth like tight slivers of liver-colored flesh, and there's an ugly smirk that rests on them.

"Are you sure, son?"

Dante's voice is quiet as he leads them through the crowd who quietens as he moves through. Most of them bow their heads in reverence or stare at him in wonder, the glint of the whites of their eyes pale under the excessive elegance of 17th-century chandeliers.

"I had plans for you to meet and train with Cage."

Cage Wallace. Dante's son whom he hasn't met yet but has heard so much about. He wonders if he's as awful as his father. Wells wonders if people think of him like that before they meet him. He feels a sickness in his stomach at the thought.

"There he is now."

Dante's voice booms and his mouth widens, his teeth glinting as he looks over to another entryway where a man walks towards them, his gait a little bit lopsided and his upper torso stiff as if to compensate for the strange mechanics of his legs.

"Straighten up, Cage!"

Dante's voice is sharp but soft enough that it's only Cage and Wells who hear him. Maya and Jasper have already drifted away to find their own seats at the President's table.
Wells looks towards the president's son whom he's seen in passing rushing from one corridor to another but never long enough to get a sense of the man. He's older than Wells, and his body is well muscled in the shoulders and arms but his waist tapers to slim legs, and as he gets closer Wells can see that one leg is atrophied and almost half the size of the other.

He's handsome with a sharp jaw and deep blue eyes, very different from his father's pale wet ones that look like dead filaments in a light tube.

His skin is like most of the Mountain Men, almost ghostly white. Cage's eyes flicker when he catches Well's eye, his hand shooting out to clasp Wells' into his own. His movements are jerky. Awkward. A lifetime of apology in his eyes which are shuttered and quickly looking away from Well's discerning look.

"Hey," Wells tries in a casual attempt at youthful dis-ingenuousness.

Cage nods a few times before attempting a crooked smile and a curt 'hey' in return.

It's evident to Wells that the man is less of himself in front of the huge personality that is his father.

"Come and join us, son."

Dante's tone is less invitation than command, and Wells sees the way Cage swallows slowly, the line of his throat moving as his father walks from them towards the President's table.

"After you," Cage says softly and motions for Wells to go ahead of him. If nothing else proves it - the way Cage is before his father tells Wells that he's met a kindred spirit in more ways than one.

And he begins to wonder if he can find out more about this son to bring down both their fathers.

**

Clarke can feel the fatigue inside her bones, and her ears feel like they've been stoppered with the echoes of angry voices and harsh dialects trying to break her brain.

Her throat is tight and sore from the amount of talking she's done explaining the technology and strategy that she and Raven have put together using their combined knowledge.

She's had to stop her mother several times from putting her foot into it and had to eventually send her off by saying there was a medical emergency in the Ark. She had no idea if there was, but knowing the Arkadians, she was sure that Abby would be gainfully occupied.

She is still furious with Costia for not allowing Raven and Octavia into the war rooms.

When Clarke had caught up with the two women earlier, they had been furious with the Azgeda woman's behavior.

Octavia's face had been grim with suspicion. At that moment, Clarke could see so many similarities between her and Bellamy but was smart enough not to mention it.

Octavia had tried to control her emotions before Lexa, but could not help herself in saying that there was something off about Costia. Octavia had learned to trust her instincts a lot quicker than the rest of the delinquents when they'd first reached the ground.

Clarke knew that Octavia had learned early on in her prison beneath the floor to listen to everything unusual, to smell things that were out of the ordinary like the scent of the guard's boot
polish or the tremor of heavier feet than her brother and mother entering the room. Her senses were picking up that the woman was hiding something, and Clarke couldn't help but agree with her.

All thoughts of Costia went out of her head when she found out about Raven's discovery.

They had found the blueprints of the Mountain on the Ark's servers from listed libraries of data back before the bombs. Clarke doesn't understand half of the terminology of Raven's explanations about encryption keys and multilayered security that she and Monty had torn apart as they went through all of the data around Mount Weather.

It was Monty who'd found a back door into their system. One of the kids in Mount Weather almost a century ago had backed up their gamer status just as the bombs started to fall.

It was a millisecond in time where the government firewalls failed allowing an amateur to update his final play onto an ancient gaming server. The same gaming service also happened to hold music and video libraries that the Ark had been backing up onto their servers as quickly as possible before everything went to hell.

Clarke wondered if they'd quietly watched in horror as the world below them disintegrated before their eyes. She knew that neither could have known that one day this line of communication would potentially save their lives, and possibly destroy the lives of that boy's descendants.

If - Mount Weather wouldn't agree to terms of cohabitation - it would be war until one side had lost.

Lexa had not completely understood the repercussions at first until Clarke explained that it was like having a map of where everything was inside of the mountain. Then Lexa's eyes had gleamed with a brightness that had made Clarke's stomach tilt, and she'd had to close her eyes for a moment before continuing to impress upon Octavia and Raven how no-one, absolutely no-one could be told about this news.

Octavia had looked at Clarke with narrowed eyes, and it was apparent that she understood immediately. There was a traitor in Lexa's midst, and until they knew who that was - this crucial piece of information had to be kept secret.

The Commander's tent is mostly empty now, and Clarke stretches back into the hardened wood of her chair. Her backside is numb and sore, and she's hungry. She wants to slowly kill some of the Arkadians who are still battling their internal politics when the mountain could wipe them all out with a single button setting off missiles or take down brothers, fathers, and uncles to turn them into Reapers.

Clarke scoffs to herself at the idea of the Arkadians, men and women alike, as they would never be chosen to be the muscled walking dead - their bodies too frail from years of low gravity and terrible diets of protein-enhanced solubles made in their replicators with a mixture of vitamins to provide the right nutrients for each member of the Ark.

Clarke moans as she thinks about food again and her eyes flutter when she feels a surreptitious stroke against the back of her neck before a large bowl of stew is set before her. Plumes of steam soar upwards and delight her senses.

"You looked hungry," Lexa says throatily and looks down at Clarke who has already reached for the tray of small, crusty bread rolls that delivers its own radiant smells of hot yeast and salt.

"Oh my God, I could kiss you!"
Clarke moans around a mouthful of bread soaked in slow-cooked boar stew. She smiles and looks up into amused green eyes.

"Better not, Klark. I do not think your mother would be too happy about that."

Lexa's voice is soft, and only Clarke can hear as she's bent closer to the outside of Clarke's ear. Lexa's soft, teasing laugh against her ear makes all the pains of the day disappear and start a new, pleasant ache to form low in her belly.

She wants. It is a beautiful suffusion of intense feelings that she's never allowed herself to experience. That one week alone when they thought they'd never see each other again, not knowing who the other was - has accelerated whatever it is that is growing between them.

Clarke finds it hard not to smile around the mouthful of food as she stares into deep green eyes that look at her with such tightly controlled features. Clarke can see the gleam in Lexa's eyes that is outwardly Commander, but beneath this, she can see the shy young woman who is opening up to her.

One little piece at a time.

"Clarke!"

Clarke watches how Lexa's soft eyes quickly harden, the skin around her eyes narrowing at the way Clarke had flinched at the sound of Marcus Kane's voice as he approached the two young women at the table.

"Clarke."

He approaches with care as he's intelligent enough to pick up on the nuances of their body language.

"I am so sorry to interrupt you, but your mother is looking for you. She says she needs you in medical."

Clarke sighs and lets out a long, slow breath before looking up into clear brown eyes.

Marcus was not her favorite person when she was on the Ark. He was the one that took her father away and pressed the buttons that sent him to his death. He was also the one that came late in the night to remove her from their quarters and into the Sky Box.

She's keenly aware that he was following Jaha's orders believing the man's lies. She can also sense the change in him since he's landed on the ground and he's transformed in the way she, Octavia and Raven have done so in their different ways.

Both Clarke and Raven have blossomed by re-purposing their expertise to adapt to each new situation, coming up with solutions that others didn't have the experience or imagination to do so.

Octavia has found a land and a people who recognize and acknowledge her strengths. On the ground, she's a being of power and not someone to be hidden or protected as she was on the Ark.

Marcus Kane has been so curious about the Earth, and it's people, quickly adapting and absorbing their differences enough for Clarke to recognize that he's an unexpected ally on the Council. One that she sorely needs.

She knows that he believes too quickly sometimes, and right now, she thinks her mother has
bamboozled him with too much medical jargon, and he's come running to get Clarke in the only way her mother knows she'll respond to.

"What's the problem?"

Marcus grimaces and spreads his hands outwards.

"I have no idea. She said something about an eptop - an iptop," he sighs before continuing, "a difficult childbirth."

Clarke raises her eyebrows. There are a few women who've chosen to have second babies now that they can, but Clarke can't think of one who would be delivering just yet.

The Ark has only been on the ground for just over three months, but if it genuinely is an ectopic pregnancy where the baby begins to form inside one of the fallopian tubes, then the woman could be presenting problems now and in a lot of pain.

She begins to stand and then shakes her head and sits back down again.

"Marcus, if I go into the Ark do I have free passage to come and go as needed? I'm not going to need my mother's permission every time I need to speak with the Commander or to liaise with the Twelve Clans?"

He pauses and looks at her carefully. It's clear to Clarke he's not quite sure what to say. She can sense Lexa's stillness beside her at this question she's raised in front of her.

"Clarke," he says, and his voice has a gentle cadence as he slowly works out the words he needs to say, "your mom is under a lot of pressure right now. She has to manage the leadership battles of the council, the foolish choices of the previous leader, the ever-present threat of - my apologies Commander - the people who are here on the ground, and her daughter disappearing for a fortnight without any communication. I think, Clarke - you need to see it from her perspective. She's terrified of losing you. Too."

She can feel how her nostrils flare as she breathes in deeply and presses down hard on the frustrated anger that pops up again at the idea of her mother trying to control her life.

"She cannot keep doing this. And you haven't given me an answer. As the head of security, will you give me your word that I am able to leave the Ark when I need to without having to beg my mother for it each time."

He straightens and plays with the belt loop that would have held a shock stick when he was head of the guards and security on the Ark. It sits empty now as most of their weapons were removed when they entered the Commander's tents.

"Clarke, I cannot answer for your mother, but I promise that I will not stop you from leaving the Ark."

"Or any of your guards."

"Anyone under my command."

Clarke nods and looks at him carefully before pushing her food away. She looks at it a little forlornly but presses her lips together with determination before rising to her feet.

"Klark," Lexa's voice is quiet, and Clarke feels how it seems to steady her immediately.
"I would like to see more of your Arcadia. If you think I would not be in the way, I would like to see your medical area."

Clarke can hear the unsaid words. To know more about you. To be there for you in case your mother keeps you enclosed in the building that you have come to hate.

It is much later in the evening than Clarke had realized and dusk is fast approaching when they leave the tent to follow Kane into Arcadia and the medical bays.

The tents surrounding the vast beasts of metal seem so small in comparison with their oiled skins that keep the water off with bright hues reflecting the colors of each clan. Clarke almost stumbles across a rope that's holding up a canvas, but a firm hand on her elbow stops her from flying face first into the ground.

She looks back and smiles her thanks to Lexa who nods as they continue towards the very different noises of Arcadia. Two of Lexa's guards appear behind her and follow at a discreet distance.

As they enter the Ark and get closer to her mother's domain, Clarke can smell the astringent odors of the medical area and can feel her body loosen with the familiar, but notices the absolute inverse reaction happening to Lexa who gradually gets stiffer and stiffer the closer they get to the shiny, metallic doors that lead into the hospital area of Arcadia.

"What is it?" Clarke whispers.

Lexa stares at everything around her and the two guards who have trailed behind them to protect their commander also show their aversion to the place as their face reflect an unease.

"This place smells of - death. It smells wrong, Klark. How does this place heal people?"

Lexa's brow is furrowed a little in confusion.

Clarke nods, and she gets it. So many people even on the Ark had the same reaction to the smells of antiseptics and the machinery of medicine.

"It isn't death so much as there is - no life. No organisms. We try and keep the place as clean as possible to prevent infections. It means that - you can't smell life."

Lexa nods once, but Clarke can see she's still quite unnerved by one of the few places that Clarke feels entirely in her skin. Clarke guesses she would probably have the same reaction to Lexa in battle.

Maybe.

The doors swing open, and her mother sweeps out with Jackson walking swiftly beside her. Clarke watches her mother's eyes light up and then narrow when she sees Lexa and her two guards beside her.

"Why do you need me for this pregnancy if you have Jackson with you, mom?"

Clarke stares at her mother and knows she's used subterfuge to get her daughter back inside the walls of Arcadia.

"Jackson has only just come on shift," Abby says quickly, and the look of confusion on his face tells Clarke what she needs to know.
"Mom. This is ridiculous."

Clarke is quiet in her fury, and Abby steps away from Jackson who nods briefly at Clarke before hurrying as far as he can from the impending conflict between mother and daughter.

"You need to be inside Arcadia, Clarke."

Abby's voice has a sibilance as she quietly looks toward the Commander and her guards.

"There are hundreds of grounders out there. You're not safe - anything could happen to you."

Clarke speaks, and though her words are aimed at Lexa, she stares at her mother throughout her small apology.

"I am sorry, Commander. The Chancellor does not wish to insult you in front of your people and me. She does not understand you and some of your ways as you do not understand some of ours. What my mother seems to have forgotten though - is that I am no longer under her direct supervision. She forgets that I do know your people. That I know you. That I trust you. She forgets that I do not trust her. Not right now when she's forgotten the things she's done to keep me 'safe.' And -"

Clarke looks at her mother quickly before turning to Lexa as she continues to speak. She notes the flare in Lexa's eyes as she looks at Clarke whose spine has straightened and shows glimpses of the leader she is.

"And that she does not have the right to imprison me in this hell hole she wants me to call home. It is not my home. My home, mom."

Clarke spins back to her mother, and her voice has dropped to an almost whisper, and she watches as Abby's eyes close in devastation at her daughter's words.

"My home is out there. In the trees, and the mountains and valleys where there are people to meet. Things to learn. Discoveries to be made. You can choose to do this to yourselves but don't you ever dare try to entrap me here again like this. I told you - I love you, and you are my mother, but you cannot control me like this to curb your fears. At some point - you have to fucking grow up and let me the hell go."

Clarke moves away and begins to walk towards the exit. She feels the swish of the Commander's cloak as she turns to follow her with the sound of her guards following closely.

"Clarke. Please."

Abby's voice is broken.

"I'm sorry. I - it looks terrifying out there. I was worried."

Clarke breathes out and counts to five in old earth Dutch so that she can focus and calm the temper that riddles her heart with animosity towards her mother.

"You know," Clarke says, and her voice is softer, and she looks at Abby with a calm that is unsettling, "you could go out there and talk to people. Learn their names. Find out about their children. Their lives. You'd soon find out that they're not the monsters in this equation."

Abby straightened. Her hands which had been held out towards Clarke slowly lowering to her sides, and she nodded. Her eyes dark as she looked away in thought.
"You're right. We've been hiding away behind these walls thinking that Mount Weather would be like us. That they would be our allies against those who lived here. We've never once thought that we were the invaders. That we were the enemy," Abby said, and she slumped with the sudden knowledge that she'd behaved in a way that would have broken her husband's heart.

He would have been out there marveling at how the people of the Earth had adapted to a harsh environment. He would have been intrigued by the inventions and the engineering.

**

Lexa could feel the tightness in her chest dissipate as she listened to the two women talking. She watched as the tension in Clarke's shoulders slowly seeps out, and finally stood before her mother in a relaxed stance.

The smells in the medical room were starting to cut into her nostrils, and she fought every instinct to run from here. This was Clarke's world, and she wanted to see more of it despite the initial feelings of fear it had brought out in her.

She could see that Clarke was aware of her; sensing her stillness as Clarke and her mother worked out more of their issues.

Lexa could see that Clarke struggled as she wanted to be patient and the level-headed one. It was clear that Clarke was finding the truth that sometimes patience was simply over-rated in times of war.

When Clarke finally looked towards her, Lexa could see how she quickly had to hide the shock she felt when she saw the paleness of both Lexa and her two guards.

Lexa could feel the slight dampening around the edges of her hairline and could see Clarke catching herself from asking if she was alright. Clarke knew better than to ask what was wrong in front of her guards and her mother.

"Come on, Commander. We need to get back to the war tent and discuss tomorrow's strategy."

They had discussed everything that needed to be addressed and the minor details that were left to deal with had to wait for Indra's arrival from Ton DC. But Abby did not know that.

Lexa nodded to Abby with a quietly murmured "Chancellor" before she spun on her heel and followed Clarke from the building.

"Are you alright, Klark? Do you wish for a tent to be set up - "

"No!"

Clarke's voice was desperate as she whispered the word urgently and looked sideways towards Lexa as they stepped past the Arkadians on their way through to the encampment outside the walls.

"God, no."

Clarke repeated less urgently and discreetly touched the side of Lexa's arm.

"All of you looked like you needed to get out of there. The medical bay."

Lexa nodded curtly, her lips were compressed as if she was still trying to keep the Ark air from
entering her mouth and nostrils. The guards at her back didn't look much better with a significant amount of their eyes showing.

Lexa could feel Clarke's gaze as she looked at Lexa carefully, her own eyes flitted around the compound as they walked towards the exit. Lexa could see signs of some kind of celebration for the Arkadians as fire pits dotted the edges of their meeting square.

Lights beamed silver across the mud and dirt, the mess that was the spillage of the Ark's twelve stations coming down one by one as they burst across the sky and onto her lands.

"Clarke! Clarke!"

The group stilled as a young man moved quickly through the pits of cooking meat, and children playing on the edges of everyone's periphery in the dying light.

Lexa watched as Clarke stopped to look at the approaching figure who's face was still in shadow until he was almost upon them.

Lexa was close enough to hear Clarke swear quietly beneath her breath.

"Finn?"

Lexa recognizes the man that has stepped in front of Clarke. She almost slides to a halt in her haste to avoid smashing into him. He is the one who shot at her and Clarke at the site of the bunker. Lexa instinctively steps towards him to protect Clarke, but both her guards have pre-emptively moved between Clarke and the Skai boy who seems to be unnerved by their presence.

"What? Have the Grounders invaded?"

He looks at Clarke and there's a look of soft confusion on his face. He stares at Lexa and he looks like he's trying to remember something about her, but it's evident that he's unable to connect her face with the woman he shot at over a week ago.

"Finn," Clarke says softly and moved toward him carefully.

Lexa watches how Clarke's eyes are darting around towards one of the rooms in the back of the Ark near the medical area they've come from. She suspects that this is where the boy should have been and not outside with the rest of the Arkadians. Her eyes quickly flick around the small square and her eyes catch Raven's who is slowly jogging up towards them.

"Damn! Sorry guys. My bad. He was meant to head to the shower block. I'm sorry, Clarke. He must have seen you."

Raven's voice is strained as she tries to catch her breath. She grimaces at Clarke who is staring daggers at her so she goes onto explain some more. Raven's narrative is not concise but at least it's not her usual rambling.

"One minute Sinclair was getting his meds out and I was going to help him to the shower and the next he was gone. I should have known he'd seen you."

"Clarke," Finn's voice is the quietest of whispers and Lexa's eyes narrow at the way he's looking at Clarke. At her mouth. At her breasts. She leans toward Clarke as if to protect her from his gaze.

"Hey, Finn. I think you need to head back with Raven," Clarke's voice is gentle and she doesn't quite look at him but tries to direct his gaze back to the woman whose heart he keeps breaking.
"But I want to stay with you!"

His voice is so unbearably child-like and Lexa tries to not react to Raven's flinch.

"Come on, buddy," Raven tugs at his arm, and whatever Skai medicine he's been given seems to make him follow Raven with almost no resistance, but his eyes never leave Clarke's.

Clarke lets out a slow breath and looks at Lexa in apology.

"I'm sorry, Lexa."

Lexa shakes her and looks back at where Finn disappeared before returning her gaze to Clarke's.

Clarke has a steadiness to her which Lexa cannot help but gravitate towards as there are so few people in her own life that have the same kind of steel as she does to deal with the choices she has to make each day.

She knows that Clarke needs to get away from this environment and that it holds more ghosts than memories.

The tension between Clarke and her mother makes Lexa's heart beat harder for Clarke and she just wants to take her into her arms, and keep her close and safe.

An idea that terrifies her.

Surely this is not possible given the amount of time they have know each other. And the feelings that rose in her when that Skai boy looked at Clarke - she is not used to such untrammeled jealousy to pin her in her steps, and stop her breathing. She does not remember feeling like this with Costia. Not until the end.

She is broken from her thoughts when she realizes they're at the entrance to her tent and Clarke is standing nervously beside her. Clarke is looking at her as if she has a thousand questions when in reality there is only one which she looks terrified to speak of.

Lexa has no qualms.

"Will you join me?"

She covers the smile that threatens to spill across her face as Clarke's lights up with relief. Lexa moves from her and looks towards her guards for that day, Ryder and Durham both of whom have been in her security for several years now. Durham since her ascension and Ryder not soon after Costia had come to Polis. They've both been by her side and so she does not see the look on Ryder's face when Clarke follows her into her tent.

"Klark."

Lexa's voice is low. Husky. She sees the effect it has on Clarke whose blue eyes darken and her lips part slightly.

She moves forward into the tent until they're well past the war room which has mostly been dismantled. The long wooden benches that had been set up during the day have been removed and Lexa has her own space again.

Shadows flicker in the corner as candles and small torches burn softly in the darker parts of the tent. She feels a terrible need pull through her limbs and her stomach, and she turns slowly to look
"Klark."

Her voice is soft and a hundred thoughts about this young woman before her create an unbearable ache inside. She does not want to feel this. This need. This want that almost cripples her. She looks towards dark, deep blue eyes. Eyes that are staring at her and there's confusion in them.

Wonder.

"What is it?" Lexa's voice is paper thin.

Clarke moves forward right into her space and she can smell the remnants of the medical bay of the Ark on Clarke's clothes, but beneath that awful scent of death is Clarke's smell.

Honey. Golden sunlight. Something fresh like the linens on her beds in Polis when they've been freshly laid on her bed. Clarke's smell is something she cannot define but she knows that it makes her hunger in a way she does not understand about herself.

Lexa does not know what is wrong with her. She only knows that she wants Clarke's skin against hers and she wants to swallow and take in her breath into her own mouth. She wants to feel Clarke's tongue against hers. Some of this must reflect on her face as Clarke's eyes darken as she takes in Lexa's open stare.

"What do you want?"

Clarke's voice is soft and is full of her own desire and Lexa can see how she stares at her lips. Lexa takes her bottom lip between her teeth before gently moving the tip of her tongue across it.

"You."

Lexa's voice cracks in the darkness of her tent. The day has been long. She has seen Clarke rise above everything and everyone around her.

She's almost lost herself a few times as her stomach twisted, and her heartbeat got caught causing a terrifying dizziness whenever the younger woman's voice, husky and rough at times, spoke over her warriors and the Arcadians who tried to stop her from speaking. She never let anyone over-ride her speech. A simple sentence or a long look was all it took for Clarke to persuade those who would speak against her into understanding.

Lexa had felt her heart leap over and over. With wonder. Surprise.

She sees the look of astonishment on Clarke's face at her single word. Lexa reaches out and traces along Clarke's cheekbones, the line of her jaw and the jutting of her lower lip.

The moment is full of their want. Quiet puffs of breath as they stare into one another's eyes. Lexa can feel the pooling of her need and desire between her legs and wants to pull Clarke down. Down to her knees. She wants to see Clarke's eyes looking up at her choking with her need as she takes Lexa into her mouth. But instead, Clarke's eyes are still.

Watching. Waiting.

"Stay the night with me, Klark. We go to war in the next few days. Both your people and mine will need us. Tonight," she swallows at the look of shyness that seems to be suffusing Clarke's face at her words, "I need you. Please, Klark. "
Lexa knows what sort of effect her words have on the woman before her as she watches the deep blue of those eyes darken. She watches with a lazy smile as Clarke moves forward and slowly pushes her back into that part of her tent shrouded in shadows, and where Lexa's bed of furs sits surrounded by the muted light of candles encased in metal and glass.

She can feel how her body reacts to the determination she sees in those eyes now obscured by thick black lashes as Clarke begins to remove Lexa's outer garments.

She feels the heavy thud of her pauldron as it hits the floor, the not so gentle tugs as Clarke removes the light armor she has worn to meet the people of Arcadia. Hardened leather that is more for show than protection although its thick membrane will keep her body safe against many different blades.

Her mouth dries instantly when Clarke drops to her knees after pushing Lexa back onto her bed. She feels the softness of the Pauna fur beneath her and watches Clarke who removes one boot after another from her feet and then pulls down the tempered cotton fabric of her trousers.

Lexa smiles as she watches Clarke struggle with the buckles and fastenings of her clothes. They are so different from what Skaikru wear. The stitching and bindings of her people's clothing are so dissimilar to those of the Arcadians.

Clarke's clothes have plastic zips manufactured by machines whilst the clothes of her people are made by the Lake People who are skilled in the art of fabrics, and clasps and each Clan have their own people to help create new clothes to protect their people. Styled to fit each unique environment.

She groans softly when she hears the small inhalation Clarke makes when she breathes in the scent of Lexa's arousal after Clarke removes the dark undershorts that Lexa is wearing.

Lexa moves backward onto her bed and removes the shirt from her body. She can feel her bed move as Clarke shifts to sit beside her. She can feel how Clarke's breathing changes. Short, sharp gasps as she quickly removes her own clothes and then there is the collision of two slim, sleek bodies.

The tightness of the day that had left a slow, dull throbbing pain behind her eyes has gone and all she wants to do is see Clarke. To touch her with fingertips that ache to feel the depths and crevasses of her body.

Lexa can feel something at the back of her mind that gives her pause.

Feelings that rush and overwhelm, and she remembers Titus' words that love weakens the fabric of strength that every Commander must have. Iron resolve for the people.

She pulls Clarke towards her and the ache inside her belly feels almost unbearable. She does not know what this is. This urgency. It does not compare to any feelings she's had before.

The giddiness she'd felt when coming together with Costia is not the same. She is no longer that younger version of the Commander. She pulls Clarke up against her own breasts and groans as she feels taut nipples press against her own.

"You were so strong today," Lexa whispers against Clarke's ear, and she can feel the shudder that moves through Clarke's body in response to those words.

"Let me bring you to your knees, Klark. Let me take you so you do not have to bear the burden of your people right now."
She feels the soft whimper Clarke makes as she knows exactly what this will mean.

Lexa leans backward until she's falling and pulls Clarke on top of her. She wraps her legs around Clarke's waist and draws her tight against her own center. They both cry out at the feel of heat. Wetness. Bodies slick and ready. Lexa thrust upwards and Clarke cries out as Lexa weaves her long fingers through the thick blonde waves that cascade around Clarke's face.

She senses that Clarke wants her closer. Closer. Deep inside of her, and Lexa holds Clarke's gaze as she tugs her face toward her own. Lips brush and there is the softness of breath against her lips that sends her stomach twisting with need. Again. Each time it happens she can feel the flow of want accumulate between her legs.

She pulls Clarke's lips onto her own and kisses her. Clarke's tongue pushes deep into her mouth and she groans as she opens up to her as fully as Clarke has done. Swallowing her every breath and groan. Clarke feels indescribably lascivious as she kisses and moves against Lexa's tongue. It is dirty and wet with need as they thrust and move against each other.

"Lexa."

Clarke's voice sounds like it has been captured in a tight whorl of breathlessness and lust.

Lexa can hear the cry, that sound Clarke makes deep below her throat. It is partly whimper and part long breath of want.

Lexa moves her hand down Clarke's back which is so incredibly smooth. The skin has none of the blemishes and scars that mark her own. Clarke's skin is of the sky and infinite space. Her fingertips trace the edges of Clarke's spine and move towards the curve of Clarke's backside.

She pulls her closer with a strong grip and Clarke's corresponding groan makes her cry out Clarke's name in between profanities in her own language.

The tightness that has been growing between them all day explodes.

The silent glances and the gentle tilt of an eyebrow the only signals that they gave each other.

Clarke's breathlessness had been noticed a few times when she'd been explaining how they would enter the mountain. Lexa had smirked inside, the power glorious as she saw how quickly Clarke responded to a simple look.

She pulled Clarke onto her naked skin and gloried in the soft mewl that escaped Clarke's throat as she lifted her own hips to push against her again and again. She can feel Clarke's fingers moving against her breasts and sides constantly pulling Lexa ever closer. Lexa can feel something inside her breaking.

Years of being the Commander has become a forgotten paradigm. The week they had spent together in the bunker had allowed her to lose everything in that moment - believing that she would never see the young Sky warrior again.

And here she was. Devouring her and drinking from her as if her thirst could never be slaked. The aching in her permeated everything, and Lexa suddenly and absolutely realized that she was falling in love with Clarke.

The moment of clarity almost made her miss Clarke's next words.

"You said you would bring me to my knees."
Clarke's voice was deeper than normal and the roughness in her throat made Lexa's stomach tilt.

"And then what? What would you do to me?"

Lexa smiled.

"Then I would make you take me into your mouth, Klark. You would drink of me until I said stop."

Lexa pitched her voice to the low, growl of the Commander and she watched as Clarke's mouth opened slightly - her breathing getting faster and more erratic. Deep blue eyes looked down towards her own and she could see that Clarke was close to exploding against her thigh.

She tightened her grip on the muscles of Clarke's backside and pulled her against it and groaned at Clarke's shuddering.

"You will not release, Klark. Not until I give you permission."

Lexa felt her heartbeat increase against her chest as she watched Clarke swallow and her eyes looked imploringly at her.

"Please, Commander."

Lexa almost came undone at the soft plaintive whisper. Instead, she moved Clarke until she is on her back and shifts her own body on the bed till her center is poised over Clarke's mouth. She moves so that it is she who is kneeling before Clarke, and her wetness grazes Clarke's lips.

"Take me into your mouth, Klark. Feed from me. Make me come for you."

Lexa's voice holds the ache that they have both contained throughout the day but it is Clarke who cries out, and it is loud enough that anyone walking past or the guards outside Lexa's tent - could hear.

"Fuck me, Klark. Fuck me with that beautiful mouth of yours. Swallow me."

Lexa voice breaks as Clarke reaches up with soft lips to kiss the wetness that has gathered at her center. She rocks her hips and smears herself across Clarke's face, on her chin and jawline, and pushes herself into Clarke's mouth. She twisted her body before pulling her hands through her hair and arching backward, the muscles of her abdomen taut in the flickering light.

Clarke takes her in greedily. Her mouth parts as much as she can, and Clarke is noisy in the way she sucks and kisses Lexa there. Her tongue is clever and wicked as she traces the outline of Lexa's sheathed flesh, and pulls the hardening nub into her mouth.

Lexa throws her head back and glories in the way Clarke abases herself for her. She moves her hips faster and faster forcing Clarke to swallow and thrust and suck until she's so wet and slippery. Lexa feels like she's going to explode.

"Your fingers, Klark. I want your fingers."

Lexa grunts as two long fingers press inside of her twisting to find that spot, pushing deeper into her, and she lifts up so that Clarke can press an additional finger inside. She is stretched tight, filled with a burn that is impossible to contain and cannot help the cries of Clarke's name mixed in with the worst expletives she knows in her own language.

She feels Clarke's groans beneath her flesh at the colorful words of Trigadesleng.
Clarke is slamming her fingers hard against her entrance, her mouth hungry to swallow up as much of the Commander as she can, and soon Lexa is coming with a loud, strangled cry.

She cannot think. There is only Clarke who continues to fuck her hard as she comes down from the absolute destruction of her body. Clarke holds her hips still and cleans her softly with the gentlest lapping of her tongue, slowly bringing her down and unabashedly moving Lexa over her mouth and face.

"Fuck, Klark."

She looks down into pools of deep indigo as she slowly lifts up and moves from Clarke's mouth which shines.

The remnants of Lexa's desire are silvered streaks of evidence tracked across Clarke's flushed face. Lexa shudders as her orgasm assails her body, and she moans softly at each wave that passes through her. Clarke stares at her with such wonder in her eyes and Lexa wants to tell her to not put her feelings so visibly on display.

But she knows she cannot rebuke Clarke as she is uncertain of what her own face holds. Certainly none of the lessons she's learned from Titus over the years.

"God, Lexa. You are so God damn beautiful when you come," Clarke whispers, and her eyes are huge as they look up at Lexa.

Long fingers trace the edges of Clarke's lips, and Lexa moves closer before bending down and delicately licking her essence from Clarke's face. She tastes herself, and it is exquisitely mixed in with the scent and flavor of Clarke's skin.

"Klark. I am going to take you now. And you are going to let me do what I want to your body."

Lexa's voice is soft against Clarke's ear, and she can feel the increase of Clarke's pulse against her lips, hears the sudden hitch in her breathing.

She traces Clarke's ribs with hands that imply restrained strength, stroking upwards before cupping a full breast and pinching a softy, rosy nipple that quickly hardens beneath the tightening squeeze of her fingertips.

She hears Clarke's gasp when she bends and takes it into her mouth sucking hard and biting enough to cause a little pain. Clarke's hips involuntarily thrust upwards and the sound she makes - a soft cry that ends in a choked sob makes her own center spasm again.

Fuck.

This girl with her unbearably blue eyes and full, wide smile. She wants her in the worst possible way and wishes - laments even - that she's left the leather cock in its wooden box hidden deep in her rooms in Polis when she wants it now. Strapped to her hips and ready to penetrate Clarke who has spread her legs wide before her. She needs to be Clarke's Commander right now, but it takes everything inside of her not to weep quietly against the softness of Clarke's mouth.

"You are ready for me, Klark."

The question is rhetorical as she can see the glistening of Clarke's slit where the proof of her ministrations is exquisitely displayed.
Clarke's eyes are dazed, and she stares at Lexa for a moment unable to speak, her breathing coming out in soft, erratic bursts of air that brushes against Lexa's lips.

"I asked you a question, Klark."

She lowers her voice to a growl and watches as Clarke's dark lashes flutter for a moment before she is able to answer.

"Yes. Beja, Heda. I need you. Please."

And Clarke breaks as Lexa slides her long fingers into the warmed heat of her body. She is so wet that Lexa feels no resistance to her entry. She slides out before pushing a third finger into her and then begins a torturous and steady push into Clarke.

She's gentle at first and Clarke whimpers. Wanting more. She can see it in Clarke's eyes, but Clarke is subject to her will and waits for when the Commander is ready to take whatever she wants from her.

And she does.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone,
I am so sorry that my daily writing dwindled down to almost nothing for a while. It was hard to get back into character and the storyline. I do have an outline but sometimes these characters go off on tangents I had not predicted. It took a bit of time to get back into the headspace of this story. There are so many plot lines and bits and pieces I have to resolve. Argh. Why did I do this to myself?

All comments and feedback are still deeply appreciated. Any thoughts or ideas or comments where you see glaring plot holes - please tell me and I will go back and fill them up. ;-) I've done a few already in terms of timelines and dates.

Anyway. Till the next update. Much love to you all.
derthecovers
Smiling Faces Sometimes Lie

Chapter Summary

Plot moves along in this chapter. We find out who betrayed Lexa to the mountain, and others find out who's been chatting on the radio. Abby has a soft moment with old friends.

Chapter Notes

It is almost exactly one year since I posted the first chapter to this story. Seriously, what a year I've just had. I am hoping 2019 gives me more time to focus on this which I still love sitting down to write. I always want to see what these guys are up to.

My apologies for the delays in posting. Big thank you to those of you who left ideas and tips on how to keep going with the writing. I hope you enjoy this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His heartbeat is hammering through his chest, but nothing on his face betrays him.

His steel blue eyes are continually moving around the camp, and his limbs are in the relaxed stance of all guards who are poised for action at any given moment.

He can see Durham's lean body a few yards further from the entrance of the Commander's tent while he takes in the outer periphery. It is a good thing he's a little further away. Even from here, the sounds of the Commander's voice has penetrated the constant murmur and sounds of the encampment.

Her singular cry can be heard by all the guards around her tent over the hundreds of muted voices, the clank of metal pots as stews are slowly stirred, and the burst of raucous laughter when warriors come together and brag about their prowess on the field.

He shifts his stance so that he can quickly look over the quadrant facing the ships of the invaders. The Sky people. The ones who have destroyed everything. All their plans. All their dreams.

He feels the tightness of his jaw and forces himself to relax it so that no-one can see his emotions. The flare of resentment burns through his chest, and he hates it that he must do this to save his people.

Being here, in and amongst them. The oppressors of his people. This is something that has become harder and harder for him to believe in.

Trikru are his friends now. Family. Lovers. And the Commander is a leader he cannot comprehend. Not when he thinks of the world he was born into and the goals that have been set into his mind since infancy. He thinks of Costia's father whose leadership is so unlike Heda, and a part of him wonders what the world could look like if he had made a different choice.
And Costia. What is she doing? The fate of everyone hangs on how she can influence the Commander. And it was apparent in the day's gatherings that what she is interested in is only to keep the Commander and the Skai leader apart.

He almost scoffs out loud but manages to contain himself at the last minute turning his body around so that he can see anyone approaching. The camp is quietly getting on with the evening meal and preparations for war.

His stomach tightens at the thought of the battle lines that have been drawn between these people he has come to know, and those of his family in the mountain.

He feels a stab of guilt at the thought. It is his fault that Costia had to seduce the sister. It had been his idea to disrupt the relationship between the sisters and cause the Kongeda to fall apart.

Except it did not. Lexa had become a woman of stone. Intent to crush the mountain no matter what the cost and determined more than ever to make the twelve warring clans one.

If he had not voiced the plan to Costia's father - none of this would be happening now. He pressed his lips tight and bit the insides of his cheeks, and expels a breath of angry air when he sees Costia approaching him in the growing darkness.

Her eyebrows are drawn together in what seems to be her habitual scowl these days. Her mouth is pulled down into an angry frown as she tries to push past him and towards the Commander's tent.

His hand shoots out, and Costia almost stumbles to the ground at the speed he has stopped her. He can hear her low growl as she turns towards him.

"What do you think you are doing?" Costia's voice is a low, guttural hiss.

"You are not permitted beyond this boundary."

Ryder's voice is soft as his eyes continue to look around him and he does not let her go, his long, lean fingers grip her arm despite her struggle to be released. He can see in his periphery that Durham has noticed their scuffle and is on high alert. The man has already moved forward to alert the guard closer to the tent's entry.

"I am not permitted?" Costia says.

The venom drips from her in the way she looks at him up and down, and the contempt she throws at him makes him flinch but he refuses to hide from her gaze.

"You are not," Ryder confirms.

"And you would dare prevent me?"

She pushes him, but he sidesteps her and draws to his full height before placing a restraining hand against her shoulder.

"Costia, what are you doing?" he asks and the urgency in his whisper is enough to make her pause. "Your father will kill you if he knows how you are antagonizing the Sky girl."

She must see something in his eyes because the determination to get past him and to the Commander seems to leave her body. Her shoulders drop, and her eyes stop darting towards the tent and begin to focus on him. On his steady blue eyes and dark blonde hair that has been pulled back into sharp lines against the side of his head. The ink on his skin that claim him to be Trikru.
"What am I doing?" she repeats, and for a moment her voice is raw.

The torment of the choices she's had to make no longer suppurates in the tight coil inside her - instead it slowly bleeds out between them as she looks into his eyes. They are full of torment, and he hates himself for being the cause of this.

"Costia. I am sorry. I did not know he would -"

"Enough, Ryder. It is too late, and we are where we need to be. Just like you did your job telling my father about the Commander's plans for the mountain. Just like you told him what a fucking wonderful idea it was for me to break up with Lexa and bed her sister. And here we fucking are, Ryder. You still get to see her -"

Costia's voice broke, and he could see the glassiness of her eyes. He knows what he's done. And this woman whom he's loved since they were sent out into the sun when they were only twelve years old - is wretched with despair.

Ryder knows what he's done, and he knows that he must do more if his family can come out into the world safe from harm. Safe from the sun. Safe from Dante Wallace who would kill his mother at the first sign of betrayal.

"We must do what we can to survive, Costia. The Commander grows suspicious of your behavior."

"Should there not be more than just survival? Ryder - he hates so much," Costia's voice is barely audible now, and he watches as she struggles to breathe. "He does not know them as we do. He hates blindly, and he wants everyone to hate them blindly when we could all walk this earth. Share. Grow."

They both know that he will never, never let the Commander live and share power equally. It is President Wallace's world or no world at all. And in that world, the Commander does not exist.

Ryder lets out a long, low sigh although his body is still tight with tension, and his eyes continue to scour the space around them ensuring that they're alone when he sees another figure in the distance slowly approaching them.

Costia stills and does not turn to look behind them. She doesn't have to turn to see who approaches them. Costia knows exactly who is always never too far behind her.

***

The fading light across the camp fills Nia with a strange sense of home. It reminds her of those long nights across the Azgedan tundra with her mother.

Hunting and camping with a small group of warriors along the ice with their skates made of leather and iron, and the fire pits that would line the banks of the frozen rivers.

She inhales deeply of the scents of the forest and fire that surrounds her and feels a strange melancholy fill her heart. She thinks of her sister. Of Lexa. Of how much she hurt her and her insides ache. She doesn't know how to heal this rift - this chasm between them.

Nia looks up when she hears the soft humming of an ancient Trikru lullaby nearby. It is one she recognizes as it is the same tune that Lexa would sing herself to sleep as a child in their rooms in the palace. The song would always be punctuated by Lexa's soft, little sobs that tore at Nia's heart. She had been able to see so much of herself in Lexa then, and while Nia had no-one to save her, she'd sworn to keep her little sister safe.
And look at what she has gone and done. With Costia. May the spirits send her some sense but why the hell had she done such a thing?

To this day she's still tormented by the idea that she would have lost herself so much that she would bed Costia in Lexa's rooms. The night is still a blur. The snap of wood burning brings her back to her surroundings, and she sees that she is not that far from Lexa's tent. She wonders if she would be welcomed if she visited. Clarke seems to have softened her sister somewhat.

As she gets closer to Lexa's tent, she can see the guards posted strategically around it. None too close. Far enough to afford privacy but close enough to come to her aid should it be needed. In the distance, she can see that one of the guards is preventing someone from getting closer to the tent. From the language of their bodies silhouetted in the light from the fires, it seems that they're arguing.

She knows that figure anywhere. Costia. Again. Trying to get to Lexa.

Nia sighs and feels a pain festering in her stomach. Costia has been distant for some time, and her behavior since they returned to Polis has been confusing. Her hatred of Clarke is also bewildering. There should be no jealousy there, no? There should be relief that Lexa has found someone now and they can be a little more at ease despite what they had done. No?

Nia watches and notices that it is the same guard she has seen Costia with at Polis. This will be the third time that she has seen Costia with this man. Her stomach plummets, but she also feels a sense of release. If Costia wishes to know this man, then that means her heart is not still with Lexa's.

Nia looks at them, and it is obvious they've noticed her approach as they've both stilled and Costia has stepped back although the guard still seems to be preventing her from moving towards her sister's tent.

She is almost upon them when there is a sound that travels across from the Commander's tent. "Beja!"

It is Clarke's voice, and it is filled with such sexual need that Nia feels her face flush at the idea of what her sister could be doing at that moment. It is not a thought she wants in her head, so she laughs as she approaches the two before her.

"It seems that my sister is indisposed this evening," she says softly and smiles at the young Trikru warrior who has stopped Costia from intruding on Lexa's time alone. She turns to Costia who is trying to grin, but Nia knows her well enough to know that the smile is a struggle.

"I did not realize that Clarke was learning Trigadesleng," Nia commented again as she watched the tension ratcheting upward on Costia's face. Her gaze flicked over to the guard - Lexa's private warrior. Trikru, looking at his markings, and she was a little shocked at the intense glare he was giving Costia. It was as if he was trying to - prevent her from speaking.

"What is it?" Nia asked, her eyes narrowing as she moved her gaze between the two whose bodies were taut with tension.

"It is nothing, my Kwin," Costia finally responded her slate gray eyes moving towards Nia. The guard's body seemed to relax a little more as if he'd won some unseen battle.

"Your consort," the guard's blue eyes flicked over to Nia before resting on Costia's form, "was trying to get past me to the Commander. As you can see. She is not welcoming visitors. At this moment."
The guard's voice was gruff, and his sentences came in short, sharp bursts. Nia noticed the sweat on his brow which was worrying as the evening was cold for these southerners. Nia did not like or understand the way his eyes kept flicking to Costia.

She most notably did not like the way his lips had compressed into a thin line of frustration. Something was going on here, but she could not for the life of her fathom out what it could be.

Costia smirked as she looked back at Nia and then the guard.

"Looks like the Sky girl is enjoying the Commander's skills. I'm glad to see Clarke is reaping the benefits of my teaching."

Her words are meant to wound, but Nia is not sure that Costia knows who it is she expected to hurt. The pain in her midriff would certainly attest that the woman has landed a blow.

"Oh?"

Nia feels a rage burst through her. She hates her as much as she loves her at this moment.

"I would not have known that from your skills in our bed."

She sees both the guard and Costia's eyes widen at her sharp retort. She does not wish to take them back. These words that have spilled from her mouth. She wants to see if Costia is as hurt as she is and by the blank look on her lover's face, Nia comes to understand something very clearly.

Costia does not love her. Costia sees her as a means to an end, but what that end is, she does not know.

She can see the guard step backward as if he's trying to decipher what to do next, so she saves him the trouble.

"I am retiring for the night. Costia, do not disturb me so please go and use our warrior's tent for your accommodation."

Her words are without inflection or emotion and the look she gives the guard is almost bored.

"And please do not disturb my sister. Whatever inclination you have to make amends - be assured that there is no recourse there. My sister is done with you."

She sees the flare of temper in Costia's eyes before she hides it behind her natural imperviousness. What is left unsaid, Nia hopes that her body speaks loud enough for Costia to hear. And the way she stares at Costia, she hopes her gaze will convey to the other woman that Nia is not far behind her sister in removing herself from the circle of pain that this woman has caused.

"Nia - I," Costia starts to speak, and the deep gray eyes hold such a melancholy within them that Nia is startled for a moment, but she remembers how Costia has been behaving all day. With her, with Clarke, and always with Lexa. Staring when she thinks no-one is looking.

Nia did not survive her mother's upbringing without learning how to be observant.

And so she shook her head and raised her hand before Costia could continue.

"Enough. Sleep. We go to war all too soon. I will see you in the morning," Nia says, and her voice is gentle despite the anger she feels settling hard in her stomach.
She watches closely as her lover walks away in the dark, the light of fires and torches illuminating a pathway for her towards the Azgedan main tent where many of her warriors will sleep this evening.

She sighed and then looked at the guard who was now standing even taller than before. She knows he knows Costia despite him being from Trikru.

Maybe when they lived in Polis, they got to know one another. Nia knows that Costia is like herself, taking lovers of either sex as they both have a healthy appetite. Had. She'd had one until Costia who had swept her off her feet and took the breath from her lungs. And now shattering it with a simple look, the distance in her eyes all too clear.

"Guard her well, Ryder," Nia finally says before turning on her boot and moving towards her own tent not far behind her sister's, and the other leaders of the twelve clans. She smiles to herself at the look of shock on his face when he realizes that she knows exactly who he is.

***

Bellamy Blake hated waiting. He hated this feeling of disconnection that had begun to fill him since Octavia had met the savage and gone to live with the Grounders.

A part of him knew he was completely irrational, but he didn't seem to know how to stop the rage that filled his bones and stoppered his breath whenever he saw one of them.

He could still feel the betrayal that had sliced through him when he found out about Octavia. She hadn't even told him. Bellamy's eyes still lived with the image of her lying beneath that brute, his own gun flying out, Octavia's screams for him to stop, and the rigidity of Clarke's fingers on his gun hand pulling it down and away from the two bodies that were intertwined. He couldn't see where his sister began and where that man finished.

He breathed out slowly. Clarke had reasoned with him. And it had been almost impossible to not want to throw her aside and lunge forward and kill Lincoln with his bare hands.

Except he knew that without his gun, Lincoln would have had him on his ass in seconds. And that fact made him even more furious. They had no chance against these monsters who were twice their size and so physically attuned to this world. A world that they were still struggling to come to grips with. It wasn't fair. They just needed a little more time. Time to grow into their bodies and adapt to the earth that had changed so much since the last great war. Since the Ark was built. Since they had left the planet behind.

He walked out of the gates and out towards the fields where the Grounders had camped. He didn't know why it just seemed that was where his feet wanted to take him.

It didn't matter. In that, Bellamy completely understood Clarke's need to get away from the restricting confines of the Ark.

It was better before the rest of the Ark had come down. They were slowly coming into their own. Learning to be themselves. Shit yes, he'd made mistakes. Things he regretted the moment he'd made the decision to do it. Like walking to Mount Weather and almost losing Jasper to a spear through his chest. That was when everyone realized just how vital Clarke Griffin was with her medical knowledge and her unflappable exterior.

With everyone screaming around her she'd roared them into silence and got them to move Jasper carefully without moving that God awful protrusion sticking out of his body.
Bellamy had been shaken, and most of the group that had been with them had promptly thrown up at the disaster that was Jasper's body where parts of his insides threatened to spill out. Clarke had meticulously cut Jasper's shirt away all the while through his screams that were both shocking and terrifying. Clarke had looked up with those blue eyes of hers and had breathed easier saying that none of his vital organs had been pierced.

Clarke who was the smartest of them all with her medical knowledge and a mind that could see through the mess, and get them to construct an order from the chaos around them - her quiet steadfastness had become a comfort.

She'd known from the moment they landed that they needed to create a bastion of safety, and she knew they couldn't rely on the Dropship. It wasn't on higher ground, she'd said. There was no way to stop them from getting dysentery and no way for them to access running water without having to tramp several miles to the nearest river. We need a better place, she'd said. So they had tracked across the valley towards the base of Mount Weather. Where they had found guns. Rifles, pistols and other ancient relics of war.

The weaponry had seemed useless to them as they'd only ever known electrical and laser guns on the Ark. Anything with ballistics was not possible due to the dangers of ricocheting and the potential mayhem that would cause.

Bellamy knew guns from all of the history streams he'd watched with Octavia whenever he could sneak in a tablet, and he knew that they were useless without bullets. And that's when the world changed after they found the ammunition crates. They hadn't been able to see an entry into the mountain, but they had found something way more valuable.

A way to protect themselves against the savages with their arrows, and spears, and swords, and heart-wrenching cries of war. War cries that his sister has become adept at.

He hates the distance with Octavia. Hates that he's brought this on himself.

It's because he's staring at his standard security issued boots that he doesn't see the figure ahead of him, and if not for the hands that thrust out towards him grabbing him by the elbow, he would have stumbled onto his ass.

"You need to be careful where you step in the dark, Skai boy," a low voice growls out.

Bellamy flinches when he realizes it's a Grounder woman that he's crashed into. He looks up in embarrassment and catches his breath at the sight of the woman before him.

Her long white-blond hair is braided tight and pulled up high on the back of her head. Her skin is fair, and he swallows hard at the sharply defined full lips of her mouth which have pulled into a sardonic grin as she watches him stare at her stupidly.

He bristles because it's almost second nature now and pushes her grip from him. He's acutely aware that she only let's go when she wants to, and not from any strength or skill on his part.

"Are you threatening me?" his voice is a growl and it hides the irritation and fear that he's trying to keep to himself.

The woman laughs, and it's a beautiful husky sound that makes everything in him tighten. Fuck. He needs to get laid.

"Why?" she taunts him and the most beautiful blue-green eyes he's ever seen look across at him.
Bellamy notices that they're almost the same height and that her eyes have narrowed at him as she smirks.

"Would you like me to?"

He's unable to speak for several seconds as his mouth opens and closes at her forwardness. Her accent is strange and very different from Lincoln and the Commander. He takes a step back and lets her pass.

"Why don't you just get on your way, and I'll get on mine?"

He watches her as she shrugs nonchalantly.

"I do not think so, Skai boy. Now you have piqued my interest. I want to see where you are going. Do you intend harm to my people?"

Her eyes scan his body for guns he presumes, and he rolls his eyes.

"With what? It's not as if I can wrestle with anyone here and not get my neck broken."

Bellamy scoffed and started walking away. He growled when he could feel her following him closely.

"That is true, Skai boy. At least you understand your limitations. I could have you down in less time than it takes for the wind to pass through the trees, no?"

The woman's irritating voice was unbelievably close to his ear, and he spun around walking backward, hoping to hell that he wouldn't trip over anything. They were getting close to the forest, and he could see that neither of them had any weapons.

Maybe. Who knew with these Grounders. Perhaps this one had a blade tucked in one of those knee-high boots or in that thick mane of hair. Bellamy still had his radio which he'd turned off, scared that the hiss and pop would alert the camp outside to his presence. He was glad of it now tucked in the back of his trousers.

"Yeah right. You may be a Grounder, but I'm still twice as heavy as you which means I could probably just sit on you and you'd be -"

He stopped at the sudden burst of low laughter and glowered at the woman who was still standing before him.

"You don't need to follow me."

Bellamy could feel his frustration reflected in the tone of his voice which only worsened when the woman's eyes lit up with mischief.

"I am not going to hurt your people. Or cause anyone harm. I'm not doing anything. Ok? So just leave me the hell alone."

The woman leaned toward him and smiled in a way that made his stomach curdle a little in fear.

"Oh, I would not say you are doing nothing. You are out here walking in the dark, no? That looks untoward on the eve of a war that you looked like you did not wish to participate in."

He could tell she was goading him and he could feel his heart beating with nerves. The rage he usually felt around the enemy seemed to have fled him since he'd looked onto a face that was
partially hidden by the dark and the grounder warrior's thick dark cloak that enveloped her, but he'd seen enough to feel a visceral response to the woman's physical beauty.

Bellamy huffed with impatience, and the belligerence he initially felt seems to have disappeared. This game of cat and mouse they were playing suddenly pulling him out of his natural inclination to shoot first and ask questions later.

"I don't believe the Mountain is the enemy," he finally responded to her previous statement.

"Meaning we are?"

He shrugged. The implication was apparent between the two that if the cap fits, then they need not look any further.

He could see the look of surprise on her face as she took a slow step backward to carefully look at him.

"You were the one that they took the faya gun from," she finally said.

His mouth tightened at the memory.

"You were there?"

His brow furrowed as he didn't remember her and with a face like that he'd absolutely remember.

The woman shook her head.

"My general told me of everything that took place at the meeting with your leaders, and the Commander and her generals."

Her gaze was steady and now she looked at him with true suspicion in her eyes. He licked his lips which had become dry with the contained restraint he could see in her coiled body. Her mouth had twisted from amusement into a stern line of anger.

He raised his hands to placate her.

"Hey, I'm sure you'd be pretty unimpressed if a few hundred of your enemy was suddenly parked outside your home," Bellamy said and the sharpness was back in his tone.

"And why are we the enemy?"

He could tell that she wasn't going to let him off the hook on this one.

"Because you've been killing us since we landed."

She shrugged as if that were of no consequence and then turned to look around at the land that surrounded them.

"This. All of this that you see. None of this belongs to you and yet here you are; your people running around as if this land is yours. It is not. It belongs to my sister. And to the people of Trikru, yes?"

The woman's voice had not increased in volume, but the tempo and the contained anger in her voice warned him to tread carefully. She had moved forward into his space, and he reflexively stepped back away from her.
"Your general?" Bellamy looked at her in confusion as her words finally made it through his thick head.

"I assume that this means you do not know who I am," her voice is soft but no less threatening than the body that seems coiled and ready to spring at him.

Bellamy can feel the dryness of his throat as he tries to swallow down the fear that creeps into his stomach. She's beautiful with that white blonde hair, and he can't quite make out the color of her eyes as one minute they are the color of the Aegean sea how he imagines Homer saw it, or they're the color of ice and snow.

Beneath that beauty, he can now see the deadliness to the lines of her body, the structural perfection of her face notwithstanding, is now frighteningly close to his own and they can both hear the unsteadiness of the breath that he takes.

"I don't know who you are. I only know you're a Grounder. You're one of the many people who has killed mine."

"You are mistaken, boy. I have not killed any of your people. Yet. And we are not the enemy that is picking off your people and mine, one by one. This you would know if you were paying attention and not stupidly hanging onto your prejudice."

Bellamy moved forward ready to argue with her when her arm shot out to restrain him. The sounds of boots running across the dead leaves of the forest floor are clear to both of them.

He watched as she raised her finger to her lips, and he nodded quietly. They both turned to follow whoever had been racing from the camp. He bristled at first when the woman pushed him behind him but decided to follow instead of arguing.

It was dark. It was late, and Bellamy didn't know what they were chasing or what they were getting into. Better he is by the side of a Grounder leader with more skills with fighting than him. He was angry with this world, but he wasn't stupid.

He trailed her, eyes trained on the back of suede leggings, and dark leather boots as he tried not to stumble over the beginnings of the forest floor.

They'd stopped after following the person who'd run through the wall of trees when all sounds seemed to still. He could see that the Grounder woman was barely breathing while he surreptitiously tried to get his breathing back under control.

She'd looked over at him uncertainly, and he could see the train of thought in her eyes. Was it a trap? Was she about to be killed by another Sky person? He shook his head quickly, and there must have been something on his face as her whole body relaxed before turning around again to creep forward.

In the darkness, he could barely see anything. Just the outline of the woman in front of him, her profile perfect against the ambient light emanating from the trees and stones surrounding them. He could smell the campfires from here, and the voices from the Grounders seemed so far away.

He felt a twinge of anxiety as he realized how exposed they both were when he heard the unmistakable sound of a radio hissing as it changed from one channel to another.

He reached out to the Grounder, and this time it was he who placed his fingers against lips to indicate extreme quiet and caution. The woman rolled her eyes, and he squirmed when he grasped that she more than understood the situation they were in.
They both heard the sound of a voice coming through the radio and the response from nearby. It was the sound of a woman's voice, soft and quiet as she quickly relayed information over the radio.

He couldn't hear anything as they were still too far to decipher anything. He wanted to creep closer, but the woman beside him had stiffened, and he looked over to see that her eyes were wide with shock, then confusion before everything in her body was transformed to a bright red fury that made her mouth twist to a snarl as she rose to her full height.

"Wait!" Bellamy hissed softly and tried to pull her back. The woman stilled and then looked at him, her eyes were narrowed dangerously.

"Enough. We go to the traitor now."

The woman spun around and began to jog quietly towards the person with the radio. Bellamy shook his head.

Fucking Grounders. Even the pretty ones.

***

Costia could still feel the burn in her legs after the run into the forest. Her breathing was steady, but she'd had to crouch and crawl walk for much of the way hidden behind the tents and from the gaze of any warrior who might be looking her way.

She spoke quietly to the person who crewed the radio control station in Mount Weather and caught her breath as she waited for someone to get her father. She started speaking immediately when his voice came over the radio.

"They have tech behind them this time, Papa. Please, you need to reconsider. We cannot win this with the Sky people on their side."

"We have collateral. Their children are here. They're not going to war when I can kill them at any time."

"They are the reason the Kky people are joining this war! If you cannot see that these people will do everything to protect their children, then you do not understand anything at all. They have already started planning things to make sure they can enter the mountain without you seeing them. Clarke spoke of dismantling the cameras. This will blind you to their approach."

Dante's voice overrode his daughter's who had become almost hysterical in her need to get him to reconsider a war that could potentially annihilate everyone she loved. And most importantly, the only one that has ever mattered. Lexa.

"It doesn't matter. We have the Chancellor's son. They will do as I command and we'll be able -"

She interrupts him. She knows she shouldn't. Her father is too enamored with his own self and vision to let something like that go, but she does not have time to waste.

"Papa, there is more at stake here than you realize. Why will you not discuss peaceful negotiations with -"

"There will be no negotiations with that scrabbling rabble of savages," Dante's voice roared over the radio and Costia could not help herself, and flinched automatically at the raised voice.

"I've sent some of the guards to come and get you. If the others are nearby tell them to prepare to
Costia could feel the tears well up and fill her eyes. She's trained to not show any emotion, but at this moment when the world seems like it is unraveling before her eyes - she cannot help the first tear that slowly moves down her cheek.

"What do you mean?" she whispers and her voice is taut with this strange disbelief that the world she's constructed is made of paper and string, and one tiny spark from her father's hate will tear it all down.

"We are all in place. You need to talk to the Ark leaders and come to an understanding. Work something out."

She knows she's desperate. Making things up as she goes along. Her heart is galloping in her throat, and she can feel the pain in it as blood seems to be pushing against the thin covering of skin.

Damn it. Costia knows she cannot persuade him. Not at this moment when his rage is full, and he's blinded by how close they are to leaving the mountain forever.

Her head jerks upwards when she hears the sound of bodies crashing through the underbrush before they stumble into the clearing where she's hiding with her radio. Her eyes must show her shock as the Sky boy Bellamy moves towards her with Nia not far behind him.

"Why the fuck does a Grounder have a radio?" he snarls and stares at the radio in her hand but then he does a visible double take and looks back at Nia, "that's not one of ours."

There's a terrible silence between the three of them before Bellamy and Nia both come to the realization at the same time.

"You are from the Mountain?" Nia's voice cracks in disbelief.

Costia looks at them both frantically trying to come up with a reason for why she's out here with a radio in her hand. She cannot think and looks around wildly for some kind of escape. She sees the immediate reaction in her lover's eyes, and she feels something else shattering inside of her.

"Nia."

Her voice breaks and she moves backward, stepping carefully away from them but then a burst of static rends the air, and her father's voice is clear in the darkness.

"Costia. You will return home immediately!"

She watches with shock as she sees the boy's mouth open wide in growing understanding.

"That's President Wallace."

He straightens up and looks across at Nia.

"He's the one that convinced our old chancellor to send most of my friends to the mountain. He's the one that's killing them one by one."

Bellamy's words are filled with anger, and he turns his wrath towards Costia. Who is here. He reaches for her and tries to grab the radio from her hand, but he's not had the training she's had, and he's down in one fluid motion.

It takes seconds but then she feels two very familiar hands grabbing her wrists and spinning her
around until Costia's arm is twisted back and she's forced to her knees. The pain is indescribable, and she is swiftly reminded why Nia is Kwin of Azgeda. She watches as the boy reaches to grab the radio from her.

"Nia, please."

She begs in the way she prostrates her body and the way she turns devastated eyes up towards two cold ones.

How does she explain the awful decisions she's had to make. The terrible things she's had to do for her people. Surely Nia would understand. They all do it. Nia for Azgeda and Lexa. Lexa for her twelve clans. For her people.

Why is it so hard to understand what she has had to do for hers? She looks up into the arctic-blue colored eyes of her lover and swallows hard. She's trembling but Nia's eyes are like flint, and they don't move from her, and the grip on her wrist has not weakened at all sending flares of pain shooting up her arm and into her shoulder.

She will not ask to be released. It is not the way of Azgeda, and she recognizes the irony that she has lived longer as Azgeda than that of her own people.

This pain she will endure, but she can feel her breathing begin to labor. She moves to alleviate the pain, but Nia simply moves her wrist even further until she falls forward into the dirt of the forest floor. She can smell the smoke of the fires and the ever-present scent of pine that pervades Trikru lands. They always remind her of Lexa. She can feel the sob begin to rise up in her throat at the thought of the Commander.

She knows Lexa will kill her.

She closes her eyes and forces back the tears. She's brought quickly to her feet and feels the sharp point of a blade pressed between her shoulders.

"Walk."

The command is ferocious. Low. Guttural and Costia feels fear streak through her body at this side of Nia. She's never been subjected to it.

She stumbles forward, but all three stop when they hear the unmistakable sound of a rifle being pulled into position and figures in dark uniforms appear from behind the trees.

Costia feels how the blade is quickly moved, she hears the gentle tear as Nia cuts part of her cloak and the boy's jacket. Both pieces of material flutter quietly to the ground, and she knows that Nia has hidden the blade again before her father's militia descend upon them.

Costia turns and sees one of the guards hit Nia on the back of her head as she's about to yell out towards the camps. She watches wide-eyed as the woman she's called her bed mate for almost two winters falls to the ground.

Costia's eyes sweep to the guard in a fury.

"They would not have heard her call from here you -"

She stops when she realizes it's Emerson, her father's second in command and the man he's promised her to. She swallows hard.
"Emerson."

His smile is full and wide as he looks her from head to toe.

"It looks like we got to you just in time," he says and looks to Bellamy who is struggling against the shackles that have been placed on his wrists.

"Someone gag that fucker. We don't need to carry two dead weights back to base."

Within minutes he's organized his team with Nia's body trussed and bound as she's the most dangerous of the two, and Costia is thrown over the shoulder of one of her father's trusted guards as they begin their trek back to the mountain.

***

The darkness inside Arcadia feels heavy, and Abby does not know what to do with the terror that is currently choking her from the inside out. She's watched her daughter all day. Observed how she had interacted with the Commander and with the people that they've mostly come to know as the enemy.

She's still reeling from the massive leap of faith she'd had to take, but Clarke has never done anything without thinking of every strategic outcome. Just like Jake and the weekly games of chess with Wells.

Always come up with more than one answer, Clarke. She remembers Jake's little teachings, and sorrow threads through her breath as the memories bombard her; memories of their furrowed brows bent together, both blonde, and both incredibly stubborn about coming up with the most alternatives to the one outcome.

Whatever is happening she knows that Clarke has thought this through, and then some. What she doesn't understand is the why.

She had caught some of the glances her daughter had been sending the Commander during the meeting between the clans and the council. It had shocked her. She's never worried or questioned Clarke's sexuality. The Ark was too small in parts and too tight to not respect everyone's right to their privacy. She'd talked with Jake often wondering whether she had her eye on anyone or whether she and Wells would end up together.

Jake had scoffed and said that the one for Clarke did not exist on the Ark.

Had he been right? Was it her? The Commander with her terrifying green eyes that had seemed to stare into her today. And then this evening when Clarke had - when Clarke had taught her own mother how to behave in this world that made monsters of everyone. Abby had seen the breadth of leadership in her daughter she hadn't been able to before.

It had pained her, but Clarke was right. And she wasn't willing to give up her daughter. Not for pride or her own need to protect her in the only way she had known. Clarke had shown her unequivocally that she would not be controlled.

She let out a slow exhale as her mind tormented her with the events of the day. All the things she could have done better. She ached inside. A terrible sense of loss filled her mouth with the ashes of her daughter's words still repeating in her head. She was so engrossed in her world she didn't hear the quiet whoosh of the doors opening onto Ark's quiet lounge area.

"Abby."
She almost jumped at the quiet voice that seeped in from the corner of the room, and she looked up into Diana's tired hazel eyes. She stiffened at the intrusion but tried to not let her emotions show on her face and stood up slowly from the lounge she'd been resting on.

"What is it? Am I needed in medical? Why didn't they just radio me?"

Her brows came together, and she started to walk to the exit speaking as she made her way towards the medical bay before a hand shot out to stop her progress.

"No medical emergency, Abby. Plus you've worked ridiculous hours now and should let Sinclair get on with this shift," Diana's voice was gentle, and her own fatigue threaded her words.

Abby looked at her with suspicion, arms folding slowly over her chest. She cocked an eyebrow at Diana who smiled at her before rolling her eyes.

"Jesus Christ, Abs. Just sit down. Let's share some of the spirits those Grounders brought over this afternoon."

Diana smiled and pulled out a glass bottle filled with a dark liquid from behind her, and three small glasses she'd filched from the kitchen that she pulled out of her jacket pockets.

Abby's eyebrows raised even further, and she balked a little which Diana saw reflected on her face which prompted her to push Abby backward until she fell back on the lounge behind her.

"Marcus isn't too far behind," Diana murmured as she joined Abby on her perch.

"I thought it might be a nice idea to catch up before he joins us."

Diana turned to look at Abby, and she could feel a flush creep up her face as she knew what this was about. Clarke.

"Are you here to talk about Clarke and how she was with that Grounder leader today?"

Abby's voice is a little loud and harsh in the quiet of the room, and Diana flinches at the tone before turning towards her with a smirk on her face.

"I'm pretty sure Clarke has been like that with the Commander since she met her," Diana's smile is cheeky, and Abby can feel herself flushing even further.

"Diana! That's Clarke, damn it."

Diana shrugged and leaned forward to pour them both some of the liquid from the darkened glass bottle. They both stared at the rich colored amber as it swirled into their glasses.

"Clarke is a grown up now, Abby. I thought her little speeches yesterday and today attest to the woman she's become. You should be proud of her."

Abby could feel the hint of judgment in the other woman's tone and could feel her ire begin to rise again.

"If you've come here to give me another lecture about how to raise my daughter -"

"I'm not."

Diana's voice is placating as she looks at Abby and her smile is gentle.
"I think Clarke is more than able to fend for herself. Don't you think?"

Abby could feel the edges of her lips compressing as she stared at Jake's old friend. Her old friend too, once upon a time. She breathed out slowly. And what had Clarke meant with making the most of their lives? She'd been staring at Diana when she'd said that.

They both moved forward to take their glasses. Abby nursed the cold glass and watched the golden liquid swirl as Diana took a tentative sip of the drink.

She watched as a slow smile spread across the woman's face accompanied by a low, soft moan of pleasure. She moved the glass to her lips and felt her eyes sting a little at the vapor, but the smell was deliciously heady. The taste that met her tongue was indescribable. She'd been expecting something approximately as atrocious as Monty Green's gin, but this was nectar.

She joined Diana in the low soft moan.
"Goodness," she breathed out softly and looked at Diana in admiration.

"Who gave us this?"

Diana smiled, and there was a hint of that smirk again.

"That would be your daughter's Commander."

And she laughed as Abby's cheeks flushed even more.

"Clarke," Abby shook her head as she tried to think of the right words to describe how she felt.

"She told me that I had to let her be."

Abby looked over at Diana who looked at her sympathetically.

"Clarke has always been strong, Abby. Stronger minded and stronger willed than any of those other kids. She's you, Abby. Strong, smart and an incredibly gifted leader. She saw things before any of the others, and she made plans to not just survive, but to win. She's Jake too. Always thinking of every alternate solution."

Abby could feel the rush of heat behind her eyes as she tried to hold the tears at bay. She blinked several times to clear them and felt a strong hand move over hers.

"She is more a leader than I can ever be, Diana."

Abby sighed.

"I'm trusting all of our lives on my daughter's word that this Commander is the right one to follow. That she won't kill us all once our usefulness is over."

"Abby," Diana's voice was careful as she spoke, "I don't know if you noticed, but that girl's eyes followed Clarke wherever she was in that tent today. She may be the Commander of the lands that surround us, but your daughter certainly seems to hold some sway over her."

Abby laughed then shook her head as she looked into Diana's who was grinning back at her.

"Only Clarke would go out for medicinal herbs and come back with the leader of the known world," Diana said.
They looked at each other for a long moment before throwing back their heads to laugh out loud, and hard.

"What did I miss?"

Marcus smiled as he walked in on them clutching at their stomachs, Diana bent forward as she tried to gasp for air while Abby hit the back of the lounge repeatedly. He shook his head and smiled when they were unable to continue for several moments.

Finally, after taking several deep breaths to gather herself, Abby looked at him and delivered a punch line neither of the other two was prepared for.

"I think it's time I resigned as Chancellor."

The laughter stopped as suddenly as it had started and the room felt incredibly still as she looked at both of them who were staring at her. Marcus looked decidedly dazed, but Diana's eyes narrowed, and the hazel eyes were bright with knowledge.

"Clarke," Diana said.

Abby nodded.

"Is that wise? We're on the brink of war."

Marcus sat slowly and pulled his chair forward while Diana poured him a glass of the liquid gold the Commander had gifted them with.

"It makes sense," Diana nodded.

"Is it fair? On Clarke - she's young and this connection she's made with the Commander. I mean, how can we know how long this will last?"

He took a sip, and both women watched as his face metamorphosed into a beatific smile.

"Oh my God. What is this?"

"A gift. From the woman whom we're all highly suspicious of," Diana's voice was heavy with sarcasm, and she raised an eyebrow at Marcus who was looking at Abby with a look that Diana recognized all too well.

His deep brown eyes were soft, and his words were trying to sway her with the logic and credibility as the head of security on the Ark. At her words, he let out a soft huff.

"Remember the Greeks and the Trojans," he said quietly.

"You've been spending way too much time with Bellamy," Abby smiled and looked away towards Diana whose eyes were still narrowed at Marcus. Abby could see that she still remembered his part in Jake's death.

"You have," Diana chided in agreement, "and Abby's right. Clarke is the recognized leader of the Ark. Not us. Not Abby - sorry Abby," Diana inclined her head in apology and Abby just shrugged it away.

The last twenty-four hours had opened her eyes to many things. Her misgivings about being the Chancellor - she felt relief to be able to share this with others. She didn't want it to be Clarke whose shoulders the mantle would fall on, but it looked like she wouldn't be getting her way about
anything that she wanted for her only child.

"We are the leaders on the Ark. Clarke is the leadership to the ground. We have to find a way to integrate the two and make sure that Clarke gets all the support that she needs from our people," Abby's voice was quietly determined, and she felt a flash of gratitude when Diana nodded in agreement.

Marcus shook his head, his long fingers stroking the beard he'd grown since they'd landed. Abby likes the way the gray streaked through it making him look like a sage wolfhound. She wondered if the Grounders had dogs. She hadn't seen any in the Commander's camp. It was one of the things that Clarke had always wanted when watching the old archives of Earth movies and series. She shook her head at the stupidity of her random thoughts.

"We don't have time to argue the point, Marcus," Diana's voice was sharp and she looked at Abby in confirmation before taking another slow sip of her drink.

"We need to bring the council together and decide. Obviously not tonight, and maybe not tomorrow, but certainly before this war kicks off. We can't have people questioning her in the field."

Abby rolled her eyes.

"Seriously, Diana. Have you met my daughter? I'd like to see anyone question that girl when she's in full commander mode."

Abby used the term deliberately. Diana snorted, and Marcus smiled before taking another slow sip. They shifted into a more relaxed position and began deliberating how best to help Clarke. And how to hand over the chancellorship to her on the eve of a war. A war they were certainly heading towards.

Abby knows that Raven and a team of people are working on modifying parts of the Ark to use against the mountain men, but what they are doing continues to be a mystery to most of the council.

Diana sighs.

"We're going to have to alert them, you know."

She looks to Abby who can feel her whole body slump at the idea of arguing with the rest of the council.

"Yes. I know. At least we don't have to deal with Darius and Thelonius. Speaking of which, who replaced their positions?"

Abby can feel how tired her eyes are already becoming. The emotional outburst and shocks of the day have finally caught up to her, and she just wants to sleep for a week. She can feel Diana's hand on her shoulder giving her a warm squeeze.

"Maybe you should sleep," Diana responds before answering, and she names two people that Abby only has a vague recollection of. She murmurs a soft assent and luxuriates in the warmth of the alcohol and this intimacy she's sharing with old friends.

It feels like a respite in a world of constant threat, and the companionship is comforting which is why she's barely aware when Diana moves the glass from her fingers and places it on the table. She doesn't feel Marcus lift her and is entirely unaware of Diana tucking her into the bed in her
quarters.

Her last thought is of Clarke as she slides into a deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

It feels like forever since my last update.

I write every day but it's been quite hectic with Christmas and summer holidays here in Australia. I've been lazing by the beach reading a lot of other writer's fanfiction instead of writing my own. Gosh, there are so many great writers out there!

I have written most of the next chapter so I am quite hopeful to get the next one out to you quicker than I have been. As always, I love hearing your thoughts and feedback. Constructive criticism is also always appreciated as I want to hone my writing. A big, fat thank you to Superwayhaught100 who very kindly bounced a few thoughts that got me all inspired and my fingers itched to get to the keyboard.

It has been hard since about chapter 19 as I haven't had anyone to talk my ideas to as my wife has been stuck on a long, NDA project at work, often away or stuck in her office working till the wee hours.

Again, thank you to everyone who dropped in to say g'day and comment. All your kudos and comments are an inspiration and make my heart explode. I'm always up for writer's group type conversations on Tumblr. Please don't be afraid and if you have ideas or any confusion around plot points or scenes come and chat with me. I really am open to it. (I'm always too scared to do it myself when other writers say this but seriously - just do it. It would make my day and help me on scenes where I'm stuck.)

Cheers
**I Sang a Hymn to Bring Me Peace**

Chapter Summary

We find out more about the mountain and Costia. Clarke and Lexa prepare for war while Raven goes nuts in the Arcadian workshop building things that go boom.

Chapter Notes

I've had this written for a while but I kept re-writing bits and pieces. My apologies for the long delay in posting. I hope you enjoy this one. It's about 16K.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Octavia can feel the grittiness of the long night they have spent in the Ark's workshop.

Sinclair and his team have followed Raven all night with her mad designs and her screams to get her more God damn coffee.

Lincoln and some of the others from Lexa's camp who have come into help move machinery stare at her with a look of awe on their collective faces as she changes the configuration of everything from the Ark into a weapon capable of maximum impact. Or so it seems to them.

Octavia observes Anya as Raven has placed her beneath one of the rotator blades from the cooling fans that she's pulled from the guts of the Ark.

For God knows what.

Octavia can feel the fatigue weighing her bones despite the rotation between her and some of the others, getting in quick naps in corners where mattresses have been pulled out, and bedding piled up.

She remembers the warmth of Lincoln as they'd both drifted off to sleep with Raven muttering something about boiling oil, trebuchets and what they could re-purpose as slings.

She had woken up when she felt the absence of Lincoln's warmth beside her, eyes flickering and slowly casting around the large workshop before she could feel him nearby; her senses always attuned to him. She'd looked over just as he bent down with a steaming mug of Raven's 'witches brew' as she liked to call it.

It's the kind of coffee that Clarke would yell at her for consuming saying that it would do more damage to her liver and pancreas than Monty's moonshine. She was pretty sure Clarke was exaggerating, but still.

The coffee was the perfect kickstart and judging by the red streaking across the whites of her eyes, Raven had been consuming more than her fair share during the night.
She smiled and took the mug from Lincoln's hands, her fingers grazing softly alongside his arm as she looked up at him. Her stomach still swooped whenever he looked at her, and she just wanted to run away with him on their horses. Riding into the sunset like cowboys from the old movie files Bellamy sometimes would put on the screeners they had in their rooms on the Ark.

She wanted him safe and away from here. Separated from those out there who still suffered from the addiction that forced them into the tormented bodies of the Reapers.

But she hated Mount Weather more. For what they'd done to him. She wanted to kill every single person who'd played a part in that deliberate destruction of a human soul.

Octavia Blake felt her jaw harden and she knew that she would never forgive them. If she had a single opportunity to bring down the leader of those monsters, she would do it with her bare hands and tear them apart with her teeth.

She felt him as his fingertips gently pressed against her heart.

"Oktevia," he said softly, and she shivered a little.

His quiet gentleness was such a contrast to everything. To the violence of the Earth. To her brother who hated Lincoln's people with such unswerving passion. To her and her moments where she lost control.

"Hey," she whispered before pulling him into a gentle kiss. "I promise to stop thinking about them and what they did to you."

It's a lie and one they both know from the slight dip of her voice at the end of the sentence. Lincoln laughs and rolls his eyes in mock emulation of the Sky people's ways.

"You two, stop your bloody canoodling and get your lazy asses over here!"

They both roll their eyes and turn towards Raven who is glaring over at them from a podium of ladders where cabling and laser machines have been set up to solder seams together from different parts of the Ark.

Octavia shakes her head and gets to her feet in one smooth, fluid motion. Her hand automatically reaches out for him, as Lincoln's does for her.

"We have about three hours before we have to show this stuff to the Commander," Raven continues to snap at them as if they're solely responsible for the delays in putting together the weapons of 'mass distraction' has Raven has been calling her crazy designs.

Octavia had queried the naming and Raven had immediately scoffed, explaining as if Octavia were a twelve-year-old child, that there was no way in a hundred years of evolution that Mount Weather would not annihilate the trebuchets and giant slings she'd developed with spare parts. These had to be big, and distracting. They had to look medieval and 'Grounderish' a term which had irritated Anya to no end at the time.

"What is it?"

Octavia narrows her eyes and stares up at Raven who appears to be doing her best to impersonate a Cyclopean nightmare. She's got her strange metal helmet with the magnifier lens over one eye while the other is covered by dark glass which Octavia knows is spitting out data and blueprints from Monty's computer.
"The oscillators aren't behaving," Raven says grimly as she looks over to where Anya is hammering away at the rotors of the old Ark cooling vents. Each blade is around ten yards long, and they've yet to come up with a solution to make them work with the single large bolt that is threaded through from the pin to the cap head.

"You can say fan, you know." Octavia is too sleep deprived, unable to restrain the terseness in her voice which she immediately regrets as Raven turns her monstrous head towards her.

"Are you taking up arms today against the common enemy, Octavia?" Raven's voice is harsh. Evidence that the woman has consumed too much of the Ark's coffee which is behaving like hydrazine in the engineer's blood.

Octavia knows better than to answer the rhetorical question and just sighs as she crosses her arms.

"For God's sake. Just make this quick," Octavia's voice is a low growl, "or I'll get Anya to come over and lop off your stupid magnifier goggle."

Raven snorts. And continues on her rant.

"The Commander instructed me to build weapons that those asses in Mount Weather could see. Weapons that work. And if we were just fighting other Grounders with swords and arrows, and shields and spears - we'd win."

Octavia reigns in the snort of laughter that's building behind her chest at Raven's grandiose speech. She knows that it was Clarke who had whispered to Raven quietly as the hubbub of the Commander's council raged around them yesterday.

Raven is staring over the temporary workshop that is now studded with smaller projects like the fire throwing machines.

Octavia knew they didn't have boiling oil or pitch, but they had bucket loads of rocket fuel that they would not need. Ever again. Well, never again to go up into the sky at least. Knowing Raven, she'd come up with a purpose on the ground.

She watched as one of Sinclair's apprentice's hair caught alight, his orange-red hair glowing for a moment before one of the Grounders helped him and threw a bucket of water on his head. Wick? Something like that.

She'd noticed him staring at Raven, but the guy only gave the other woman the creeps, and Raven had managed to stay out of the reach of his gaze by assigning him to the projects operated by Sinclair.

Raven's eyes drifted over to Anya, her long legs leaking out from beneath the hydraulic lifts that kept Raven's rotator blades aloft.

Octavia watches, her eyebrows raising as she sees where Raven's eyes keep darting back to.

Seriously, Anya?

Her own eyes quickly move to Lincoln's whose face, damn him and his implacability, is entirely calm and shows no reaction at all.

When Raven removes the helmet and extra eyes, Octavia knows that her mouth is slightly agape. She takes in the soft look on Raven's face every time her gaze connects with the leather-clad legs that are peeking out from beneath the dark grey metal of the fan that Raven is building to blow
away Mount Weather's poisoned gas.

"Do you need more coffee?" Octavia's voice is threaded with amusement and Raven's head snaps back towards Octavia who is grinning as her gaze moves from Raven's height back to Anya's legs down below.

"No," Raven snaps back.

"Well now that you've got our attention, what the hell did you want us to do that everyone else isn't doing?" Octavia says and walks around as she tries to shift the stiffness from her body after a night of lying on the haphazardly strewn mattresses across the floor of Raven's enlarged workshop.

"I should have gone to grab Bellamy instead of watching you ogle Anya, which by the way, looks ridiculous with one eye."

Raven flinches so hard she almost topples back off the ladders she's standing on.

"Watch out!"

Octavia's voice is sharp with worry, but Lincoln manages to stabilize the ladder Raven is standing on as she got her balance back under control.

"I am not ogling," Raven hissed.

Octavia was not in the least bit ladylike when she snorted at Raven's outright lie.

"You stare at my General as if you hunger and thirst for something you cannot name," Lincoln smiles up at her and Octavia feels a grin spread across her face in pride.

Lincoln looks towards her and smiles before giving her a gentle wink. He's still not good at it as the movement is not something that his people do. It's adorable as his other eye almost blinks in unison with the first.

"Yeah well, you stare at Octavia as if she's an all you can eat Chinese buffet," Raven retorts but the snap of her sarcasm is lost as the two stared at each other after Lincoln quietly whispers a response that Raven doesn't quite catch.

"I do not understand your words, Revon. But it seems you could be right."

Octavia laughs at his words and looks back up at the devil on stilts.

"Ok. Seeing as how you aren't going to tell me why you wanted us up and over here, and I'm suspecting it's because you just felt like yelling at us; I'm going to find Bellamy. We can start figuring out where the Ark's security can position themselves today. Use Lincoln's strengths wisely, Raven. He's more than muscles and knows this area really well. Use that knowledge to put your 'weapons' into the best places possible."

Raven rolls her eyes and moves her hand to shoo Octavia away.

"Got it. Go, go, go. I'm sure your brother can't wait to participate in this Sisyphian battle between the good guys and the bad."

Octavia stares at her for a long time before looking around the sizeable makeshift workshop that Raven has managed to put together since the Ark had landed. And she looks at the work that's been done since the Ark landed on the ground.
"You know, you are a genius and," Octavia's voice stumbles when she sees how Raven has stiffened, her body ramrod straight and no longer looking at her with her demented mask.

"You did good, Raven. Really good."

And with that, she turns and moves from the heat and bustle that is now Raven's workshop.

It is probably the first time, and the last time Octavia has left the other young woman speechless, but she feels a thrill of anticipation and energy move through her. The day is just beginning.

And they're going to war.

***

Clarke stretched her body slowly and tried not to wake the warm body beside her, but as her eyes slowly open, she can see what her body had already sensed.

The bed is cold, and she's alone.

She moved slowly and groaned at the small aches that are scattered across her body. There are blossoms of vermillion streaks that punctuate the curves of her skin where Lexa's mouth had strayed and sucked deeply when Clarke had moaned and asked for more.

Clarke doesn't regret one moment of giving up her body to Lexa's lips and teeth, but what she wouldn't give for Lexa's handmaidens to appear with a hot bath right now.

She almost yelps when the tent's entrance is moved aside quickly, and a figure dressed in darkness strides into the back towards the bed. Clarke feels her heart begin to race and her eyes sweep the room for a weapon before she realizes that it's Anya.

Anya, who smirks at the marks she can see littered across Clarke's shoulders and the tops of her breasts not covered by the bed furs. Clarke narrows her eyes until she sees the steam rising up from a tray of food that has been set down in the Commander's war room. It sits on the long wooden table that divides the room and is only a few steps from the bed which is cordoned off by a thick and heavy colored tapestry that hangs between the two areas; serving as a makeshift wall for privacy.

"Your food. The Commander is with Indra who has just arrived from TonDC. She said to make sure you eat well before Revon does her weapon demonstration today." Anya's voice is threaded with a subtle amusement at Clarke's predicament.

"My clothes. Can you hand them to me?"

Clarke doesn't make eye contact and stares at her shirt which was thrown across the room last night in their haste to get naked and into bed.

She can hear Anya laugh quietly before the soft fabric of the tunic Lexa has given Clarke hits the side of her face. Clarke flinches for a moment before glaring at Anya.

"Do you need anything from me?"

Clarke stared at the General with narrowed eyes. It was too early for Anya. Too early for any of this and if Lexa walked into the room right now, Clarke would give her a piece of her mind for not waking her before leaving their bed.
She feels something hurt a little in her heart at the thought of Lexa leaving her, and she blinks away her sleep before shaking her head. She doesn't want her mind to wander in that direction.

Anya tilted her head and stared at Clarke without any fear. Clarke wondered at her presence. This woman who had trained Lexa from the moment she stepped into Polis when she was a child, would not be in here merely to taunt her for spending the night in the Commander's tent.

"Klark," Anya said, and she looked directly into Clarke's troubled blue eyes, "the Commander does not send her highest general into her tent to gloat at her - territorial marks."

Clarke watches how Anya's mouth twitches.

"You are known to be her bedmate. For now. And this means you are a target. The Maunon have spies in our camps. I do not know how - but when I do..."

Anya's voice had turned to steel and Clarke didn't have to imagine too hard what would happen to those who had betrayed Lexa. She could feel her own anxiety arise as she wondered who had betrayed the Commander and their people?

She quickly moved from the bed after slipping into the tunic which fortunately fell to just above her knees covering most of her body. She saw how Anya's eyes flickered down her limbs, her eyebrows shooting up into her hair.

"Don't. Don't say a word. Your Commander would not appreciate it," Clarke snapped and hated that she was bandying Lexa's title around, but she felt out of sorts with how her morning had started.

And she was starving.

"She certainly would not."

Lexa's voice was soft and amused as she walked into the tent leaving two of her guards behind to protect the entrance. She moved to the table and joined Clarke who had moved from the bed to sit by the long wooden trestle that had been setup, her long fingers lazily stretched across Clarke's body to filch a fig filled with honey and crushed pistachios.

Clarke looked at her with a muted softness as her eyes traced over Lexa's face, carefully watching how her lips were licked free of honey before slowly chewing the sugary goodness that Clarke knew Lexa was extremely fond of.

She was stunning, and Clarke wasn't too sure what to make of the ache inside of her, the need to reach out and trace the outlines of that perfectly straight nose, down over the tip to follow the lines of those beautiful full lips.

"You'll have a sugar spike if you only eat that," Clarke commented trying to hide the flare of heat that went straight to her groin when Lexa moaned at the tastes in her mouth.

She blinked quickly when she saw the smile spread across Anya's face.

"And you will starve, Clarke if you subsist only on desire," Anya mocked.

Clarke could feel the heat creep up her neck and onto her cheeks as thoughts of the previous night came unbidden into her mind. Lexa's legs splayed before her as Clarke devoured the complex flavors of the woman who was now staring at her with curious green eyes.
"You must eat, Klark. Today will be long. We will need all of our wits about us," Lexa moved and put together slices of meat onto a short, crusty roll of bread before handing it to Clarke.

"Eat."

The command in her voice did not allow for argument. Not that Clarke was going to argue. She devoured the roll within a few minutes, groaning all the way through making Anya laugh, and causing Lexa's green eyes to darken before they darted furtively away.

"Anya, I believe it is time for you to assist Indra out on the fields. And Revon was also asking for you."

Lexa's voice was quiet in the hush of the tent that kept most of the camp noise dampened, but they could now hear the stirring of more people preparing for what was going to be a long day.

Anya quirked an eyebrow at her old second and was not in the least bit fooled by Lexa's deflection, but she nodded once before moving off her perch and walked towards the exit.

"I do not believe Klark should let her mother see what you have done to her body. This is only a suggestion, Commander," Anya said before turning from them and walking out; a small smile on her lips.

Clarke watched as Lexa's eyes darted in confusion towards Clarke's body, and watched the growing look of horror form on her face.

"Klark!"

Clarke looked down to see what she was looking at and then saw the marks along her thighs which were visible now that she was sitting down as the tunic had ridden up high along her legs. Exposing a lot more than she had realized.

Oh. And Anya most certainly had quite the eyeful.

Clarke rolled her eyes and smiled softly at Lexa.

"Lexa. I'm pretty sure we were both there in that bed last night. Do you not remember how these got -"

"Klark. Anya saw."

"Well then, don't send Anya to deliver my breakfast next time."

Clarke leaned forward and tugged a lone tendril of chocolate brown hair, drawing Lexa closer to her.

She felt a joy sweep through her at the concerned look on Lexa's face and just wanted to pull her into an embrace. Clarke's smile was beatific as she stared into those deep green eyes and felt the breathlessness that Lexa seemed to create in her every time Clarke looked at her; or thought of her, or kissed her.

She pulled Lexa's body closer with one hand firmly against her hip and the other pulling on that lovely curl that had escaped her braids.

"Good morning," she whispered softly against a perfect, small ear, "you left me. I should chastise you but you look too beautiful, and I can't find it in me to scold you when you look like this."
Clarke can feel the blush glowing across her skin as the words she had in her mind spilled out of her mouth. She can feel Lexa stiffen at her words and so Clarke involuntarily stepped back to see if she'd gone too far.

Lexa's face looked like it was on fire, her cheeks a deep, dusky rose and her eyes downcast as she looked away from Clarke. Clarke tilted her head as she tried to figure out the look on the woman's face before she realized that Lexa was blushing and had become shy from Clarke's words of praise.

Did Lexa not have any idea what she looked like to the world? She moved her fingertip across that strong jawline, the flesh beneath so soft yet firm and perfect beneath Clarke's tentative touch.

"Lexa. You are the leader of your people. And an amazing leader from what little I've seen. Your people respect you."

The more Clarke spoke, the deeper the blush became, and Clarke was entranced by this side of the Commander. Gone was the stoic face and she was left watching a woman trying desperately not to squirm at her words.

"And in the bunker. When you pretended not to understand me," Clarke said slowly as Lexa's eyes finally met hers, "I said so many things. Thinking that you didn't understand. How are you blushing now? I said so much more before and you didn't respond at all."

Lexa pressed her lips tight together and struggled with her discomfiture.

"Klark. You have come to mean so much to me in such a little while," Lexa said, and her voice was soft.

Clarke felt her throat close at this. Both of them becoming aware of where they were as the clamor of Lexa's general's could be heard outside the tent.

"So much," Lexa whispered again and leaned against Clarke's forehead.

Clarke could feel Lexa inhaling her scent, and she felt that aching again moving through her body. What was Lexa saying? Clarke didn't know what she felt right now. She was too scared at this stage to confront any of her feelings. Finn had been such a disaster. Did love survive at all? Her mother had caused her father's death, but they'd had several years together where they loved deeply. She didn't want to walk from one disaster into another and be betrayed yet again. But Lexa was nothing like Finn.

Nothing like him at all.

Deep blue eyes look across into those green eyes which were looking dreamily at her, and Lexa is nothing like the impassive, hard to read, angry young woman that Clarke had first met. She felt her mouth tilt upwards, and she sighed softly against those lush lips.

"God, Lexa. You - you make my insides go crazy and I know we're heading into a war, and maybe, just maybe - there's a whole bunch of mixed emotions happening inside of me and I have no idea what any of this means," Clarke rambles, and she watches the smile grow on Lexa's lips. It's a lovely smile and very different from the one Lexa displays around her people.

"It is full and brilliant in the morning light. Clarke can see the perfect white teeth that bite on a reddening bottom lip, a lip she wants to swallow into her mouth and slide her tongue across. But there is a war outside the Commander's tent and the sensibility that she's been ingrained with as the daughter of the Chief of Medicine, and Engineering rises to the surface."

Finch Medical and Engineering rise to the surface.
"We have a mountain to bring down," Clarke says carefully, and she's proud that her voice doesn't tremble at all, "so for God's sake, please keep yourself safe for me."

Their moment of intimacy is quickly broken when a guard from outside calls out that the generals and Skaikru are ready to enter the war room. Clarke feels that strange ache again behind her chest which is fast becoming all too familiar when she sees the look on Lexa's face hardening as she prepares to deal with that outside world.

"I'm here," Clarke whispers, and she doesn't know what it is she's promising, but Clarke wants to make sure that this young woman who holds the lives of so many on her shoulders to know that she's not alone. "I've got you."

She pretends not to notice the look of anguish on Lexa's face before she turns away and straightens her back, lifts her chin and slowly curls her hands into fists as the outside world spills into theirs.

***

"What do you mean you cannot find your Kwin?"

Lexa's voice is sharp, and the hint of exasperation beneath her tone is barely contained as she looks to the Azgeda warrior who has run through the encampment and now stands before her. The man is tall, his long sinewy arms and legs seem to contract into his body as if by appearing smaller he can escape the Commander's wrath.

"She is not in her tent, nor is she in the -" the man's face pales.

They can see the visible swallow he makes as his throat tightens against the words he must say next. "We cannot find our Kwin's uh - the Kwin's. We cannot find Kostia. Neither of them is in the places where they should be."

Lexa can feel her body tighten with fury. Is this a ploy of her sister's? Some strange agenda she's concocted with Costia to undermine her strength, her rule, her authority?

She can feel the words of anger just bubbling at the back of her throat, pushing against her teeth ready to spill out onto the encampment as they wait for the last ambassador to arrive at the fields where Raven's weapons can be tested and shown to her people.

Lexa can feel the coolness of the leather strips around the metal of her sword's pommel beneath her fingertips. She knows that outside no-one can see the emotions on her face that are threatening to ravage the terrain inside her.

She breathes in the cold of the early morning air and takes a deep breath when her eyes catch blue ones that are staring at her with a worried gaze.

She can see Clarke struggle to keep her feelings hidden, but the girl has not grown up in the world that Lexa has had to, and the worry in those blue eyes betray her.

She spins on a booted heel ready to make towards Nia's tent when she hears the sound of running feet and a voice that is desperate and slightly winded.

"I can't find my brother. I can't find Bellamy."

She turns to find Octavia almost bent over her knees as she looks around desperately at the Sky people.
"He's not here. I haven't seen him since yesterday afternoon," Clarke says quietly, and now the worry is evident in her voice.

"Heda!"

Lena cannot help but think with a snarl 'what now' as the group stand on the edge of the field where Raven's weaponry lay ready to be showcased.

The field wasn't far from where her war tents had been setup lying in the foothills of the small slopes that surrounded the valley that the Ark had landed in. They all turned as one towards the voices that were running hard towards them.

Lexa's eyes widen, and she straightens recognizing the insignia of her scouts immediately. She walks towards them and can feel a terrible dread hit her stomach when she sees one of her sister's blades in the scout's hand.

Nia's blades are always instantly recognizable. Hewn and sharpened to a thin, long edge that shimmers blue in the daylight, but almost disappears at night absorbing the shadows into the blade itself. Lexa has two that her sister gifted her on her ascension.

"What have you found?"

The warrior is almost as breathless as Octavia but his training has been for far longer than the young Skai girl, and he manages to deliver his report quickly in a steady voice. Her gaze flicks towards Octavia who's eyes have traced the track of the scouts and where they've appeared from.

"The ground where we found this was disturbed, Heda. There was some blood, and we found scraps of cloth. Torn. I believe your sister tried to leave a message. One is from her cloak, and the other is from Skaikru."

The man raises his hand and the people from the Ark gasp as they recognize the small black patch of material that is lifted into the air.

"I think we know that wherever your sister is Commander, Bellamy is probably with her."

Clarke's voice is sharp, and she crosses over to where Octavia is slowly beginning to look panic-stricken and touches her arm briefly before turning back to Lexa.

"That's the patch our guards wear on their jackets. It's been sliced off not torn. I can see the stitching is loose like it has been cut. Your sister is quick thinking."

Clarke moves back to Octavia, and her voice has to carry across the rising tide of talk that is now raised in speculation. She paces slowly among her people, but her eyes always stay connected with Lexa's.

Lexa can see that she's aching to reach across to grab her hand, so she moves both of her behind her back to keep the rising fear and panic down, and to ensure that Clarke is not tempted to touch her in front of her generals, her ambassadors, and not in front of the Arkadians.

Even from where she stands she can see the sudden dimming in Clarke's eyes, but Clarke only straightens up and looks towards Raven and Anya who are still arguing around the blades of one of Raven's air machines.

"Raven," Clarke's voice cuts across whatever it is that the two are saying and both women break apart. Lexa can see the banked fury in her general's eyes and wonders what Clarke's friend has
managed to say to make Anya lose her temper so obviously.

"When was the last time you saw Bellamy?"

Raven takes her time in answering as she tries to stare down Anya who has turned her back to Raven and that seems to only infuriate her more.

"Clarke, I haven't slept. I've had way too much java for any grown human to have consumed. The last time I saw him was after dinner yesterday evening."

Raven twisted her neck as if she was trying to crack it while her deep brown eyes flashed towards the Tondisi General who was now standing ramrod straight while her knuckles looked ready to pop out of her skin as she clenched her fists so tight Lexa could see the reddening of her skin in the curl of her hands.

"He was storming out after another spat with someone about something." Raven shrugged and continued talking as if it was too obvious and barely worth her breath.

"Who knows what about but I remember he left the compound. I was pretty pissed off with him as he was meant to help us with the air machines. Because he'd gone off to wherever to sulk while I've been stuck with General Surly over there who has not exactly been peachy keen to assist."

Lexa's eyebrows rose a little when she saw Anya flinch, her body elongating to the full height of the General, and ready to respond to the crazed looking young mechanic.

Before anything could start between the two, she moved forward and pushed discreetly against her general's shoulder and only needed to give one quick glance before Anya nodded and stepped behind Lexa.

Clarke watched Raven and Anya with growing frustration and her brow furrowed in that way she did when she concentrated too hard or too much.

Lexa wanted to trace the lines with her fingertips but steeled her heart so that her thoughts would stop going in that direction. She could feel the tension in her jaw create a lance of pain that worked its way down her neck and wondered what was wrong with her.

She looked around at the growing looks of frustration and fear that was forming on the faces of both her people and Clarke's.

"And that was the absolute last time anyone saw him?" Clarke questioned softly, and her voice was coming out slowly as if she was trying to take everything in. She turned carefully to look at everyone from Arcadia who stared at one another looking for answers.

"He didn't report for duty," Marcus spoke as he moved his head from a radio he'd been speaking into, "I just spoke with the security team. Raven's right. He walked out of Arcadia last night. One of the guard's on the outer posts saw him running towards the forest with a woman. They ah - assumed he was -."

"You have got to be kidding me," Octavia snapped. "He's Bellamy for God's sake. Everyone knows how much he hates the people here. There is no way he'd be running off to have sex with one of them."

Marcus raised his hands to placate the bristling woman.

"I don't know that the security team could have seen those kinds of details, Octavia. They only
know it was Bellamy because they'd tracked him when he left the compound. Then Collins tried to break out of his constraints, so they were busy with that for a while."

Lexa stopped herself from instinctively moving forward to touch Clarke and watched helplessly as Clarke's face stilled and what color she had slowly seeped from it.

"What happened with Finn?"

Marcus and Diana looked at each other before turning to Abby who shook her head slightly. Lexa could see how Clarke breathed in deeply to keep her temper; her voice was relatively calm when she turned to her mother.

"Mom?"

"It was nothing, Clarke."

Abby's brow had drawn together in the same way that Clarke's did, and Lexa wondered at the similarities when the two women behaved so differently in many ways.

She could see that Abby had thought the incident too minimal to be of any impact or interest to the events of the moment. Unfortunately for Arcadia, it had happened at the worst possible time as the only people who could have seen what happened to the Arkadian guard had been distracted by that boy.

She compressed her lips and wondered at Arcadia and how it contained the threats to their own safety.

Clarke's exasperation leaked into the way her back stiffened and the way she tightened and loosened her fingers which she then pulled tight against the side of her torso.

"It's something mom. Finn caused enough of a commotion to cause not one but all of the Ark's guards to stop their duty from their positions. Positions where they're meant to watch out for enemy threats."

Clarke's voice was still soft, but the tension and anger that vibrated in her voice were evident to everyone watching the two women. Abby shifted forward but stopped when Clarke moved back a step in response.

"What the hell was Finn doing that all of them had to leave their posts?" Clarke asked, the quiet anger evident in the tightness of her voice.

Lexa watched Abby's face and saw when the realization hit the woman. There was a quick flicker in her eyes, and her mouth turned downwards. Lexa could see that Clarke was watching her mother intently. Waiting for her to come to the realization herself.

"Oh," Abby's voice was small, "I - I wasn't there at the time."

The look she gives Marcus and Diane looks almost sheepish before she shakes her head again before continuing. It is clear that she sees this as a healer's issue and not a threat to the Arkadians. A gross misunderstanding of the world she now lives in, Lexa quietly thinks and is not surprised by the barely contained anger that is forming on Clarke's face.

"Jackson had everything covered, and it was dealt with, Clarke. I received the reports this morning, and Finn was quickly returned to the medical holding area with his medication increased."
Abby is doing her best to manage what seems to be a volatile situation with her daughter. Lexa can see from the look on the Chancellor's face that she cannot understand why it has her daughter so worked up.

"What did he do that distracted the guards? Was that also in your report?" Octavia says and steps closer to the two women.

"Come on, Abby. This is important." Octavia's voice has sharpened, and even though she's been at war with her brother since they landed, those closest to them know how much the siblings will fight for one another.

"We need to know when Bellamy disappeared off their radar. If we can connect the timing -"

"He was trying to find Clarke," Raven snapped.

She rolled her eyes at the group of people staring at her as if she'd grown horns. "Oh come on. What else would he be doing? He's barely able to construct a single coherent sentence without saying: where's Clarke?"

Lexa pushes down the feeling of dread she can feel in her stomach at this new knowledge. The boy's constant focus on Clarke is disturbing.

And each time she thinks of Nia fear sears across her gut with growing tension.

She can feel her jaw aching from the way she's been clenching it to keep from saying anything that will cause an all-out war between the clans and the Sky people.

And now this. Bellamy. The guard that wanted to keep them out of Arkadia is now missing alongside her sister and Costia. She cannot comprehend why these three would have been together so late in the evening. She knows her sister. She would have torn strips into Bellamy or even worse, used her knives on him if he'd articulated his hatred of her people in any way.

"Enough," Lexa finally snaps and watches with impatience as all of her people snap to attention, but the Skaikru continues to meander around murmuring to one another.

"I said enough," she grinds out again and watches as stillness runs through everyone on the field including Clarke who spins on her heel to give her a look that would generally cause Lexa to call out for her guards, and detain Clarke indefinitely in one of Polis' containment areas.

She wishes she could do something at the flare of anger she can see in those deep blue eyes. Clarke is slow to provoke, and Lexa does not want an argument to be had between them before all of their people.

"Klark, please. We need calm and not disquiet. We need to observe Raven's hard work. My sister and Costia will turn up," she breathes out a slow sigh at the lie.

There is no way Nia has gone off in the middle of war preparations. And for all of her faults, Costia must have gone to keep her sister protected whatever the situation.

She knows Clarke must see something in her as her body relaxes and she moves towards Lexa. Clarke is careful in her approach, but her face reflects some of the anxiety weighing on her mind.

"Do you think they're together?" Clarke's voice is quiet, and it is low enough that only Lexa hears. She thinks that Octavia may have heard as she watches the younger woman's body still. Octavia is good. Whatever training she's received - has indeed taught her the basic concepts of a warrior to not
allow any truth to appear on the body.

"I cannot say, Klark. All things point that Bellamy and Nia are together. There is no proof that Costia is with them. This could mean she's tracking them, which would be a good thing as she could relay what's going on."

"You don't believe that for one minute. About Costia."

Clarke's words are fast and come out in a tumbled rush that Lexa can barely understand her. She feels a particular pride in Clarke that she's learned her so well and that her observations are sharp. Another part worries that she is so easily read.

"I do not know. Costia - she would not betray Nia. She is her Kwin."

"She betrayed you. And you were her Commander."

Clarke's voice is soft, but still, her words tear into her.

Lexa looks at her, and the sharp edges she feels inside must be displayed clearly to all those around her. For Clarke, who knows her well enough. For Anya, her first and who knows her more than any other human being.

Clarke steps away, and there's a quick look of regret while Anya moves forward her fists curling around the edges of her sword ready to remove Clarke's head from her body.

Lexa raises her fingertips, and Anya stops, but the glower she sends towards Clarke has all of Lexa's people move closer towards her. The movement is enough for the Skaikru to notice the sudden tension and everyone is tight with banked energy that could spill out at any given moment.

Lexa sighs and looks steadily at Clarke who is not budging.

"She did," Lexa finally says, "but that does not mean she would betray her Kwin. Azgeda is founded on a strong belief in their matriarchy. The sovereign is more than a ruler. The position is almost that of a deity."

Clarke nods, but Lexa can see the doubt that still rests in her eyes.

There is a suspicion growing in Lexa's own heart, but she cannot afford to show it. She presses her lips together and looks away towards the machines that Raven has brought out into the open field for testing. The landscape is like something from her own nightmares of the Mountain Men. Dark contraptions of metal and thick wiring, while others reflect the light of the morning sun in bright flashes of silver.

"Keep searching," she says, her voice is tight as she looks to the waiting scout who nods and turns to quickly move away.

"They should take a radio. And one of our guards. They know how to use the radios and can quickly tell us what they find as they search."

Clarke's voice is clear, and the tone she uses is deferential as she understands the protocol with the Commander, and just how much she pushed it before. It's conciliatory, but there's still an urgency to it that stops the scout in his tracks.

He looks to Lexa who nods quietly as she slowly moves her hands behind her back. It is the only way she can control her need to fidget when she becomes anxious. It pulls her shoulders back, and
the face of the Commander falls into place.

She can see Clarke visibly swallow but the quiet anger she feels is hard to assuage, and she knows better than to express herself when her emotions are too far forward in her mind.

The scout is joined by one of the Arkadians whose radio crackles and hisses as they turn back towards the forest. The gathered collection of Skaikru and her warriors are getting restless, and she knows it's time to get the demonstration started before more tempers fray and careless words create unnecessary tension between the two groups.

"If you would, Revon?"

Lexa's voice is loud enough that everyone waiting can hear. There is a strength to it, and it resonates across the fields with her quiet power. It is enough to calm the fears of her people and more than adequate in cowing the restless Arkadians.

Lexa notices that it does not surprise Clarke in the slightest that the first thing Raven shows them goes off with a bang and is loud enough to make all of her warriors' crouch into a defensive stance. The Generals and Clan leaders automatically move around Lexa defensively, but with a quick shake of her head, they return to their original places.

She hears Clarke's muffled laughter and contains the small smile that wants to form on her lips. When her eyes catch Clarke's gaze, she feels her stomach swooping again, and she hates how quickly her mouth dries when she sees the curve of Clarke's body in the brightening light of the morning.

She swallows and shuts her eyes before looking back at the field which is now dark with thick plumes of orange smoke. The giant towers of metal that had been positioned around the ground begin to spin, and the smoke is pushed back to where they are coming from. She can feel the strength of the wind as it picks up her cloak and flaps it behind her, the pull is powerful, and the feel of it across her face is like stepping inside a storm.

She smiles when she realizes just what it is that Revon Kom Skai Kru has created. A machine that pushes back the foul gases from the Mountain that shreds skin and ulcerates them like the Mountain Men when faced with sunlight.

Clarke laughs outright at the next exhibit where flames are thrown a considerable distance from a small contraption that is being operated by two of her people and one of Clarke's.

Lexa cannot see the purpose of it other than to set the field on fire which is happening with alarming speed before large hoses of white foam are poured onto it. She shakes her head in uncertainty.

Lexa can see the benefits, but not against the Maunon whose tek can incinerate whole villages with their long-distance arrows. Missile, Klark had explained. A part of her is disappointed as she'd expected more from the Sky people. She looks to Clarke and Revon in growing confusion especially when Clarke turns a brilliant smile towards her.

"It's a diversion. Something that will capture the people of Mount Weather's focus, and cause them to underestimate our approach," Clarke says before turning to the next machine which is being loaded with small rocket shaped projectiles.

"And that tool is where the real threat is. As Mount Weather focus on a low tech machine like that one, "Clarke indicates the trebuchets that are across the field, "this will be loaded and moved
behind the main group."

Revon moves and turns to point to where the Arkadians are holding long tubes on their shoulders.

"These will target known points of weakness in the mountain. The dam where the Mountain's energy is generated isn't heavily fortified as they've relied on the acid fog to keep your people away. They may have backups. Well, they will have backups," Raven says, "but this will cause enough disruption for them to begin to worry. Another key point is the entrance. We don't think these rockets will have much impact so your scouts will check the back area while we distract them from the front."

Lexa smiles for the first time that morning. She can hear the swift and quiet inhalation that Clarke makes at her uncharacteristic behavior, and she can feel herself tightening in response to a sound she's relegated to dark evenings and the soft coverings of her bed.

She refuses to make eye contact and instead watches with keen interest when Anya knocks an arrow onto her bow before letting it fly where it hits one of her warriors in the arm.

As far as shots go it is not up to Anya's exceptional standard, Lexa thinks and wonders why her General is shooting her own people. This is hardly something that will turn the war against the Maunon and their tek. The injury is not going to incapacitate her warrior, and they'll be able to continue fighting.

She goes to say something to Anya when she catches the quiet smirk on Clarke's face. Her head darts back to the warrior who she now sees falling to her knees and clattering to the floor struggling to get up before finally sliding the last bit before laying still on the ground.

Lexa stepped forward in confusion before looking at Clarke.

"What is in the arrow tip? Poison? That injury is not enough to fall that warrior," Lexa says.

Her voice is sharp with worry, but she believes that neither Clarke or Anya would willingly kill one of her warriors to prove a point.

"The tip is lined with a strong medical solution that we use on people before putting them under," Clarke says as she watches Anya move towards the warrior and with the aid of another Trikru, lifts the woman onto a stretcher and off the field.

Lexa finds herself even more perplexed and turns to look back at Clarke who she catches staring at her in open amusement.

"Klark, I do not understand what you have said. Under? Under what? What do you mean?"

It is good that they're a little bit further away from everyone. Maybe Octavia is close enough as she can see the small smirk that appears on the young warrior's face which quickly disappears when Lexa stares at her steadily.

"It means they go to sleep very quickly and don't get up for a few hours," Clarke says softly.

Lexa must have shown a part of the horror that she can feel rise up inside at the thought for she feels the brush of Clarke's fingertips against her arm.

"It causes no harm other than the arrow injury," Clarke explained, and Lexa concentrated on her voice rather than the image of being put to death for a short time.
"And what is the value of this?" Lexa looks up at Clarke and Abby who has moved across to join them.

"Not everyone from the mountain will be the enemy. Some will be doing this because they must, and not because they want to. Just like some of your warriors go into war for you even when they might disagree with you," Abby expands on Clarke's explanation.

Lexa shakes her head vehemently and stares at Abby with such fury on her face that the woman takes a step back involuntarily.

"The Maunon have taken my people for too long. They are all our enemy and must suffer the impact of their choices of the past," Lexa feels the emotion in her voice and knows that her warriors can hear her as they begin to move carefully towards their commander.

"They have children in there. Families. Parents. People who have been protecting our kids -"

"But they have not protected my people. They have bled them dry, Abby. What would you have me do? Release them all after we bring them down?"

Clarke moves forward and speaks in a soft voice so that others do not hear them, and Lexa can feel how her words calm her immediately, but the rage at Skykru is hard to push down when she believes that their understanding of what has happened between her people and those of the mountain has been grossly misunderstood.

She will not allow anyone to escape. She hears Clarke's voice, but it is only after a few seconds that she understands her words.

"These weapons are to stop their soldiers. The ones who will be able to fight out here in the sunlight without protection. Not to kill them but to slow them down so that we can capture them. They will be useful in providing information or collateral for bargaining should we need to," Clarke's words finally penetrate the burning that seems to have stilled her mind.

"So you bring them down. How long are the warriors 'asleep' before we can question them?"

Lexa's mind is quickly putting together all the different variables that this new information has provided.

"It depends on the dosage. The one we just used was for ten minutes just to show the capabilities of the arrow. We can create a solution to make them sleep for longer. It wouldn't make sense to do any less during a battle as you wouldn't want them to wake up too soon," Clarke says, and her words come faster now as she's thinking of the possibilities of using the tranquilizers.

"We also have them as dart guns. We shoot small arrows from special guns. They cause less harm than the arrows, a small pinprick, but they're more for close range combat."

Lexa nods as she finally sees the many benefits of these sleeping bullets and arrows.

"And after?" she finally says and looks up at the group of Skaikru people who are now closer to her as they watch Raven's cavalcade of weapons unfold before them.

"And we'll deal with after when we get to after," Clarke sighs and then swallows hard before continuing, "Commander, if I've learned anything from landing on the earth, I know that sometimes not everything is as it seems."

Lexa knows that Clarke understands that this is not the answer she was hoping for.
Lexa also knows that at some point they'll have to deal with this, but for now, they need to find Nia, Costia and the young guard, Bellamy.

She nods once and looks away which is the only answer she can give right now. Anything more and whatever peace she's sowed between the two groups could rupture. For now, she needs the Sky people to help bring down the mountain.

After that, she'll see.

She had been wondering how Raven had ostensibly made all of these weapons overnight. The realization had come slowly that perhaps these weapons had already been in the making.

Against her own people.

So yes, she will wait to see what happens after.

***

Bellamy can feel the hardness of something beneath his face. It's cold, and he can smell the antiseptics of a med bay. He moves and groans when he accidentally smacks his head against a trolley sending metal trays clattering to the tiled floor.

"Fuck!"

The expletive is loud in the small room he's in. It's dimly lit with strip lighting along the edges of the floor, but Bellamy can see that he's in some kind of medical supplies unit as he's surrounded by cupboards filled with things barely understandable, but he recognizes the tubing and some of the paraphernalia from the med bay on the Ark.

It takes him a moment before he can feel something soft pressed against him. He stiffens and turns slowly.

Nia is laying behind him. There's blood smeared in the white-blonde hair near her temple, and she's still bound tightly with ropes that he can see is cutting into her flesh.

Bellamy grunts softly and wonders what happened to him after they entered the mountain. Once they'd neared a hidden entrance, he'd felt a piercing in his neck and then blackness. Obviously some kind of tranq.

Fuckers.

He pressed his lips tightly and moved his fingers and toes tentatively. He wasn't trussed up like the Grounder before him. It was apparent he was seen as nowhere near the same physical threat that she was, but they'd still shackled his wrists with cuffs. And they'd taken his radio.

"Fuck!"

He slammed his fists against the wall and heard the sound of a soft groan.

"Shit!"

He looked around the room quickly. After watching Clarke stitch and clean their fellow delinquents he'd picked up some basics, and he knew he should clean up that head wound to see what was beneath the blood that had caked in the woman's hair.

He raised himself to his feet and fumbled through the boxes he saw in the cupboards. After a
cursory search, he saw alcohol swabs and grabbed the pack quickly before moving back to the woman who was still lying absolutely still.

The binding around her arms had rubbed her skin in patches, and they'd tied her feet together before attaching it to some piping near the entrance. The room seemed to be almost entirely white except for the aluminum benches and trolleys that surrounded them, some of which had tools laid out neatly. Bellamy grinned when he saw the base of a scalpel. No blade but he was sure he'd find some in one of the cupboards over his head.

He knelt slowly beside her and began to use one of the alcohol swabs against the congealed blood. He swore again when it came away, and he could see how thick the blood was.

"Ah geez, whatever the hell your name is. That's a bitch of a cut you've got and you really, really need to wake up."

He didn't know why he was talking to her. The woman was definitely still out of it and wouldn't hear a word, but it comforted him. He didn't feel so alone.

He could feel his skin itching with rage at that bitch who'd betrayed them all. It was good to know that Jaha wasn't alone in being a sneaky bastard but the look on this woman's face when she saw the other one - Costia if he remembered correctly. That had looked personal.

"What are you doing?"

He almost leaped back at the soft voice that growled from the woman.

"You're hurt."

"Well, that is something I was unaware of, no?"

He snorted at her sarcasm and looked at her closely. Her skin was almost waxy, and there was a sheen of perspiration on her forehead.

"Let me help. Those fuckers really slammed your head," Bellamy said, and tentatively moved towards her again with more swabs. She didn't flinch or look away, and he found those eerie blue-green eyes disconcerting as he tried to remove as much of the matted blood from her hair without hurting her.

He sighed slowly when he finally removed the last of the blood and could see a long gash along her hairline.

"What?"

He rolled his eyes and moved back up before rummaging around and after a few minutes came back to lean before her. He tore the packaging with his teeth and fumbled a little before removing a bandage which he began to roll tightly around her head.

"I thought you hated my people?"

He shrugged and moved to sit down beside her after he'd tied off the bandage and ensured that it wouldn't slip off easily from her head.

"I do. But right now, I hate these fuckers from Mount Weather more. I don't understand what they're doing, why they took us. How were they so close to the camp and no-one knew? Do they know all of our plans and is this fucking war a waste of time?"
He began to pant as his fury took over his skin and breathing again.

"Chil yu daun, Skai boy."

"What?"

Bellamy growled at the switch in language. Was she taunting him because he'd said he hated her people? What the hell. He'd just helped her.

"Calm. Breathe."

He wanted to, but his chest was tight, and he could feel pain lance up his spine as his rage seemed to want to consume him. Bellamy Blake had no idea how to change a lifetime of responding to the world around him. He would fight first. With his bare fists that he didn't know how to use like these people from the ground did, but whatever - he'd kill every single one of these mountain men with his last fucking breath if he had to. To make sure they couldn't hurt the Arkadians. Or Octavia.

He flinched when he felt her hand against his arm. Her breathing was loud, steady and her hand didn't move when he tried to twist her off him. He could feel the air in his lungs again though, and the quiet wash of her words seemed to seep through the constant red haze of his tangled emotions.

He let out a slow, shaky breath.

"When does this endless fucking cycle stop?" he finally said, his voice crackling with restrained anger, the grief and fear barely hidden beneath the layers of hate.

"Is that what bothers you, Skai-boy?" the woman responded, and there was a hint of humor in her tone.

His eyes snapped up to hers, and he was met with those calm eyes that couldn't seem to decide whether they were the blue of the ocean or the subtle striations of jade threading an iceberg. He felt breathless for a moment. She was certainly stunning. And a pain in his ass. And she had a fucking girlfriend.

He rolled his eyes. Of course, the Grounder woman had a fucking girlfriend.

"Yes," he finally whispered in defeat shoulders slumping as his head dipped forward towards the floor. He felt tentative fingertips move across his arm again. Soothing him.

"Bellamy," he said softly.

"What?"

The woman's voice was curious and confused.

He looked up at her and smiled. It was a little bit twisted as he grimaced before pushing his hand out towards her in greeting. She looked down at it in bewilderment, so he took it into his and shook it once firmly.

"That's my name."

"Ah," the woman grinned, and it was sharp with knowledge and humor, her teeth a brilliant white and her eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Queen Nia of the Azgeda," she said.
Bellamy could feel his mouth opening in shock and surprise. This was the Queen he'd heard the other Arcadian's whispering about. The Commander's sister, and the one that had stolen the Commander's lover.

It was amazing. You couldn't get a messenger to the powers that be in the direst moments, but gossip; gossip traveled well and fast. Across cultures and the imminent threat of war did nothing to slow it or deter it.

"Well, fuck me!" Bellamy breathed out, and his back hit the wall they were leaning up against, "Clarke is going to kill me!"

He looked over at her when she laughed softly in the semi-darkness of their room.

"Well Queen Nia, any ideas on how we get out of this hell hole?"

***

Costia walked through the halls of her home, her shoes sounding strange against the tiled flooring of this level. She'd gone to her mother's rooms and changed into the clothes her father preferred her to wear when she was in Mount Weather.

She was unused to dresses as it had been such a long while and she could feel the muscles in her arms and legs pull against the fabric, but habit ingrained from years of control and punishment lent her the grace she needed to sway through the corridors of muted lighting.

Her heart ached. Lexa. Nia. Nia who was here now and captive. What had Nia done? Didn't she realize that she couldn't afford to give her father any leverage against Lexa?

Lexa.

She almost sobbed at the onset of pain that lanced through her chest. Every step she'd made, every counter move against her father and his machinations against Lexa was unraveling. She could not let him see, would not let him see how much she felt for the girl who had become the most exceptional leader of their world. Was Lexa stronger than him though?

She didn't know. All her life she'd been led to believe that the Commanders of the Twelve clans, or tribes as her father called them with contempt, was anathema. They were the enemy. They were corrupted and driven by distorted primitive drives and needed to be herded, shepherded back into the fold under the guidance of the descendant of the last president of the United States.

Her lips tightened, and Costia grimaced.

But the people outside hadn't been like her father had said at all.

They'd been kind. At first, Costia had been terrified of the Azgedan family who'd brought her up, their ways so strange and harsh compared to the life she'd led in the mountain.

Her world in the mountain had been one of constant training, learning the soft cadence of her mother's dialect as well as the language of the Commander with its harsh directives. Azgeda were often hard and sharp like the lands of ice and snow that surrounded them, but their language flowed softly like the glaciers of the far north while Trikru seemed like the rat-a-tat of the Maunon's rapid-fire semi-automatic rifles.

She had been in a constant state of battle readiness. Of being made to feel like she didn't fit. Her nomon had been demonized and terrorized by her father, but Reda never bowed to him which
always made him fly into fits of rage.

Reda was a reminder to all of them of what the world was with the sun on your skin, her color a constant reminder that the sun could darken and change the way you looked.

Every single person in the mountain had a strange pallid complexion, even Costia's rich caramel tones had seemed grayish until she was pushed out into the radiated world. Her skin had tanned until she was the deeper color that she was now after a time riding and walking beneath the sun. Dante had not recognized the child who had returned the next winter for re-education.

Her thoughts were heavy as she thought of those years. The beatings she'd endured to remind her of her loyalties.

Costia's mind shied from the sheer horror of what they did. The fact that it was her father who instigated all of it, which she'd learned to compartmentalize to preserve her mind.

Her love for him strengthened with each remark of praise, every look of disappointment when she resisted his commands, the conflict in her heart increased each time he instructed a guard to press the electrocution wands against her mother's body whenever Costia 'misbehaved.'

She loved him. She hated him. And a part of her knew that she needed to win so that Reda could finally be permitted to live with her own people again.

For the Commander to be safe. And to never, ever let her father anywhere near the mantle of power he wanted to take once Mount Weather toppled the Grounder forces outside.

Costia looked inside the medical supplies room that they'd thrown Nia and the Arkadian into. She felt the nerves she'd been curbing race across her chest, and then took in a deep breath when she saw them sitting side by side against the wall.

It was time to deal with the consequences of her choices.

***

Nia's head ached. It had been hours of them trying different ideas for escape. After they'd cut through the rope that connected his manacles, and then her own she'd watched Bellamy climb shelves and push against grates before finally giving up and sliding back down to the floor.

She could feel the cords of her neck tightening with the strain of holding in her pain while her temple throbbed from the injury the coward Maunon had inflicted on her from behind.

The boy, Bellamy was still sitting in a furious lump of long limbs beside her as he railed against the situation they now found themselves in.

"If we hadn't followed her none of this would be happening," he said, and the anger was evident in the clipped tight breaths he punctuated each word with.

"But we followed, and here we are. No?"

Nia's voice is soft and a little hoarse from pain, and dehydration. She rolled her eyes when Bellamy growled low in frustration.

"If only we'd gone for backup. If only I'd radioed the Ark. They'd at least know where we were."

His voice was a low mix of frustration and rage, and she could not comprehend how this boy could
allow himself to show so many emotions. He exposed himself, and his weakness so easily. She needed to train him quickly before they were interrogated, something she knew was coming.

"Bellomi - you do yourself and your people no good when you focus on what could have been."

Nia’s voice is quiet, but the edge of sharpness to it makes the young Skai man stop the automatic response that had been on his lips which were twisted in the beginnings of a snarl.

"I don't know what the fuck -"

"Em pleni!"

The Trigadesleng is hissed, and his eyes almost bulge in fury and incomprehension, but Nia continues.

"Enough, Skai boy. They come. And when they do, they will interrogate us. They will not need to ask you any questions as your face, your body - everything that you know is outside written on your body. You have no common sense to hide these things from the enemy. And you must. No matter what happens, you must hold yourself still. You must be quiet. Do not ask anything. Show nothing of your feelings or thoughts. Your rage is your weakness. It makes you small, and they will see it immediately. And they will use it against you."

She's panting by the time she's finished speaking. The dull pain at her temples is now splitting her head into two, and she can barely tolerate what little light there is in the room. He must see it on her face as he moves forward to touch the side of her temple.

"Ok. Calm down. I get today's lesson, alright?"

Bellamy's response is a little cantankerous as he slowly pushes up and starts searching the small room again. She can tell from his body that he's worried about her despite the words he's just flung into her face. Nia smiles softly and tries to contain the groan that escapes her mouth when the pain surges up again as he hands her two small, white round discs which he almost throws at her in his glee.

"Pain killers!"

His voice is joyous, and a bit too loud and she cringes at the sound.

"You have to swallow them," Bellamy gently prods as she stares down blankly at his open hand.

She shakes her head and gasps at the sharp pain that almost blinds her.

"Nomon joka!"

He grimaces and looks over his shoulder to see if he can see outside and whether anyone has noticed that they've regained their consciousness after her too loud expletive.

"Come on, big, scary Grounder like yourself. A Queen no less," he taunts and pushes one of the pills towards her, "surely swallowing something this small without water is easy? Something you could do blindfolded and hopping on one leg?"

She glares up at him not understanding why she would blind herself but takes the pills and swallows them quickly. They are bitter and painful to pass down her throat, and she has to swallow hard a few times before they finally move downwards. She's left with a terrible taste in her mouth which she tries to brush away with her hand.
They both flinch when they hear the sound of shoes softly moving in the corridor outside. Nia reaches out and touches the tips of Bellamy's fingers as the sounds outside are definitely heading towards them.

"Remember what I said. You have strength. Use it. Do not show your emotions on the outside unless you use it to trick or deflect. They are not seasoned to the world as my people have been. They do not know how far I can go if I must. And they do not know you. You can be anything you want to be today."

She whispers her words close to his ear, and she can see the way his face pales as her meaning is not lost on him. He moves far from her as the door is opened slowly from the outside.

"Natrona!"

Nia hisses as she stares up at the woman she's shared her bed with for the last two years. She sees a woman she no longer recognizes dressed in the clothing of the enemy. The long pale dress flutters like faded pink ribbons around Costia's muscled body. Her legs, usually clad in leather leggings, are now revealed. They're well defined and beautiful, Costia's darker skin mesmerizing as her long legs taper into shoes that compress her feet into dainty pinpoints and sharp angles, while her body is draped in soft materials that mold across her form.

Costia pales and stumbles in the doorway.

"Nia. We have no time for me to explain."

Her voice is urgent, and she looks over her shoulder, her body blocking the view from the cameras.

"They are coming. They will hurt you. My father - he will not have mercy. Please. Understand that I had no choice!"

Nia's eyes are like ice as she stares back at this woman who has destroyed everything.

"Fuck you. Go. You bitch!"

She can't breathe, and she can feel the pain in her head a dull ache in the background as her insides ache. The wretchedness of this betrayal seeps from her heart and out onto her skin. Nia does not hear her own ragged breathing, nor does she feel the tears that flow down her cheeks.

Costia's breath hiccoughs as their eyes meet.

"I am sorry, my Kwin. I had no choice."

"You always have a choice, Costia."

Nia is barely conscious of anything that is going on in the outside world, and it's only because of Bellamy's grimace that she realizes they're wasting time.

"What do you want?" Nia says and her words are soft, almost broken as she looks away from the woman who's torn her from everything that she'd held precious in her life. Nia feels the terrible irony of it all as she had a choice too. And she'd made it, and by doing so, she had betrayed her own sister.

"He will come, and he'll hurt you because he wants Lexa."

Costia's face is a strange mixture of despair and regret, but the urgency, the need to keep Lexa safe
is real. It's telegraphed by the glitter of her eyes and the tight mien of her body as she leans forward into the small room.

Nia nods and then looks at Bellamy.

"He knows nothing about the Commander."

"He knows her war plans." Costia's voice is now frantic with fear.

Bellamy begins to shake his head.

"No. The Commander allowed only her generals into the room for the last part. As you would know," his voice is tight with worry as he can sense the urgency of their situation, "why don't you let us go? We can run, get help."

He stops before he can begin as Costia shakes her head in exasperation.

"No. There is no time. He comes. He has our nomon - I cannot -"

"Costia!"

The voice is sharp, the timbre a thick low rumble, and from the quiet stiffening of Costia's body, and the mask that quickly slips across her face - Nia knows that his voice is the most terrifying thing in the world for the woman before her.

And Nia's heart almost stops beating because nothing scares Costia.

Even for Azgeda, her courage has no parallel. She always jumped from the highest cliffs into the snow below, battled the snow leopards on thinning ice, and took risks where no other would - almost as if she had a point to prove.

Some things are beginning to make sense, but in all the time she's known Costia - Nia has never seen her balk or be terrified of anything.

Until now.

***

Clarke can feel the burn in her thighs as she runs quietly to keep up with the Commander's long-legged pace for most of the day.

It had been evident to her that Lexa's mind was focused on all blueprints that she and Raven had found. She could see her mind spinning with plans for the weaponry that would be used to bring down the mountain.

She'd watched with increasing worry as the Commander's jawline became even more rigid with tension with each thing they showed her during the presentation. Her distraction was obvious to Clarke and perhaps Anya, but to anyone else, she seemed impenetrable in her calmness.

Clarke wondered if Lexa was more worried about Nia than she'd let on. She knew there was little love lost between the two sisters because of Costia, but she had come to know Lexa in the short, intense time they'd spent together. She knows that the young leader still loved her sister absolutely, and Clarke had seen the dampened emotion in those deep green eyes that hid an ache. The mistrust. A lingering look of despair as she could no longer trust Nia as she once had.

Clarke could feel her own lips tighten with displeasure at the thought of Costia.
She tried to understand her, but something made her query why this woman seemed to be everywhere that trouble started.

If Costia has betrayed Lexa's love with her sister no less, why was she still behaving as if there was still an emotional connection between her and the Commander, and that she had the power to influence her?

Clarke wondered if she was thinking irrationally and if she was more than bordering on the jealous side. Regardless, she seriously was beginning to despise the Azgedan scout.

Clarke would bet any money that Costia had something to do with the disappearance of Queen Nia and Bellamy. She just did not know how or more importantly, why.

Clarke had hoped that Lexa would be happy that their combined forces would be ready for the mountain, but the exact opposite happened and she couldn't make sense of it. Now it seemed that Lexa's contained fury was about to spill out from the short, sharp responses she was giving Clarke at every corner.

Clarke had been so intent on her thoughts she didn't realize Lexa had stopped her furious pace around the encampment. Clarke had walked several yards past the Commander, her mind thinking of all the different ways they could enter the mountain without detection before she felt the absence by her side.

She stiffened and came to a stop when she heard her name being quietly murmured behind her.

She turned and realized quickly why Lexa had stopped in the middle of her strident walk.

Lexa had stopped in front of the bald-headed teacher who was now standing before the Commander's tent. This was the same man that seemed to have Lexa subjugated to his opinion.

In this case, Clare was neither jealous nor irrational. This man was dangerous, and she hated him unequivocally. In the week she'd stayed in Polis Clarke had learned to hate the look in Lexa's eyes whenever she looked to him for advice. Uncertain. Fragile.

In those moments Lexa was not the young Commander Clarke was fast growing to like despite their earlier beginnings, and here Clarke's mind stuttered away at the memory of Lexa's subterfuge, but she understood.

If she distanced herself from her own feelings, she completely understood the necessity of Lexa's mistrust. Lexa had grown in a world of war, and sacrifice and unending cycles of revenge while Clarke had been raised to believe in the principles of peace.

Even now, the man standing before them in his riding clothes, the robes of the Fleimkepa were dusty and crumpled from his ride from Polis, exuded an air of arrogance and omniscience that made Clarke's senses tingle.

The way he looked at Lexa disturbed Clarke. It was not sexual, but there was a strange feeling that threaded through her while watching their interactions. There were an odd paterfamilias and intimacy he extended towards the Commander.

Lexa was used to it and had probably grown up with the man's arrogance, and his perceived entitlement to the woman's time and thoughts. Lexa didn't see the darkness behind his drive to control Lexa while Clarke did.

And Clarke knew without a doubt that this man hated her. Their slight altercation in the tower at
Polis had been illuminating, and Clarke knew when to be wary of people who seemed calm on the face of things.

His inner turmoil had spilled out in the vitriolic stream he'd spat at her. Clarke knew exactly what she represented to him, and she knew that he would do everything in his power to sow doubt into the Commander's mind about their relationship. Or whatever this was between them that was in its very nascent stages.

Clarke felt her breath catch as she watched Lexa's face become distant and the look she quickly gave Clarke told her everything Clarke needed to know. But she wasn't going to make it easy for the Fleimkepa.

"Klark, I will need to speak with -"

"Lexa. Before you go. One last word. In private please?"

Clarke was firm, and she kept her gaze steady on Lexa's. She knew something had been bothering her all morning and she wanted to get to the bottom of it. Both of them were not particularly adept at trusting. Their lives had surely broken them of that habit.

She needed to make sure that Lexa knew that Clarke could be trusted. Her instincts told her that everything depended on this.

She saw the hesitation in those green eyes which flicked over to her mentor as if seeking advice, but then Clarke saw how Lexa's spine straightened, and she nodded once.

"Fleimkepa. We were not expecting you. Please get some food for yourself and your warriors. I will speak with you after you have refreshed yourself."

Lexa's tone is clipped and firm, and she doesn't make eye contact with him.

She's already turning towards Clarke, and the entry of the tent before his voice interrupts them.

"Commander. I am here to ensure that we lead the people with our heads and that the teachings of our people are not lost with these - invaders."

His voice is a low growl, and he directs all of his animosity towards Clarke who steadies her breath as she stares back at him, refusing to be intimidated when he steps towards her.

Clarke watches with caution as Lexa looks back at him in surprise.

"They fell from the sky, Titus. We know now that it was no invasion. We also know that Skaikru has Tek that will help us do something we have not been able to do in a century. Would you spite yourself and your people for words, for truths that have served their day?"

"They killed 300 hundred of our warriors, Heda. Is that not enough? How many more must die before you learn to trust the doubt in your heart and not be swayed by this -""

Lexa's face had darkened during his rant stepping between him and Clarke. She swore beneath her breath and took several calming breaths before she could speak again.

"To see the world through one eye diminishes us, teacher."

From the way the man flinches, Clarke knows that Lexa is quoting his words back at him.

"Love is a weakness. It will get you killed, and it will bring down your people,' he finally
responded, his words slow as he side-eyed Clarke.

"Without love, there is no honor when we kill to protect. Love defines our duty to the people, and should never be forgotten when we must choose war."

"You compromise us all! You compromise yourself! You destroy the Kongeda for no reason," he spits the words in a volley of anguish.

His face is reddening to such a point that Clarke reaches out and touches Lexa's arm gently. She watches as the tension between the two is still tight and awful and decides she needs to speak.

"Anya can bring you up to speed on everything that has happened," Clarke says distracting him for a moment, and his deep-socketed eyes swivel towards her. She can see the anger banked in his gaze, and she swallows softly before speaking again.

"Many things have happened that you need to know about."

"Then let us speak now," Titus doesn't hide the contempt in his voice.

"Enough," Lexa snaps and turns towards the tent. "Klark."

It is a command, and Clarke shakes her head at the temper that rises up in her at that tone, but she pushes it down knowing that this is necessary before the Fleimkepa.

"Fleimkepa. I will meet you at Indra's tent later. Please take my advice and get some food and rest."

He nods abruptly and moves away, but not without one last glare at Clarke who can feel her stomach sinking at the man's presence. He's trouble. She knows it, and they cannot afford any more right now when there is already so much happening around them.

Clarke walks into Lexa's tent and almost stumbles when she sees how the Commander stares at her. Lexa's gaze is careful as she takes several moments to breathe and calm herself. It's unlike her, and Clarke feels a sharp stab of worry begin to slither through her guts.

"What is it? Something has been bugging the hell out of you since this morning. So just tell me."

Clarke sees how Lexa's eyes blink for a moment as she stares back at Clarke, and for the first time since that first week in the bunker - she sees wariness.

Clarke moves forward, and she's gentle with how she approaches. She knows Lexa a little now. Knows how her chin will rise if she's not going to back down on something. How those green eyes will dart away if Lexa is unsure and has to think something through.

The look in her eye now is something that Clarke had not expected to see being directed at her. Caution.

Lexa moistens her lips before speaking, and she takes a step back as she slowly pulls her thoughts together.

"You had a lot of weapons ready for today's demonstration."

Her tone is almost casual, her voice soft, and she's staring at a point somewhere just over Clarke's left shoulder.

Clarke looks at her quizzically and shrugs.
"Yes? We have a lot of tek. There's enough there that will distract the people of Mount Weather. It will be fine, Lexa."

The silence that falls between them is tight, and Clarke slows her breathing down and begins to pay attention as she can tell by Lexa's lack of response that Clarke's answer is not the one she was looking for.

What had Lexa said? Clarke thinks about how many weapons there were on display for the Commander to view. She thinks about how this might look to Lexa, and her people and the bottom falls out of her stomach.

"Lexa."

Her voice is raw, soft and starting to get tense.

Lexa's gaze is steady as she moves her body to turn and stare back at her, and Clarke can feel her body tighten, her mind going into defensive mode. Clarke is the leader of her people. It wasn't something that she chose, but these were things the Ark had to do to survive. She was not going to apologize for that. Peace was something they aspired to, but not at the expense of their own lives.

"Some of the weapons were already there for defense. You cannot ask us not to defend ourselves. The rocket launchers - Sinclair and his team had been working on that on behalf of the council. The other things, Raven came up with that and used all the personnel we had on hand to work on these overnight. The sleeping darts we developed in case of a Reaper attack. We don't want to kill them. They are innocent and my mother and I, we can bring them back. That's why all of those things were ready for you to see so quickly."

Lexa stared at her for a long moment, and the silence in the tent becomes heavy before she lets out a slow sigh.

"You are right, Klark. And - " Lexa's voice faltered for a moment, "your people had a right to defend yourselves against this world. I - I am sorry for mistrusting you. I saw them all this morning, and I thought that - that all this time you could have wiped us out whenever you wished."

Clarke is dumbfounded. The thousands of warriors that surround Arcadia right now belies that statement, but she understands the meaning beneath the words.

"Don't you understand, Lexa?" Clarke's voice was sharp with worry.

She needed Lexa to see the core of the Arcadian spirit and mindset.

Yes, some of them like Bellamy would fight to take the land from Lexa's people. And some were terrified of the Earth and all it stood for. But she wasn't, and there was no way in hell she'd take what wasn't hers. Neither would her mother, or Diana or Marcus.

The majority of the Ark was relieved that the Earth was habitable. That they got a second chance. A chance to breathe and see the world that they'd only ever imagined.

"We want you to win. Yes, I made sure we were prepared to fight if we needed to. To survive whatever the Commander of the Twelve Clans sent our way."

She smiled softly her blue eyes bright in the umber tint of sunlight, and the reflected golds inside Lexa's tent, the light dappling from the shade of trees that towered nearby, moving softly in the mid-afternoon breeze.
"You know how to live on this Earth. You can teach us. We can teach you all the things about technology that does not destroy. For everything you saw today that has a harmful consequence, there is an equal opposite for good."

Lexa's smile was soft as she moved to touch the side of Clarke's face.

"Was that your idea to help the Reapers?"

Lexa kissed her softly after Clarke had nodded almost shyly at the question.

"I knew that it was. You are always trying to find solutions to impossible problems," Lexa's voice is gentle and Clarke can hear the tenderness in it by how it softens at the end of her words.

Clarke's heart almost bursts at the look of soft and quiet pride in Lexa's eyes when she looks down at her.

"Klark," Lexa's eyebrow rises up, and her face becomes serious almost immediately, "my instinct is to go and find my sister, but so many of the axioms I grew up with, the things I learned from Titus are true. We must pause and see all possible paths into the mountain."

Clarke nodded and looked up into tired green eyes that were tinged with a little bit of desperation.

"If they're there, we'll find out. I can send my message to Wells using our old secret code. He's the only one who will understand."

Clarke tries not to smirk when she sees a hint of jealousy flare by the tightening of that beautiful mouth, the nose crinkling a little so that small lines appeared across the bridge where her skin was lightly dusted with almost imperceptible freckles.

"What code? And why did you have this - this communication?"

Her voice is cautious as if she's trying to be reasonable, but Clarke can see right through her and notices the thread of jealousy beneath Lexa's words.

"Our parents were both strict. We had incredibly specific times we had to go to our rooms for sleep," Clarke's voice drifts as she turns her eyes to the side in memory.

"We were two bright minds often bored to distraction by the things we were forced to study. This was our way of rebelling. And Wells, his dad was cruel in his constant need to assert his authority. This was our way of - circumventing some of his more vicious punishments."

Clarke reached across and moved her fingertips across the Commander's armor before continuing her words.

"Whenever we wanted to break curfew, we'd contact each other through the internal radio system using Morse code, but we used chess moves as part of our messaging as they were short and required fewer letters. All the chess pieces meant something. One piece meant danger, cancel all plans while another meant everyday shit - nothing to worry about. We'd worked it all out by the time we were fourteen. We were part of the elite that Well's father created, but it wasn't a world that either of us was comfortable or happy living in."

Clarke laughed softly at the growing confusion on Lexa's face.

"Chess is a game. And the Ark had it's own problems around politics even though we never went to war. We shed blood without having to see it on our hands," Clarke's voice was soft as she
remembered how her father's body was thrust into the frozen chamber of space.

"Chess is about warfare and strategy. It teaches you how to win through calculated risks, and creating multiple options in your head. It teaches you a lot about yourself and your opponent. What you're willing to give up to bring down your opponent."

Clarke pauses and looks up through dark eyelashes and grins, "I think you'd be very good at it."

Lexa smiles, and Clarke gulps at the sudden predatory look in her eye.

They're silent for a moment, and Clarke is acutely aware of Lexa's body beneath her lighter armor. It's the same as what she'd worn when Clarke had found her on the forest floor. She can hear the way Lexa slows down her breathing.

"You will have to teach me when we go back to Polis," Lexa finally says.

Clarke knows, she knows that this is not what Lexa was going to say, but she's all too aware, that now is not the time for a real answer.

"I'll message him. Raven can help with the radio connection and boost the signal if Mount Weather is jamming them. I don't know if Bellamy and Nia are there, but if they are, I hope Wells can help them."

Clarke's eyes closed, and she inhaled deeply. She doesn't want to think that Wells may already be dead.

He'd had been in radio contact with the Ark for almost every evening since they left, updating his father and Darius. Except today but it was still early. In either case, they couldn't do anything except prepare their weapons inside the cover of Sinclair's workshop.

They didn't know who among Lexa's people was relaying the messages back to the Mountain, so Clarke had been careful only allowing most of the camp to see the more basic weaponry in today's demonstration.

The more complex ones like the rocket launcher and tranquilizer darts had been shown only to Lexa and her generals.

Clarke was grateful that Titus had not been there earlier for she would not have known how to influence Lexa to stop him from seeing the demonstration. It was only Anya's encouragement to keep information close and the presentation small that helped Lexa make the final decision to bring her generals in alone for the more dangerous parts of what Arcadia was capable of when they put their minds to it.

Most of the Ark were the descendants of scientists and engineers, and every one of them had been brought up to believe in the possibility of peace through invention. Seeing the Earth destroyed had broken many hearts on board the old International Space stations, but it hadn't hardened them.

The first people of the Ark had imparted to those that followed, their children and their children's children; that it was necessary to evolve and to wait until the Earth was ready. It was their duty to keep thinking, inventing, creating and developing with what they had on the Ark.

The monolith had come together when twelve international space stations united to form one working hub; The Ark. The day was still celebrated by the Arkadians through Unity Day.

It was only when Thelonius Jaha became their elected leader that things became less cohesive,
factions formed, and a hidden elitism that Jaha promoted through his consistent rationing on those who did 'less important' work. Like the Blakes, Raven, and Finn, Monty and Jasper and several of the delinquents who ended up in the sky boxes with Clarke.

Clarke like many of her peers had devoured the historical footage of Earth before the bombs. She’d seen images of Paris and Amsterdam, the high rises of New York city, fjords and the bleak landscapes of the extreme ends of that incredible blue planet. She had watched newsreels speckled with time, and the hysterical voice-overs of an era long, long dead before the first of the neutron, hydrogen and nuclear bombs had fallen annihilating most of the people of Earth, leaving empty buildings, horrendous sentinels of death, behind in their wake.

As the Ark had traversed its elliptical path around the planet, it had seen the remnants of a dead civilization. Or so they’d thought. Glimpses of light had been shrugged away as anomalies as no-one could have survived the high radiation fallout from those bombs. Clarke now wondered if they had targeted cities, and maybe that was why there were survivors. The concentration of the bombing had targeted high population areas leaving sparsely populated rural areas to survive the aftermath.

The repercussions to the climate would have changed dramatically and killed millions afterward with irradiated winds and storms. It would have been the worst kind of death. Slow, torturous and inevitable. But there were survivors. People who had hunkered down. And waited.

And that's why she was here with Lexa. Someone whose ancestors had more than just survived. They'd evolved too, and something-something had been done to create someone like Lexa with her dark blood and terrifyingly swift recovery skills. Clarke hadn't forgotten how quickly the woman had recuperated from her injuries.

She felt Lexa's long fingers move softly, and firmly close over her wrist.

"He will call tonight, Klark. We must be patient."

She nods. What else can she do? The awful heat in her chest that has spread to her stomach curdles everything, and the words on her tongue are stilled as she worries about her best friend stuck in the mountain.

Chapter End Notes

Well hi, everyone.
I am so sorry this took so much longer than I expected. I have no excuses. I've been reading some fantastic, long fics and got very distracted and lazy. My working schedule to write went out the window over the summer and now we're heading into Australian winter I hope to do better.

Thank you a million, squintillion times to all of you who always respond and comment to each chapter. You have no idea what an inspiration it is to keep going.

With a lot of affection,
Underthecovers
Chapter Notes

I know it's been a while. I get bogged in the details. Sorry. Here's a short chapter for all of you lovely people who kept with the Kudos and comments. I truly do appreciate it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Costia walks along the hallways of her father’s mountain.

The mountain people's eyes had skittered away when she had come roaring in last night still dressed in the clothes of the Azgeda scout. Now that Costia is contained in the dresses her father prefers, they smile and nod in passing. Her feet are heavy on the old tiled floors. The illumination at this time of day is bright as lunch has just passed. It's a strange dissonance inside her body when the cool breeze that flows through the vents hold the smell of metals used to process and reduce the harmfulness of the radiation that comes through the air tunnels. Her clothes from outside are now in decontamination, and they have forced her back into the clothes they expect all women in the mountain to wear.

They are hideous and she hates them with a passion. The silk of her dress is soft and delicate as it flows along the line of her muscular torso, but all she feels is the incredible urge to tear it from her body. The only thing that stops her is the knowledge that her father would humiliate her in some way like he’s done a hundred times before.

Costia knows it is best to not dwell on these things so she draws in a breath and walks as smoothly as possible in the ridiculously high heels; the dress swirling behind her as she strode towards the holding area she knew they had contained Nia.

Fuck. They had the Queen of Azgeda but had no idea who she was yet. Only Ryder knew what Nia looked like and he was still out there. Preparing for war. Sending her father more details of the Commander’s planning wherever he could.

Costia could only hope that Lexa was feeding misinformation to weed out any moles. Lexa had almost got killed the last time when Ryder had told her father of the attempt to assassinate him by the small group led by the Commander herself.

At the time, the cameras outside the mountain had caught dark, blurred images with everyone in the war group wearing face paint. The joyous irony was that the Grounders all looked the same to her father and his people, and he would not know Lexa from any of the other female warriors.

Nia had not been around Mount Weather so any images of her were also non-existent. Her father only knew that she had white-gold hair, but that could be said of many Azgedans from the capital. If she kept quiet about this, they would not know the value of what they had in their hands.

Not just the Queen of Azgeda, but more importantly, the Commander’s sister, an invaluable asset for leverage against the ruler to the twelve clans. Costia had never said anything, and it seemed as if Ryder and none of the others had thought to do so either. She was their leader to all intents and purposes, and the daughter of the President. They would have assumed she would have told him at
the beginning, and yet she never did. Some instinct telling her to keep pieces of information to herself which she thanked God for now.

Her head lifted when she heard her name being called quietly. She looked over and forced the distaste from her face. Cage.

And it appeared that he was accompanied by the young ones from Arcadia that her father had tricked into coming into the mountain. She blinked a few times to clear her mind before stopping slowly to greet her brother.

“Cage.”

Her voice was still rough, the raspiness from her throat still painful from the previous night where she’d screamed trying to stop her father and his men from hurting Nia, and then screamed some more when he’d had Nia moved to the holding cell near the other captive women of the eastern and northern provinces.

Dante had made it very clear what he intended for Nia once she recovered from her injuries.

Cage Wallace was the strangest of brothers. His tall frame was reflective of Dante in many ways, the breadth and strength of his shoulders also a testament to his blood, his dark hair and eyes were more his mother while Costia had Dante’s distinctive blue-grey eyes, but in every other way, Cage was different to their father.

She should have appreciated it but over time it had made her more resentful of this weak brother who never stood up for her and her mother.

There were times when she could barely look at him as his face simply reminded her of all the things that he had, and had never lost. His freedom was a constant thorn that tore at her insides, the resentment growing as they grew apart. The fact that he could never step outside while she could is a constant source of victory and joy that she held over him.

Instead of looking to her sibling for help against the tyranny of their father, she’d looked to her mother’s jailer for hope, for salvation and help. And yet, her father was the one that held all their lives in his fists.

Damn him. Damn Cage for his inability to save her, and to only hold her when she’d wept at night. A resentment she is barely aware of buried deep beneath the skin of sibling animosity.

“You’re back,” Cage tried to contain the happiness in his voice as he knew how Costia would react to it.

He probably only risked it now knowing she would not cause any scenes in front of the strangers from Arkadia.

She nodded and then looked over to the dark young man beside her brother, and a young woman with long blonde hair beside him. Both were staring at her with open curiosity before the man moved forward with his hand outstretched. It took her several seconds to remember to reach for his hand, and not wrap her fingers around his forearm.

“I’m Wells Jaha, and this is Harper McIntyre. We’re from the Ark.”

The man’s smile was charming, perfect white teeth and a chiselled jaw. She could see how useful this young man would be to his father.
Unlike herself. Unlike Cage.

She was not incapable of her own charm which she quietly switched on with a bright smile.

“I am Costia.”

She modulates her voice so that it is soothing, and she makes her smile soft and warm as she turns her gaze to the two young people from Arkadia.

Cage is smiling. Costia completely stills so as not to betray emotion and she turns to stare at the newcomers instead. She looks at Cage through her peripheral vision as she does not understand this visage he’s displaying. Her brother’s face usually has a sullen childishness, and he’s as quick to anger as his father when he talks to the security team or the people of the mountain.

Costia has always believed that it was because Emerson is their father’s second in command when Cage had always expected to follow in his father’s footsteps.

But maybe she and Cage have that in common. They will never achieve the aspiration of a lifetime; to please their father.

Costia is no fool. She saw their world with different eyes each time she returned home to report new findings to her father on the Grounder culture. And each time with each beating her mother took on her behalf she had closed off more of herself. She removed the joy of being with people she felt a kinship to than the people she’d been born to in the mountain. She began to remove herself from those she loved inside.

Like Reba, her mother, whose despair was too much to absorb when Costia had turned twelve, and impossible when she turned fourteen and realized what her father had done for Costia to be alive.

And what was worse that her mother loved her absolutely and with a quiet wonder.

“We haven’t seen you before?”

Wells smiles and she snaps out of the fast growing torment inside her heart.

“She’s been unwell and had to be quarantined in her quarters during recovery,” Cage says and his voice is gentle when he speaks.

The look he gives her tells her that this is the story that Dante has concocted for her sudden appearance.

“Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that. I wonder if it’s anything we could help you with?”

Costia feels a little panic but doesn’t allow anything to show on her face. She smiles with grace and nods at Wells.

“Thank you, our physicians are exceptional, and I am fine now.”

She turns slowly and she knows that the dress which outlines her body so well will be a distraction for a minute. When she turns back towards them she can see that the girl Harper’s eyes are still bemused and staring at her legs.

“You certainly do look fine,” Harper says with a smirk before tilting her head, “you know. You’re the first person here we’ve seen who is not -”

The woman flounders for a second and her hands waves uselessly in the air before she looks to
Well’s darker skin before looking back at hers, and Costia clicks as to what the woman is attempting to frame a question around.

Beside her mother - she’s the only person of her skin coloring in the mountain. There are some like Dr Tsing who were descendants of the original medical crew that came with the last President of the United States, but they were from the Indian subcontinent unlike herself and Wells who she assumes have a similar genetic makeup with their natural darker skin tones.

“I’m Dante’s daughter and yet I’m much darker than him and Cage. Yes, my mother is from the northern tribe of Azgeda where some of her people were descendants of darker races. And yes, I’m the only person of this color in Mount Weather.”

Her voice is neither aggressive or passive. She refuses to hide her mother from the eyes of the outside no matter what Dante demands. She can see how the young son of the old Chancellor wants to ask questions in the tightly coiled energy of his torso which tilts towards her ever so slightly, but his upbringing stops him short and he smiles instead.

“That is amazing. So the Mountain has contact with the outside? How did your father meet your mother?”

She looks at him carefully and tilts her head. She can see Cage begin to stiffen as he knows that this is usually a precursor to her doing something he’s going to regret not stopping.

“I am afraid I am the product of rape, Wells. My father didn’t really give my mother much of a choice when they conceived me. Such notions of consent are non existent for my father’s people who think my mother's people are savages.”

The implication is clear.

She hears the sharp intake of breath from the woman named Harper, and she sees a sudden dimming in Wells’ eyes. There are a range of emotions passing across his face. Shock. Worry. Fury. They’re all quickly tempered back into an impassive look that betrays nothing. Neither pity nor scorn. The two things she’d dealt with all of her life living in her father’s shadow and her mother’s torture.

“I have to find someone,” she finally says in the growing uncomfortable silence.

Costia stared into her brother’s face which had softened, after the initial stricken look he almost always expressed around her. She didn’t need his pity nor his protection.

She nodded quietly, her lips had firmed into a thin compressed line.

“I’ll leave you to your guests, Cage. I hope to see you both around.”

She tried to sound sincere but from the looks on everyone’s faces she could see that they were still reeling from her words.

As Costia walks away, the clack clack of her shoes are loud. It is a terrifying reminder of her captivity as she moves along the tiled floors.

***

Nia’s head had stopped hurting after the medication the Maunon forced down her throat. She’d tried to spit it out, but the female fisa had held her mouth firmly tightening a fist into Nia’s hair while growling insults beneath her breath.
“Filthy savage. Swallow or you’ll know what real pain is.”

She’d swallowed the pills when the guard had stepped forward with a short baton that crackled loudly, the end a bright blue.

She had seen him thrust it against one of the other women earlier, and after years of experience with her own mother, Nia knew which battles to fight and which ones to let go.

Right now she knew she had to focus and get out of here alive.

After her first encounter with Dante Wallace, the President - Nia realized she had to be careful after seeing the terror in Costia’s eyes. Her howls of rage when they’d brought Nia to this part of the mountain had made Nia’s heart thunder wondering where it was they had brought her to. Costia’s reaction had made her pause, and she realized that the location was some kind of open prison. One that had filled Costia with an inexplicable fury.

She did not understand Costia’s hysteria but after watching how Dante beat an older woman who’d been dragged into these rooms told her more about Costia than the time they’d been together as lovers.

The despair in both women’s eyes had shown a bond or connection that Nia could not untangle as the pain in her head had been crippling.

The Skaiboy had been dragged off kicking and yelling in a different direction the look of panic in his eyes clear, but she’d shaken her head once hoping he’d remember what she had said about never giving the enemy any knowledge of you. Not through fear, and most of all, never through rage and anger.

Bellomi had instantly calmed, stilling his body and walking away with a quiet intent in his eyes. Nia had tried not to roll her own as any idiot could see that the young ‘branwada’ was planning on something.

She just hoped that whatever it was; worked.

Nia felt better. The sharp shards of agony no longer threaded through her head, and her tiredness made the Maunon watchful until someone had brought in food for herself and the other inmates within this part of the compound.

Nia had tried to speak with the other women. Despite their Maunon clothing something about them felt off, and she could feel something out of place about them compared to those who walked in and out of the area.

The women who had come into heal her and the guards - she’d seen the looks of contempt on their faces for these women and herself and she began to wonder who they were.

Nia heard her before she could see her. Costia’s voice is sharp and exudes anger before she swept into Nia’s prison. There are no bars nor shackles, but the number of guards patrolling the exit and entry points tells Nia that this was not a space for the free.

Nia can feel her eyebrows rise at the clothes the scout was wearing. Gone were the dusty leathers and the light tunic that Costia had been wearing, and the high boots that often cover her feet and calves are gone.

This woman before her, swathed in a billowing mess of dark pink and rose atop flimsy shoes that showed off slender feet with tapered toenails was not the Costia she knew. Nia closed her eyes a
few times as if it would clear the image before her.

“Oh God, Nia.”

She looked upwards to Costia’s beautiful, treacherous face. Her mouth with those full lips pressed into a tight line, and covered with a colored stain strained with worry, and fear rose off her body in shocking waves.

No-one else would have seen the tiny indications of anxiety on Costia’s face, but Nia knew her well. The time spent sharing her bed, a lifetime of being trained to observe, and she knew all of Costia’s tells. She swallowed hard and forced herself to breathe slower. She did not want those guards running towards her with the lightning sticks.

“Who the fuck are you?”

Her words are just above a whisper and she’d spoken in the tongue of the Trikru clan. The little trick Clarke had played on her had made her more wary about the language of her people. If Clarke understood the language of the North, then chances were these monsters had some understanding of it too. She flinched when she felt the gentlest brush of fingertips against the side of her head near where she had been hit during their capture.

“I am sorry, Nia. I am so, so sorry. I never meant -“

“Em pleni, Costia!”

Nia tried to calm the tension between them when she saw in her peripheral vision one of the guards looking towards them with curiosity.

“Nia. Please - you cannot say anything. If he finds out he will kill you. Or he’ll use you to bring Lexa in.”

Of course; Lexa.

She knew deep in her heart - somewhere beneath the layers of her desire that Costia still harbored feelings for her younger sister. Her behavior of the last few weeks were all too clear on that front.

Nia grimaced before she moved her gaze back to Costia, and stared into those beautiful pale silvery blue eyes, the thick dark lashes almost hiding her gaze as Costia tried to keep her own composure in the constrained environment.

“I asked you a question,” she said and her voice though quiet, held the steel of generations of Azgeda monarchs.

Nia watched as Costia’s chest began to rise and fall with increasing panic, her eyes wild, darting everywhere as if someone would appear from the shadows.

“Dante Wallace, the President,” Costia’s voice faltered as she named the man who had moved Nia into this cell yesterday.

Nia had been slumped on the floor feigning greater illness than she felt as the man commanded his guards to enter the small room unshackling her, while dragging Bellamy out.

“He is my father.”

Nia felt a coldness sweep up through her body as she tried to take in the implications of what she’d
Costia’s father. So. He’d known everything about them, what they were doing, their plans, locations, their people’s movements because of this woman here.

Rage choked her breath. Hundreds killed. Stolen from families. Because of Costia. Nia could feel her fingers curl and slide down to her boots before she remembered that all of her weapons had been stripped from her body last night, the man rough in his handling, brushing deliberately along her legs and across her chest. His eyes mocked her as she struggled to stay awake and alert through the pain blasting through her head. Nia was without her daggers and her hands shook at the sheer frustration that pinned her in this moment.

Nia looked around the area trying to find somewhere where they could speak more privately but stopped when she saw the subtle shake of Costia’s head.

“There is tek everywhere. Do not resist. Do not fight. Wait -“ Costia said and her voice caught and cracked before continuing, “Lexa will come and get you. Just wait. My - my -“

Nia watched and used all of her mother’s indoctrination to not show her feelings as she watched Costia’s mouth tremble so hard she could not continue to speak for several moments.

“That woman last night,” Nia whispered, “the one he beat in front of you. Is she someone - important? Your mother?”

Costia’s eyes were still glassy, and she held herself rigidly before nodding only once which Nia acknowledged with a gentle tap across Costia’s knuckles.

“I understand,” she said as the silence grew between them.

She noticed that the guard had grown bored with their conversation of silences and had shifted his gaze over to the other women in the room.

“You are in a - difficult position.”

Costia immediately became rigid.

“Do not, Nia. I - I am not worthy of your forgiveness. I did what I had to do for my mother to survive yes, but at the beginning it was all me.”

Her words tumble out in a rush of whispered words of almost non-moving lips.

“I wanted to bring your people down. I wanted the Commander’s head for my father. I wanted to prove myself to him.”

Nia lifted her head, the first sign of discomfort that she gave to anyone who had been watching them. She could feel a numbness creep across her body as she stared down at the tormented eyes of her lover.

She wants to say more. She also wants to tear Costia to pieces with her bare hands, but she knows that the woman would have been in the same tormented position as herself not so long ago.

Nia is fortunate that her mother died during a hunting accident while Costia’s father continued to live.

Nia swallows hard and forces herself to speak in a normal tone.
“What have you done with the Skaiboy?”

There are a hundred questions that sit between them. Ugly truths that neither can face in a time condensed now by the war that is steady as it builds around them.

“He’s in quarantine. Then he’ll be taken to be with his friends in the lower floors.”

Nia sighs. It is too much. Her head is better than it was but she can feel a headache forming again behind her eyes inside her skull. Something of her pain must reflect on her face as Costia touches her jawline to move her face away from the light.

“Hey. I can see you are still in pain. Let me get you some medication for that.”

Nia shakes her head.

“No. I need to be alert.”

“Nia, you must heal. These will help and your concussion will pass with ease. There’s no internal bleeding and your bump is already receding but Emerson -“

Costia pauses to breathe, deliberately slowing it down to allow the rage to leave her body.

“He hit you hard without need or cause. I’m sorry about that. He knows who you are to me,” Costia breathed and Nia almost had to bend forward to hear her words.

“He is to be my husband when Polis falls and we can come out into the light.”

Nia feels a terrible heaviness, a schism that divides her heart as she thinks of what she has done for this woman. And what that has done to Lexa whom she had sworn to protect.

The hurt is terrible and if she could throw her head back and keen she would, but now is not the time.

Now is the time for quiet planning and silent assessment. She is her mother’s daughter and if she can help Lexa from within these walls she will.

And this time, nothing and no-one, least of all Costia - will stop her.

***

Bellamy can feel the itch to move in the way his hands want to clench and unclench, and the way his knee wants to jiggle up and down, but he forces himself towards stillness.

He noticed the camera in the corner as soon as they shoved him into this room yesterday. Was it only yesterday? How many days have they been missing?

His mind runs through a hundred scenarios, but he’s not sure if anyone will look for him. He knows what he’s been like since the Ark came down. God, even before. Constantly at war with Clarke.

Clarke.

Would she be looking for him? Would they even know he is missing?

He felt the hollow pain of loneliness that had been hounding him for months bear down hard on his insides.
He closed his eyes tight and made sure that the camera could not see his face as he grieved for the lost connection between Octavia and himself.

He didn’t understand why or how she could have left him so quickly once she found that Grounder Lincoln. He felt the rage well up inside again. Every God damn time he thought of him his mind would seize, filling with a red haze that clouded everything to the point that was all he could think about. Them. Together.

Is this how a father felt? He didn’t know who to turn to or what to think. He’d had to be everything for Octavia for almost two years since she was discovered. All his aspirations and hopes had been sidelined so he could make sure she would be ok.

His mom - his heart stuttered as he thought of her lying through her teeth so that Bellamy wasn’t floated too. She had been adamant in front of the council saying he had not known about the extra rations he’d stolen, so he could live.

His mom would have told him what to do. How to handle this and his emotions. But she wasn’t here because of God damn Jaha and the stupid one child rule.

Once upon a million years ago he had dreamed he would teach history and earth studies class, but that had to be set aside after Octavia was discovered, and he applied to be a guard to keep an eye on her.

Bellamy had put up with the other guards taunts and jeers simply so that he could see Octavia every day and make sure that no-one hurt her. He’d almost worn himself into the ground taking multiple shifts after he had interrupted two guards trying to rape her one night.

He’d gone to Kane whom to his surprise had been supportive and had made sure those same guards pulled duty outside the Sky Box. Kane had also told them in no uncertain terms why their pay was being docked and for how long, and that any sign of retribution would cause even further repercussions.

Bellamy has no fucking idea where he is right now but that’s ok. He recognizes panels and vents similar to what they had on the Ark. His head is spinning with what’s going on and he hates it that he’s now worried about her. That bloody Grounder queen.

He shakes his head in amazement and thinks on all the queens in history that he’s read about and none of them had prepared him for her.

He feels pride at the way he’s handled himself. He listened to what she’d said and not given the fucking Mount Weather personnel any idea of what he was thinking or feeling. He’d forced his face into the same implacability that every single one of those Grounders did and he had felt a certain thrill when he’d seen how frustrated it had made the President of Mount Weather and the head of his security.

Bellamy recognized the guy as being the same fucker who had hit Nia from behind. Coward. Fucking coward.

He had felt control start to seep into his consciousness when he understood how much he was pissing them off. They had expected something else. Fear maybe. Possibly his usual anger that would have put him right into their hands. They couldn’t make sense of him and that was good. That meant he could play this anyway he wanted.

For the first time in Bellamy Blake’s life he finally understood how to step away from his
emotions, and by restraining them he finally regained someone of the control he felt he’d lost since his mother got floated.

***

It is the tenth repetition of a leg press that finally makes Cage’s quadriceps cave to the pressure of the weight he’s used. The muscles in his quads are bulging and aching with a pain that seems like it is running through his blood.

Cage can feel the heat of his skin which is sweating beneath the gymnasium’s low lights. The loud clank of metal against metal reverberates through the room as he lets the weights crash down after pulling his legs away quickly.

The stink is coming from his own body. It’s partly the smell of his own natural scent mixed in with the stench of his growing fear. Costia had been in another blazing row with their father last night, and he can still hear her furious words rising in temper and volume.

Costia’s rage is completely useless. Her screams were ignored before their father back-handed her hard across the face. Cage had stepped forward instinctively even after all these years, and even after Costia’s contempt for her big brother; his need to protect her was so instilled in him.

Dante had looked across the room, its stark white walls and strip lighting making all of their faces appear ghostly in the late night. Not that it mattered what time it was. It was always night time so deep below the ground if not for the incremental lighting to give the appearance of time passing throughout the day.

His father had glowered, and fucking Carl Emerson had sneered to his face, mouthing words behind his father could not see. Nancy boy. Pussy. It didn’t matter. Cage was used to Carl’s tormenting even when they were kids soon after the accident had happened.

Cage Wallace was not always hated by his father. He remembers a time when his father’s eyes lit up whenever he walked into the room as he walked beside his mother. His joy real as he bent towards his son and wife. They were real memories he could still see in his head.

The story went that Cage had tried to reach the decontamination chamber which was bathed in sunshine from outside when he was five years old. He’d killed his mother, and destroyed the calf muscle on his left leg, and forever shut his father’s heart from the world. He knew why his father hated him for they were the same reasons he hated himself.

His life had changed dramatically from that moment as his father disappeared from his life, and President Dante Wallace began to look at every way possible to bring his people out into the sun.

The sun that had killed his wife and destroyed whatever masculinity his son could ever have had. All for the want of the first sunbeam he’d ever seen. The sharp brightness had shocked him after years of the lights of the Mount Weather bunker - it had been breathtaking. He knew not to go. It had been drummed into every single person in the facility that they were never to go outside. That outside would kill them.

But a part of him didn’t understand and wanted to believe that something so unutterably beautiful could cause him harm. He’d almost stepped out before his mother’s body had catapulted into his pushing him away from the exit panels to the decontamination area. Only one part of his calf had caught in the doors, and he’d screamed at the burn. And then he’d forgotten everything when his world was drowned out by the screams of his mother as she drowned in the light that had cascaded over her body causing a fiery trail of burns that tore her skin apart.
He knows his father doesn’t see him anymore. Cage is a shade of a memory. The torment of his mother’s screams a horrific coloring of Cage’s every labored step and despoiling each memory Dante had of the wife he’d been deeply in love with.

From then on Cage was looked after by the women from the Grounder clans whom his father and his team brought back home from their forays into the primitive heartland of the savages.

He was six when Costia’s mother, Reba had been brought in. He remembers the look of need in his father’s eyes when he first saw her. He’d never taken one of the Grounder women; always assigning them to the single men in the community. Building up the blood work he’d called it. Bringing the sun’s radiation back into their blood while ‘purifying’ the savages outside.

He’d stared and stared at the young woman whose skin was like nothing Cage had ever seen. Darker than the shadows he sometimes played in, with eyes even darker. Reba had only been nine years older than Cage.

The girl from the northern tundra of what had once been the southern parts of Canada had been dragged in - trussed up in ropes like one of their farmed pigs.

He remembers her spitting and fighting, bruising the men that had surrounded her with fists that flew so fast, her darker skin an anomaly in the darkened cave of their underworld. She’d been put into their household and he had slowly got to know her during the day, hearing her cries in the night when his father visited her room.

The month after his seventh birthday, Costia had been born to a mother a few weeks shy of turning sixteen.

His father had kept Reba to mind Cage and Costia, while another, younger woman replaced her in his bed. They were all fighters, women who struggled and fought, but night after night of his father’s visitations to their bed, and the children he removed from them; Dante had cleverly removed their desire to resist.

He constructed a life for them where they lived vicariously through their children. Both mother and child were only allowed to see each other if their child behaved. And through this awful symbiosis, Dante found the most powerful weapon to galvanize his children of the sun to commit to his long-term plans.

Cage had seen and felt the misery in them, the fracturing of their souls. He’d wept for them in silence never once allowing his father to see or know of his empathy for the women whose lives had been destroyed.

The man never saw them as human beings, simply vehicles for him and his people to get outside. Except for Costia’s mother whom he returned to time after time whenever he’d over indulged in his fine wines, punishing her for his betrayal to the memory of his wife.

He remembers the day his father made the choice to put all these children of the captured women out into the light.

The long, slow wails of the women as they saw child after child scream as the air tore and blistered their skin, leaving marks that scarred but didn’t kill.

The sounds were awful and most of the people of the mountain looked away in shame at what they had done. For a long while no one would look Dante Wallace in the eye. And for a long time, Cage was consumed with rage at his father which was systematically beaten out of him when his father
would thrash Costia for any of imagined transgressions he thought Cage had done.

That was when he’d learned to curb his anger and Costia had fostered her hatred of him as the vehicle for all her pain and helplessness. Beneath the animosity both knew that there was little Cage could do to control the situation except for keeping his mouth shut and his feelings hidden.

Of the thirty children they’d let out into the bright light only ten did not burn. Costia had been the oldest, the brightest and his father’s greatest hope. He’d treated Cage with a callous disregard, but Costia - Costia had suffered so much under their father’s growing madness.

Reba’s beatings in front of Costia taught her to be better than the others as she was the President’s child. She learned it young. To please him. Costia’s need to please Dante was so awful to watch and by observing her, Cage’s own rebelliousness found outlets in small, subtle things.

He brought things to Reba to help her heal. Medicines to stop pregnancies that he hid from Dante.

He held Costia in the darkness after being banished into her room without food, without approbation - without any hope for succor in a world that defined her as so different. To be her people’s savior had been drummed into her from the moment she could comprehend, and Cage had hated the look of sadness in both mother and daughter’s eyes whenever Costia failed.

He loves them both. More than he will ever love his father. His father whom he hates more with each passing day.

There are signs of Dante’s disconnection with reality everywhere. Cage knows that wherever his mother is - she would be weeping at the man, the President had become and wondered what she would make of him - the son she’d saved with the damaged leg and misshapen soul. Did she hear his whispered prayers in the dark hoping someone would save them from his father’s growing insecurities?

Costia grew up to be as beautiful as Reba. There was a subtle difference with the lightening of her skin from Dante’s blood, and still she was darker than any of them except for the Tsings. The population of Mount Weather had been brought in from the top levels of a racially constructed government when the world fell. It had not reflected the country that stood outside.

Even without sunlight Costia’s skin was a rich color that stood out from the pallid whiteness of the inhabitants of Mount Weather. That first year when she came back after living with her Grounder family for almost three years, the sun had changed her. The outside world had changed her. The gangly ten-year-old that had been sent out was gone.

She’d come back lean, muscles in every movement of her body and those strange gray-blue eyes of hers were such a contrast to the darkness of her skin which glowed from her time in the sun. The shiny blue-black waves of her hair had become streaked with deep reds, and she’d walked with a confidence that Dante had quickly broken to re-assert this authority.

And last night was no different to any other. Costia had been brought back in to be reminded exactly what she was working towards, and for whom.

Dante rarely hit her. He would always bring her to Reba’s rooms with the other women from the twelve clans. Costia would submit and beg when her mother was dragged from whatever she was doing. Reba was usually sleeping as Costia came back home in the dead of night.

And last night had not been any different.

Cage had been moved along with the rest of his father’s security team. Dante Wallace never lost a
moment to teach his children about their responsibilities. The only problem was that Dante had no idea that his eldest born was determined to bring down his father’s empire.

And Costia had no idea that her brother would see to it that she would succeed where their father had failed. He had to believe in something more than this constant aspiration to bring down others to elevate the Presidency.

Last night. Cage’s breathing caught as he remembered Costia’s eyes as they locked with his. That shade of blue-grey that refused to shed tears as her mother was beaten in front of her.

And he promised her with his own dark eyes as she broke down in front of their father, that he would get her out of this no matter what the cost was to himself. And then Cage had moved Reba after watching his father drag Costia to his office.

She had looked back at him, imploring even through the thread of hate in her gaze - she begged without words when she never needed to. With the help of Lorelei Tsing, they would put Reba back together yet again while his father tore strips into Costia as he reiterated the values of loyalty and the future of their people.

Fuck that. If it was the last thing he did - he would release the hundreds of people imprisoned for their blood beneath the floors of Mount Weather. He’d find a way to release them and Reba so that Costia could be free to live the life she imagines for herself. And maybe he could too. He thought of the boy Wells. The looks they’d been sharing. The looks he’d been hiding from his father who would kill him if he knew.

Cage flinched hard when the doors of the gymnasium flung open and Emerson and his crew walked in, their cruel eyes staring at his leg but never speaking of it. No-one was stupid enough to speak out loud against the President’s son. Not even Emerson with his veiled threats and quiet whispers about Cage’s sexuality.

Cage had never allowed himself feelings like that let alone leave any implications that would send his father into an apoplectic rage. He blinked slowly as he thought of Well’s strong body as they’d shared the evening meal. Quiet words exchanged despite Cage’s tormented anxiety being so close in the same room as his current crush. He’d hated his awkwardness and had probably come across as his usual callous self, but Wells had seen through it and smiled softly encouraging him with kind words to open up to him. Wells had talked about his friends and his fears for their families back at the Ark.

Cage didn’t have the heart to tell him that it was Wells and his friends who were in a more dangerous situation, but there was something - a hint in a chance glance into the dark eyes of the other man and Cage knew, that Wells Jaha knew exactly how dangerous a situation he was in.

And Cage could not help the bitterness fill him at his father destroying another pathway for their people.

He knew from his conversations with Lorelei that his father had removed bone marrow from the young Arkadians and they’d already started experimenting on the bodies of two of the kids who had foolishly believed the surrounding adults about a ‘Peace Mission.’

“Cage!”

He snapped out of his reverie and slowly pushed the weights back onto the racks behind the machine.
He turned slowly and moved a towel across his face which was wet with sweat, using it to give him time to face whatever unkindness Emerson had prepared. Sneaky. Far from the cameras that studded the rooms throughout the complex.

The people of Mount Weather had relinquished their democratic rights when they decided to save their skins over a hundred years ago.

“What?”

His voice was its usual quiet snarl, and he kept a steady gaze on Emerson. The trick was to never show weakness. He’d learned that from his father.

“Where’s Costia?”

Emerson’s question surprised him. He knew she’d been promised to Emerson for being a good second in command once Dante’s plans to bring down the commander were complete.

He also knew that Costia despised Emerson more than Cage ever could.

He turned away and shrugged, stiffening when he felt strong fingers dig into his shoulder. His body tensed with a brittle anger that made him breathless.

First there was his father. Taking all the joy from their home and filling it with rage and sanctioned violence against those who had less power. Like Costia and her mother. Like all the mothers and children stolen from this generation of Grounders. Their rape was a constant source of torment for him knowing that his father rationalized it as elevating the ‘savages’ with the blood of the privileged.

Fuck that.

He knew exactly what his father was doing. And he’d make sure Costia didn’t have to suffer this fool for another unnecessary minute.

“Get your fucking hands of me, Emerson. You maybe my father’s lackey, but I’m certainly not yours. If you want to know where Costia is, ask my fucking father you asshole.”

He turned towards the other man and pushed him back and onto his shocked friends. Cage felt a surge of adrenaline when he saw the flash of anger that Emerson forced down.

“She’s meant to meet with me today,” Emerson said and he could feel the repressed rage emanating from the other man’s body from the white line that ringed his mouth to the tight fists that he held tight against dark sports trousers that clung to his thick muscled legs.

“And why would I give a fuck about that?”

Cage stepped forward into their space and to a man, they all stepped away from him desperately trying not to show their fear.

He’s learned early that if you snarl like a beast, people live in fear of you and never look past to see if you have teeth.

But unlike his father who can harm his people whenever they don’t comply, Cage has very little power, and most of his comes from making himself bigger and more frightening than he is.

Lorelei knows that, and last night Wells Jaha was able to get past his bluster within minutes of
speaking softly with him.

Emerson stepped forward and moved into his space. Cage could smell the scent of the recycled air clinging to the fabric of his clothes and the duck l’orange from dinner on his breath. Beneath it he could smell his father’s expensive whisky.

“Always so fast to ignite, Little Foot.”

It’s a deliberate jab and Cage wants to head butt him but they’re all distracted by the sound of the doorway opening up again.

He doesn’t look but he can see from Emerson’s eyes that it isn’t anyone they were expecting. From the glint of contempt in the man’s narrowed gaze Cage guesses its someone from mechanical support or one of the lesser support groups within the compound.

“Hey.”

Cage’s head snaps around as he sees Wells and another boy from the Ark group walk into the room. He recognizes Well’s friend as he’s always hanging around Maya, his floppy dark hair and the ridiculous goggles on his head are distinctive if not a tad on the contrived side. Jasper, if he remembers correctly.

He straightens even more and nods quietly, watching as Jasper trails fingertips along the metal of the weighted plates stacked alongside the wall.

The boy is curious as he investigates the workings of the pneumatic tubing behind it. His behavior is over the top as he oohs and ahs over the mechanics of it, and Cage realizes that they’re putting on a show to distract from the tension within the room.

“This isn’t a room for you to play in,” Emerson says and his voice holds enough threat in it for Cage to grimace.

“Oh, don’t be like that Emerson. There are enough toys to go around,” Cage responds and his tone is jocular but his voice cracks with the strain of trying to stay polite, “and our guests are welcome to anywhere in Mount Weather that my father has shown them.”

His eyes are caught on Wells who is looking more concerned by the minute. He can see the confusion and he knows enough of the man now to know he’s going to try to step in to help fix this.

“As I said before, Emerson,” Cage’s voice is clipped as he looks back at the head of security and he keeps the rage down, “you’ll need to speak with my father to find out where my sister is.”

He wants to smirk when he sees the belligerence rise up in the other man, and the look of frustration when he realizes he can’t say anything in front of their ‘guests.’

Emerson nods curtly and turns towards the door, but it’s not in his nature to not have the last word.

“Be careful around the machinery. We can’t easily replace them and you’ve probably not seen anything like them before,” he says to the newcomers.

“Oh we had similar shit up in space,” Jasper says, “I was just wondering at the air tubing you’ve got here to move stuff around. All of this stuff you guys have here. It’s crazy-arse old-school and so retro. I love it. I’ve only seen pictures of this kind of equipment in our archives.”
Jasper’s grin is serious as it’s obvious to anyone looking that the guy loves the tech.

Cage looks at him and then at Emerson whose face is now deepening to the same kind of red rage his father often exhibits.

Cage feels the strangest sensation as a smile creeps across his face while Emerson and his crew walk out noisily, their boots clomping across the old tiles almost in unison as if they’re marching.

“You have serious gall, kid.”

Cage grins and his gaze drifts over to Wells who is smiling in relief at the obvious break in tension and the absence of the overt threat of Emerson’s men.

Jasper smiles and winks at him.

“Deflection one oh one, man. Gets them every time. But kidding you, I was not! This baby. I mean what the hell is this stuff?”

They talked for a few minutes as he described the machinery and how it was operated by pneumatic tubing all over the compound. High pressured air tubing moving heavier objects around small distances, while smaller material went super fast anywhere in the building to designated chutes.

He could feel Wells’ gaze flicker across his body from time as he was still in his gymnasium clothes - loose fitting dark shorts that hung low on his hips and an equally dark singlet that covered his torso but left his arms bare. He knew he over compensated for his leg and the muscles of his arms were coated in a fine sheen of sweat, still bulging after his workout.

Cage could feel the thrill of unwanted butterflies scouring his stomach. He didn’t want these feelings. Not when his father was on one of his rampages, paying attention to every single detail now that the kids of Arcadia were here. Dante’s instant ticket out into the world. His way of toppling the Commander and her people with their primitive ways.

The only problem was that the Arkadians had no idea they were going to be the saviors of Mount Weather. And he wondered what the hell his dad was up to when Wells finally turned to him and said something that made his world start to tumble.

“Hey, I thought you guys couldn’t go outside? Why did that guy have a tan line around his neck?” Wells asked his brow furrowed.

“We can’t go outside,” Cage narrowed his eyes and tried to think back to Emerson’s body in his workout clothes. It wasn’t that he’d not being paying attention it was simply that he tried to avoid eye contact or any kind of contact with Emerson and his stupid crew when they were around.

He shook his head slowly.

“You must be mistaken,” he said and turned to look into the younger man’s deep brown eyes. Eyes that were looking at him with curiosity and a little baffled by their interaction.

“Nope. Them sure was the signs of sunshine around his face and neck. You can see his face is darker than where he was covered up,” Jasper interrupted the small stare off going on between Cage and Wells.

Cage’s eyes narrowed as he tried to work out what they were saying and trying to remember what he’d seen. Had there been a line? Was this what his father had been going on about the Arkadians
being the key? Did they have something that could accelerate the transition for the compound’s inhabitants out into the light?

“Do you guys have something that you’ve been sharing with my dad? Some kind of medical technology?” he finally asked.

Wells stared at him for a long time and Cage could see the moment when the young man realized that whatever was going on - Cage was not privy to his father’s plans.

“No. No, we don’t. But I bet you guys here do and that’s why we’re here,” Wells finally said.

Cage tightened his jaw and shook his head gently.

“Why don’t we go for a walk by the pool.”

The smile he gave was curt and direct. Shut up now before someone hears you. His breath came out in a loud exhale when Wells and Jasper nodded and followed him through the gymnasium area and back through another set of doors into a room filled with steam and the smell of salt and chlorine. They sauntered towards the water’s edge which was noisy with the sounds of children shrieking as they splashed and dove into the deep end of the pool.

“What are you saying to me?”

Cage’s face looked as if he was talking about the weather, and Jasper and Wells followed his lead by looking around the pool with looks of suitable awe.

“I wonder how long it will take me to learn to swim?” Jasper asked as he turned around taking in the people so casually wasting water which could never have happened on the Ark before saying, “how do we know we can trust you?”

Cage nods as Wells just continues to stare at him. He can see that the young man has already made a decision about him. He should not trust Cage. Doesn't he know he's his father's son? And maybe that’s why Wells is looking at him as if he knows which way he’s going to go because Wells is just like him.

They are both stuck with the blood of someone who is willing to spill the blood of others for their dreams.

“And how do I know I can trust you?” Cage replies smiling at the frolicking that’s going on in the water but his gaze is nervous as he flicks between Jasper and Wells. The question he asks seems to make both of them relax and Wells moves towards him as if he wants to put his arms across his shoulders.

“Because your father is killing us one by one. And we want to know why. And more importantly, we want to know how to stop him and how to get the hell out of here,” Wells says and his tone is deadly. "That's why we came looking for you. We hoped you might have some answers."

Wells eyes are smiling at the children in the water and not at Cage when he says these words that takes the breath out of Cage’s lungs.

Cage had suspected something. Lorelei had been avoiding him most of last week and the evening before was the first time they’d seen each other in days as they quickly patched up the bruises his father’s belt had drawn across Reba’s body. Lorelei always avoided him when she was ashamed of something his father made her do.
“Well fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry. I posted this on accident. It's not a final edit but once I posted it, I thought just let it go. I'll come back in the next day or two and do my final editing. There are some plot points I'm not a hundred per cent happy with. I'll have to figure it out and work it into the next chapters.

Thank you so much for your ongoing support and patience.

Much affection,
Underthecovers
Chapter Summary

The tension between the Ark and the Grounders starts to increase as Clarke butts heads with Titus. Lexa is caught between the two. Costia is caught between cultures and plots. Wells has to use his wits to keep everyone alive and Raven drinks way too much coffee.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone. Happy New Year. Please enjoy this chapter which I did struggle with. So much chopping and changing. I hope the almost 23K is long enough for you. :-) A big thank you to my friend Out of the Garden. By helping them edit their work I've been able to get back into my own writing. If you get a chance please go and check their work out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ache burned all along the length of Wells’ arm. They had performed blood tests earlier that morning including a plasma withdrawal, but as usual, none of the medical staff could find a vein for the blood-letting. He stretched again as his body still protested after an hour of using the aging equipment in the Mountain's extensive gymnasium.

It feels so similar to the Ark's and yet different at the same time. The Ark had not sported an Olympic-sized pool though, a carefully chlorinated one protected from the outside air which appears to poison the blood of the people in the compound.

It was a pleasant surprise when Cage Wallace had offered to teach him and Jasper how to swim the evening before after their precarious first encounter.

Jasper was all smiles for the cameras pointed at their activities. His keen mind had cut to the chase, and he was the one that had broached the thorny subject of their people being killed off one by one after Well's initial outburst.

Cage had been fearful that the audio spies dotted throughout the military bunker would overhear their conversation. He invited them to learn to swim there and then in the pool which had slowly emptied as kids left to return to family rooms.

It was in the water as they learned the basics for floating and breaststroke that Wells realized Cage had developed the strength of his upper body to compensate for the size of his lower limb. He was careful not to look at Cage's left leg which is half that of the other, the musculature of the calf atrophied so that it looked almost child-like in the darker areas of the pool.

Cage.

Wells sighed.
Cage is nothing like his tyrant father and Wells could see enough of himself in him it hurt. It hurt enough to inspire him to never let his own parent speak or behave like he had in the past. While Wells was patient and compassionate, Cage had learned to hate himself so much that it filtered out in how he spoke and interacted with others in Mountain Weather.

He was sharp, his voice a terrible parody of his fathers when barking out orders. His lack of compassion for himself made him unkind and ruthless when dealing with those who worked for him.

Wells had seen the glimpses of kindness in Cage. It was in how he interacted with the young people of Mount Weather. He taught those kids softly and with great care. Cage’s behavior with Wells had told him so much more of the man that lay beneath those layers of prickliness.

Cage hadn't laughed at Wells when he'd almost sunk and drowned his first time in the deeper end of the pool. He had been patient, teaching him the stroke over and over until Wells could manage a lap down the pool without his help. His patience whenever Jasper hit his face in a mad panic whenever he began to sink into the strange, hard water that wasn't anything like the rivers outside.

Wells had also seen the surreptitious looks from the older man whom he guessed to be in his late 20s or early 30s. He saw how Cage's deep brown eyes would drift down Well's body when he thought he wasn't looking. The way his thick lashes would flutter and his eyes darted away when Wells turned back to him. The slow swallows and shallow breaths.

And Wells was not averse to his attention. The man was beautiful with his thick, dark chocolate hair that looked like Cage often threaded his fingers through it setting it into disarray. Wells liked him. But he liked Maya too. Not that it mattered as he could see the love blossoming between her and Jasper. This situation was too confusing. He wished more than anything that Clarke were here and he could talk to her. He desperately wished he could ask her what to do and how to process these feelings that seemed to bombard him from everywhere.

And what the hell were they to do with Dante Wallace, Cage's father, who was a colossal bastard. A man who would kill them all for some indescribable aspiration to restore the United States of America. To the way it was when Wallace’s ancestors had fled the capital to this secret, military holding to prepare for the fallout from the neutron bombs they'd sent over the border. He remembered his history. He knew exactly who these people were. They were the children of those who had orchestrated the end of the known world.

They were anathema and totally not what the people of the Ark stood for. Except for his father who had decided that the enemy of peace was anyone who stood in his way. And Wells knew why his father was like this. He certainly remembered his grandfather always needling his dad, pushing him to be better, smarter and stronger, and to be more like his son who he kept saying was a more natural leader than Thelonius Jaha could ever be.

Wells grunted in frustration and looked up when the door of his room slid silently open.

"Hey. I'm sorry to barge in."

It was Jasper. His face was pale, his mouth tight with worry and the whites of his eyes glistened in the low emission diodes that lit up the walls of each level of the mountain, the reach of the candela bright enough to light the way but not always enough to see details.

Wells blinked and stood from his chair, his body unfurling slowly as he rose to his full height.

"What is it?"
"Maya told me."

Wells stepped back and took a deep breath and the look of growing horror on Jasper's face told him he'd have to step up to calm his fellow delinquent down.

"How the fuck long have you known? Last night, I thought you were just bluffing!" Jasper's voice teetered between hysteria and rage.

Wells shook his head and stared Jasper down until his eyes flickered away in contrition.

"Sorry, man. Sorry. I'm just - I'm fucking freaking out here, you know?" Jasper babbled almost incoherently.

"Quiet," Wells said and his voice maintained his usual quiet gentleness while his heart started to pick up speed.

Wells grabbed Jasper's arm and dragged him into his bathroom cubicle, quickly turning on the shower so that the steady stream of recycled water could muffle some of what they were saying.

"I don't know how much they listen to us. If you talk to the others - cover up. Dante is a lunatic," Wells whispered as close to Jasper's ear as he could. He could feel the way Jasper rolled his eyes.

"You think?"

Wells could see how he was using sarcasm to cover up the fear that was making his hands shake.

"We can't talk about Maya here. Find somewhere where we can speak in private."

"Do you trust her?"

It isn't really a question and Jasper's voice squeaks at the end of the sentence.

He sagged in relief against Wells' shoulder and he could only nod hoping if anyone could hear, they wouldn't be betraying the Mountain girl that Jasper is slowly allowing into his heart.

"Get the others. We need to come up with something. A way to avoid being taken away."

He could feel tears seep into his shirt and looked down to see Jasper completely break down as he sobbed against him.

"Fox. She's gone. She'd dead. That doctor said they couldn't save her, but that's how I know. They fucking killed her. She was fine until they took her. That doctor looked scared. Pissed and sad. But scared. She's scared."

Wells pulled him tight into his arms and shushed him, rocking him slowly. The bond they'd all formed had been acute and intense, and this level of intimacy was something they'd never shown each other on the Ark. But they'd seen too much now on the ground and had felt too much together. Those barriers had long since gone.

Fox. She'd been small, quiet and always hiding in corners talking to Harper or one of the guys from Mecha station. Bellamy would be furious as he'd seen her as another little sister. He'd protected her when Octavia had stopped needing her brother's help.

Wells sighed and leaned against the bathroom wall. Whatever grief he began to feel he tamped down. There would be time enough for grief later. Now, they just had to figure a way out of here.
"When?" Wells asked and his voice was tight with the pain he tried to constrain. If ever given the chance, he would kill his father for this.

"Last night, but I only heard about it just now." Jasper's voice is tight, barely above a whisper, and he has to lean forward to hear him.

"We can't meet as a group. We need to relay messages to one another so they don't guess. Or -" His mind buzzed as he tried to think of ways to communicate to the group and remembers the games nights on the Ark.

"Games night," he whispers and grins at the slightly disbelieving look on Jasper's face.

"That's how we tell everyone. Remember those games we used to play on Friday nights? Charades, Atomic Whispers, Kings -"

Jasper nods in frustration trying to figure out where this was going when the light bulb literally crashed over his head.

"Brilliant. We can't be too obvious though," Jasper nods as he thinks of the games they could play that would help deliver key details to the whole group without Dante Wallace and his men figuring out what they're up to.

"We missed speaking to Arcadia yesterday," Wells continued, his eyes were closed tight in concentration," if Abby answers I can ask her to play my next move with Clarke on the chessboard. That will tell her -"

"Yeah but Clarke's been missing for a week. She won't be much use now."

Wells shook his head in a sharp, quick motion.

"Abby said that Raven and Octavia had contacted her. I think she's on her way back to Arcadia. I'm hoping she's already there."

*Please, Clarke. Please, please be there.*

Wells turned off the tap as it was more than a minute now and any longer would give them away. Wells moved his head towards the common area. Jasper followed his lead and quietly walked behind him as he left his room.

"Would you mind getting the others, please?"

The innate politeness instilled into him by his mother was often the thing that exposed him to the most ridicule with his peers on the Ark. He knew that he and Clarke had lived a life of privilege in the eyes of most of the kids. What they'd lived was a life of isolation and Clarke had helped him navigate the more difficult social mores but his unfailing politeness had caused more bloodied noses than anything else about their social exclusivity.

"Sure, sure." Jasper muttered, his eyes looking around him trying to find hidden cameras around the room. Wells could feel his own tension tightening at the younger man's behavior and quickly pulled him into what would have looked like a brotherly hug to their captors.

“You need to be calm. Act normal. Please.”

Jasper's back slapping was hard and Wells could feel the repressed fear in his actions but when
Jasper moved to get the others, he looked a lot less like a serial killer searching for his next victim. A lot less like someone who had something to hide. He looked like an excited kid about to organize a huge game night with friends.

The smile was slight and anyone looking would have thought Wells was pleased for his friend and not hiding the terror of being discovered by the men who ran this place of injustice. It was awful to know that there were far worse men in the world than his own father.

***

Costia tries to contain the rage that battles with her fear. She cannot show too much strength or he will beat her. She cannot show that she has become the enemy or 'gone native' as her father likes to joke. She does not know what she is anymore. Is she of the mountain or is she of the ground? What world will comfort her or hold her still in safety?

Lexa.

Lexa is everything to her. When her father and his cohorts had directed her to seduce the young Commander's sister to create discord she had been frantic. None of his plans had worked backfiring spectacularly on him and breaking her heart while she slowly began to see her father differently. His plans slowly stopped being hers.

Costia had ended up banned, exiled to the far north of the known lands which crossed over parts of the badlands, and was on the far side of the Hudson. She had returned to the land where she had learned her mother's tongue and learned of her mother's culture to be the dormant spy for her father.

The Azgedan capital was also the place where she'd first seen Lexa, who was a very young child when Lexa's father had brought her into court. Even then, Lexa had stood out with those large green eyes and a propensity for aggravating Kwin Ronto.

Costia had not known that she would fall in love with that slip of a girl. She had not even known it when her father had said do whatever was necessary to get the Commander into her good graces. She'd lied and manipulated a very naïve sixteen-year-old Lexa. One who had believed with all of her heart that Costia was hers.

And at first she'd been so amused by the wonder that had been in the young Commander's eyes, and it had filled her with an innate sense of her own power as the young Lexa had adored her body. She tested how far she could go and what she could ask for. If not for the constant interference of Lexa’s Fos, Anya, and the incessant ranting of the Fleimkepa, she was sure she could have asked Lexa the world and Costia would have been given it and more.

Lexa's love had been so incredible, so unconditional, and after years of her father's abuse of the familial love she'd clung to hoping that he would release her mother and love her as his own, Lexa's love had finally broken through the walls she'd constructed around her own heart.

Costia Wallace had slowly started to love the Commander of the Twelve Clans. That young woman who had a vision to finish what Commander Luna had started almost eight years ago. Luna had only failed because of the Ice Nation who had been absolutely against the coalition or any form of it. The Kwin had been powerful with the largest army at her disposal conscripting her warriors from an early age which was how Costia had entered the court when she did.

Costia was only terrified of her father until she met the Queen of Azgeda with her whips and the easy to flare temper tantrums.
It was here that she'd learned the ways of the Azgedan court. She had seen the fury of Queen Ronto with her older daughter when she protected the bastard child of her consort. The man had finally returned to her side after years of absence. And Ronto had been furious when she realized that each year he'd been away was reflected in the young girl's age. Costia remembers flinching at the rage that had terrified everyone at court and Nia had stood up to that.

She and Nia had never discussed the madness of their respective parents, and it certainly could have been something they could have bonded over. But how could she ever explain who Dante was? Instead, she carried those scars on her soul and had buried them so far into herself that whenever she confronted the brutality of that part of her life she often reeled in shock and surprise at the memory of it.

When Luna's Fleimkepas had descended on the Azgedan capital to do their search for Natblidas, Ronto had been contemptuous. She had sneered and made fun of the robed mystics in her court, who demanded to test her people again.

She had wondered loudly what the hell would differ from the year before when they'd come through. But even with her power she knew not to go against the men and women who protected the secrets of the clans. To do so would have meant her own death as the Fleimkepas were sacred across all nations.

She had forgotten the one change, the one difference to the previous year in the world that she ruled.

Lexa.

It had excited the Fleimkepas when they had seen the black blood drip from Lexa's thumb where they'd pricked her for testing. Lexa would need to return to Luna's capital of Polis to train as a Natblida. When Ronto screamed and raged because the victim she had chosen to pay for her father's sins was being taken from her vengeance. The Fleimkepas had been intractable and prepared for Lexa's journey to Polis almost immediately.

Nia had wept quietly in the corner watching her sister being taken away. There had been a strange mixture of relief and grief on her face, and when Lexa had broken free to run back to her arms, both sisters had cried holding tight to each other. Costia did not hear whatever it was the Nia had whispered into her sister's ear but she watched how the young Trikru girl had straightened her spine and nodded curtly before turning and walking away.

Costia was impressed and jealous at the sibling care. She supposed she had this with Cage but the knife edge of animosity and rivalry that sat between them had rendered whatever companionship that they could have had useless. She knew it was her fault. Her need to fit in, her need to please her father over-rode all things. Including any love she may have shared with Cage as they grew up. She learned to despise him as their father did. She learned to mock him as many of her peers did in the compound.

And she regretted all of it now for he would have been an ally she could have used. Costia knew how much he loved her mother as his own, as Reba was the only one he'd ever truly known.

The affection between them had filled her with a terrible jealousy. She'd pushed it away as each time she returned to the Mountain they would be closer in their grief of her absence. Her absence! Costia hated the irony that what brought them together was also the thing that made her feel untethered to anyone. To anything. She had felt no connection except for Dante who nurtured her strength and cunning, and before Lexa, before love entered her heart - he was the only one she cared to please.
She pulled at her hands, trying to calm them down as her father paced towards her, his minions following closely.

"Tell me what you know?"

His voice is sharp, tight with unrestrained fury and his pale blue-gray gaze, eyes just like hers, move around the room where all of his security wait for her advice. She moves and turns to the monitors. They can see most of Mount Weather, the common rooms including where the Ark's youth are now in residence, but all the screens that should show the forest surrounding them is a haze of luminescent green and gray dots. It's obvious to anyone that they have taken the cameras out.

"She's brought an army of thousands," Costia says, and she's proud that there's not a tremor in her tone when she thinks of Lexa. Instead, she feels a guilty pride at what Lexa has done, but then her face darkens when she remembers Clarke.

"The Commander has aligned with the Ark."

Her father's face smiles slowly, and he throws his head back and laughs. It's disconcerting as she does not understand why this would amuse him.

"There's nothing the Ark can do while their children are in our care," Dante responds, his tone is dismissive and he looks at her like she's disappointed him again. She feels that need to please but the rage that has been quietly simmering all day will not allow her to do that.

"The Ark will not be as easily cowed by kidnapping and blackmail as the women you hold captive. Father."

He steps forward, and she sees the backhand before feeling it sharp across her face. She could not hide the contempt in her tone, and now can smell his rage in the scent of his sweat, the spray of venom from his mouth as he roars at her. She tries not to hold her head high against his disdain. To do so now would be like pushing at a bear raging to protect their children.

As he spends the next few minutes in a full-blown tantrum, her mind drifts and her gaze move to the screens flickering in the low light of the control room. They flicker several times and the green emissions with the offline signal blinks on and off before the view outside the mountain comes back. Her heart stutters to a stop. Fuck. Lexa. They'll see her coming and she won't know. She'll think the Mountain is blind. Before she can say anything, one of the security team jumps and yells out what is fast becoming obvious to the rest of the team.

"Where back online. We've made it past their hack."

The men grin and begin slapping each other on the back and one even goes to high five the man who'd been fastidiously typing away on the Mountain system computer.

"Well done, men."

Dante's grin is ferocious. The smugness behind it is typical. They've broken the hack into their system; after all they're the superior race. Whatever skills the Arkadians think they're bringing into the war, they're no match for the last President of the United States and his descendants.

It confuses Costia. The people on the space station had been the greatest minds of their time. She shook her head and assumed that something had gone wrong with Lexa's plans. She tried not to show her fear, but she felt a slight elation that maybe now, her father's people could emerge from the Mountain without the air killing them. She just hoped like hell that Lexa would survive. That
she would escape him before he could get to her.

She didn't know how but she'd find a way for Lexa to live and for her own people to come out of this godforsaken bunker. The seeds of an idea began to form an idea in her mind. If she could distract her father with one victory, maybe he could turn away from the loss of the Commander.

If she brought him the one person who had been hampering his efforts against the Grounders, then perhaps her father would finally be pleased with her. And he would be too caught up in destroying the leader of the Ark that had been thwarting and evading him since her arrival on the ground.

Clarke Griffin would need to watch her movements. Costia was careful to keep her countenance blank as a grim pleasure began to move through her.

***

Raven can feel an ache in her belly from hours of eating through whatever was nearby and mixing it with the poisonous coffee she’s been brewing from the Arcadian stores. It's a sad mix of substitutes from the Arcadian food replicants with some natural products they've found on the ground. It's not perfect like the coffee used to be before the Ark's different sections came crashing down to the ground, but it will do.

She should have known better than to consume it like she's done, but she'd needed fuel to get her ideas out to the rest of the team. She'd been grateful for some Grounders that Clarke's Commander had sent. Clarke had said they were the closest things they had to engineers. Men and women in Lexa's armies who built bridges to cross rivers when fighting the enemy, turrets, ditches for latrines to keep the warriors healthy during lengthier campaigns. Something that hadn't happened in a long time because of the Kongeda but the skills were still there.

And they'd been handy coming up with crazy ass schemes that she would have been proud to have come up with herself. Nothing that Sinclair or that idiot Wick could have come up with. Monty had been a genius looking up scalable projects which they'd applied to existing motorized parts that they'd salvaged from the guts of the Ark. That General;Anya was driving her insane with her constant querying of Raven's ideas. She's not used to it as she knows she's the resident genius. To date, no-one has ever expressed concern unless they worried something would blow up like that time she'd experimented with splitting hydrogen from the bio-panels.

But fuck if her body didn't ache. That unbearable ache of not enough sleep and being a slave to her own adrenaline. She could feel the dry grit behind her eyelids, which told her for the umpteenth time that she really needed to blink.

"Revon Kom Arkadia."

The voice is sharp and the low growl that threads that familiar voice has her spinning around too quickly so she stumbles a little. Too much fake caffeine. Not enough sleep. That's all it is.

She feels the strength of the hands that reach out to steady her and looks up into tawny dark eyes similar to her own color but shaped so differently.

"What? Damn it. Don't you guys know not to sneak up on someone with deadly weapons?"

She's tired and the headache that's been hiding behind her eye sockets almost threatens to destroy her optic nerve. She can feel her right eye start to tick even as she realizes just how fatigued she is.

“You need to rest. You do no service to your people if you destroy yourself.”
Raven can feel her temper flicker a little at this woman's arrogance.

"You've been up just as long as me."

"That is not so. I slept for some time before dawn. When I woke, I could see that you had yet to sleep."

Raven blew out a long, slow sigh before looking at the woman who leaned across her blueprints and cabling as if she'd been born in Space too. Her comfort and ease as she moved around the workshop made her look as if she'd been around this equipment all her life.

"What do you want me to do? There is no-one else."

Anya nods slowly as she realizes the truth of Raven's statement.

"May be so, but you must rest or you will make mistakes."

Raven's brow furrowed, and she scoffed at the other woman.

"I don't make mistakes."

"A warrior who knows rest in moments of stillness steals from death and keeps their life from the enemy."

Raven knows she's right. The pain in her eyes is too much already after being awake for almost twenty hours. She feels like the walking dead at this point.

"Ok. I promise to get some rest."

"You will come with me, Revon. If you stay here with your people, someone will disturb you."

Raven stares at this woman whom she's been hanging out with for only a few days at Polis. They'd automatically clicked and abraded against one another immediately. The push and pull of their personalities had made Clarke laugh while the great Commander had stared steadily with those fuck-arse scary green eyes as if she couldn't comprehend what Raven had done to her General.

She likes General Anya. There's a no nonsense swagger about her that appeals to Raven. She likes it when she can speak directly instead of having to pussy foot around everyone's sensibilities.

"Ok. Fuck. Fine. Whatever. Lead the fucking way Macduff."

Raven rolled her eyes at the look of confusion on Anya's face before her implacable mask returned as she shrugged before turning away to walk towards the encampment.

Raven looked around at the mess she'd caused this morning and saw how cleverly the Commander's army had re-purposed the furrows of blown up dirt into areas for latrines. The more she saw of this culture, the more she realized how entrenched it was in and around war. Logistics and engineering were very much a part of moving large armies. She was more than impressed, which must have shown on her face when Anya turned towards her to see if she was coming.

"An army that does not make use of what is around them is an army that will shortly be buried beneath the earth."

"You have got to be fucking kidding me, right? Do you have a proverb or pithy saying for everything that relates to war? And armies?" Raven's words are sharp and shows that the tiredness is coloring everything for her.
Anya shrugged.

"We are born into war. They train us for war. We die on the battlefield. What do you want me to say to make you feel more at ease with yourself?"

Anya's words are curt, but there's a hint of curiosity. She is searching Raven's face trying to understand how the Sky people who have caused so much disruption cannot have the same knowledge as her people.

Raven can feel a tightness in her chest. A sorrow so deep at this clear chasm between the two groups. She lets out a small sigh exhalng softly and looks over at the woman who is walking so easily by her side, and not so belligerently as she did a week ago.

"Surely you must want something more? More than this? More than just - killing each other for survival?"

Anya grunts quietly as she strides through the mud and dirt between the tents and marquees of the Grounder camp. Raven can see that most are made of hides that are waxed for waterproofing. She wants to touch and learn but stumbles as she trips over one of the many ropes threaded throughout the encampment. She can hear the soft laugh that escapes Anya's lips as she grabs onto her solid arm.

"Yes, we want more," Anya finally responds.

There's a hint of wistfulness in the tiredness of her voice and the way her eyes drift upwards towards Mount Weather in the distance.

"But while the Mountain stands, as long as one clan wants more of what another has - there will always be conflict. The Commander has always wanted more, which is why she formed the coalition. She wanted more for her people. To live peacefully. To plan for a long life."

Raven nodded. The tendons in her neck were pulling tight after the time she'd spent bending over and soldering for hours and she doesn't notice that she's constantly massaging to ease her pain. She and Monty had been working for a while on the feedback loops for the camera system in Mount Weather.

They'd broken through late last night, and Monty had assured her that the people of Mount Weather would not understand that they'd set some surrounding cameras on a loop reflecting the previous forty-eight hours. Raven left the cameras zoomed in on their weapons of mass distraction alone so that they could do their job. And then she'd moved onto the finer bits and pieces that needed her mechanical engineering eye, and now her back and neck are fucked. To say the least.

"The Commander. What made her do that? Bring all the clans together. What makes her so different to the other Commanders? Does she not want war too otherwise what would be the point of her?" Raven's questions come in a burst, a flurry of sounds as each thought tumbles forward in her brain.

Anya shocks her when she stops to throw back her head and laughs out loud. The sound is so unnerving to those in the Grounder camp that they all stop what they're doing to stare at Raven. She can see in their eyes that this is a unique phenomenon and they're wondering what she's done to cause it. She smiles weakly at them and shrugs before everyone continues with whatever they were doing.

"You do not pause for breath, Revon. How are you still standing?"

Anya smiles and there's a gentleness to her face that Raven likes. It brings a warmth to her chest,
and she wants to see more of it in the curmudgeonly Grounder General who Clarke seems to have a love hate relationship with.

And then the smile falls from Anya's face and a small frown forms between her brows as hazel eyes darken.

"Our Commanders do not live long. Their legacy is often destruction to preserve peace. They have emerged from different clans over time, but more than any other clan, Trikru has provided the most Commanders for our people. Lexa -"

Anya stops and Raven looks up surprised that they've arrived in front of a good-sized tent separated from the main city of canvases that border the eastern side of the Ark. She walks through when Anya pulls back the flap of the entryway and steps into a different world where the sounds from outside are muffled, and it cuts the biting wind that has been rising since this morning, and she can feel her body instantly warm. She's acutely aware of Anya's use of the Commander's name. Something she thought only Clarke had the luxury of.

"Titus trained Lexa, but her heart, her determination for change comes from many things. Things the Fleimkepa cannot control. Things that Klark kom Skaikru reminds her of every day. That from peace comes so many great things. That war is for a short life and forgotten dreams. Lexa still believes in hope. You are part of that. We never thought we could bring down the mountain. Each time we came up with a plan to bring them to their knees, they were always several steps ahead of us. The last plan almost got Lexa killed."

Raven nodded as she felt the warmth of the tent seep into her bones. It's been a few days since the Queen of Azgeda went missing along with Bellamy. And that God awful woman who could barely keep her eyes off Lexa.

"My bed is there. You may rest here. I will keep my eyes and ears open, but I will not allow your people to disturb you for at least a few hours. Agreed?"

Raven scoffed and rolled her eyes. She didn't need this woman's sympathy or her ability to make her slow down when they were in crisis mode.

"Yeah, yeah. If you wanted me in your bed, all you needed to do was ask. You didn't have to go to these extremes -"

Raven found her voice stilling when she saw the long, slow look the Anya gave her.

"If I wanted you in my bed like that, Skai branwada, you would be."

Anya's mouth curled up in a sneer.

Raven laughed at herself and at this woman. God. They were so alike. She rubbed the tendons in her neck again and said the first thing that came out of her mouth.

"You know, if the Mountain Men are several steps ahead of you that means you've got a mole in your midst. A spy," Raven said, elaborating when she saw the blank look on Anya's face.

"Yes Revon. We know that. We are not complete fools."

"Huh. Coulda fooled me," she murmured groggily as she slowly laid herself down onto the furs that made up the bed.

God. So fucking comfortable. If a warm bed signified the sophistication of a civilization, then
hands down; the Grounders won.

The last thing she felt were strong fingers massaging deeply into her neck before the world dimmed into darkness.

***

Clarke Griffin has always been serious. She was the sober one that sat back in corners reading books constantly learning, and wanting something more, and to be somewhere else. She rarely took part in conversations unless she had something to say.

Clarke also knows that she's ridiculously curious. Even as a child she'd ask questions that would have both her parents shaking their heads with wry amusement. Why can't we breathe space? When will the sun die? How do we know who we are, and what if we're someone else's dream? Her existential angst at that question had bothered her for weeks at age nine as she constantly worried that one day she'd cease to exist when the person dreaming her life woke up. And her parents had been no help with their quiet muffled chuckles.

Clarke has always known that when she fell in love it would be deeply, absolutely and forever. She never thought it would happen when deep green eyes that were narrowed in pain would stare up at her from a darkened bunker on Earth. She'd always wondered who it would be from the Ark, but that had never happened in her glorious twenty years up there. No. It had happened down here. A place she never thought she'd see in her lifetime.

Clarke can't help but chastise herself that it's too soon. How did this happen so quickly? And she's here now without her father to share all her little worries and discoveries.

Dad, she's got the prettiest green eyes, and when she speaks the world seems to still.

God, when she speaks - Clarke can feel her insides tumble in and out as if the world is rotating in her stomach. And she's completely at a loss. Befuddled, unsure. God. Unsure. She wishes that she could talk to her mother about these mixed feelings, the ones that seem to want to tear up her insides, but she and her mother are not at a place where Clarke can entrust her with these emotions that have shocked her senseless.

Clarke moves away from the bandages she's been rolling. It is necessary work and despite the horrors they may face, will face, she cannot help but think about strong, lean, sun-kissed arms, the muscles flexing so deliciously whenever Lexa moves to tighten them around her. Nor can she stop remembering the feeling of soft lips moving across her skin and looks that defy everything that Clarke had ever imagined for herself. This is so much more.

It's been over a fortnight and she's foolishly fallen crazy, mad in love with someone she should never have met. Never, if she'd stayed up in the sky. Never, while she had been running through the forests trying to evade capture from the very woman who had put a bounty on her head. No. Nope. She had to walk right up and almost tumble across her body lying in the dirt. And now here she is. Fumbling like a lunatic, fingers thick with nerves as she remembers Lexa in all of her Commander like glory. She feels agitation just thinking 'how is this fair?'

She thought she'd have more preparation. A slow unfurling of understanding as love crept along the edges of self awareness.

But no. It had to happen with the stink of impending war all around them. The dirt and mud, the accumulation of a thousand voices and bodies clamoring, readying themselves. For death. For victory. For possible annihilation.
Clarke closes her eyes in wonder at the crazy place she finds herself in. Rolling bandages and packing them into field med units for her mother and her team, which now includes her.

She is a doctor. She has always been just like her mother in that sense. And she's known about the randomness of death for as long as she's been able to put two and two together. War isn't random. This is a deliberate choice to exert their will over another to ensure they no longer perpetuate the atrocities they've been doing to Lexa's people. She can feel the anger suffuse her body at that thought. She thinks on the Reapers and Lincoln's drug addled body. The whispered stories of blood transfusions to help heal the sick in the mountain.

Her hand accidentally brushes against a metal container of surgical instruments and Clarke's body flinches at the awful clatter it makes in the tent that's been setup for the medical team. She sees the sharp eyes of her mother quickly glance over at her, the glint of worry and the sudden hush in the room.

She mutters a quiet apology before leaning down to pick the scattered items before replacing them back in the box.

"You'll need to -"

"I know."

Clarke's voice is sharp, and she knows she's being too abrupt with her mother. She breathes out slowly and repeats her words albeit in a much softer, apologetic tone.

Abby's eyes are too keen though, and she pokes when she should leave Clarke alone. Clarke remembers that it was her father who was so much better at deciphering their quiet daughter's myriad signs for 'leave me to my thoughts.'

"What's wrong?"

Clarke refuses to roll her eyes despite how much she wants to. Instead, she smiles tightly and tilts her head just a little at her mother.

Monty who has spent a lot of time with Clarke in the year they've been on the ground knows the look and takes an involuntary step towards the tent's exit. Octavia who has been quietly sharpening the blades of her swords and knives in the back of the room chokes back the soft laugh that's threatening to erupt from her mouth.

"Oh. Nothing."

Clarke's voice is deceptively gentle. Deadly. Her nostrils are so pinched they're almost white against the skin of her reddening cheeks. Clarke wants to prevent herself from saying anything more. She knows she's been unfair and that it's her thoughts about Lexa getting hurt in a battle that could kill them all, including Abby, that prompts her to say words she knows she will regret.

"Nothing at all. Only our collective death at the hands of an enemy we know nothing about. Or where the hell Bellamy is. Or Queen Nia -" 

Her growing, quiet anger is clear and Abby's eyes widen almost comically, but whatever Clarke is going to say is interrupted by the harsh crackle and hiss of the radio that is in the middle of the room.

"Anyone copy from Arkadia? This is Wells Jaha. Anyone copy?"
Clarke lunges for the radio and her voice is breathless when she answers.

"Wells? Oh my God, Wells. Are you ok? I've been waiting to hear from you."

She's careful with her tone knowing that Mount Weather is listening in on them. She's a balance of worried concern and joy at hearing her best friend's voice, and slight irritation as if she's peeved she's had to wait. The first two are not an act, and she has to force herself to curb the anxiety.

"Clarke!" Wells' voice is unbearably happy sounding, but she knows him and she can hear the worry in his tone too.

"Where the hell have you been? I'd almost given up on you," Wells deep baritone rumbles through the speaker.

She grimaces and looks over at Octavia, who shakes her head quickly before leaving to get Lexa.

"Pot. Meet kettle."

Clarke deflects quickly and smiles when she hears Wells laughter over the radio.

"Yeah, ok. I deserve that. Hey, how's my dad? The President is concerned that he's not heard from him in the last few days."

Clarke swallows. They'd thought about all of this beforehand and Clarke still isn't sure if this is the best strategy, but for now it's the only one they've got.

"That's probably because my mom has him in medical. Both he and Darius stayed out too long after dark, and Mom thinks he's got a viral infection from the change in temperature. Our bodies are not used to these kinds of infections."

She goes on explaining in tedious detail the medical treatment Jaha is receiving at her mother's hands. Abby smiles encouragingly. She's just as worried about Wells as Clarke. Just as angry at yet another betrayal from Well's father.

"So Wells. I miss my chess buddy. When are you going to make your next move? My Queen was about to take your Castle, right alongside my knight. I haven't decided, but both of my pieces are right in there."

It's a simple gambit, and she knows Wells will immediately pick up the code.

"Huh. Your Queen, you say? White Queen or White Knight," he plays around softly as if he's visualizing the pieces.

“You've got two moves before I lose her. If you're clever enough,” Clarke taunts as she laughs, but everyone in the tent can see the tension in her from the way she keeps pressing her lips together. It doesn't help when Octavia returns to the tent with the Commander and Titus following her closely.

‘If you're clever enough.’

It's their key phrase. The one that tells the other they're in trouble and need help. To switch to the adapted morse with radio clicks, which Clarke does.

Their voices continue over the line and anyone listening would have fast tuned out or fallen asleep as Clarke recounts what's happening in Arkadia, the solar panels that are now sitting on the
expanse of roofing on the Ark, the plumbing channels dug up and strategically positioned, the
general day-to-day minutiae while Wells talks effusively about how grand the mountain is, and the
generosity of its President. In between, the clicks and hisses Clarke receives a story that makes her
face turn white.

She can feel Lexa’s presence, the touch of her fingertips against her shoulder, but it isn't enough to
assuage the grief that's growing on Clarke's face. The people in the room are quiet as they watch. It
only the Fleimkepa who looks at them all in complete consternation. He goes to speak, but Lexa's
hand rising quickly shuts him up as efficiently as a sword slicing through his tongue.

The conversation doesn't take too much longer. Enough for Clarke to deliver her message and for
Wells to deliver his. She worries for him as he will have to act before the mountain people who
will see his face. They can only hear Clarke. They can't see the tears that have made her eyes
glassy. Nor the deep breaths she takes in between each depression of the radio mic when she's off
the air. But everyone around her does and their faces all reflect confusion, worry, and with Titus,
complete mistrust and contempt.

"Why do we waste time listening to foolish children talk?" Titus snaps when the conversation is
finally over.

He ignores the quiet, tightly held in sob that Clarke makes as she turns away from everyone.

"Titus! Leave us." Lexa's voice is sharp with worry as she looks over at Clarke.

"No."

Clarke's voice breaks through the awful silence that lays heavy over the room. Her eyes dart over
to Octavia, whose brittle blue eyes glitter with a restrained menace as she glares over at the
Fleimkepa.

"No," Clarke repeats, and her voice is husky with contained anguish.

“He may as well stay and hear this. Wells - he told me that two of the delinquents were killed. It
took too long to say who - "

"You lie."

Titus' voice cracks with the frustration he can barely contain.

“We heard none of this on your tek. We heard you wasting our time talking about nothing!”

"We didn't say it with words.”

Clarke walked towards Octavia and Raven, while her mother and the others from Arkadia looked
at her with growing anxiety. She felt a hand on her shoulder. Strong fingers that dug into the soft
part of her flesh and she winced as it jolted her to a sudden stop.

“Do not walk away from me, Skai girl.”

His voice is so close to her ear and she can feel the vibration of his body, fingers trembling against
the back of her shirt while anger slithered through his flesh and onto her. She shivered before
feeling her own curiosity creep into her again. She does not understand this animosity. Or she does,
but she's not got the patience to let it go this time.

"Get your hand off me or I swear to God, I will shoot your dick off," Clarke says, and her voice is
dangerously low.

She can feel his grip loosen and she spins around. From the corner of her eye she can see Lexa, green eyes wide as she looked at Clarke and then back to the Fleimkepa.

"You are always in the background. Waiting for the Commander to falter. To fail. What is it you're so afraid of Titus? Us? Why? We're surrounded by you and our guns can shoot only so many bullets. The Mountain? That we can actually help you bring it down? Why would you be frightened of this when that's what you've all been trying to do for the last hundred years? Is it the Commander? Do you not like her having allies outside of your clan system? What is it, Titus? Why are you so afraid of me? Why do you want her to fail?"

Clarke doesn't flinch when he stepped forward, the veins in his forehead looked as if they were ready to burst and crawl out of his skin while his arm rose in a fist that came dangerously close to her face.

"You dare," his voice was a low growl that had every one of Clarke's friend's move towards her. Her gaze darted over to Lexa, who had a look of confusion and conflict on her face.

Clarke’s curiosity had sent her reading so many of the digital files on board the Ark. From trout fishing to repairing neural pathways, and the works of of all the great psychological thinkers of the Earth before it all went to hell.

Lexa.

Her response and behavior towards this awful, bombastic man suffused in mysterious ideology like a medieval priest felt off. Like she was trained or conditioned to particular responses. But she could see that a lifetime of conditioning was not sitting well with Lexa. Her lovely green eyes had darkened with fury and she'd moved forward behind the Fleimkepa and the tight white knuckles of her fingers had prevented Titus from following through and striking at Clarke.

"How many Commanders have you destroyed Titus because they didn't comply with your rules?"

"Klark, enough."

Lexa's voice was strained as she held the man back from punching at the Skai girl, and Clarke stepped back. The look of mistrust in deep blue eyes told everyone in that room that Clarke thought Titus was not on their side. Something he finally sensed as all eyes trained on him with suspicion.

"We are here to bring down the Mountain. Not each other," Lexa said and the vexation in her voice was enough to bring Clarke back to her senses as she looked around the tent and at the look of wariness in the Arker's eyes.

"You're right. I'm sorry, Commander but perhaps your Fleimkepa needs to learn that there are more ways of communicating than jumping up and down, and yelling battle cries, or sidling into rooms and whispering salacious untruths to foment discontent."

The look Lexa gave her made her bow her head despite the snigger she could hear Raven trying to cover up.

She let out a soft, long sigh before shaking her head a little.

"Wells tapped out our code. The clicks and hisses you heard on the radio was the private messaging system we used as children. It is our version of morse code. When I talked I released and clicked on the transmitter which caused interruptions in what we were saying as if the
transmission is faulty. He now knows we're coming. He knows we believe they have captured three people, and to look for them in the Mountain. I know from him that they're taking our people to their medical bay and that so far two of our people have not come back. He was emphatic as he clicked out 'dead' before he had to leave.

"Any causes?" Abby's voice interrupted.

Clarke shook her head and tried to cover the anger that flared through her while masking the grief at losing yet another of her friends who were cast from the Ark with her. Another reason to resent the leaders of the Ark whose decisions had killed so many of her peers. And her father. But now was not the time to think about these things.

She's singularly aware that Lexa is still taking time to breathe and has not made eye contact with her, and that Titus is still bristling with fury, his whole body leaning towards her as if he would run her over with the bulk of his muscles beneath the Fleimkepa's robes. She lifts an eyebrow at him and then turns to Lexa.

She needs to express so much but holds her tongue. Send him away, Lexa. The thought passes through her mind. Send him away. He has no valuable insights. He simply fills you with doubt and you second guess yourself.

Clarke has to take more than several moments as she knows that to say these things would splinter the coalition that they've formed. This this would tear the nascent relationship that is forming between them.

"We know from Lincoln that terrible things are being done to your people. We both know it is time to bring them down and that we can do this together," Clarke says.

Her voice is quiet, almost thoughtful as she steps closer to Lexa.

"We do not know this, Klark."

Lexa's thick dark brows are perfect angles above those deep green eyes as she looks at Clarke in confusion. Clarke almost jerks back her head in response to the statement.

"I don't understand."

She can hear the growing murmurs of the Arkadians. She needs to contain this, whatever this is that Lexa is pulling on them now.

"I am sorry, Klark. I only meant that we do not know that we will bring them down together. We can try, but it is not a given. Plans change in battle. I may fall in battle. And they may emerge as the victors."

Ok. Maybe she's imagining things that aren't there but the look - the look Lexa and Titus had exchanged was worrying.

This was not the woman - the girl she'd saved and helped stitch up over two weeks ago and started to feel things for. This was the Commander. Not the woman who could make her fall to her knees and her heart stutter. This was someone she could not decipher.

"Maybe we need to discuss this later," Clarke said as her eyes moved to Titus whose lips are compressed so tight they look like thick, fat worms crossing his face in the dappled light of the tent.
Lexa walks around the tent observing the looks of the Arkadians who are now staring at her and Titus with a range of emotions. Anger. Mistrust. Hope. She sees the loyalty glowing in Octavia's brittle blue eyes and the concern and confusion in Raven's dark ones.

Clarke sees something in Lexa’s face change when Lexa nods quietly to herself. A quiet epiphany of sorts and Clarke can feel her senses go on alert as she wonders, hopes - that Lexa can see her mentor for what he is.

"You are right, Klark. Please join me in the war tent? We can discuss what you've learned further.”

Clarke can feel her heart ease up again after the rise of tension inside the tent. She looks over and deep green eyes are staring at her thoughtfully as if she wants to say something. Whatever is going through Lexa’s mind is disrupted by the sharp words that comes out of the Fleimkepa's mouth.

"What is there to discuss? This has squandered what little time we have. If there is more to discuss then I will accompany you, Commander.”

Clarke can feel everything clench inside and she wants to rail against him but she doesn't want to be unreasonable.

"I don't think so," she says sharply.

So much for staying rational and calm and reasonable. She breathes out slowly and looks at Lexa to see how she responds.

For a moment Lexa doesn't speak her eyes flicking between the two of them.

"I think it is best if Klark and I discuss what she's learned from her friend alone, Titus. We have many things to consider and -”

"I am your counsel. Why would you not want me to advise you through this?"

Titus' voice is strained but his countenance matches Lexa’s own stoic one. Their faces do not reflect the absolute betrayal felt within unsaid words.

Clarke and the others in the room watch on as accidental observers to what seems to be a changing dynamic between the two. Lexa turns, her nostrils flare for a moment, and her throat visibly tightens as she swallows hard whatever initial words had come to her lips.

"Perhaps you can see that even now - with you interrupting the both of us at every turn, the conversation between Klark and I may go swifter without - constant intrusion.”

Clarke can hear the distinct sound of both Octavia and Raven covering the quiet gasps that come out of their mouths. Even her mother is struggling to stifle some kind of reaction.

Titus scoffs and turns to stare at Clarke. His eyes raking up and down her body in contempt.

"Your bed mate is not a distraction,” he says and the sarcasm is deep in his voice, “and I- your longest serving counselor, your teacher, I am an intrusion?”

His tone is snide and the way he's looking at her, Clarke can feel pricks of unease move across her skin. Her eyes dart quickly to her mother, who to her surprise has risen from her chair, cheeks reddening in indignation.

"What are you saying?”
Titus scoffs.

"Surely you have heard the sounds that intrude this camp -"

He doesn't get to finish as Lexa pushes him hard and he stumbles back almost falling in surprise.

"You dare?" Lexa's voice is a sharp hiss, and Titus struggles to find his footing to tower back over her.

"You are not thinking," Titus speaks, and the words are a low hiss that makes the hackles rise on the back of Clarke's neck.

She wants to move between them, but from the look on Lexa's face, this is one battle she needs to leave alone.

"You are not thinking," he repeats and glares at no-one as he struggles to find the words he needs, "your body rather than your mind is dictating your actions. You know better than anyone after Costia -"

"Speak again, Titus. Do it. See what happens."

Lexa's voice is soft but there can be no mistaking that despite the deceptive gentleness of her tone that the Commander is ready to tear out tongues. The silence in the room is absolute and Clarke can feel her chest tighten in anxiety. Her mind is a blank and she cannot think of a thing to help diffuse the situation.

"Well, fuck me. Looks like I'm not the only person who knows how to make things go bang around here."

Raven's voice is so dissonant in that moment that it takes a while for Clarke to make sense of her words.

"Listen Baldy. If you're as smart as you say you are I would make haste and get the hell out of here before the Commander rights the so many wrongs you've just said in the last few minutes. Pfft,"

Raven moves her arms around wildly as she speaks, her words are rapid as they spill out of her mouth.

"I'd have thought that with all of this equality shit you guys had going on here with women being warriors and generals that there wouldn't be this," she waved her hand up and down Clarke's body before speaking again as she quirked an eyebrow at him.

"This slut shaming thing you've got going on with Clarke. Just so you know - she's our very own Commander except she's the Commander of Life, you know. Bringing people back from the dead and all. So future reference you little fucker, leave her the hell alone. You may need her healing skills one day should the Commander spear you."

Clarke can feel her cheeks suffuse with red and she's not sure where to look as Lexa's eyes are so wide in shock, and Titus' mouth hangs open in complete consternation.

"Ok. Enough. Lex-"

Clarke stops herself from blundering and overstepping when she should not.

"Commander. Let's move this to your tent. Now. And I'll tell you everything Wells told me in between the - inane but very necessary conversation. Perhaps your people haven't discovered the
art of spying on one another yet, but it's pretty key to not let your enemy know that you're onto them."

The last part of her sentence is a parting shot at Titus as she strides out of the tent hoping Lexa follows her. She feels relief in the way her chest seems to unclench once she realizes that Lexa is trailing behind her, and Titus has taken Raven's counsel by removing himself from the tent and the collective wrath of the Arkadians.

She moves into the darker confines of the Commander's war rooms and feels the chasm that has formed between them in the silence that follows. She keeps her eyes down as she's too worried to see what may be in Lexa's eyes. It terrifies Clarke that Lexa can never overcome her training with that odious man.

"You disrespect us, Klark." Lexa's voice is quiet and Clarke looks up then and she sees something that she had not expected to see. Disappointment perhaps or even the slightest tint of sadness in those deep green eyes.

"I didn't mean to come across as disrespectful to you, Lexa," Clarke says, and her voice matches the gravity of Lexa's tone.

"I don't disrespect your ways or your culture. From what little I've seen in Polis and the year I've spent on Earth - you are so very different from us with your culture of war. It was easy for us to be pacifists when we were so far away from all of this."

She doesn't waver even when Lexa lets her face reflect some of her inner world. There is a slight twist to Lexa’s mouth, but her eyes are impossible to penetrate. Clarke cannot figure out what's going on in her mind as the light seems to have deadened inside of eyes that usually stare at her with affection instead of this steady, terrifying gaze.

"Your people, Lexa - they're amazing. What you've done with the twelve clans, your capacity to build and work together has been a revelation and I believe that we could easily follow you. Your ideal of the world you want to create is one that I know my people would love to be a part of."

Clarke sighs when she sees the stubborn line that has crossed Lexa's brow. She's got her work cut out for her, and even though she wants to reach out and trace the line of Lexa's jawline, to cup her face and to just hold her; she knows that to do so now would cause a rift that Clarke isn't sure she's able to repair.

"He is your teacher. I know that. I see that. I understand all of that."

Clarke’s lips tighten and they say more than her words do to Lexa whose chest rises and falls a few times as she takes several deep breaths before speaking.

"Your words Klark, do not match your eyes. Say what you wish to say. Do not hide behind pretty words for we do not have time for them. My sister has been missing for three days! I cannot, I will not be the person who mediates between you and my docent."

Clarke can feel the knot tighten inside her chest. Her misgivings, her innate distrust of Titus; is it a simple case of prejudice? Are her misgivings simply a reflection of her distrust of religion? They had been educated to dismiss all forms of religious groupings as it was one of the Ark’s tenets that religion was one of the strongest pillars that brought down old Earth.

But Lexa is right, she needs to speak her truth and not deflect the issue at hand.

"I don't know, Lexa. I don't know if it is because they have brought me up to resist the mythos
around spiritual leaders like Titus, or whether it's my mistrust from his behavior around you. And his attitude to me when I am around you.”

She saw the flicker in Lexa's eyes and she didn't know what it meant. Clarke sighed and turned away.

“He was awful in there. To me. And you -’’

Clarke looked up and finally their eyes locked. Her eyes were the color of brittle winter skies and she didn't blink as she stared at Lexa.

"You said nothing. You did nothing when he had his hands on me.”

Lexa's brow furrowed.

"You are mistaken, Klark. I reprimanded him when he went too far.”

"Lexa, he crossed the line the minute he spoke. He diminishes everything I say. He diminishes you. He has no qualms about making everything about 'your' people when it suits him. And about 'you' the Commander when he wants to manipulate you.”

Clarke presses her lips and doesn't shy away from the intense stare off she seems to be having with Lexa who looks to be struggling with the ideas Clarke just threw at her. She can see in those green eyes the level of deliberation that she's putting into Clarke's words.

"I -'

Lexa struggles with words and it is painstakingly obvious to Clarke that she’s conflicted with her ideal of her mentor and the actual man that he is.

"He was your teacher, correct?” Clarke asks and her voice is gentle in the tense quietness of the room.

Lexa nods once and looks away as her brow furrows in concentration.

"Yes. Teacher. Father. Everything for a very long time.”

"And let me guess - he didn't beat you once he realized that anything he did to you would never be as severe as your stepmother?"

Lexa's body stilled and Clarke could literally see her whole being listening as she took in those words. Clarke knew her question resonated with Lexa. Knew that Lexa had realized a truth. Clarke knew men like Titus. She'd met men and women just like him on the Ark who used their imagined powers against children weaker than themselves.

Like Ensign Charles Pike, their Earth and Life Sciences teacher. And how he had bullied John Murphy who came from the lower echelons of the Ark until Clarke had stood up for him. Murphy had been sullen and hated that someone like Clarke had saved him from another humiliating experience, but he'd gotten over it when Clarke had placed herself between Murphy and one of Pike's flying fists after a particularly heated argument.

Clarke's split lip had been difficult to explain to the Chief Medical Officer, and the man had found himself far away from teaching children after that. After that, Clarke had forged a fast bond between the young boy whom most of the Ark had hated.
She loved his dark humor and his complete contempt for the hierarchy within the Ark. Murphy had kept her sane and safe in that first year on the ground. She missed him like hell and wished he'd come back from wherever he'd run off to when the Ark had landed. A wry grin and a kiss on her nose was the only farewell he'd allowed them, whispering that he wasn't allowing a bunch of assholes who were willing to kill their children be the master of his destiny.

"What did he do to you when he couldn't control you like that? With the threat of a beating? Did he withhold things like food, sleep, did he isolate you? Did he make you feel like he was the only one who could save you? Tell you that you weren't worthy every time you weren't able to do something or disobeyed him? Did he stop you from making friends?"

Lexa swallowed hard.

"We had no friends when we were training for the conclave. We only had each other. And only Titus. We had no other teachers when we were children except for our Fos. I had Anya, but she was away. Often."

Too often leaving behind a child traumatized by war, death, and the ever present Fleimkepa who knew exactly how to mold the future Heda with his words.

"So," and Clarke sighed at the enormity of this, "he was the only thing left for you when you had to kill everyone in the conclave?"

The sharp nod and brittle look in deep green eyes made the rage rise again in Clarke. She nodded a few times and tried to see what is in Lexa's eyes but Clarke could see the solid barrier Lexa had erected between them; her gaze impossible to decipher. Clarke remembers their first week in the bunker, arms and hands waving as they tried to communicate with one another.

She moved her arms slowly now, her fingers elongating as she expressed things that her words could not articulate.

"Your loneliness must have been - unbearable. I am so sorry to hear that Lexa. I had moments of loneliness and isolation, but I always had the love of my parents. It was absolute. And Wells. He was always there for me. When I failed, and I failed a lot, my parents taught me that failure was the first part of learning. To never fail was to live an illusion," she paused while collecting her words. "My mother never made me feel less than I am nor did she try to forge me in her image. She knew I was naturally talented in surgery and she did everything in her power not to influence me," Clarke said and her voice had gentled even further as Lexa's deep green eyes sought hers. For clarity. For understanding. Lexa's body seemed to sag a little, her whole body losing tension in her muscles as she'd tried to absorb what Clarke was trying to say to her.

"I am glad to hear it," Lexa breathed but Clarke could see from the small furrow left in her brow she wasn't sure where Clarke was going with this.

Clarke smiled and touched the edges of that very sharp jawline with the gentlest of touches that she could manage.

"I could have also followed my father."

Clarke sighed and looked away. Regret colored her voice and Lexa turned to face her with surprise reflected in her green gaze.

"I could have been an engineer like my father and Raven. I had skills in that area too. I can help build things with Raven to help us win this war, Lexa. What I'm trying to say is that my parents
encouraged me to follow the strength in my heart. Not my head. My mind works in a crazy way and I could follow any path. But they trusted me to know. To know what to do, Lexa. Titus. Titus does not allow you to be the best that you can be. He's always at your shoulder, whispering doubt into your mind. This is war. There is no time for doubt.”

She watched as Lexa's spine began to straighten again and Clarke could feel the frustration build in her. Whatever indoctrination he had wrought along the seams of her mind seemed entrenched and difficult to dismantle.

"Klark. I know you mean well but our worlds were not the same. Your wars were bloodless. I had to live or die by the time I was fifteen when I ascended. Our world is not as primitive as you believe but we construct it from very specific truths of what is right, and what is wrong."

Lexa's voice was tight as she tried to explain Titus, and Clarke would not hear it. The man was anathema to the evolution of this Commander. He wanted her stuck in the ways of the Heda before they drew the treaties. Survival of the fittest, the strongest and the most aggressive.

"Lexa. I know men like Titus. It doesn't matter what world they come from. They all want the same thing. They want the vicarious power they experience through those they mentor. He will never let you be the Commander you want to be."

Lexa stared at her for a long moment and Clarke wondered if she'd pushed her a little too far.

"I'm sorry, Lexa. If you trust me at all, know one thing. I want you to be the leader that your people need but above all that - I want you to live and thrive and create a world where everyone pursues their own happiness. You understand Titus more than me. He has taught you but I think the student well surpasses the master and it's time to move on with your own mind, your own spirit."

She suppressed her reaction when Lexa visibly flinched at the last word she said and she watched as if a light flickered to life behind troubled green eyes. She wants to know what's wrong. What is it that Titus has that controls her so much?

"I have the spirit -" Lexa begins and her eyes are huge with almost no pupil. The green of her eyes are luminescent and there's a look on her face that is confusing to Clarke. There is fear threaded in them as there is in the tremor of her voice. She watches as Lexa takes several deep breaths before continuing.

"The spirit of the Commanders live in me."

Her face is ashen, and she looks steadily at Clarke while Clarke desperately tried to make sense of what she'd just heard. Was Lexa alluding to some kind of spiritual communion with their Gods like a Catholic transubstantiation situation?

She nodded slowly and waited.

"There have been fourteen Commanders before me. They are with me in my head passed on through the Flame. I speak to them through meditation and through our connection by the flame," Lexa says and her voice is just above a whisper, thready, terrified as if she's committing heresy, and Clarke supposes that she is as Lexa is telling an outsider a deep secret specific to the Commander and the Fleimkepa.

And maybe this must be what curtails her. Holds her in his thrall or whatever the hell he's doing to her to keep her his captive.

"I've never heard of that," Clarke finally says. Her mind is running a hundred miles an hour as she
tries to think of the reasons a culture came up with such an ideology.

"When I ascended, Titus put the Flame into me," Lexa said and looked at Clarke carefully.

Clarke couldn't help her automatic response and her face scrunched up. Was Lexa using a metaphor to describe sex?

Lexa's green eyes glinted with something akin to horror when she realized what conclusions Clarke was coming to. Her face paled, and she shook her head furiously.

"No, no, no, Klark! Not that. Jok. Not that."

The distaste on Lexa's face was enough to make Clarke laugh out loud. Almost. She restrained herself knowing exactly how delicate this conversation was and they seemed to teeter on the brink of some terrible chasm that threatened to come up between them. Clarke grimaced inwardly at the thought of Titus and held those feelings inside, not wanting to disrupt the flow of Lexa's words.

"The flame is where the memory of each Commander lives. When a Commander dies, it stores their memories in the flame and is passed onto the next to ascend. Someone else gave this to us, someone who came down from the sky less than a hundred years ago."

"Someone else from the sky? Why didn't you tell me?"

Clarke's brow furrowed, and she tried to think back on conversations wondering if she'd missed any references to it.

"Why would I, Klark? This is one of the most sacred parts of our lives. To be the Commander is to be honored and revered, yes. But it is more than that. It is a responsibility that carries into every part of my life. The secret of the flame is well guarded by a few. It is sacred, Klark."

Lexa's green eyes were staring into Clarke's who felt her stomach tilt at the idea that Lexa had entrusted her with this. Clarke moved forward and entwined their fingers, feeling the coolness of those fingertips against her own skin seemed like a balm against the tension that had been sitting low in her stomach.

"The test of the true commander on ascension is to name every single Commander that came before. I could not have memorized it. There are questions each Fleimkepa must ask before they accept the Commander amongst my people."

Clarke could feel her brows rise.

"You've got to be kidding me. There's more of him?" Clarke snapped.

She watched as Lexa's eyes filled with amusement, the small fine lines forming around her eyes crinkling with contained laughter.

"Each clan has their own Fleimkepa. Titus leads them all and has helped mentor each one to guide and assist every Clan leader and the generals of my armies. They are more than just the guardians of the flame. They maintain the records of my people. They remember our history and pass this onto the next generation."

Clarke groaned and leaned back into her chair. Lexa had to be kidding, right? There were more of these pompous fools scattered through the remaining clans. Clarke shook her head in frustration. "What is the point if all he does is undermine your decisions? Good leaders must choose. He can't keep questioning you like he’s done since he arrived."
"Klark. Beja. Please."

And Clarke can see that the Commander has disappeared and the Lexa she knows is there before her. Vulnerable. Frustrated. Afraid.

"You didn't defer to him like this in Polis. Or maybe I just didn't see him as much there? I don't remember seeing him constantly question you in front of your generals. Is this normal?"

It is that same curiosity that made her parents laugh and often got her in trouble with her teachers. And now, possibly with Lexa as she's determined to find out the cause of this behavior in a woman she's grown to admire and respect.

Clarke's frustration is clear in the tumble of blonde curls that spill around her face where she's mussed up her hair with the constant running of her fingers through it as she thinks aloud.

"I -" Lexa's voice falters and her eyes are shadowed as she looks away from Clarke.

"You are right, Klark. We are so close to our enemy now. The one that has tormented so many of my people. Titus has lived through the deaths of three Hedas. He has knowledge and experience that we cannot ignore."

Clarke stares at her and then nods slowly. Blue eyes catch the torment reflected in deep green ones that are shaded partly in shame, and the other Clarke can only guess at.

"And my sister. Nia. I - we have been at odds and for this to happen without me, without us saying goodbye -"

Her voice cracks and Clarke instinctively pulls her close. She holds Lexa tight despite the stiffening body in her arms, but after a few minutes of taut silence and Lexa's harsh breathing against her clavicle, Clarke can feel dampness on her shirt as Lexa's tears slip past, and her body softens against Clarke's determined hug.

"Why did she have to go into the woods that -"

Clarke can feel the obvious shake of Lexa's head against her skin, but they both stiffen and jump apart when they hear the whoosh of material at the front of the tent move quickly as someone pushes into the outer room.

"Commander."

The voice is sharp with urgency and Clarke does everything in her power to try to stop her eyes from rolling. This man!

"Titus, you better have a good reason for this interruption," Lexa says and her voice is sharp with irritation, her face turned from him.

"Your General and her scouts returns."

Clarke watches in quiet interest when she sees how Lexa lifts her eyes upwards in response to Titus' gruff voice that penetrates the confines of the private section of her tent. She lets out what sounds like a soft huff mixed with a growl.

"And my General can advise me of her news, Titus. You are not a messenger boy."

Clarke watches how Lexa's body transforms as she straightens her spine, and the muscles in her
"Lexa," Titus hisses, "this is not good enough. You should not be in here with her! Your people wait to hear from you. They wait to see you walking these grounds. They look to you for leadership and not to confine yourself with this -"

Whatever he meant to say stops as Lexa moves forward into his space and despite the difference in height, she towers over him.

"You will address me correctly, Fleimkepa. We are at war and I look to Klark for advice on how we use their tek wisely against our common enemy. Or do you forget where we are?"

Clarke can see the strain on the man's face as he tries to keep steady eye contact with Lexa. After several moments of tense silence he looks down, but Clarke can see the redness of his cheeks as he contains his anger.

"Yes, Commander. I forget myself. The message is urgent and we could not find you."

"That does not excuse your presumption in interrupting a meeting," Lexa says, and her voice is deceptively soft. Clarke feels a shiver at the latent threat in her tone.

"I am your Fleimkepa. Your teacher for many years. I have made you the Commander you are today."

The man's voice comes out in sharp guttural sounds and it is clear to Clarke that he feels these words far more keenly than that of his apology moments earlier. She can feel her whole body tense in shock at his words, and her eyes dart quickly over to Lexa whom she can see is shaking as she tries to control her breathing.

"You were my teacher," Lexa finally says and Clarke wants to step away from the impending firestorm that seems to have been brewing between these two.

"And I trusted you to give me council when needed. I do not need you to over step as you have been doing since you arrived at this camp. I do not need you to weaken my decisions. My generals have provided me with advice, and Klark and her people have shown us ways into the Mountain that we have never had before. Why do you doubt me?"

Lexa repeats Clarke’s questions from before, and there is confusion and hurt beneath the anger of Lexa’s words.

Titus breathes for long several moments, his eyes flicking towards Clarke and then back to the floor at his feet. He pulls his lips tight several times before speaking.

"You are weakened by her, and that is why I doubt your decisions. Just as I doubted you when you took the Azgeda woman to your bed and was I not right then?"

Titus' head tilts upwards the anger visible in his dark eyes as they sweep across Lexa's taut frame and back towards Clarke. The look in his eyes makes her want to bolt from the room, but she feels a jolt of rebellion spear through her. She wants to be by Lexa's side for this.

Clarke straightens her posture, and she lifts her chin. She responds with her own blue eyes never breaking from his. He looks at her with narrowed eyes, his whole body screaming out that he wants to leap towards her and tear her to pieces with his hands.

"Do you need a moment, Commander?" Clarke says and her voice is so low it almost escapes
Lexa's attention. A swift turn of that perfect profile and Clarke knows she's heard.

"No. Titus is finished."

The silence is awful in the room, as Lexa says these words. The double implication is obvious to all of them.

"She will ruin you."

Apparently, Titus was not quite finished and quite dramatic when cornered, Clarke mused as she turned to face him.

The slight smile on her face seems to aggravate him even more. It's a small victory, and Clarke hates herself a little for reveling in it during a time like this, but Titus just triggers such a negative response in her she finds she can't help herself.

"Enough! Titus. Enough. Leave us," Lexa whispers, and there's an awful sorrow in her voice as she turns away from him. Clarke immediately feels regret fill her heart for the moment of pettiness against the man.

There is a kinship between them that Clarke cannot understand. She wonders if she should step back and let them work it out without her there. But it's too late, and he leaves the tent far more quietly than when he came in.

"Lexa," her voice is soft, and Clarke watches with worry as Lexa's body stiffens again.

"Please, Lexa. We can work together on this. Don't worry about Titus for now. They do not build some people for change. We will find Nia. We will," Clarke whispers the last part but stops herself from promising.

She's only been on this planet for over a year. She can barely promise herself a tomorrow let alone one for another human being.

"I must go. I need to find what my scouts have found."

The determination in Lexa's voice is clear, and she looks at Clarke as if she’s struggling against asking her to join her. Clarke can feel her own heart hurt a little as she must return to Arkadia to complete plans with Raven and Octavia.

"Go. I understand," Clarke says and touched Lexa's wrist while looking at her wistfully, "I wish -"

Clarke's blue eyes darkened, and she blinks away the creep of tears that have glossed over them. She pulls her lips into a grimace and shakes her head at all the wishes that flies through her head. She wishes for more time. More time to get to know this lovely young woman she's met at the worst of times. She wishes to fall in love, which might be a little too late as she's pretty sure she's given her heart away to this strong woman before her. This woman whose eyes are almost black in the shadows of the tent, her full lips glistening after continuously swiping at them absent-mindedly during her altercation with Titus.

Clarke wishes she could take the time to draw those lovely features, the tilt of her mouth and the winged arch of each brow. She wishes that the Earth wasn't so God damned hard and she almost hiccoughs a sob at the thought of all the things she's had to do and had to be.

This wasn't the safety of the Ark or the books she'd always immersed herself in. The heros weren't abstract; they were real and suddenly she was in the thick of things instead of reading from a
distance. The Ark could afford its ideas of peace until it too suddenly had scarce resources to fight over. The source of peace was being happy with what you had. To not hunger for something more than what was available. To never thirst for something that was not yours.

"I'll see you later?" Clarke said and her voice already feels like it is disappearing. Contained. Ready to flee. All her life she’s been curious about everything. And now, she wants to run from all the unanswered questions she has for this young woman before her.

Lexa's eyes moved quickly to her.

"Yes. Of course. Are you well, Klark?" Lexa asked, her forehead creased with worry as she wonders at Clarke's sudden withdrawal. Titus has left. Shouldn’t Clarke be happy? Clarke nods quickly, bringing up a tight smile that seemed to make Lexa look at her even more worrily. She tried not to flinch when soft fingers interlaced with her own tugging her gently towards soft skin and hardened muscles.

"Klark?"

"It's nothing. I have to get back. I need to talk to Raven and Octavia about how to set up everything for when we go up against Mount Weather. I need to make sure that all of our medical supplies are ready, our tranqs, the arrowheads, bandages - "

Clarke stopped her rambling and panic when soft lips brushed against hers and strong arms moved around her before pulling her in closer.

"Klark."

It's a strange combination of her Commander voice laced with Lexa. Soft. Strong and waiting for Clarke to tell her the truth.

"Will I ruin you, Lexa?"

Clarke tries to minimize the anguish she can feel inside, but she's not sure if she's been terribly successful as she can see the look of worry strain Lexa's features.

“Niron," Lexa whispers as she traces the outline of Clarke's cheekbones. It's soft and tentative and her voice breaks a little as she looks into Clarke's eyes.

"Niron," she whispers again and Clarke wonders what the word is that causes Lexa's green eyes to look at her in both wonder and sadness.

"I am already ruined, Klark." 

Lexa's smile is as watery as Clarke's and it doesn't make Clarke feel any stronger for it. She laughs softly. She knows that she’s meant to laugh at Lexa's little joke, but her heart feels a little more broken than it had before.

***

Jasper's eyes dart over to Maya's whose mouth is covered up as she tries not to laugh out loud at Well's pantomime of 'Korra Legend of the Avatar' as they go through another round of charades. As each person laughs raucously Jasper moves silently through the group, laughing and joking and leaving a small piece of paper in each person's hand with instructions to not look down, and read it only when they reach their bunks.
Most of them are laughing too much to pay attention until he either pinches them or slaps them hard on the back all the while pretending that it's all just good fun.

To the cameras he would appear as the prankster of the group always joking or horsing around. He nods to Wells after he's completed the room and the sixteen other kids have all received the message they'd written before the games night. There's only eighteen of them now after they'd taken both Fox and Andy from Mecha station. Jasper knows for sure that Fox is dead and his heart still aches at the thought, but they're all still hoping that Andy is still alive somewhere that Maya will confirm as soon as she's on duty again.

Wells raises his hands up into the air after he's finished his round.

"Ok. Last game. This will involve the whole group except for Maya who will start us off by whispering in our ear. You all remember 'Whispers' right?"

Everyone laughs as it's a lame kids game that most of them haven't played since they were about thirteen.

"Aww c'mon, Wells. We're not children anymore," one of them whines a little and Jasper flicks the back of her head softly.

Zoe Monroe was tall and her distinctive deep auburn hair and hazel eyes had caused the worst kind of crush when he was fifteen. As a result, Jasper knew her better than most, but his crush had gone nowhere as the girl had a line of boys constantly fawning over her good looks.

"It'll be fun, Monroe. I bet the message gets totally fucked up," Jasper says, goading her a little with a dare. He knows how competitive she can be after the last laser game they'd had in the augmented reality section of the Ark. Now, they were literally living the escape room games they'd all been so passionate about.

Monroe shook her head slightly and laughed before rolling her eyes and nodding.

They look ridiculous as they form a long line far enough apart not to hear the message before it comes to them and Jasper makes sure he's the last in the line. There's shuffling and moving as they all get ready for the first whisper. Wells moves forward and deliberately speaks slowly and softly into Monroe's ear.

"Just smile. Do not react. Laugh at the end as if it's the most hysterical thing you've ever heard. Read the note away from the cameras. Be ready."

He steps away from her and smiles as she tries not to look confused and a little shocked. She's careful though when she turns to the next person as she plasters a wicked grin on her face as if it's all good, cheeky fun.

It takes some time, and each person adds their own little piece of subterfuge to the game of whispering in the next person's ear either by giggling or snorting until it gets to Jasper. Jasper hams it up and snorts out loud with an incredulous look.

"What the fuck?"

He looks around the room grinning like a maniac. The sentence he comes out with is nonsensical about Clarke and Bellamy having sex, and the laughter is more relief from the tension that has built up amongst the group after playing this crazed game.

The smells of their combined bodies in close quarters is wearing thin and Jasper wonders how
these Mount Weather people endure it. He guesses that if you've lived this way all your life just like they had up in the Ark, you'd get used to the smell of metal and recycled air, and in their case the scent of rising damp and mold that seemed to permeate the walls.

Everyone screeches with laughter and Wells is almost doubled over at the visual. This hadn't been part of the plan but trust Jasper to come up with something that would make all of them laugh at the dissonant image he'd conjured. Everyone knew how much Clarke hated Bellamy.

It's convincing enough that no-one comes down to see what they're up to and after a few rounds they all finally filter to their shared rooms and bunk beds. Behind the smiles there's a tension in each of them as they move away from the cameras and the privacy of their beds to read whatever Jasper Jordan had slipped into their hands. The silence that night is terrible.

‘Do not go to medical. Stay together always. Get any weapon you can get your hands on.’

The note is enough for them to realize exactly how much trouble they're all in.

Wells can only hope that Clarke and the rest of the Ark, and possibly this Grounder army she’s told him about will reach them in time. He knows his father is coming, which means they will have to work fast. He knows that Clarke has made a deal to switch them, but he doesn’t trust his father or Dante. His dad has proved several times that his self-interest trumped anyone else’s safety. Including his son.

He’s been worrying for so long and immersed in his head he doesn’t notice the commotion at the dormitory door until a voice he recognizes bursts through the silence.

‘Where the fuck is everyone?’

He smiles grimly. Finally. He’d wondered when they’d put Blake into their part of the compound. Cage had told him about Bellamy’s capture with a Grounder woman.

‘Bell?’ He heard Jasper’s voice through his room door and quickly moved into the common room.

‘Blake.’ Wells smiled as Bellamy almost lost his footing spinning around to look at the new voice.

‘Glad you could join us,’ Wells joked as both younger men stared at him.

Wells is used to Bellamy’s surliness so when he grins and jokes back he’s a little nonplussed at the change in his behavior.

‘Oh well, you know. They interrupted me with a potential hookup. She and I stumbled on a spy before we could get it on.’ Bellamy shrugged as if it was every day that he cavorted with Grounders. It was enough to silence both Jasper and Wells who knew that Bellamy would rather eat live snakes than hang out with a Grounder.

‘Right,’ Wells blinked before looking to Jasper, who quickly stepped in.

‘No way, man. Is she hot? Where is she?’ Jasper asked and tried to look behind Bellamy as if the woman would appear behind the closed door.

Bellamy’s smile faded from his face and that surliness everyone knew to be more true to his nature flashed again for a moment. It was for a second but Wells hid his astonishment when Bellamy stretched and ignored Jasper’s questions with one of his own.

‘I’m fucking starving. Where can I get some grub?’
Blake is putting on the aggressive swagger, but Wells realizes quickly that he’s trying to give them an opportunity to find a less public space to have this conversation. Before they can move more of the delinquents trickle into the room after hearing the initial noise.

“What the fuck, Bells?” Zoe is rubbing at her eyes as she adjusts to the light in the room. “Where the hell did you come from?”

Wells releases a quiet sigh of relief when he notices that everyone is being careful. They’re all on high alert and ready for whatever happens next. The last year has certainly prepared them for anything, but being stuck in this gilded cage was something a little beyond any of their expectations.

“The militia from here grabbed me. I think because I was with a Grounder is why they initially imprisoned me,” Bellamy’s face is implacable as he recounts the story of his journey.

There’s something about him that is discomfiting for Wells. Blake is usually a hot-head. All mouth and swear words. Since they landed he’s often been nasty and vicious trying to wrestle power and wreak havoc against the snot-nosed kids which he’d branded Wells, Clarke and a few others who had been unfortunate enough to be in the Dropship. Alongside kids from the lower classes of the Ark. A class system that his father constructed and which hadn’t existed before Wells’ birth. Thank you again dear old dad, for all the bruises he’d received while Clarke had to ward off the threats of rape from boys whose father’s had suffered under his father’s regime. If it hadn't been for her friendship with Murphy and her medical skills.

Someone turned on some music while Monroe moved to the kitchen where she grabbed some leftover sandwiches for Bellamy who consumed them as if it was the first meal he’d had in a month.

“No offense, Bell?” Monroe teased.

Bellamy grunted and spoke around a mouthful of food.

“I haven’t eaten in days. Those bastards only allowed me water until they figured I was from the Ark.”

He chewed some more before lifting the sleeve of his jacket where everyone could see the Arkadian Guard Watch on his wrist.

“They also left this,” Bellamy grinned and Wells felt a rush of relief that was dizzying.

He had never particularly liked the guy but in this moment; he wanted to kiss him. The Mountain guards didn’t have this kind of technology was bloody brilliant and for the first time he felt they could be one step ahead of Wallace.

The noise and clamor of the room rose exponentially, and it wasn’t long before they heard a loud bang against the door before several guards pushed it open.

“Wells Jaha,” the lead guard spoke quietly into the rowdiness of the room, “President Dante would like to see you first thing at 0900 hours.”

Wells didn’t show the nerves that were pulling at his guts and smiled instead.

“Thank you. I will be there. Please pardon our excitement but one of our friends from the Ark has joined us tonight. We’re all so surprised.”
As if they didn’t know. The guard smirked and nodded before reminding them that lights out would start at 2300 hours.

When the last guard had left the room Jasper turned around and raised a fist in the air.

“Who’s up for some beer?”

The cheers that filled the room didn’t allay the anxiety that had formed in his belly. Wells looked over at Bellamy who was staring at him quietly before nodding his head once and leaning in close.

“So Wells. What’s the plan? There’s someone in here we have to save.”

Wells smiled.

“Let me guess. A queen?”

---

Lexa's nerves are now tight to a fever pitch with an intensity that sees her snarling at scouts and generals, and immensely short-tempered with Titus who had continued to plague her with doubts throughout the ongoing war preparations against the Maunon.

After that terrible moment in her tent she had waited a day before she finally sent him packing in a rage that everyone within the camp could hear. Titus would return to Polis under the escort of Gustus who would keep the city safe and governed in Lexa’s absence. She had quietly instructed her second in Command new instructions for the Conclave which she ensured Titus could hear and understand. He had not reacted well, but she simply told him that he was Fleimkepa no more and that Gaia would hold the conclave should she fall during battle. A real possibility once the Maunon recognized her.

The Conclave would be a series of tests of agility, speed and strength and strategy. The one who emerged the victor with the flag of the Conclave would rise and become the new Commander.

The ramifications of Polis being without its Fleimkepa would be minimal as Lexa had already sent messages to Gaia to return to Polis immediately. Gaia would make her way to Polis with the Commander’s seal to be the next Fleimkepa.

Lexa hid the terrible grief she felt and put the sudden and absolute untethering she experienced to the back of her mind and continued preparing for war.

Her fur-lined boots are a comfort now as the edges of winter seeps into the daylight hours. The sun is watery through a pale sky and the smell of meat cooking across the camp fills her nostrils, causing her stomach to yearn for something fresh and light instead of the constant stews they’ve been having since camping outside of Arkadia.

The day when the war actually begins is nondescript. It blends into the days that came before with the same desultory sun hidden behind high cumulous formations. Lexa is not unprepared. None of them are, but hearing the President's voice for the first time - the voice of the enemy hidden beneath the mountain, makes her heart pound and she can barely hear him beyond the dreadful boom in her ears. The high pitch wail of the tek makes many of her people shudder but she's proud of them as they stand tall when the voice comes over the boxes that Raven had constructed to amplify sound.

It has been days since that first demonstration so Lexa is quietly bemused when war arrives as an insignificant whine before a sudden crackle, and bursts of sound on a derelict system that threads
from the towers of Arkadia. Her eyes search the campground and the entrance to the metallic citadel, searching for blonde hair and that graceful walk Clarke has when striding through the grounds outside her home.

It is now the fourth day since she's seen her sister and she clamps down hard on the terror that has been steadily rising in her throat. They cannot move forward as the tracks found near the camp disappear less than fifty yards from where they could see the beginnings of a fight. The clues left behind can only be from Nia, who was always quick-witted under duress.

Years of her mother's caregiving had created a woman of incredible resilience, and despite the tormented schism that had formed between them in the last year because of Costia, Lexa knew her sister well enough to instruct her scouts to look for details in the ground. And she had left details like the scraps of her cloak and Belomi's jacket, but there was nothing of Costia who was also missing. Lexa could only assume the worst and imagine that she'd been trapped by the Maunon and captured too.

Lexa feels the brush of fingertips against her shoulders, and it is only the training she has had that stops her from flinching.

Clarke. Her scent is a mixture of the Ark's metal and the pine that surrounds them, and the breeze mixed into her hair.

"It is the President from the Mountain. Dante Wallace. He wants to speak with us," Clarke says, and her voice is soft against Lexa's ear.

If not for the worry and rising anxiety of the last few days, she would respond with a swift embrace and perhaps something more. As it is, Lexa finds it hard to even breathe let alone speak. Instead, she nods curtly and tries to ignore the look of worry reflected in deep blue eyes that stare at her.

Lexa has been the leader of these twelve clans for almost a year, with only Delphi Kru coming in to join the union in the last year, delaying the full formation of her coalition. She's fought armies and conquered warrior's hearts, and she's had her own shattered twice by Nia and Costia. This pain that lingers and sits heavy in her stomach is debilitating, and Titus' constant whispering of 'love is weakness' in her ear had threatened to break down her obstinate calm.

If she did not love Nia as a sister so much would she be able to see more clearly? Fight with more discernment? She does not know, and she worries that her choices now will lead to Nia's death. It would mean sorrow and grief, and ultimately even further unrest, as there is no-one to lead Azgeda without their own battle for the throne.

She's pulled out of the moribund and back into the real world once she realizes that Clarke has stopped and is leading her gently to the Ark's 'center of operations,' or Mission Control as Raven laughingly called it. Lexa did not understand the humor around their naming but understood the place to be the same in nature as her own war room.

"Ask Raven to jam the broadcast."

Clarke's voice is sharp with her own worries that breaks through Lexa's thoughts.

Clarke is speaking to Octavia, who waits by the radio.

"We don't want all of Arkadia to hear this lunatic spouting his crap."

Lexa watches the bustle of the Skaikru who surround her and the two guards she's brought with her. Gustus should have been with her but she’s assigned Ryder, who is someone new. She's
learned to forget of his quiet presence after a year of having him as a constant in her background. The other guard Micah is also Trikru, from Indra’s town of Tondisi.

She watches Clarke with a quiet steadiness as she paces the constrained floors of the Ark’s control room where they’ve been meeting to map out plans and strategies on walls that shimmer in the darkness, trails of white and blue as Clarke furiously draws up maps before saving them and sending them to the small devices that each of the Arkadians hold as close to them as their guns. Lexa holds her breath when that awful voices bellows over the airwaves again.

“I wish to speak with the Chancellor. This is the President of the United States, Dante Wallace.”

The voice is loud. It is the shouting speech that lesser men use when the value of their words do not carry enough weight for them to be heard on their own merit.

Her gaze catches Clarke's, and she notices how the blue has intensified, and she can see the twist to Clarke's mouth that barely disguises her contempt for this man. Lexa breathes out slowly and watches as Clarke reaches over to the dark mesh objects on the table. The radio which Clarke expertly switches to speaking mode to cut off the voice from the other end.

"The Unites States of what? The mountain you rule? You can't mean these vast tracts of land outside that you've never set foot on?"

Clarke's voice is a razor's edge sharpened with anger, a brittle sliver of animosity that she's barely able to contain. Lexa raises an eyebrow, and she watches as Clarke steadies her breath as she listens to the man on the radio explode.

"Who is this? I am the President of the -”

Lexa smiles when Clarke pushes down on the buttons on the radio, again cutting off the man's voice.

"This is Clarke Griffin of Arkadia. What do you want from Arkadia? As far as I can see the mountain that you rule has nothing to offer us,” Clarke’s voice has the quietness of the snow leopards that populate Nia's provinces. It is deathly in the way the quiet of her voice tracks slowly across the room, which is a stark contrast to the yelling oratorical style of the president.

"Young lady, your people will negotiate with me. Where is your Chancellor? I have his son here with me and I do believe he would like to speak with his father.”

Lexa can see the color draining from Clarke's face, but this is a gambit they'd expected the mountain men to use. The reality of it seems to have taken some of Clarke's breath away, and she looks up towards Lexa with troubled blue eyes.

Lexa lifts her head and can feel the tightness in her jaw before nodding once to Clarke, who seems to garner solace from the movement. Clarke straightens at the control desk where tek clutters every surface while the radio sits like a belligerent overseer sitting in the mess. Clarke breathes out slowly before depressing the switch to speak again.

"Do you mean Wells Jaha? We have locked away his father for betraying his people. I am Clarke Griffin. I am the Ark’s leader and you can say what you need to me,” Clarke says and Lexa watches as everyone busy with their tasks within the control room all stop to turn towards her, and then towards the radio which is now deadly silent.
Clarke looks over to Lexa before catching Octavia's eyes, who seems ready to leap into the fray, her hand steady on the hilt of her sword. Lexa nods quietly to herself. It is good for Clarke to have someone like Octavia near her. She's well versed in both styles of combat and she's heard from Lincoln's mother Indra that she has taken the girl under her tutelage to be her second.

None of them expect the sound that comes out of the radio next.

It is a loud bark of laughter. And Lexa feels a rupturing inside the fierce stoicism that she and her people have become so good at. It tears at her and she wants to rage at this man who has devoured her people for over forty years. It is only since he became the leader of the Maunon that her people who stood upon the land suffered. Children stolen from their families. Wives and daughters. Men removed from their homes in the darkness only to return as the walking dead Reapers who destroyed everything in their path - their souls ripped from them.

This insufferable man needed to die. Lexa's fingers twitched on the pommel of her sword and something in her eyes must have shown. Clarke stiffened and moved to the radio but before she could speak or shut off his contemptuous laughter, his voice crackled through the sound boxes all over the control room of the Sky people.

"Clarke Griffin, Chancellor? Well then, we have a lot to discuss little girl. Your friends are here and they're - very keen to see you again. As keen as I am to meet you."

The silence in the room is now overwhelming. Nobody moves as if they're holding their breath and they part quickly when Lexa rises and walks towards Clarke. It is clear to anyone who watches her that she bristles with the need to cut something. Deep blue eyes stare at her with caution as she approaches and sits next to Clarke who nods quietly before speaking again.

"If you mean us no harm, then let them go."

Lexa wants to smash the radio but holds tight to her emotions as she looks at the many eyes staring at them - hope and faith in their eyes believing that Clarke will know what to do.

"Clarke, Clarke, Clarke," Dante admonishes. "You're not very good at this are you?"

Clarke bristles, and she goes to speak but breathes out to regain her temper before speaking.

"I've negotiated a peace with the leader of the clans. I'd say I'm doing a lot better than you at the moment, sir."

Lexa smiles and she can hear the muffled snickers of the younger Arkadians, some of whom have gone back to their work - fingers flying over the tek as they stare up at black mirrors on the walls where lines of bright green numbers and letters stream across in hurried lines.

It is a long while before Dante Wallace speaks.

"You've negotiated with savages. Bully for you, Chancellor. You've signed a death sentence then for Arkadia, as these people know nothing of honoring treaties. That bitch will betray you in a heartbeat."

Clarke's long fingers reach over and tangle with her own, and Lexa can feel the rage that catches on the edges of her throat ease to a simmer.

"If you negotiate with me, Clarke Griffin, we can rule these primitives that are squandering the land that they walk on. I can show you a world far greater than this squabbling rabble run by the Commander. She is a child. What does she know of the rule of law? Of the world that created so
much and did so much. A world that my ancestors ruled."

Dante's voice is slick and Lexa can see that Clarke too hears a man used to getting his own way.

"A world that your ancestors destroyed. Why would I put it back into the hands of the children of monsters? I don't like what you have done President Wallace; Dante. Can I call you Dante?" Clarke says and Lexa cautions her with a look. This man is not to be toyed with nor made a fool of and Clarke is walking a fine line.

Clarke compresses her lips and they're tight with frustration as she holds back the words that want to spill from her mouth.

"If you wish, Clarke."

It's plain that Clarke's baiting has barely penetrated his skin, and she breathes out a slow huff of air.

Lexa shakes her head imperceptibly, which Clarke notices on her periphery. Lexa watches as Clarke straightens her spine and Lexa can see that she's thinking. Multiple possibilities go through her mind on how they can achieve what they want with the minimum loss of life and suffering. Deep blue eyes darken and her eyes flick towards Lexa once before she seems to fill her mind with resolve before taking the radio into her hand again.

"What do you need from us, Mister President? What can we do to achieve the best outcome for us all?" Clarke finally says and her voice is quiet.

Lexa feels the hum of activity bustling in the corridor and the rooms beyond them. The large banks of mirrored screens shift from colored lines before stuttering once, then twice before the screens fill with images that Lexa doesn't recognize.

Rooms with people in clothing that look nothing like the Skaikru and she wonders what she is looking at as she watches men wearing dark fabric over white shirts, dark cloth cascades from their necks to cover their front, women walk by in clothing she does not know; fabric like the gossamer of spiders flow around their bodies in a myriad of colors. She watches as several of the Skai people do a double take at what is appearing before them.

"Griffin! We've got eyes on them," a woman with dark blonde hair shouts from the control room floor where many of Clarke's people are working.

Lexa watches as relief flutters quickly across blue eyes that lighten for a moment. Clarke nods once while waiting for an answer after waving over to the woman who called out showing that she wants to know where the voice is coming from.

The screens move from room to room and Lexa cannot keep up with it as her eyes fumble with the flashing light against her retinas. It is a part of Arcadian tek that seems to only hurt her mind and she wonders what this new event means. She looks at Clarke, who picks up on her confusion.

"We have hacked into the Mountain," Clarke says and at the look of further bemusement on Lexa's face she smiles. It's a soft one. Tentative as if she's too shy to show her emotions in front of her peers.

"We have tech that has broken into their tech. Instead of their cameras spying on us, we are using it to see them. What you see on the screens over there," and Clarke points to the screens and Lexa feels her heart speed up as she realizes what Clarke is telling her.

"That's them. The people you see are the Mountain Men. We are now trying to find the room that
"I would like to continue what your previous Chancellor had forged with myself and my security team, Clarke. I've spoken with your lovely young man, Wells and he seems to agree that us working together as a team should be the focus of this negotiation," Dante says and his voice is persuasive. Charming and not the raucous tyrant that had first bellowed at them over the radio.

On one screen they can see the outline of a man speaking into something and there's a flurry of activity with the younger Arkadians until his face is a little clearer on the screen.

Lexa can feel her breath leave her body. So this is the man who has been the reason for so many deaths. So much destruction and pain and misery amongst her people. She still remembers Ronto's grief when Roan went missing near Mount Weather.

The face is pale and older than she'd expected. He's broad shouldered and his light-colored eyes seem strangely soulless. Next to him is a tall, lanky man his features barely distinguishable as he's turned away. She can hear Clarke whisper the man's name beneath her breath and there is an agony of anxiety in her tone when they see the gun pressed hard against his neck.

"Wells. Fuck! Wells."

There is the beginning of chaos amongst Clarke's people when they see this and everyone shouts over each other. Clarke raises her hand once and calls for quiet, which immediately stills the floor.

"Someone, get the council here."

Octavia's voice is sharp as she looks at Clarke's ashen face. Lexa can feel how much she's trembling, her hands shaking so much their fingers separate and move away from each other.

"Klark. You must stay strong."

"No, Lexa. I have to - I have to protect everyone. He's my best friend. He's everything. I can't - I just can't."

The words tumble out of Clarke's mouth and Lexa can feel her own rising panic. For Clarke to lose her nerve now means the end of the war. Dante is smart. He's using something that will intimidate the Arkadians. Their children. Their friends.

"If Dante kills him, if he hurts him - what leverage does he have? He has already killed. He'll kill more if you surrender now."

Clarke turns to her and her eyes are so dark that there is almost no blue left in them.

"Surrender? You think I want to surrender?"

Lexa blinks in confusion and surprise. She has underestimated Clarke. Again. Lexa looks at her with new eyes and searches for the truth in the lines of the other woman's body but they're both distracted when the clatter of running boots fill the corridor before several bodies move into the control center.

"Clarke, what's going on?" Abby's eyes are frantic as she looks around the room, her body stilling when she sees the images on the back wall. From the sudden slump in her body, it is clear to Lexa that Clarke need not answer her mother's question.

"Keep watching them," Clarke's voice is curt before she turns to the boy at the front of the room whose fingers are still flying over the machine in front of him, his fingers clacking almost
musically as he continues to do whatever work Clarke has asked him to perform.

"Monty, can you zoom in on his face? Dante's."

The young man, Monty, looks up at Clarke then at the screen before tapping with his fingers and the face on the screen becomes bigger, and it takes everything in Lexa to not leap up and remove her swords from their scabbards. They have both risen from their seats the radio between them forgotten until they see the full-sized head on the mirror move a black piece of tek towards his mouth. It looks nothing like the Arkadian radio loose on the table, as it shimmers a bright green in the darkened light of the room. It shocks Lexa when she sees the man speak and the sound comes through the radio at the same time.

"Here, Clarke. A friend to give you a better understanding of the world we wish to build together. We can rebuild their mud hut cities into the ones of grandeur that we had before the bombs," Dante speaks and they can see the fire of belief in his eyes.

Lexa watches as the other figure on the screen is pulled closer to the tek in Dante's hands, and as one they all stiffen when they see Dante whisper words furiously into his ears.

"Do we have audio on any of this?"

Clarke's voice cuts through the silence and the boy Monty shakes his head.

"Not yet. Raven's working on that," Monty mumbles and Clarke nods quietly to herself.

Lexa watches as Clarke's soft mouth purses up into that line that means she's yet to think through their options. From the look on Clarke's face, it feels like none of the choices are good. "Clarke," the voice is almost a whisper and they can see how Clarke's friend moves to clear his throat, and though the sound does not come over the radio, they can see his movements on the screen. "Clarke," he says again and his voice is clearer, falsely bright and he continues to speak, "hey. I see you've been chatting to our friend the President. He's got some ideas. On how to rebuild. Something he and my father hatched together."

Clarke's face lightens with a sudden look of revelation as Wells carefully uses his words to help remind them who has brought all of this onto the Arcadians heads. She whispers quickly to Marcus Kane who has just entered the room.

"Can you bring Thelonius up? Let him see what they're doing to him. He can finally see exactly what his plans have brought about."

Clarke's voice is deadly in her anger and Lexa wonders how she could have ever thought this young woman ready to surrender to this fool of a man that clutters the insides of the control room.

Marcus does a quick turn before speaking into something on his wrist. Lexa has stopped wondering at every piece of tek she comes across but has noticed this one on several of the Arkadians, mostly those who wear the same jacket with the Ark symbol on the sleeve. She realizes it must be one tool that all the guards have. Something feathers in the back of her mind but she's snapped from it when Wells continues to speak - there is a dissonance to seeing him at the back of the control room and hearing him half a second later on the radio.

"Clarke - they know you're preparing for war with the Mountain. You need to stop. If you were thinking you'd know that the best way forward is with your Queen and her knight."

They watch as he smiles and says something to Dante on screen but off radio. Lexa feels her
frustration burn as the words are meaningless to her. What Queen? What knight? But Clarke is smiling so wide it almost hurts Lexa's eyes to look at her. She moves towards her and raises one eyebrow in a query.

"Queen and knight," Clarke repeats and her grin is almost infectious.

Lexa can feel the side of her mouth tilt upwards in instinctual response to Clarke. She shakes her head to show that she does not understand what Clarke or her friend are talking about. The only Queen she knows is her sister.

And with that thought, Lexa stills and her heart hammers in her throat. Knowledge, a dark seed that grows as the barest hint of hope. And she can feel the slightest tilt of her mouth at the thought as it travels through her.

"They've found your sister," Clarke almost whispers even though she is not speaking on the radio that connects her with Wells and Dante. Lexa can see her shaking with excitement, and she cannot but help feel a similar sense of intensity. And relief.

"Please, Clarke. Why don't you put down your arms and come and discuss this freely between two leaders?" Wells' voice is a soft burr, and it startles both Lexa and Clarke who almost jerk away from each other at the intrusion.

Clarke turns and moves back towards the radio. She's silent for a long time as she tries to form a response. Lexa can feel her own nerves rise again as she wonders how Clarke will ask what is almost crippling Lexa with anxiety.

"Wells. Come on, buddy. It is time for Dante to understand that he can't just take what he wants. We're happy to help him and his people find a solution to their problem, but I sure as hell am not willing to sacrifice anyone for it. We aren't pawns in this ridiculous power trip of his."

They can all see the visible flinch of Dante Wallace on the projected screen of the monitors that flank the back wall. His visible anger at Clarke's half joking tone is mediated by Wells, who moves a placating hand onto his shoulder. They can see them speak for several moments before Dante's face clears and he's smiling. Whatever he's said seems to have appeased the President of Mount Weather, and his head nods in understanding as if Wells is complicit in a plot with him.

"Clarke," Wells speaks, and it is disconcerting that the voice now has a face. Lexa looks at him, the finely shaped nose that flares to a wider tip. Skin the color of Indra's family, the sheen of blue-black a beautiful outline of sharp cheekbones and full lips. Lexa feels a distinct tremor of unease when looking at the handsome young man on the screen and the look of adoration on Clarke's face. "We can come to an agreement. The President believes that we can forge an alliance that will help them move out of the mountain and back to Washington. They can rebuild what they lost in The Fall."

Lexa tilts her head. She recognizes the phrase. It is one that Clarke has used several times to describe what they call Praimfaya.

She stiffens when a man is led into the control room of the Ark; his wrists caught in two white shiny cuffs that are several inches wide. It is a material she does not recognize, nor does she understand what she's seeing but she can see that it holds him in place and he cannot move if the cuffs do not move.

Lexa stares at the man and can see from the shape of his nose and mouth that he's related to the boy on the screen.
The previous chancellor. Thelonius Jaha.

***

The fatigue in his body is extreme after several weeks of almost no sleep, and the ache behind his eyes is intolerable, but all of that disappears when he sees his son on the monitors at the back of the control room. Thelonius turns around in confusion, his eyes looking into the faces that are staring at him with varying degrees of hostility and in some cases, fear.

He breathes in deeply and shapes his lips into a tight grimace to hide the pain that has been badgering his right leg since they landed. A tilt of his chin and he stares down at Clarke Griffin, who is looking at him with a mixture of insouciance and frustration. Her feigned indifference almost makes him laugh out loud.

"What do you want, Clarke?" he finally asks as she continues to stare at him as if he's something she's accidentally trodden on. He wants to lunge forward and smash his head into hers.

Everything, every single thing that he's fought for and moved towards has been destroyed because of Clarke Griffin and her ridiculous standing amongst the young who landed here first.

As they stare at one another the radio crackles with life. And it is then that he notices the young woman, a Grounder, her deep green eyes staring into him as if she can discern his every thought. He feels a coldness creep across his skin but twists towards the screens again when he hears Well's voice.

"The President will open the gates so that Arkadia can come in. He'll point his guns towards the Grounders so that they can't enter with you. Once you're in, you and Abby can assist with the transfer."

Thelonius can feel the edges of rage move within his gut. This was his plan. His idea. This was his dream with President Dante so that they could re-instate government. Wallace had promised him a position, a role in the new government. Now this - child would take over what he planned?

"This is my solution. I came up with this. Why is he negotiating with you?"

Thelonius can feel the hot rush of blood as it boils in his skin. No. No, this is his.

He moves forward, but the electric wrist cuffs keep him solidly in place. A warning light appears on it flashing a deep red as his blood pressure elevates.

"No," Clarke's voice is succinct, and she turns to look at Thelonius. Her eyes are the same deep blue as her father's.

Thelonius feels a sharp stab of regret pierce him. He'd never meant for Jake to die but the damn fool would not shut up. And then he'd told his daughter everything.

"This President does not deserve to inherit the earth. What he's done - if he ever emerges from the mountain, and we catch him; I will personally hand him over to the Commander of the Twelve Clans and have him tried as the war criminal that he is."

Thelonius stares at her in shock. What is she doing? Is she mad?

"Clarke?"

His voice tells her more than any words he can say. She stares at him with those blue eyes,
steadily. She doesn't flinch even though that's her best friend on the screen. He hadn't noticed the 
gun in Wallace's hand until now which he's lifting and pushing in to the back of his son's head. He 
waives as Wallace moves and takes the radio from Well's hand.

"Clarke. I am disappointed."

It is Dante's voice. Clear in his intent when his fingers tighten on the gun. 

He looks at the screen and back to Clarke, who is biting her bottom lip hard as she tries to control 
tears that are building in her eyes. She's taking a calculated risk. One that involves his son. How 
dare she? He cries out when the silicone molds of his cuffs tighten when he lunges forward again.

"You needn't be," Clarke responds, and she keeps her voice steady despite the fear that Thelonius 
see can in the way her eyes widen.

Thelonius is confused, and he takes a step backward quickly when the young Grounder woman 
who has been focused on Clarke this whole time turns those intense green eyes towards him. 
"Who are you?" he whispers and watches as the woman barely responds, her face unutterably still 
as she stares at him.

"We will send you a trade. Father for the son."

Thelonius can feel the crack in his neck when he hears those words and whips around to stare at 
Clarke. He can feel the horror sweep along his mouth as it opens in silent shock. He feels all the air 
leave his throat and mouth when Clarke Griffin turns baleful blue eyes at him.

"We feel that our previous Chancellor is more able to negotiate with you, President Dante."

Clarke's voice becomes more conciliatory, but she continues to watch the screens with interest. 

“I believe it's in all of our interest if he attends Mount Weather in his son's stead. We need Wells 
here for more complex work on some of our machines that broke down during entering the Earth's 
atmosphere. He's probably not told you about his engineering skills."

Clarke threads her fingers through her hair and those eyes so similar to Jake's look almost black in 
the control room’s darkness center. The only light emanates from the screens which cast a ghostly 
glow over everyone in the room.

Thelonius catches the eye of Monty Green and grimaces at the look the boy is shooting at him. He 
remembers the boy's quiet rage at the time when he'd sent the youth group to meet with their 
counterparts in Mount Weather. It had been the last straw for Abby and the rest of the council 
who'd voted him out and put him in the stockade for prisoners. Him! He could feel the bitterness 
caught in the back of his throat like a septic ball that soured everything he tasted.

He watches as Clarke walks around the radio area; her hands moving as she spoke into the receiver 
and then shifting her body to watch each minute reaction on the screen. She negotiates and 
wheldes and cajoles and almost flirts with the President as she convinces him to release Wells for 
his him; his father. It will be her last mistake because the second he steps into Mount Weather he'll 
provide Dante with everything he needs to bring down those savages. Including Clarke.

He's frustrated. How can the last few months have wrought so much change? He's planned and 
calculated meticulously with Darius who had worked tirelessly in the background to create the 
links between the Ark and the mountain. And then damn Clarke Griffin had to follow in her 
father's footsteps and choose the fucking wrong side.
Thelonius feels a curdling in his gut, and he would love to tear that arrogant smile of Clarke's lips, but as he turns he sees the room staring at him. There is not a single person on the Ark who will protect him. When he hears Clarke complete the last part of the deal to exchange himself with Wells, he doesn't know what to feel.

There is a relief that he will finally be face to face with Dante Wallace, but he's terrified that he's not heading on his own terms.

It doesn't matter. Whatever happens he will do everything in his power to ensure that Arcadia comes under his dominion again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you a million to all my wonderful readers who have stayed the course with this piece of writing. It is meandering a little at the moment as we get close to the battle against the MM.

A really, really big thank you for everyone who has popped by to drop me a personal note, and who have encouraged me to keep going. Because of you - I am here posting another chapter because of your constant and wonderful inspiration.

I started this, God - how long ago now? I know it was my New Year's resolution to post in 2018 and I can't believe I'm still writing this story. It started off as something where I was only going to write lots of fun sexy stuff and I've ended up with a full on plot. My goodness.

Please keep dropping by to comment. I appreciate every one's feedback and try to get back to each of you.

Please, please, please - if you see any errors or plot holes please tell me and I will go back and fix.

A big, fat thank you for the kudos - over 1500 now. Wow.
Have a fabulous 2020.
Underthecovers

End Notes

I love hearing from you. Please come and chat on Tumblr @underneaththecovers-au

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!