Sanctuary
by RogueTwelve

Summary

What was meant to be a fun college getaway with friends to Dubai ends in disaster.

Now Navy SEAL Bellamy Blake is in a race against time to find and rescue his sister's friend... and he's on his own.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m not leaving you here.”

Clarke sighed for what felt like the twentieth time. Octavia could be more stubborn than a mule sometimes.

“You are.”

“Really? Then what am I going to do Griffin? Say I do by some miracle manage to escape. We don’t even know which goddamn country we’re in anymore. It’s not like I can just walk to the closest corner store and ask for a payphone.” There were tears threatening to fall from Octavia’s eyes. Clarke reached up to wipe the younger girl’s cheek. She only managed to smear some of the grime.

“Hey. You can do this O – I know you can. You’re going to get out there and use your head…” At this Clarke had to break off as her body was wracked with coughs, each one sending shooting pain through her already battered ribs. Octavia just continued to cradle her friend’s head, the tears finally beginning to fall.

When Clarke finally managed to wheeze in enough air to continue, she put her hand on Octavia’s and squeezed it with as much strength as she could muster. “You are using this Octavia. They’ve barely been feeding us and you need to fight while you still have the strength. Once you get out of here I have no doubt that you’ll figure something out. Hell, for all we know Bellamy could be stationed down the block.” She managed a small smirk and Octavia did her best to return it.

The smile quickly faltered though, “I still can’t just leave you here. You’d be alone and-“

“Octavia.” Clarke cut her off, her tone deadly serious. “I’m ailing. If you try to take me with you we’re both dead. Please… this is our chance.”

Octavia still looked torn. She pulled the filthy wool blanket that their captors had given them closer around her friend and hesitated there chewing her lip.

“O…” Clarke had managed to hold strong for so long but she was finally feeling herself start to crack. “Tell my parents – they need to know that I love them. And make sure that they know that none of this was their fault.”

Octavia opened her mouth as if to argue, probably to tell her friend that there was no way that she was going to die. But at the sound of voices arguing in Arabic coming closer down the hallway she merely nodded her head.

Clarke gave her one last reassuring smile, then fluttered her eyes closed, trying her best to hold in any loud coughs even when they felt like they might explode out of her chest.

She could feel Octavia’s legs shaking beneath her head as the young girl positively thrummed with nervous energy. Clarke ached to comfort her, but this part of the plan was crucial.

The lock clicked and was followed by the loud creak of the door to their prison swinging inward. Above her, Octavia’s hyperventilating intensified.
There was the dull thud of boots slowly entering the room and scuffing on the dirt floor. Two bodies. Exactly as they’d planned.

“She needs a doctor, she stopped breathing,” every bit of fear and pleading in Octavia’s voice didn’t need to be faked.

“Up.” The uncaring voice of one of their captors barked out. Clarke gave Octavia’s hand one last reassuring squeeze before she was gently lowered to the ground.

Clarke traced the sound of Octavia’s much lighter barefoot tread to the doorway. As the girl crossed paths with one of the assailants there was a wicked crack followed by a sharp gasp from Octavia. Clarke fought not to open her eyes and give herself away.

One of the men approached and there was the shock of his rough boot knocking her onto her back. Clarke allowed herself to flop, a cough absolutely tearing at her throat, trying to get out. Somehow she managed to keep it in.

There was a moment of silence before Clarke felt the air shift. A rush of body odor and sour breath washed over face as the man squatted down beside her, checking to see if she had finally died.

Clarke sprung into action.

Quick as a flash, she pulled the makeshift plaster shiv that she and Octavia had meticulously crafted from a crumbling piece of the wall out from under the blanket and shoved it up and under the man’s ribs as hard as she possibly could.

There were the sounds of a skirmish from across the room and Clarke looked up just in time to see Octavia send the second man’s head sailing back into the door jamb. He slumped to the floor and didn’t move.

For just a moment Octavia stood there, her eyes wide like a deer caught in the headlights as she looked pleadingly at Clarke. She managed half a step towards the blonde before Clarke screamed, “Run!”

Octavia gave her one last apologetic look, a single tear streaming down her dirt caked cheek before she turned, her pony tail swinging as she disappeared down the hallway.

Clarke was given half a moment of triumph before her attacker began to stir, finally over the initial shock of the stabbing. She managed to struggle to her knees allowing herself enough leverage to twist the shiv and pull it out. The man stared at her with haunting eyes, then gave a horrible gurgle before collapsing to the floor in a heap.

Clarke scrambled away from him then doubled over as her whole body spasmed in a coughing fit. It was the worst yet. As she slowly pulled her hand away from her mouth she saw that her palm was splattered with blood. She wiped it away on her already soiled shorts.

Eventually she managed to make her way to the entrance to the room. She pushed the door closed. The heavy click of the lock felt like it reverberated through her whole body. She hadn’t told Octavia this part of the plan but it had two purposes: if Octavia’s victim somehow managed to get up he wouldn’t be able to pursue her. If Octavia decided to come back for her… she wouldn’t have a choice. Hell, if she was really lucky, the lock might even slow down the guards’ replacements.

She wasn’t counting on it.

For now, all Clarke could do was wait and hope.
She retrieved the blanket and settled into the far back corner of the windowless room, as far from the two bodies as she could possibly achieve.

There was nothing. No shouting, no alarms, and thankfully no gunshots echoing across the compound. The silence was only broken by Clarke’s rattling coughing fits.

Maybe Octavia would actually pull this off.

As the adrenaline began to fade from her system, Clarke began to fade in and out of a sleeplike state. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d had anything to eat or drink and she simply didn’t have the energy to keep her eyes open any longer.

What could have been hours, or maybe even days later Clarke awoke to the sound of heavy boots once again clomping down the hallway. Nothing in the room had moved since the last time she opened her eyes and she allowed herself a grim sense of satisfaction that they had actually managed to take out two of the bastards.

Without warning the door slammed back on its hinges and she was met with hard, dark eyes surveying the room.

She cowered back into the wall hoping the man would somehow skip over seeing her, but it was useless.

“American bitch!” he roared, and in just a few long strides the butt of his rifle was slamming into the side of her skull and she was swallowed by darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick prologue of a work that popped into my head last night and wouldn't leave me alone. I'm not really sure where I'm going with this yet or how frequently it'll be updated, but I'll try to get the next chapter with at least a bit of an explanation of how Clarke and Octavia got into this situation ASAP.

Be forewarned... Angst is my specialty.

Comments and kudos are appreciated.
Bellamy still couldn’t believe the whirlwind shitstorm that had bulldozed his life over the last week.

Things had started out as any other Thursday: roll call, breakfast, morning training, strategy and logistics meetings, and the like. At dinner he had spoken to Lincoln. Both men’s contracts were coming to an end at the end of their current tour and they were trying to make sense of what to do with their lives.

Bellamy knew one thing for certain – there was no way he was re-enlisting. He didn’t regret the path he’d chosen, but the things he’d seen, the things he’d done… he needed some time to re-evaluate. He was still under thirty (barely) and figured he could still make a life for himself outside of the navy. He still had no idea what that would entail.

For Lincoln it wasn’t so simple. As the team’s lead medic he felt more of a duty to their comrades on the frontlines. Re-enlisting was a real possibility for him – a fact that had led to many an argument between the two men.

Bellamy could absolutely respect his position, but as far as he was concerned, if Lincoln had any real intentions towards his little sister he needed to get his shit together and go home.

When Lincoln and Octavia had first started dating Bellamy had been categorically against the pairing. His sister should be with someone who could keep her safe at home in Virginia and not be overseas on deployment for six months at a time. But on the battlefield Lincoln had earned his grudging respect, and over time that had gradually turned into a strong friendship. He had to admit that there were certainly worse men that Octavia could fall for. But that didn’t change the fact that Bellamy strongly felt that Lincoln should go home and actually be with her. His sister was too young to be an army wife, or worse yet a widow.

Their argument had gotten heated, as usual, and the two had decided to blow off some steam with some target practice before dark descended.

Their plans were foiled however when Miller, another member of their team pulled Bellamy off to the side as they left the Mess and told him that he needed to head to the Troop Commander’s tent for a sat-phone call from General Kane.

There were no alarm bells right away. Marcus had been a father figure to him and Octavia ever since their mother had passed away on base when he was 13. Though he obviously didn’t make a habit of making personal calls to Bellamy, the General would know that his contract was coming to a close and probably wanted to weigh in with some advice.

Bellamy had shrugged off the grim look on his commanding officer’s face and simply took the proffered phone. “Sir,” he greeted.

Marcus hadn’t bothered with any formalities. “Bellamy, you need to sit down.”

The words had been like a bomb going off in the pit of his stomach. His mind immediately raced to a million worst-case scenarios. All of them had one common thread – his sister.
“Is she alive?” was all he had managed to gasp out.

Kane had then relayed all of the information that they had to him, and each new fact had hit him like a sucker punch. He hadn’t even known that his sister had left the States, let alone that she for some reason had thought that a vacation to the Middle East could possibly be a good idea. When Marcus finally got around to admitting that his sister had already been missing for a week and they were still no closer to tracking down her whereabouts, Bellamy had been downright furious. Which, when he looked back and thought about it, had probably been the point of withholding the information.

In the end, Kane had had him confined to quarters, lest he do anything stupid. Then, with the assurance that they were doing everything they could and if they found anything he would be the first to know, the conversation had ended.

And his life felt like it had imploded.

Back in his barracks, his emotions had finally had a chance to catch up with him. The utter betrayal that Marcus had kept this from him for a whole week ‘for his own good’. And a pit of helplessness that felt like it would swallow him whole. He spent hours pacing the confined space and trying his best not to grab the nearest piece of furniture and throw it at the wall.

By the time the rest of the men were ready to turn in for the night, Bellamy had already gone to bed, unable to muster the energy to control his emotions enough to speak to anyone, even Lincoln.

He could feel his friend hesitate near his bunk, obviously sensing that something was wrong. Bellamy ignored him, keeping his back turned. Eventually the medic gave up and got into his own bunk.

Bellamy had lain there -wide awake- for hours, his mind still racing. There was no way that sleep was coming to him with all of the terrible things he was imagining could have been happening to his little sister while he was lying there safe in his bed. At that moment he had felt that he would be surprised if he ever slept again.

Lincoln’s nearby presence also ate at him. Having no legally documented relationship to his sister, he would not have been informed about what was happening. He remembered the rage he felt about being kept in the dark and realized that he couldn’t put one of his best friends through the same ordeal.

With a heavy sigh he’d sat up in his bunk and looked at the bed next to his. In the dim light he could just make out Lincoln’s still form. He’d debated then about waiting until morning to deliver his crushing news, but again the guilt of not knowing won out.

“Link,” he whispered just loud enough for his friend to hear. He hadn’t wanted to wake anyone else up. And if Lincoln didn’t wake, he would have taken it as a sign.

“Yeah,” there was no trace of tiredness in his voice. Obviously Bellamy hadn’t been the only one kept awake by racing thoughts.

“It’s Octavia…” Bell took a deep breath, trying to steady his voice. “She’s missing.”

There had been a moment of silence, then slowly Lincoln had rolled onto his side to face him, his brown eyes piercing in the darkness. “That’s not funny man.”

Bellamy had struggled to find words for a moment. Obviously Lincoln had thought that he was playing some kind of cruel prank, trying to further his point from their argument earlier in the
evening. When he could speak again, his voice broke as he asked, “Do I look like I’m joking?”

Lincoln had silently studied him for a breath longer before sighing and sitting up as well. “No.”

Lincoln had taken a moment starring at the ceiling to collect his thoughts. “Tell me what happened.”

It had probably been the first time ever that Bellamy was thankful that SEAL team 10 employed some rather loud snorers. Their conversation wouldn’t wake anyone up. “She was on a trip to Dubai with a couple of college friends. Receipts from their hotel room show that they’d bought tickets for a cruise on a small catamaran last Wednesday. The burned out hull of the boat was found off the Gulf Coast the next day. No bodies have been recovered.”

“Any ransom notes? Reports of suspicious activity?”

“None,” Bellamy had felt the frustration begin to grow again in the pit of his stomach. “If she’s even still alive, she could literally be anywhere in the world by now. Kane is doing what he can, but they’ve literally turned up nothing.”

“She’s not dead. We’d know if she was dead.” Lincoln wearily scrubbed both hands across his face. “So what’s the plan?”

Bellamy had resisted the urge to punch the wall at the head of his bed. “Nothing. I’m confined to quarters under threat of court martial. Kane says it’s for my own good.”

Lincoln had chewed that over for a bit. “He’s probably right. At least for now when we don’t even have a clue about where to start. But the second they find anything…”

Bellamy had only given him a firm nod in response. After that, both men had drifted into a tense silence. Neither of them slept a wink.

Over the week, Bellamy’s restrictions had slowly become more lax due to his good behavior. He was eventually allowed to return to training, though he wasn’t allowed to leave the base without a CO’s supervision. There had been radio silence from the General, and that thought had been like a constant monster clawing at his insides.

Until Friday morning, exactly a week and a day since that first fateful phone call. Bellamy was approached at breakfast about an urgent message from General Kane. He had stood immediately, nearly tripping over his own feet in his haste to leave the Mess. Lincoln had given him a meaningful look and an encouraging shoulder squeeze as he passed.

Back in the Troop Commander’s tent Bellamy had fumbled for the sat-phone without a word. As he’d lifted the receiver to his ear his world had been rocked by a single sentence. “We’ve found her.”

That was how Bellamy found himself in the back of an army transport on his way to a medical center in Baghdad. Kane had called him from a plane and would probably beat him there. So far details were scarce and Bellamy felt almost as if his skin were crawling with nervous anticipation.

When they finally arrived, Bellamy hopped out of the vehicle before it had even had the chance to come to a full stop. He entered the building at a jog and after a brief stop at reception, was on his way to the top floor, taking the steps two at a time.

At the top of the stairs he was met with an armed guard: U.S. military holding sub-machine guns. His jaw tightened. On the one hand he was grateful that his sister’s safety was being made a priority. On the other… it meant that they still considered her to be in enough danger to warrant
keeping her on a military-secured unit.

What the hell had happened?

After the guards checked his credentials and relieved him of his sidearm he was waved through.

The floor was busier than he had expected. The rooms were obviously so full that some of the patients were forced to stay on stretchers in the hallway. They were made up of a mix of civilians and soldiers, some unconscious, some restrained, nearly all covered in bloodied bandages.

Bellamy took a quick scan of the room but didn’t see any familiar looking faces. He stopped a frazzled looking nurse on her way past and inquired about where he needed to go.

“Sorry, things are a bit hectic today… car bomb.” She told him by way of explanation, shrugging a shoulder and giving him a ‘what can you do’ look. “Octavia Blake? She’s in the room on the left at the end of the hall.”

Bellamy thanked her, though he doubted she heard it as she had already hurried off to attend to another patient.

A heavy feeling of trepidation set in as he made his way down the corridor. He had no idea what he was walking into. What if his sister had been maimed beyond recognition? What if it was like one of those cheesy soap operas and she didn’t remember him? What if it wasn’t even her but just some girl who had happened across his sister’s passport and carried just enough of a resemblance for whoever found her to just shrug it off?

He was snapped out of his reverie by the sound of a familiar voice coming from the second last door. Bellamy decided to have a quick peak inside and was met with a view of the back of Marcus Kane’s head. The room had been transformed into a command center of sorts, with maps and notes posted on a corkboard covering one wall. The majority of the far wall was being used as a makeshift projection screen and was currently split into two halves. The General was obviously in the middle of a conference call.

The screen on the right showed a distraught woman, her eyes obviously red and swollen from crying. The man on the left had a much more stoic expression, though there were dark circles under his eyes and upon closer inspection his suit appeared rumpled, as if he’d been wearing it non-stop for more than a day. Bellamy vaguely recognized him as some form of politician from back home in Virginia.

“How could you?” The woman was yelling. “How could you allow her to go on such a dangerous trip? She’s your daughter!”

The man let out a deep sigh, squeezing the bridge of his nose. “She’s a grown woman Abby. She makes her own decisions. Not to mention that Dubai is normally a very safe area of the world-”

“How could you?” The woman screeched.

“And what exactly did you do to stop her? She’s your daughter too. Maybe if the two of you had been speaking at all, you could have talked some sense into her.”

Marcus cut in, “Jake, Abby, please. Now is not the time to lay blame…”

Bellamy backed away from the door. He hadn’t meant to eavesdrop and he also didn’t want to interrupt. When Kane was finished it wasn’t like he would be difficult to find. He wasn’t leaving his sister’s side.
Bellamy approached the final door of the hall and knocked lightly, not wanting to startle his sister.

“Come in,” the muffled sound of Octavia’s voice caused his whole body to deflate, as a lot of the tension that he hadn’t even realized he was carrying instantly evaporated.

Slowly he turned the handle and poked his head through the doorway.

“Bellamy?” Octavia lay propped up in her hospital bed, an IV attached to the back of one hand and an oxygen tube in her nose. Both of her arms were wrapped in pristine white bandages from her wrists until they disappeared under the sleeves of her hospital gown. One side of her face was swollen and mottled in awful shades of reds and purples. But there was something about the spark in the one eye that she was able to open that was so undeniably Octavia. It still held the fierceness and brilliance that Bellamy had always associated with his sister.

“O.” Bellamy was at her side in an instant, pulling her into his arms. He felt a sharp sting in his nose as he tried his best to hold in the tears that were suddenly flooding his eyes. Under his hands he felt the sharp edges of her ribs poking out. His sister had always been thin, but this took things to a whole new level.

“Ow, big brother,” Octavia winced, but as Bellamy pulled away quickly he saw that there was a glimmer of humor in her eye.

“Jesus O, how is it that you’re handling this better than I am?” he asked as he smoothed back the tangled hair from her cheeks, just like he used to when she was a little girl.

“I have to be strong. For Clarke,” was the girl’s solemn answer.

“Clarke?” Bellamy’s eyebrows knit in confusion. He was hit with a sudden vision of a tangled mop of curly blonde hair over a pair of startlingly blue eyes. “Clarke Griffin? The girl from next door?”

Octavia bit her lip and only managed to nod, lowering her gaze. Bellamy noticed moisture finally starting to collect in the corners of his sister’s eyes.

Marcus Kane had taken in the Blake siblings when Bellamy was 13 and Octavia was 8. They had lived next door to the Griffins and Octavia had become fast friends with their daughter. The two had been thick as thieves in their childhood. Bellamy barely remembered the girl - that had been during his angst filled teen years and he had enlisted soon after. He was struggling to connect the dots on why his sister would be mentioning her now.

“Not to be rude, but what does she have to do with anything?” he asked her gently.

“They still have her.”

Bellamy felt his gut plummet. He knew that Octavia had been with friends when she'd disappeared, but never in a million years did he think that he would know one of them.

Octavia had begun to cry silently, so he took her hand in his reassuringly, doing his best not to jostle her IV. “Hey, it’s okay.” He knew that it wasn’t, but he was at a loss for what else to say.

They were interrupted by a knock at the door. The Blake siblings looked to find General Marcus Kane standing in the doorway. Bellamy reluctantly released his sister’s hand in order to salute.

Kane gave him a quick nod. “At ease Petty Officer.” He came to the other side of the bed and gave Octavia a quick kiss on the forehead. “I’m glad to see you’re alright.” He told her earnestly. Turning to Bellamy he asked, “May I have a word?”
Bellamy looked askance at Octavia and she managed a small smile for him. “I’ll be fine.”

Before leaving, Bellamy reached into the pocket of his fatigues and pulled out a folded note. “From Lincoln,” he explained. Octavia accepted the note and nodded, worrying the edges between her fingers.

Bellamy followed the General out to the hallway where Kane stopped and closed the door behind them. “It’s good to see you son,” he told the soldier, giving his shoulder a pat followed by a firm squeeze.

“What the hell happened to my sister?” Bellamy had never been one to beat around the bush.

Kane sighed deeply. “Fractures in her right cheek and left wrist as well as a hairline fracture in her jaw. Shallow cuts and cigarette burns covering a significant portion of her body. She was also dehydrated and malnourished when they found her. The doctors say it’s not as bad as it looks. Most of the injuries were meant to inflict maximum pain with minimal damage. There will be scarring, but I’ve been assured that there should be no other lasting physical damage. We’re more worried about the lasting psychological trauma. She was tortured for nearly 2 weeks.” Kane paused there, allowing that information to sink in for a moment. Bellamy looked to the ceiling trying to regain control of his emotions. When he had salvaged some semblance of calm he nodded. “As for what actually transpired over the last 15 days I’d like to hear that from Octavia herself.”

Bellamy looked at him skeptically. “Is that really necessary? Hasn’t she already told everything she knows to the officers that she was debriefed by?”

Kane nodded. “I received their full report this morning. Nevertheless, if it’s okay with her I’d like to hear it from your sister. There’s still a life on the line here and I’d like to see if I can glean any other useful information.”

Bellamy longed to say no, that his sister had already been through enough. Instead he nodded, thinking about poor Clarke Griffin.

The two men re-entered the small hospital room and Marcus pulled two chairs up to the side of the bed. Octavia hadn’t moved since they left. She was still clutching the letter tightly in her hand and playing with the edge with her fingertips.

Kane allowed Bellamy to sit closest to his sister, knowing that her testimony would probably take a lot out of her. He took up the chair closer to the foot of the bed. Retrieving a small tape recorder from his pocket, he laid it near her feet. “You’re not in any trouble Octavia, I’d just like to have a copy of this conversation so that I can go over it again later with a clearer head. Is that alright with you?”

Octavia nodded.

Marcus reached forward and hit the record button. “Alright then. Octavia I know that you’ve already told your story more than once, but I’d like to hear it just one more time. Any small clue you give us might be crucial in helping Clarke.”

Octavia sighed, but nodded once more then waited for further direction.

“Start at the beginning,” Marcus coached her. “What were you doing in Dubai?”

“It was just a normal college trip. We spent a couple weeks touring Southeast Asia with Monty, Harper, and Jasper, then did a week long yoga retreat with Niylah and Ilian in Goa. At the end of it Clarke wasn’t ready to go home,” Octavia winced slightly, giving Kane a sideways glance.
“Things still aren’t great with her mom and she was viewing this trip as one last big rebellion before she starts medical school at Johns Hopkins in the fall. I know I didn’t tell you any of this Bell, but I didn’t want you to worry. I’ve been working my ass off at the Dropship to pay for this and none of the money came from my college fund I swear.”

Octavia really did look apologetic and honestly, even if she had blown all of her tuition money on the trip he couldn’t be mad at her. They’d had a rough childhood and she deserved to be happy. Not to mention she’d already more than paid for any potential wrongdoing. He placed his hand on her sheet-covered knee and gave it a gentle squeeze letting her know that it was alright.

Kane cleared his throat, signaling her to continue.

“Anyway, Clarke wanted to make one more stop. She practically begged me to fly with her to go to Dubai -even offered to foot the bill for hotels- and eventually I caved. Wells had promised Jake that he would keep an eye on us and keep us out of trouble so he came as well. The first few days everything was normal. We mostly went sightseeing and did some shopping. On the second last day Clarke suggested that we go on a boat tour in the Gulf and Wells and I thought, why not?

“Again, everything seemed normal. There was another group of guys on the boat but we didn’t think much of it. We didn’t even notice the commotion at first. The group of guys had guns. They ordered us and the crew into a corner and started tying our wrists and putting bags over our heads. Wells… he fought back, hoping the crew would back him up. One of the men smashed him on the side of the head with the butt of their gun and they—” Octavia’s voice broke. She paused for a moment, recollecting herself. “He was unconscious and they threw him overboard.”

Kane leveled her with a look. “Wells Jaha was found by locals washed up on a beach close to Abu Dhabi. He suffered a traumatic brain injury. He was medevaced back to the States and is currently recovering at a hospital in Virginia.”

Octavia gasped. “Wells is alive?”

Bellamy also gave their mentor a sharp look.

Kane sighed. “Without ID it took days to identify him, and even then he wasn’t able to provide us with any useful information. He still hasn’t woken up. I’m sorry Bellamy.”

Octavia looked as if she were struggling with this new information, but eventually she was able to continue. “We couldn’t see anything but we knew the men had hijacked the boat. After Wells no one tried very hard to fight back. Not very long after, we were forced across a plank onto a different boat. There was a strong smell of gasoline and then a rush of heat. They forced us into a small stuffy room and we were there for a long time.”

“What can you tell me about the place where you got off the boat?” Marcus prodded.

“Not much. We still had the bags over our heads. I could tell that it was dark outside… and it was quiet, like no city noises.”

“What was the ground like?”

“Sand, then eventually pavement.”

Marcus gave a small nod. “Go on.”

“They put us into the back of a vehicle and forced us to kneel on the ground. At this point I’m pretty sure it was just Clarke and me. I don’t know what happened to the crew of the catamaran.
The road that they took us on was really windy for a long time. I felt carsick. Eventually it straightened out for a bit then got windy again at the end. When they took us out it was still dark. There were men guarding the facility and they spoke to our captors in Arabic. The guards took us directly to the room where they held us before throwing us in and locking the door. Eventually we managed to get each other’s hood off.”

“What can you tell us about the room where they kept you?” Kane prompted.

“It was underground. There were no windows, the only light came from the space around the door. It made it really hard to tell how much time was passing or whether it was day or night. The floor was dirt and the walls were really old plaster. It was crumbling and falling apart in places.” Octavia paused here to see if Marcus would ask her anything else. When he didn’t she continued.

“They rarely fed us. Just a bottle of water to split between the two of us, I guess it would have been every day, and maybe a couple of pieces of stale bread every 2 or 3. They left a plastic bucket for us in the corner to use as a washroom. The most human interaction we got was for beatings.”

Bellamy automatically reached for his sister’s hand. He wasn’t sure that he wanted to hear this part.

“They usually came in groups of three, two to restrain one of us while the other was tortured by the last man. Clarke would antagonize them, trying to get them to focus on her instead of me. I begged her to stop, but she just insisted that one of us needed to stay strong if we were going to escape and since I had martial arts training it should be me. She definitely got it way worse than I did. We kept asking them what they wanted but they never responded. Eventually Clarke got really sick. She tried to hide it at first but after a while it got too bad. They started sending only two men in because one was more than enough to restrain her.” Octavia’s voice broke and Bellamy’s heart broke right along with it. He couldn’t imagine how she must have felt watching her best friend do her best to protect her, and then slowly deteriorate as a result.

“We started devising a plan. They had freed our wrists early on as if to show us that even without being restrained we had no chance of escaping. We used it to our advantage. We fashioned a makeshift shiv from a piece of plaster from the wall. The next time that they came for us I... I pretended that Clarke was dead. When one of them went to check on her she shanked him and I knocked the other one out. She yelled at me to run. I... I heard her lock the door behind me so that I couldn’t go back for her. Someone needs to go back for her, she didn’t have a lot of time,” Octavia pleaded.

The grimace on Marcus’ face was subtle, but Bellamy still caught it. The General motioned for his sister to continue. “Tell me everything you can about your escape.”

Octavia hesitated, not satisfied with his lack of response, but went on. “I climbed out of a window and hid until the guard on the gate changed so that I could slip out while they were distracted. After that I hid near the compound until dark then set off. Based off of where the sun set I started walking west… I have no idea why because we had no idea where we were. I did my best to avoid people for as long as I could, and when I made it to a more populated area, I hitched a ride on the back of an old pickup truck by hiding under a tarp. I must have fallen asleep but it couldn’t have been for very long… maybe an hour? When I woke up it was early morning and the truck was stopping in a market place near a river. I stole some food and less conspicuous clothes and holed up again, just trying to come up with a plan. I noticed that across the river there were men in fatigues holding machine guns. They didn’t look like any of the local militia that I’d seen. When it got dark I stole a couple of old wooden pallets and decided to try to paddle across the river. Luckily, the water was pretty calm. When I got across I hid in the reeds until I could get a closer look at the
uniforms. They were a mix of American and Canadian soldiers. I got their attention and luckily they didn’t shoot me. Long story short, that’s how I ended up here.”

If it were anyone other than his sister telling him the story, Bellamy wouldn’t have believed it. The idea that a civilian, let alone a 23 year old girl with only some tae kwon doe and jujitsu to her name could escape a compound of armed men and navigate a hostile foreign country and live to tell the tale seemed more than a little far fetched. But his sister had been amazing him with her feats ever since she was a little girl. He was just utterly grateful that he would have a chance to tell her just how proud he was.

Octavia looked at both of them expectantly. “So when is the rescue mission for Clarke going to leave?”

Silence.

Eventually, Marcus sighed deeply, unable to meet her eyes. “Octavia…”

Octavia straightened in her bed, looking almost ready to pounce. Bellamy’s hand around hers tightened as he anxiously watched her pulse and her blood pressure began to rise. “How could you? She saved my life. She’s going to be your step daughter!” The hurt and betrayal in Octavia’s voice was undeniable as she shouted at the man who had adopted her as a child.

Marcus hastily stopped the tape recorder and placed it back into the breast pocket of his fatigues. “Octavia, listen-“

He was cut off as a nurse barged into the room and clucked disapprovingly at the now angrily beeping heart monitor. She began shooing them out of the room. Marcus rose without a fuss but Bellamy was much more reluctant. Kane firmly placed his hand on the younger man’s shoulder, giving him a pointed look and nodding toward the room next door that Bellamy had seen earlier. The Petty Officer tried to ignore him, but at a stern look from the nurse, he kissed the back of his sister’s hand and followed after the General.

Bellamy was feeling more than a little bewildered by everything that just happened and especially by Marcus’ reaction. They had undergone dangerous rescue missions before and beyond that, if he remembered correctly, Clarke was the daughter of a United States Senator. Things started to click into place as he remembered the video conference call that he had witnessed earlier – the tired man and woman had been Clarke’s parents: Senator Griffin and his wife Dr. Abby Griffin. Bellamy hadn’t seen them much in the few short years that he had lived at the Kane residence, so it was no wonder that he hadn’t recognized them.

But then why the hell weren’t they mounting a rescue mission?

The second the door to the conference room had closed behind them Bellamy chimed in. “With all due respect Sir-”

Marcus held up a hand, silencing him. He stood with his back towards Bellamy, gaze fixed on a topographical map littered with notes. “Based off of everything we’ve managed to piece together from Octavia, she’s being held in Iran.”

“So?” Bellamy wasn’t following.

Marcus sighed deeply, his shoulders slumping. Bellamy had never seen him look so old. “The US has no diplomatic relations with Iran. Sending in a team would be seen as an act of war.”

Bellamy’s brow furrowed. “So that’s it then? We’re just going to leave her to die?”
Kane’s hands balled into fists. “I watched that little girl grow up. Other than Octavia, she’s the closest thing that I have to a daughter. If I didn’t think it would put both her and the whole damn country at more risk, I’d be the first one over there myself.”

Bellamy couldn’t believe what he was hearing. They really weren’t going to do anything about it.

“What if Octavia were still there?” Bellamy’s voice was low, lethal. Kane was one of the few people in his life that he’d ever fully trusted. He’d been able to leave overseas on missions knowing that Octavia was fully protected. Obviously he had been dead wrong.

Marcus let the heavy silence hang for a few more moments, still thoroughly studying the intel in front of him. It took all of Bellamy’s willpower not to throttle him.

“Two weeks furlough,” Marcus finally remarked quietly.

“I’m sorry, what?” Bellamy asked, totally thrown for a loop.

“I can get you two weeks furlough to take care of your sister. Maybe even a month if things go south. But you absolutely cannot get caught.” His eyes were pleading though his posture remained stiff.

“But I thought you said-“

“A rogue SEAL is a lot easier to explain away than a full team or an Army General. But if you get caught, a court martial would be the least of both of our worries. Do I make myself clear?”

Bellamy worried his jaw for a moment, but when Marcus eventually turned to look at him, he nodded his head.

Marcus finally relented, allowing some of the tension to drain from his body. “I can’t ask you to do this Bellamy. In all likelihood this could be a suicide mission. You’d have no backup waiting if anything goes wrong. And even if everything were to go perfectly, though I’ll do everything in my power, you still may end up in prison.”

The reality of what was coming started to sink in for Bellamy, but there was no real choice. The thought of what Octavia had been through combined with the haunted look in her eyes as she pleaded with them to go save her friend weighed heavily on his mind. His sister owed this girl her life. *His sister, his responsibility.*

“I’ll do it,” he confirmed with a nod.

“I can get you as far as Al-Faw, near where Octavia was picked up by patrols. From there, you’ll have to cross the border on your own. A military transport will leave here at 0900 hours tomorrow. Be on it.” Marcus’ eyes shone with pride as he engulfed his adopted charge in his strong arms. Bellamy remained stiff in his embrace, still finding it hard to reconcile the fact that this man whom he had so respected was essentially hanging him out to dry.

“Thank you son,” Marcus told him, seemingly not noticing his rigid posture.

Bellamy stepped back and gave him a salute, before turning away, unable to meet his eyes.

Leaving the room, he hesitated, sparing a glance at Octavia’s door. He needed to see his sister, to reassure himself that she’d be alright.

Tentatively, he once again peeked his head into her room. Octavia was still awake though she had
obviously been heavily sedated, her eyes blinking slowly as she fought the grogginess.

“Hey,” she gave him a small smile.

He allowed himself to slip the rest of the way into the room and back to the chair at her side. “Hey yourself.” He managed a slight grin, not wanting to worry her.

Her eyes grew serious as she reached for his hand. “Tell me someone is going after Clarke.”

Bellamy swallowed heavily. He couldn’t tell her. “Someone is going after Clarke.”

Octavia visibly relaxed, “Thank god.”

Bellamy chewed his lip for a moment. He was really having a hell of a time keeping his emotions in check. This could be one of the last times he ever saw his sister. “Hey O, I really love you. Please don’t ever scare me like this again. You need to take care of yourself, put your poor brother’s mind at ease.”

Octavia gave him one of her signature smirks. “I love you too big brother,” she let out a tremendous yawn. “These drugs are hitting me hard.”

Bellamy ruffled her hair one more time before kissing her on the forehead. “Get some rest. I’ll come visit you again first thing tomorrow morning before I get sent back.”

Octavia pouted, just like she used to when she was a little girl. “So soon?”

Bellamy just nodded at her, then made sure she was properly tucked in before heading for the door.

“Hey Bell?” He was standing in the threshold when her voice caused him to turn around. “I almost forgot to tell you, Lincoln proposed.” Bellamy just stared at her wondering just how hard those drugs were hitting her.

She gave him a mega-watt grin and held up the now opened letter that he had given her earlier. “I mean he’s going to do it for real in person, but he said that these last couple weeks have given him perspective and that he didn’t want to waste anymore time. He’s going to leave the military when this tour is over and he wants to get married.”

This time, Bellamy’s smile was genuine, for both his sister and his friend. “That’s great O. Congratulations.”

At least if he didn’t make it back his sister would be taken care of.

Chapter End Notes

My apologies, this chapter took longer than anticipated. It was a combination of trying to get school applications completed and the chapter ending up way longer than anticipated.

Full disclaimer: I'm not American, I have no ties to the military, and I've never been to the Middle East. All research was done using TV shows and google. If I got anything wrong please don't get offended... this is a work of fiction.
As always, kudos and reviews are appreciated!
How had Octavia done it?

That was the question that constantly cycled through Bellamy’s head as he tried to puzzle through just how to make things work. It had taken him two days just to figure out a way to get across the border without getting caught, and even then he’d barely made it without completely destroying the bag of untraceable supplies that Kane had provided him with in the waters of the Shatt Al-Arab. It had taken another full day to travel to the compound that Marcus’ intel team had indicated as Clarke’s probable location.

Now he was hunkered down, sheltered in an abandoned building on an adjacent plot of land, doing his best at being a one-man surveillance team. So far he had gathered next to nothing. He didn’t even know if Clarke was still alive.

Security had obviously been tightened since his sister’s escape. Not only were there guards on the gate, but there were also two-man patrols circling the compound. Through his binoculars he could make out more men through the windows of the compound. All of them were heavily armed.

There was no way that this was going to run like a normal combat extraction. There would be no backup waiting for him at any sign of trouble, and there was no helo waiting for extraction. The intel that Marcus had given him was shoddy at best. Intelligence believed that this was some form of small time organization with far-flung ties to Al Qaeda. They had no idea why they would be kidnapping American nationals and trafficking them across borders. And not knowing what kind of operation he was walking into was probably what scared Bellamy the most.

The sun was close to setting, and Bellamy’s skin was practically crawling as he felt more time slipping away. Waiting had never been his strong suit. He’d usually leave the logistics and planning to other members of his platoon. Tactical, sharp shooting, and brute force… give him any skill requiring physicality and he was your man. What he wouldn’t give for a little help from Roan right now. As much as it begrudged Bellamy to admit it, he was usually the brains that would take the lead in this type of situation.

With a sigh, Bellamy eased himself beneath the view of the window and began to rummage through his pack for an MRE, trying his best not to think about the fact that Clarke was probably starving less than 100 feet away. If she was even still alive that is. He needed to keep his strength up and his wits sharp if he was going to be able to come up with a plan.

He tucked into his beef stew trying to ignore the weird preserved flavor that all MREs seemed to have. On his fifth bite he was distracted by the sound of voices drifting in through the window. Peeking his head up just high enough to see out, he spotted two men- young, armed- speaking Arabic.

Bellamy immediately crouched back down and pressed as far into the wall as he could in order to minimize his shadow. His Arabic was far from what could even be considered conversational. Luckily he could understand more than he could speak… just enough to get the gist of most conversations. The men were speaking in slow, arrogant tones, making it easier for him to pull out words that he knew.
One commented on how tired he was of guarding the American whore. The other replied that if she wasn’t dead already, he’d put her out of her misery himself.

Bellamy continued to trace their voices as the men got closer to the compound that he had been watching. When they were far enough away, he finally allowed himself to take a breath. Glancing over the windowsill again to ensure that there was no one around, he hopped to his feet and began to pace.

He needed to act. Now.

Octavia had mentioned that Clarke had been sick, and if these two men were to be believed it sounded like she was on death’s door. That complicated things. It didn’t sound like she would be able to make it out on her own two feet.

His options were already limited. He couldn’t go in guns blazing- though relatively isolated by abandoned buildings, the compound was still in the city and gunfire would draw too much attention. He also couldn’t go in in full gear or he would more than likely be shot on sight.

As he continued to pace, his boot echoed as he trod over what would seem to be a hollow spot in the floor. Getting down on his knees, Bellamy peeled back the dirty old carpet to reveal a trap door. The space it led to wasn’t very large- probably a spot for the former tenants to hide their valuables- but it would fit his pack.

Scrubbing a hand roughly over the quickly growing-in stubble of his jaw, he contemplated what he could bring with him. The sat-phone hidden in an inside compartment could very well be his lifeline, but it was too large to easily conceal and he couldn’t risk being caught with it. And it likely didn’t matter much anyway, Marcus had expressly forbidden him from using it unless he made it back across the border. Nearly, everything else in his pack was either too conspicuous, or just unnecessary. He settled for sliding a large hunting knife into the side of his boot, holstering his sidearm, pocketing a few extra clips of ammunition, and slipping a small pin-like piece of metal into the waistband of his pants. Being captured was a very real possibility, and he needed a way out of cuffs if necessary.

As for any form of disguise, he was kind of hooped. Marcus had sent him off in non-descript fatigues, the kind of thing that you could find in an army surplus store, with all of the tags removed to hide the country of origin. They didn’t exactly help him blend in with the locals, but at least they gave him some camouflage amongst the sandy brown buildings and he didn’t have to worry about dealing with flowing robes that he wasn’t used to. It would have to work.

He lugged his pack into the hole in the ground, then re-covered it with the old wooden door and carpet, making sure to kick some of the dust around so that it wouldn’t be so obvious that the place had been disturbed. He said a silent prayer to whoever was listening that by some miracle he’d be back to recover his equipment within a couple of hours with Clarke in tow. Then he set off.

Dark had fallen, and without streetlights, Bellamy was easily able to stick to the shadows. Unfortunately that meant that anyone else would be equally shrouded in darkness. He wished he could have brought his night vision goggles with him, but as an expensive piece of equipment that would have been rare to see in the hands of a civilian, he had had to leave them in the pack.

He dodged into a small alcove in the outer wall of the compound and tried to calm his breathing. It had been a long time since he’d been this nervous for an opp. From this standpoint, he had a decent view of the two men he had overheard earlier. They stood outside the gate, AK-47s resting against the wall within easy reach. He hadn’t had the time to observe the nighttime guard schedule, so he had no way of knowing whether these two were it, or if they had more men patrolling the perimeter.
like they had during the day.

Bellamy was in the middle of contemplating whether he should take the two men out, or simply scale the wall right where he was, when a loud crash caused him to jump, his nerves on edge. Whirling towards the noise, he found a dark alleyway, but didn’t see any movement. He took another deep breath, this time trying to slow his racing heart. It had probably just been a cat knocking over a heap of trash.

He started to edge his way along the wall towards the men, figuring better the enemy you know - or at least the one you can see.

He was only about 20 feet away when out of nowhere, pain exploded across the back of his skull. His vision blackened for a moment, but it wasn’t like in the movies. A blow to the head wouldn’t cause you to instantly lose consciousness, at least not unless you were in serious trouble. But it was still enough to momentarily stun him and cause his ears to ring.

When he was able to vaguely focus again, he became aware of the fact that he was on his knees. Someone was shouting something, but for the life of him Bellamy couldn’t understand what. Someone, no, more than one person was pulling his arms behind his back, but before he was able to concentrate hard enough to fight them off, his wrists were being lashed together, and then his forearms. A burlap sack was thrown over his head and the air became instantly hotter, heavier, and harder to breath.

He was pulled roughly to his feet and the men used the butts of their rifles to propel him along. He stumbled several times, unable to see where he was going. The men simply continued to shout. At some point he went to take a step- and realized too late that there was no floor beneath his foot. His knees crashed into what could only be the stair below, followed by his shoulder painfully hitting the wall, and finally his cheek slamming into the ground as he came to a rest, sprawled at the bottom of the stairway. His ears were met by harsh chuckles.

Instead of helping him to his feet, the men simply grabbed him beneath the armpits and began to drag him the rest of the way to their destination. Bellamy heard the faint sound of a lock clicking, and a door creaking open. He was hit by a wave of an awful smell, like the combination of rotting meat, and human sick. The bag was yanked off his head, and he was thrown into the room, skidding across the dirt floor on his face and stomach.

All of this had happened so quickly, his mind was still struggling to catch up. But when it did, he was hit by one thought and one thought only.

He was utterly fucked.

He allowed himself to catch his breath for a moment and take stock - mostly scrapes and bruises as far as he could tell. His head still throbbed, probably a mild concussion. He tested the bindings on his arms- thick zip-ties. He wouldn’t be able to break out of them with more than one set keeping his arms pressed together nearly to the elbow and trapped behind his back.

With a groan he rolled to his side and brought his knees in toward his chest, managing to complete his roll into a kneeling position. He scanned the room.

It was dim, the only light coming from under the door so it took a few minutes for his eyes to adjust. This must have been the room where Octavia had been held. The floor was dirt like she’d said, and was littered with darker patches. There was a particularly large dark area close to the center of the room and it occurred to Bellamy that the darker areas were stains caused by blood seeping into the ground.
The rest of the room was fairly unremarkable and bare except for a pile of filthy old blankets heaped in the far corner.

A pile of old blankets with a messy mop of wavy blonde hair poking through the top.

**The smell.** He’d grown accustomed to it after that initial flash as he’d entered the room, but now it hit him again like a freight train.

“No,” he gasped.

He crawled to her as fast as he could while still managing to balance on his knees. He bent to grasp the top blanket and then turned his body in order to pull it off of her.

She barely even looked human. Her skin was a patchwork of yellows, greens, purples and angry reds, in between the gaping and pus-seeping wounds. She wore only a bikini and what he guessed was once some form of crocheted beach cover up, but he had no guess as to what color any of her clothes had been they were now so coated with filth and dried blood.

Her cheekbones jutted and her eyes were sunken back in her skull. There was more dried blood crusted at the corners of her mouth.

Bellamy twisted away from her to vomit.

When he was sure he was finished, he turned so that he could reach his arms towards her. Feeling the strain in his shoulders, he found the angle of her jaw, and traced his fingers down, just like Lincoln had taught him, trying to find a pulse.

“Come on… come on… come on,” he whispered frantically.

**Nothing.**

With a defeated gasp, he fell back onto his haunches. He was too late and now he was probably going to die too.

The lightest of breezes danced across the back of his knuckles. He nearly missed it, but after an extended pause he felt it again and he knew for sure this time that he hadn’t imagined it. Turning his head back to face her he was able to confirm… it was subtle but it was there – the slight rise and fall of her chest.

He felt his shoulders slump in the slightest amount of relief. He reached back towards her and traced from her wrist down to her hand, and pulled in between both of his own grasping it tightly.

“Clarke,” he intoned, hoping for a response. When he didn’t receive one, he tried again, a little louder. “Clarke.”

Nothing, not even the twitch of a finger.

He settled in on the ground beside her, continuing to hold her hand despite the fact that his arms were quickly going numb. There wasn’t much that he could do to help her, but he could at least be there for her. She didn’t need to be alone anymore.

The fact that he had to sit with his back towards her helped marginally as he tried not to think about what Octavia had gone through. Clarke’s flesh didn’t even look like skin anymore it was so marred by cuts, burns, and infection. Was that what his sister’s arms had looked like under the bandages? Octavia had mentioned that Clarke had gotten it worse, but how much worse?
He was eventually snapped out of his train of thought by the click of the lock turning. Bellamy immediately shot into a more formidable crouch with his hands darting to his holster... which was now empty. Of course the guards would have taken his sidearm away when they brought him in. Twisting his foot within his boot he was able to ascertain that his knife still resided where he left it, even though in his current situation it would be next to impossible to pull out and use.

He was able to make out the shape of four men entering the room. One stayed by the door, two took up closer positions with their AK-47s aimed squarely at his forehead, and the final came straight for him, grabbing him under one arm and wrenching him forward to once again land on his front.

Bellamy scrambled to try come up with the proper phrasing for what he wanted to say in Arabic, but instead was left with just trying to get past the sharp throbbing in his skull. He’d have to use English and hope that one of his captors would understand. Keeping his knowledge of their language under wraps might help him in the long run anyway.

Fighting his way back into a seated position so that he could see his captors’ faces, he elected not to beat around the bush. “She needs a doctor.”

The man closest to him spit back towards the corner where Clarke lay prone. “She is trash. If she dies we will find another.” He grabbed Bellamy by the lapel and gave him a hard shake. “Who are you? Why are you here?”

“I’m nobody. Get her a doctor. Now.”

A hard shove sent Bellamy face first into the ground with a boot planted heavily between his shoulder blades. “You don’t appear to be in a position to make demands.” There was the sharp scrape of a knife being pulled from its sheath. Bellamy didn’t flinch as he felt the blade knick the flesh at the base of his spine. There was a hard tug and the unmistakable sound of ripping fabric before a rush of cool air flooded his back.

A derisive chuckle rang out in the room. “This ‘nobody’ is from the American Navy,” the leader informed his comrades in Arabic.

Bellamy bit the inside of his cheek and cursed inwardly. The eagle tattoo on his shoulder blade had been an impulsive act when he had just entered the corps at 18 and was looking for a sense of belonging. Now it might be his death sentence.

He felt the muzzle of a handgun press into the base of his skull. “Give me one reason why I shouldn’t kill you.” The man’s voice, now very close to his ear, was cold.

Bellamy had fucked up big time. His youthful indiscretions and inability to formulate a solid plan under pressure were about to get them both killed. Unless... he’d already been captured, breaking the one order that Marcus had given him, and his identity was already blown. At the very least- if he somehow made it past the next five minutes and by some miracle somehow made it back stateside- he was facing a court martial and some serious prison time. If there was a chance that he might be able to still get Clarke through this, he might as well dig the hole a little deeper.

The click of the safety disengaging snapped the current situation back into focus.

“The girl,” Bellamy gasped out, feeling his gut clench. “You don’t know who she is do you?”

The safety reengaged and the pressure against the back of head lessened slightly.

“She’s the daughter of a United States senator, her mother is a highly paid surgeon, and she has
close ties to a general in the American army. You’ve been sitting on one of the most valuable hostages you could get your hands on and you didn’t even know it.”

The boot on his back was briefly removed in order to land a swift kick to his kidneys. “Liar. You would say anything to spare her life. You’re just trying to buy time for your American friends to set up their raid.”

“Does this look like a well orchestrated operation to you?” Bellamy managed to gasp out. When he didn’t receive a response he continued. “Senator Jake Griffin from Virginia. Look him up on the Internet. I’m sure that he has a picture with his family from the campaign trail.”

The leader spat off rapid-fire orders to the man outside the room, then returned to pressing the gun to his head, grinding his face into the dirt. “And what use are you to me?”

Bellamy didn’t have an answer to that. But he needed to try… for Octavia’s sake as well as for Clarke. The US had a strict no negotiating with terrorists policy and if things went south she would still need him. He was committing treason, but if it helped save Clarke’s life it would be worth it. Besides he had control over how much he gave them. He closed his eyes. “Information. I know her family. If communication breaks down I can help.”

The guard from the doorway came back and affirmed Bellamy’s claims. The pressure left the back of Bellamy’s body. “Don’t outlive your usefulness,” the group’s leader advised him before landing one final kick to his ribs.

In a matter of minutes all four men had left the room locking the door behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Bellamy, thinking with his heart instead of his head again.

I hope I didn't make him sound too idiotic, getting himself into this situation in the first place. Bellamy has always been impulsive but I still struggled with trying to get this chapter out. It was originally meant to be longer but you guys have waited long enough.

As always, kudos and reviews are very much appreciated.
Chapter Notes

It's been a while! Just a few quick notes before this chapter, first I know that this story is very dark, and as we delve further into the total awfulness of Clarke and Bellamy's situation I just wanted to make a note of the fact that this story will have a happy ending (eventually). It certainly won't be all sunshine and rainbows, but there will be brightness coming I promise. Please don't give up hope.

Secondly, to avoid confusion, when things are italicized in quotes it's because the characters are speaking another language. I myself don't speak a single word of Arabic or Kurdish, so this was just easier than embarrassing myself using google translate.

Bellamy had been relatively left alone in the couple of days since he had ended up in this underground cell. His captors were obviously biding their time, trying to figure out what they were going to do with them. Which was fine... Bellamy needed time to game plan as well.

Shortly after the men had left for the first time, they had sent in a doctor. They only spoke to the man in English and through the haze in his head it had taken Bellamy a while to figure out why. But when he had, he felt the tiniest spark of hope. The doctor’s accent was recognizable from the region of Iraq where Bellamy and his team had been stationed. The man was older and likely was more fluent in Kurdish. Bellamy’s Kurdish was even worse than his Arabic but he could still at least try to use it to his advantage.

The doctor had kind eyes. Bellamy had noted that when he was originally brought to their prison that he hadn’t looked shocked at Clarke’s condition, but rather resigned. He had done his best to take care of her in the short periods of time each day that he was given to treat her. He had even demanded that she be given a sponge bath and clean clothes and blankets in order to try to control the spread of the infection.

Putting trust in this man wasn’t ideal, but Bellamy was running pretty short on options. Now he just needed to wait for an opportunity to arise.

And it did. On the third day that the doctor came in, Bellamy was positioned in his usual place, on his knees between two guards on the far side of the room, when both guards were called elsewhere in the compound. They argued into their walkie-talkies briefly before the taller guard pushed Bellamy to the ground and pressed his boot heavily between his shoulder blades. “You move before we come back, you die,” he was told gruffly. With that, the guards left, locking the door behind them.

Bellamy turned his head so that he could see where the doctor still worked on cleaning out Clarke’s many cuts, his shoulders tensed.

After they had been in silence for at least 5 minutes and there were no signs of their captors coming back anytime soon, Bellamy decided it was time to act.

“Help us,” he managed in what he hoped was passable Kurdish. His voice was rough and barely
audible after days of disuse and only receiving a few sips of water that his captors had forced him to lap up from a bowl like a dog.

The man flinched but continued to studiously ignore him. Bellamy figured that the men that held him had probably ordered the doctor to pay him no mind. He kicked the ground, frustrated, then attempted to come up with something else to say.

A few minutes later while Bellamy was still stewing over his next move, he was startled by the soft sound of the man’s voice. “I have a family.”

Bellamy felt himself sag into the dirt floor beneath him. He had known that this might be a possibility. The fact that this man was even in Iran in the first place meant that he had likely fled the violence of the war in the neighboring country. Obviously he hadn’t fled far enough, considering he was still under the employ of the terrorist organizations he had been escaping. There was likely nothing that Bellamy could do or say that could convince this man to put his own family in jeopardy for the sake of two Americans whose country had put his life in such turmoil to begin with.

That said, Bellamy could still attempt to wear away at him over time. That was, as long as Clarke still might be able to be saved.

It took him a while to formulate his next question, “Will she live?”

The man finally looked away from Clarke in order to meet his gaze. He began explaining her condition to him, but the words were far beyond Bellamy’s level of comprehension. Finally realizing that the soldier wasn’t taking in anything that he was saying, the man sighed.

“It’s a miracle that she has even survived this long,” the doctor told him solemnly after switching to English. “I am doing the best that I can with limited resources but… her body has been ravaged with infection causing a high fever. The state of her body is improving slowly but such a high temperature can cause extensive brain damage. The fact that she hasn’t regained consciousness… I am not optimistic.”

Bellamy felt tears burning at the back of his eyes. It felt like a heavy weight was crushing his chest and he suddenly found it difficult to breathe. He tried to ask the doctor more but he couldn’t seem to formulate words.

“Who was she to you?” the man asked him gently.

Bellamy swallowed. “She saved my sister’s life. I promised that I would save hers in return.”

The man clicked his tongue reproachfully. “In the future I would suggest that you do not make promises that you do not have the ability to keep.” The man sighed. “I’ve already lost two sons to this senseless violence. These men have taken one of my daughters, they know where the rest of my family is, and they’re more than willing to follow through on their threats. My advice to you is that if the opportunity ever does arise, run as far and as fast as you can and do not look back. Anything that slows you down will only allow them to catch up.”

By that point Bellamy had stopped listening. His vision had developed a haze around the edges and there was a loud high-pitched ringing noise roaring in his ears. He was vaguely aware when the terrorists came back to escort the doctor away, largely because they made sure to give him a few swift kicks before they left, but for the most part he remained numb to his surroundings.

When the room was again empty except for him and Clarke, he was once again left to the cold
darkness and his own thoughts.

How could this have happened? What in life had led him to this point? And probably more importantly, what was he going to do now?

His brain was fighting an internal battle between self-preservation and morals that had been instilled in him since the beginning of his SEAL training. No man was left behind. Not ever. Not to mention it still felt premature to give up on Clarke. It’s not like the doctor had given her any form of fancy tests like a CT scan. He had just been voicing his opinion, right?

But what if he wasn’t? In all of his years in the military Bellamy had seen many a man die after having gone through far less. Shouldn’t he be focusing on finding a way to get himself out alive?

But Clarke didn’t deserve that. She didn’t deserve any of this.

He needed to clear his head. Unfortunately, being restrained in a dark basement by hostiles in a foreign country tended to preoccupy one’s thoughts. He started the slow trek on his knees to the water dish in the corner, hoping that a drink might cool him off.

Just as his lips touched the liquid he was interrupted by a soft moan coming from the center of the room.

That was the first sound Clarke had made since he’d arrived.

Hurriedly he scrambled to his feet, not really caring if he fell. He was at her side in an instant, throwing himself to his knees on the ground beside her so that he could reach to grab her hand. It was awkward, especially trying to avoid the portable IV that had been set up to give her a steady stream of liquids and antibiotics, but he somehow managed to firmly grasp her hand between each of his own, and still look at her face over his shoulder.

“Clarke,” he whispered to her softly, hoping for some kind of response. He was rewarded with another quiet whimper and a crease forming between her eyebrows.

He sank back onto his heels, getting ready for a long wait. He was going to wait as long as it took, no matter how badly his neck cramped up from being at such an awkward angle.

Bellamy wasn’t sure how long he sat like that, maybe minutes, maybe hours, but eventually her eyelids cracked open to reveal the beautiful blue underneath.

She barely moved, looking like it took almost all of the energy she possessed just to keep her eyes open. “Mom?” her voice was soft and raspy after not being used in so long.

Bellamy’s heart broke at the amount of pain in that single syllable. She sounded so lost, like she was a little girl.

“It’s Bellamy. Bellamy Blake. I used to live next door to you when we were younger. I’m Octavia’s brother,” he explained to her, trying not to scare her.

Clarke’s eyes roamed the room, but it was clear to Bellamy that she wasn’t actually seeing anything. She wasn’t fully conscious to her surroundings or her situation.

“I-“ she started, then broke off. She swallowed laboriously and Bellamy squeezed her hand urging her to go on. His arms had so long ago gone numb that he was unable to tell if she squeezed back.

“-Want to go home,” she managed at last.
Her words were like a stab wound to his gut. He took a deep breath and released it slowly through his nose. “I know Princess.”

The nickname had just slipped out. He hadn’t used it since she was a little kid, and truth be told he hadn’t even thought about it until that moment. But somehow their circumstance had changed the meaning from a derogatory nature to a term of endearment meant to make her feel more at ease.

“I know,” he reiterated quietly.

Clarke’s eyelids drooped languidly a few times before finally closing again.

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It was a long night for Bellamy. He didn’t want to chance falling asleep lest he convince himself that he had imagined Clarke waking up. He also wanted to be there for her in the off chance that she came to again.

In the many hours that had stretched past Bellamy had had more than enough time to think. He needed to talk to the doctor again. Surely this new development in Clarke’s condition was a good sign. If it meant that she would make a full recovery, then he just needed to stall long enough for her to get stronger and the two of them could work towards escaping together.

That was assuming that the fact that she hadn’t seemed lucid the entire time that she was awake wasn’t indicative of the brain damage that the doctor had talked about.

When it was late enough in the morning that light began to creep through the crack under the door, Bellamy began to coax his reluctant muscles out of the uncomfortable kneeling position he had held all night. He didn’t want to draw suspicion from their captors so that they might not leave him alone again.

Slowly he crawled (under great protest from his stiff legs) back to the far wall and settled in to wait.

Bellamy was vaguely aware of the echo of more footsteps than usual above their heads and did his best to wrack his brain about what that might mean.

An indeterminate amount of time later, someone came into the room. He was young, little more than a boy, and he studiously ignored both captives. He placed a fresh bowl of water and two pieces of some type of flatbread just inside the doorway, before turning to leave without a word.

That was new. Bellamy hadn’t been given any form of food since he’d arrived at the compound. Something had definitely changed. He hoped that it was just that the men had begun negotiations with Clarke’s parents.

He made his way over to the bread and managed to lean over awkwardly so he could sniff it. It smelled like normal bread, if anything maybe stale. He certainly couldn’t smell anything that sent off warning flags that it might be poisoned. Not that he had any form of expertise that would help him tell the difference.

It had been so long since his last meal that Bellamy was far past the point of physically feeling hunger anymore. Flatbread also was not the easiest thing to eat when it was lying on the dirt floor and he didn’t have any access to his hands.

Somehow he managed to tear off small bites, making sure to pace himself and take sips of water in between. The last thing he needed was to cause himself to vomit up the only source of energy he’d
been given in days.

His stomach must have shrunken enough over the last few days that he’d felt full after the first piece, but forced himself to down the second as well. It wasn’t as if Clarke was going to eat it while she was still unconscious and he needed all of the calories he could get.

He was left waiting and wondering what was going on for quite a while longer before his ears picked up the sound of boots tramping down the stairs.

Lots of boots.

The door flew back on its hinges, and two men grabbed him beneath the arms and hoisted him up so quickly that his feet couldn’t even find purchase on the ground. He was marched to the back corner of the room and shoved so far forward that his nose nearly grazed where the walls met. He was locked in place by the strong grip of a hand squeezing the back of his neck and the cold bite of the muzzle of a gun pressed to the back of his skull.

Bellamy could hear more people enter the room. Probably ten, not including the guards that continued to flank him. Finally there was silence.

Was this his execution squad? Were they going to make this into a grotesque propaganda video that would be posted on some dark corner of the Internet?

He was snapped out of his musings by the soft swish of two final sets of footsteps entering the room. The sound stopped near where Clarke still lay in the center of the room. There was silence for several agonizing seconds before a tiny female whimper caused ice to creep down his spine. Bellamy struggled to turn his head to see what they were doing to her, but the nails on the hand holding his neck bit into his skin forcing him to stop.

One of the soft sets of footsteps eventually made its way over until it was directly behind him. An impending sense of dread flooded Bellamy from head to toe. This was it.

“I am sorry,” it was the voice of the doctor, whispering in Kurdish. There was a rush of air on his skin as his ruined fatigues were jerked further down his arms, then a sharp pinch at the back of his left tricep.

Almost instantly, a burning sensation began to spread from the location, followed by a heaviness in his muscles. Bellamy began to struggle in earnest, but it became harder and harder, just as his thoughts became more and more clouded. Eventually everything was just black.

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Through the heavy haze in his head, Bellamy became vaguely aware of cool metal beneath the length of his body, heavily contrasting the intense heat of the air around him.

There was a constant rumble vibrating through his chest. A motor. They were moving. Judging by the gentle sway of the floor beneath him they were moving at a decent clip... perhaps on a highway?

It took him a few attempts to open his eyes as his muscles still felt sluggish and uncoordinated. When he did, it was no help. All he saw was black, with a small amount of light glaring through the upper and lower edges of his vision. A blindfold.

Moving very slowly so as not to draw suspicion, he extended his leg to the side, trying to see what else he could ascertain about his surroundings just by touch.
He brushed against something pliable, shorter than where his own leg ended. A shoeless foot… Clarke? There was no way of knowing for sure.

They hit a particularly hard bump and Bellamy was unable to suppress a grunt as his body slammed back down to the floor.

There was muttering from above him, then another sharp pinch at the back of his arm.

And then nothing.

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When Bellamy finally came to again, it took him even longer to get his bearings. Where ever he was it was extremely bright- he could see the light blazing through his closed eyelids. It did nothing to help the wicked pounding in his head.

It felt like he had swallowed cotton, and there was an acutely annoying ringing in his ears. He shifted his body, and it took him a moment to realize that his arms were no longer wrenched behind him. In fact, they were no longer numb. Instead a burning sensation raced all the way from his shoulders to his fingertips. He wasn’t sure which one he preferred.

Opening his eyes, he had to wait for them to adjust to a higher level of light than he had seen in at least a week. The room was largely unremarkable. The walls were painted white, and bare incandescent bulbs blazed on the ceiling. The floor was cold, bare concrete. There was only one door, and it was made of thick metal with bars over the window.

Quietly adjusting himself into a sitting position, he took stock of himself. Bellamy’s ankles were shackled together with only about two feet of heavy chain between them. With a low groan he took note of the fact that they’d taken his combat boots, leaving him only in socks. So much for his knife. His wrists were no longer zip-tied, but instead were held with standard issue handcuffs which were also attached to about 6 feet of chain secured by heavy bolts about waist high on the closest wall. With a shiver he realized they’d taken the ruined top half of his fatigues, replacing it with only a thin white t-shirt. At least they’d left him his pants.

A gasp followed by a light thud from behind him startled Bellamy. He whipped around to find Clarke who had obviously just fallen onto her butt, probably shocked to see her fellow captive awake and sitting. At some point during their relocation Clarke had been changed as well, as she now was wearing an abaya without any form of head covering. Bellamy’s stomach rolled at the thought of their captors being the ones to change her clothes.

He scanned the small amount of skin that he could see, looking for fresh injuries and was slightly relieved when he found none. He was also thankful to find that the unmarred areas of her flesh were beginning to have some color return to them.

She stared at him, her piercing blue eyes frightened. Her chest heaved with laborious breaths as she inched away from him, crawling backwards weakly in slow painful jerks. Out of the blue she stopped, her eyes widening almost comically.

“Bellamy Blake?!”

Obviously she hadn’t tried to figure out who she was sharing a cell with before this point, and honestly he couldn’t blame her. What were the chances that it would be someone she’d know after the ordeal she’d been through?

Instead of her face melting into a look of relief like he’d expected it to, her countenance quickly
morphed into a troubling combination of horror and grief. Her hand shook as she brought it to her mouth. “Oh my god,” she whispered brokenly.

Bellamy’s mind raced as he tried to figure out what could be so upsetting to her about his presence. Had he been beaten worse than he thought? His injuries didn’t feel like they’d be particularly horrifying to look at… mostly just bruises and shallow cuts.

Then it dawned on him.

“Hey, hey, shh…” he tried to crawl closer to her to comfort her, but was yanked up short by the chain. “Octavia’s alright Clarke. She should be stateside by now. I’m here for you. She’s the reason why I found you.”

Clarke looked skeptical, but at least her breathing was starting to slow. She studied him for a moment, apparently trying to puzzle out the situation a little further.

“If you’re not here on some kamikaze mission to save your sister, then where’s the rest of your team?”

Bellamy clenched his jaw. He didn’t want to extinguish any bit of hope that his presence had managed to instill in her, but he didn’t want to lie to her either. He sat there, warring with himself for the right thing to say, his silence ultimately cluing her in to their situation all on its own. She always had been as smart as a whip.

“There is no team,” she speculated softly, her eyes dropping to the floor.

Bellamy sighed. There definitely was no point in lying now. “No, there isn’t.”

Clarke nodded sullenly. They sat in silence for a moment before it was broken by Clarke’s coughing.

He shifted, again trying to get closer to her to try to support her or do something… anything.

She simply slouched back to the wall, still out of his reach and rested there. When the coughing ended her chest continued to heave. She looked exhausted.

“Pneumonia,” she answered his question before he even had to ask. “It’s from the broken ribs.” She took a small break, allowing her breathing to calm a bit. “It’s much better than it was though. I think the fever's broken.”

Bellamy nodded. “You’ve been treated by a doctor. He put you on a course of antibiotics.”

Clarke swallowed, closing her eyes and letting her arms fall to her sides. “What’s the point?”

Bellamy’s heart broke a little more, if that were even possible. He pulled the chain as far as it would go ignoring the cuffs as they bit into his skin and managed to hook two of her fingers with his pinky. When she finally opened her eyes and made contact with him he gave her hand as much of a squeeze as he could manage.

Bellamy thought back to the doctor’s advice about making promises he couldn’t keep, but right now he needed to.

“I’m going to get you out of here.”
As always, please motivate me with kudos and reviews!
Chapter Notes

Another very dark chapter. We finally get to see Clarke's point of view of things again... and it isn't pretty.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke was still trying to figure things out. Her body was in a much better condition than it had been the last time she was conscious. Her cuts had been expertly treated and it was easier to breath, even if only a little. Bellamy had mentioned antibiotics. But why?

What did all of it mean?

Clarke wasn’t an idiot. She may not have started medical school yet, but she had done more than her fair share of classes on anatomy and physiology in her undergrad. She knew that she had been on death’s door. Without treatment she wouldn’t be alive right now. So what had changed her captors’ minds that suddenly now her life was worth something?

And more importantly why couldn’t she have gotten something right for once and just died?

At this point her continued existence was a death sentence to Bellamy. Had she been at home in America in this condition, she’d be holed up in a hospital for weeks healing up, before months of physio to try to get her lungs back to functioning properly and to rebuild her atrophied muscles. It wasn’t like she’d be able to get up and run to safety if the opportunity presented itself. And she doubted Bellamy was going to leave without her. No man left behind and all that…

In her mind any good karma she might have gained by getting Octavia out was now negated by her brother’s resulting capture. She couldn’t bear to even look at him.

She’d spent the hours that had elapsed since she’d regained consciousness huddled in a corner, as far from the door as possible and out of Bellamy’s reach. She couldn’t handle him trying to comfort her right now.

Tracing random patterns on the bare wall with her fingertip she continued to puzzle through any possible reason that those disgusting men were keeping her alive. The only thing that she could come up with was that they wanted to continue to torture their plaything. Her brain struggled to process the thought. She couldn’t imagine suffering such cruelty only to be continually revived so that the brutality could start all over again.

Her breathing began to become more labored as panic set in. She couldn’t possibly live through much more of this. She just couldn’t.

“Clarke,” the deep voice startled her. The room had been silent for so long, even the soft tone of Bellamy’s voice rattled like a gunshot in her head.

She looked over at him for the first time since their last conversation. He was sitting with his back against the wall, legs bent in front of him, cuffed hands resting between his knees. He looked so calm for this situation, like he was just bored waiting for his sister to finish her martial arts lesson.
His eyes however, betrayed his concern.

“Don’t,” Clarke pleaded. She couldn’t take listening to lies about how all of this was going to be okay. Not from him. Especially considering that she was the reason that he was stuck in this hellhole with her.

“Don’t what?” Bellamy raised an eyebrow at her.

Clarke sighed. The gust of air caught in her chest and she burst into a fresh coughing fit. She saw him flinch like he wanted to come over to help her, but he remained sitting where he was.

When her lungs finally relaxed and she managed to calm her breathing to even better than it had been before he’d originally spoken he repeated himself. “Don’t what?”

Clarke looked at him hard. Despite the bruises and dried blood marring his face he still looked like he was doing alright. They certainly hadn’t tortured him to the extent that they had with her and Octavia, but it was likely only a matter of time. He needed to leave while he still had the strength. She was just at a loss for how she would convince him of that fact.

She thought back to every childhood memory she had of this man, hoping to come up with something she could use. All she could come up with was how protective he’d always been of Octavia… and his general disdain for her.

Chewing her lip, she tried to come up with something intelligent to say, but instead ended up blurting, “Why did you even come after me? You never even liked me.”

Bellamy’s brows narrowed together in confusion, “Clarke I-“

She cut him off. She was on a roll and she needed to get some things off her chest. “I was always just the ‘spoiled brat next door who was a terrible influence on your sister’. And you know what? You were right. I’m the one that got her into this mess. I could have gotten her killed all because the bratty ‘princess’ wanted to get back at her parents. God you must really hate me now-“

“Jesus Clarke, I never hated you.” Bellamy no longer looked relaxed. He had shifted to his knees and looked like he would have come closer to her had he been able to. “I was still a stupid sullen teenager when I left to join the navy. I disliked everyone and everything. And this wasn’t your fault.”

Clarke scoffed, turning her body away from him once again, “You can’t tell me that when you got the phone call that your sister was missing you didn’t blame me.”

Bellamy attempted to stutter out a reply, but none was forthcoming.

“That’s what I thought,” she sighed. Breaking eye contact with him she turned her head back toward the wall and leaned into its cool surface. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to hold back the threatening sting of her tears.

She sat in the silence for a moment and just focused on her breathing. Slow inhales and exhales. She knew how badly she had screwed up. This self-pity wasn’t helping anyone.

After several minutes the quiet was once again broken by Bellamy’s voice. “Clarke when they come for you I need you to cooperate with whatever they say.”

Clarke’s eyes snapped back open. She studied him, trying to figure out if he was serious. He was.
“What the hell difference does it make?” she scoffed. “They’re still going to torture me whether I’m compliant or not. Probably more when they don’t get a reaction as they grind lit cigarettes into my arms.”

Bellamy flinched at her nonchalance as she’d mentioned what had been done to her. “Clarke-“

“No, Bellamy. You don’t understand. These people are monsters. They thrive on pain-“

It was Bellamy’s turn to cut her off this time. “You’re right. I couldn’t possibly understand what it’s been like for you. But things should be different now…”

Clarke gave him possibly the most skeptical look she had ever given anyone in her life.

Bellamy sighed, rubbing his forehead against the shoulder of his t-shirt agitatedly. “I told them who you are. They’re going to ransom you off.”

Clarke couldn’t do anything but stare. “You did what?” she eventually managed to grind out through clenched teeth.

Bellamy shifted uncomfortably. “I needed to buy time.”

“The U.S. doesn’t negotiate with terrorists. That’s pretty goddamn common knowledge.” Clarke stated flatly.

“The government won’t, but your parents can,” Bellamy looked at her pleadingly, trying to will her to understand.

“What in the actual fuck Bellamy? So now my parents can watch me get tortured on video as if just knowing it was happening wasn’t enough. And when all of this goes to hell like every hostage situation always does, they’ll blame themselves.”

“I didn’t have a lot of options and I needed time to make a plan-“ Bellamy’s argument was cut off by the door flying open.

Clarke cowered back as two men came toward her, their faces hard and expressionless. She heard scrabbling coming from Bellamy’s side of the room and she glanced over to find he had managed to get to his feet and was trying futilely to put himself between her and the men. They didn’t even spare him a glance.

Without a word the men grabbed her beneath the arms and started hauling her toward the door. Raw animal panic took over and she immediately kicked out at the one pulling her right arm. He gave her a swift blow to the ribs and between the shooting pain that spiked through her side and the coughing fit that immediately followed, the fight quickly went out of her. She hung limply between the two men, all of her energy focused on just trying to breathe. The other man roughly pulled a burlap sack over her head and without pause they continued to pull her in the direction of the door. She couldn’t even bring herself to move her legs, instead feeling the rough concrete scrape the tops of her feet as they dragged uselessly behind her.

“Clarke!” she could hear Bellamy’s panicked yells echoing from the room as they continued down the hallway. They were soon drowned out by the slamming of the door.

She had no idea how far they had taken her, only that they were still on the same floor. When they stopped, she was forced into a chair, the cool metal chilling her even through the fabric of the abaya she was wearing. Her arms were forced to meet around the back of the chair before being secured together by a rough rope. The bag was unceremoniously ripped from her head and she was
left blinking in the harsh light.

She was in yet another plain, unadorned room— the walls white, the light coming from bare bulbs in the ceiling. The men standing before her were new. None of them were the ones who had tortured her in the previous compound. She knew that with certainty— their faces would be burned into her memory for the rest of her life.

There was a video camera mounted on a tripod aimed toward her. It was an older model, but one that would still record digital files. The red light near the lens remained off. It wasn’t recording yet.

One of the men near the camera stepped forward, his appearance all business, though there was something dangerous in the way he held himself that put Clarke on edge. “You will read the information on the cards Sharif is holding. Do not stray from the script. Do you understand?”

Clarke studied the man shrewdly, assessing his cold eyes and hard demeanor. She managed to pull together the best scathing look that she could in her condition and spat towards him – no easy feat considering how dehydrated she was.

There was the harsh scrape of metal on a scabbard, and before Clarke could comprehend what was happening, one of her guards who was still standing at her side pushed her shoulder back toward the chair as he held his knife to her throat. Without warning, Clarke was overtaken by another violent coughing fit. She could feel the sharp edge of the blade part her skin in a tiny nick, but she was unable to pull away.

The man by the camera held up his hand and said something that Clarke couldn’t understand. The blade was moved so that it no longer pressed into her skin but instead hovered just in front of her neck. She managed to catch her breath in small gasps through her nose as she tried to stifle any remaining wheezes by clenching her jaw.

The man waited, then with exaggerated patience continued. “Your life means nothing to me. If you do not do this, you will not live to see tomorrow. Now I ask again, do you understand?”

Clarke simply continued to glare at him.

The man sighed dramatically and turned to the door. “She is of no use to us so we won’t be needing the soldier either. Kill them both.”

Clarke felt panic rip through her. They couldn’t kill Bellamy too. He had to get home to Octavia. She had to make up for all of the stupid mistakes she’d made and get him out of here.

“Wait!” she cried out, straining forward almost to the point of touching the knife again. “I’ll do it… please just- I’ll do it.”

The man turned back to her with an unmistakable smirk twisting his features. “That’s what I thought.”

Clarke wanted to kick herself for being so stupid. If it had been a real kill order it wouldn’t have been in English. He’d been doing it to taunt her and she had walked right into his trap, not just giving him what he wanted, but also laying her weakness on the table for him to exploit. She felt bile rise in her throat.

The leader nodded, and the one behind the camera flipped it on while a third held up a cardboard sign with barely legible letters scrawled across it. She bit her lip, resigning herself to the fact that she was going to have to do this. The knife was pressed back to her flesh urging her to hurry up.
She took a deep breath and rolled her shoulders back to sit as tall as she could. Her parents and god knew who else were going to see this recording. She needed to look like she was still holding strong for their sake.

The man that Clarke assumed was the leader cleared his throat impatiently. She sighed then began to read.

“My name is Clarke Griffin. This is a message for United States Senator Jacob Griffin and Dr. Abigail Griffin. I have been taken captive by the Al-Rashid Organization. My captors apologize for the poor current state of my health. They would like to assure you that they did not know of my relations in America and that I will be treated gently from this point on, so long as your cooperation is assured in a timely manner,” Clarke had to bite back a derisive laugh at that last statement- the result of which was yet another coughing fit. She did her best to hold it in. Her mother would know how bad of shape she was in and she didn’t want that.

She gathered herself, then continued. “My captors are asking the reasonable price of 10 million dollars for my safe return. This amount must be sent in full by wire transfer within the next two weeks or else there will be dire consequences. This is a generous offer and should not be taken lightly.”

Clarke scanned ahead and realized that the recording would be ending soon. She made a rash decision, deciding that she needed to try to get a message of her own out. It would likely get edited out of the video but she needed to at least make an attempt. Screwing up her courage, she tensed her shoulders and attempted to lean as far away from the knife as possible.

“Mom, Dad I love you so much. Please tell Octavia that I’m so sorry for everything—“ she rushed to get out. Clarke could literally watch as the realization that she had gone off script changed each man’s expression. The one by the camera lunged to stop the recording, while the one holding the cardboard simply dropped it. The leader started towards her before she was distracted by the sharp sting of the blade slicing across her throat.

For a brief moment she thought it was all over. Then she realized the amount of blood seeping down her neck and pooling at her collarbones was nowhere near enough to have come from a major blood vessel. The cut was superficial, only slicing through skin.

She was conflicted about whether to feel relief or anguish that this wasn't over yet. But any emotion she may have felt was quickly quashed as she was hoisted from the seat by a rough hand on her throat, her arms hanging uselessly behind her. She stared into the enraged eyes of the group’s leader as she gasped ineffectually.

“You insolent bitch,” he spat at her, before he dropped her to the ground, where she stumbled and fell back into the chair. The sharp sting of a slap whipped her head to the side and she was left with the unsettling sensation of the warm blood from his palm cooling as it dried on her face. “You’ll pay for this,” he promised her before turning his back and striding from the room.

Without a word the bag was placed back over her head and she was dragged back into what she could only assume was the cell she had shared with Bellamy. There was a hard tug as the rope binding was cut from her wrists, then the sack was removed and she was thrown to the ground landing in a heap.

There was a sharp inhale followed by a shocked exclamation of “Jesus Christ,” and frantic rattling as, she assumed, Bellamy jerked desperately at the chains binding him to the wall as he tried to get to her.
Clarke just laid on the ground unmoving, not even blinking. She was in shock, still trying to process the fact that she had almost just died. In fact she probably looked dead to Bellamy.

When the clamor above her shifted from irregular clanking to sharp rhythmic jerks punctuated by pained grunts, Clarke finally snapped out of it, afraid he was going to break his wrists.

She struggled clumsily into a sitting position and took in the wild look in his eyes as well as the deep red smears above and below his cuffs. “I’m fine,” she whispered hoarsely trying to reassure him. He just stared at her as if she had suddenly sprouted a second head.

She balled up the end of one of her long flowing sleeves and pressed it firmly to the gash in her neck, doing her best to staunch the bleeding.

“Clarke let me help you,” he pleaded with her, reaching toward her as much as he could.

Clarke ducked her head, avoiding his gaze. She retreated back into the corner that she had occupied earlier, curling into herself and doing her best to block the stream of tears slowly meandering down her cheeks from his view. She obviously wasn’t fine, but she’d be damned if she let anyone see.

Bellamy continued to call out to her, urging her to at least let him take a look at the wound. She tuned out his voice, tuned out everything and stared blankly at the wall.

She tried to formulate a plan but continuously came up empty. Her only goal was to get Bellamy home. She’d long since given up any hope of ever making it back herself. At this point death would have been a mercy, a release. Her panic when she’d felt the sting of that blade hadn’t been for herself, but for Bellamy. If what the leader had said could be believed, if she were killed they probably wouldn’t keep him alive either. Their fates seemed hopelessly intertwined.

Which meant that she’d have to submit to these monsters’ will. She couldn’t risk pissing them off again. Not when Bellamy’s life was still at stake.

Her stomach rolled nauseatingly at the thought.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Apologies for taking so long to post. I’m a professional dancer and Nutcracker season is a bitch. I’ve also recently gone back to school which is taking up a significant portion of my time.

As always comments and kudos are very much appreciated, and also helpful at reminding me that it's been a long time since my last post ;)
Clarke was isolating herself and Bellamy knew it. She barely ate. Though their captors had surprisingly been bringing them food regularly, she would at most nibble on a piece of bread (and struggle with even keeping that small amount down) before bringing the rest of the tray to him.

He wanted to yell at her, rage at her, hell even beg her to have more, to keep her strength up, to not give up. Instead he just silently watched time after time as she retreated back into the far corner of their cell, alone.

In a small mercy, the men hadn’t returned for Clarke since that first time that she had come back bleeding and in shock. Bellamy mused that they were probably afraid that she’d provoke them into killing their hostage. Instead they’d come for him.

What he could only assume was every day, they’d come into the cell, put a gun to Clarke’s head, and tell him they’d shoot her if he didn’t cooperate. Considering they’d nearly slit her throat, he believed them.

Next he’d be dragged roughly with a bag over his head to another barren room, tossed unceremoniously into a hard chair, and restrained by his arms and legs.

Two of the men were always the same. The rest varied, most of them young – new recruits. They’d been using him for interrogation training. They didn’t give a damn about his answers, hell most of the time they didn’t even ask any questions. All they cared about was making sure that the next generation knew how to torture.

So far, in the six times that he’d ended up in this room, their favorite method seemed to be waterboarding. As they brought out the cloth and bucket, it appeared this time would be no different. As they pulled his head back by the hair and placed the mildew scented rag over his mouth and nose, Bellamy closed his eyes and took a deep breath, knowing that he wouldn’t get another for quite a while.

He retreated back into himself, doing his best to block out what was happening to his physical body. In one of the few conversations that Clarke had had with him in the past week, she’d asked what they’d done to him. He’d assured her that it was nothing worse than what he’d gone through in SERE training. That had been an out right lie. At least in SERE training he knew that the officers in charge had ultimately wanted to keep him alive.

The first torrent of water cascaded over his face, and after the first minute or so of holding his breath, he could no longer stop himself from gasping, and then choking at the drowning sensation. He was allowed a short reprieve to suck in what little oxygen he could manage, before it started again. After the third round his head was jerked back forward, signaling that he’d have a small respite as things were explained to the recruits.

As he worked to catch his breath, he did his best to distract himself, thinking of literally anything else.

Octavia. It had to have been at least three weeks since he’d left Baghdad – probably more. The month’s furlough that Marcus had gotten him would be running out any day now, which meant that
he would be officially declared AWOL.

It also meant that it would be time for John Murphy, his lawyer back in Virginia to take action.

Bellamy had called him the moment he’d left Octavia’s room at the hospital, not caring that it was the middle of the night back in the States. He’d left him explicit instructions that if 30 days passed and he hadn’t been heard from, John was to get in touch with Octavia and tell her everything.

His sister was smart, she’d probably figure out most of it on her own. But still, she deserved to know with certainty that he hadn’t just abandoned her, and that some one really had done their best to bring Clarke home.

He’d also ensured that all of his assets be left to her should he end up being declared dead. That was still a long ways off -years in fact- but it was important to him that he knew she’d be taken care of.

It made his chest ache to think that his little sister might be getting some of the worst news of her life any day now, but it also gave him solace that she’d have solid answers.

Once again his head was jerked back. More water cutting off his airway, leaving his lungs screaming for relief. Another shove forward.

He spluttered pitifully while he tried to rearrange his scrambled thoughts.

... Octavia. He still had to focus on his goal to get back home and see her again. Unfortunately he was at a loss. He hadn’t been able to pick up any useful information on where they were being kept, which left him no closer to building a plan to escape.

But he also wasn’t kidding himself that he could just sit and game plan forever. Though Clarke seemed to be recovering from her illness, she certainly wasn’t getting physically stronger. And neither was he. His arms were still numb, despite the fact that the tight zip ties had been removed at least a week ago. That couldn’t be a good sign. Not to mention, the longer they stayed, the more opportunity it gave his captors to screw up and cause him to dry drown.

Or they could get frustrated and just kill them both.

He was caught between a rock and a hard place. There was no easy answer. But he couldn’t help the notion in his gut that trying to get out of this situation blind was a terrible idea.

Head back. No air. Head forward.

This time they removed the cloth from his face and Bellamy was left blinking blearily in the harsh light from the bare bulb in the ceiling. This was different. They hadn’t gone through near enough rounds.

Bellamy’s attention was snapped into focus by a high-pitched buzzing originating from the man standing closest to him. He was holding a cattle prod.

Bellamy’s sluggish mind was still trying to catch up with what was about to happen, when the tip of the staff was brought down on his thigh. He clenched his jaw but couldn’t stop the grunt of pain that escaped as pain shot up and down his leg.

This time he was given no reprieve. Shocks continued to rip through his legs causing his muscles to contract involuntarily as he pulled ineffectually at his restraints. Each shock was short but powerful, his nerves feeling like they were on fire to the point where he was unable to focus on
anything else.

Then all at once, his attention was snapped into crystal clear focus as the prod was brought to his chest and held there. He could literally feel the electricity racing across his wet shirt, forcing every muscle in his chest to clench and refuse to let go. His heart gave a stuttering thud, then another, then all of a sudden it was racing at an uncontrolled pace, giving no sign of slowing down.

He was vaguely conscious of the electricity being removed and the men speaking in harsh voices. But all he could focus on was the fact that no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t get a full breath in. His heart continued to race and he swore he could hear the blood rushing through his ears with every lurching, panicked beat.

He let his chin slump to his chest as a diffuse pain began to spread across his upper back and down his jaw. He continued to struggle for breath, but it was like his ribs wouldn’t expand enough to let the air in.

His restraints were removed, and he was pulled to his feet and led back down the corridor towards his cell, but he was just going through the motions as if his head were in a fog. A cold, clammy sweat was breaking out on the back of his neck, contrasting sharply with the burning heat that he felt was radiating from every capillary in his face.

When the men began to reattach his handcuffs back to their bracket in the cell, he just let them, leaning heavily against the wall and slowly sliding down it until he was sitting.

“Bellamy?”

The world tilted in confusing ways as the wall in front of him seemed to shift and get brighter. Maybe he was looking at the ceiling? He was still gasping for breath as the pressure in his chest continued to build.

“Shit.”

The crazily frantic beat of his heart was no longer confined to his chest. It felt like his whole body was vibrating at a break-neck pace. Logically, he knew the panic that was taking over him wasn’t helping, that he should be trying to calm down. But that was easier said than done when he was pretty sure he was having a heart attack.

“Bellamy you need to cough.”

He was dimly aware that there was someone speaking to him. Some one with startling blue eyes. …Clarke? He knew he should probably do what she said.

He tried, but barely managed a couple of weak wheezes.

“Come on Bellamy, you need to cough harder. As hard as you can.”

He took as deep of a breath as he was capable of and coughed as if his life depended on it – it probably did.

His heart gave two more halting jolts, then went back to its regular rhythm. All of the pressure suddenly disappeared from his chest, making it feel strangely empty. It also felt like all of the blood suddenly drained away from his head, to the point where he was actually fairly surprised that he hadn’t blacked out.

Taking the first deep breaths he’d been able to for a while, he took stock of his situation. He was
lying on his back, with his head and shoulders raised on something soft – Clarke’s lap. She had two fingers pressed firmly to his carotid and was using her other hand to hold tightly to his. Her forehead was creased with concern, and she was biting one corner of her lip worriedly.

In some far corner of his mind it clicked that this was the first time since she’d woken up that she’d willingly come anywhere near him. He fought back a derisive chuckle that it had only taken him nearly dying. This wasn’t exactly a laughing matter.

She removed her hand from his throat and began to brush his drenched hair back from his forehead with shaking fingers. “You’re okay,” she murmured to him soothingly.

He could feel her own elevated pulse where his cheek rested against her abdomen. She had been scared. Now the adrenaline was wearing off for both of them.

Bellamy tried for a small smile. “I guess you picked up some useful stuff from your mom, huh?” She’d been quick on her feet in a crisis and had known exactly what to do. He wished he could say the same for himself if the situation had been reversed.

Clarke’s shoulders tensed and she began to pull her hand away as she made to stand up. Bellamy cursed inwardly, wanting her to stay with him. He knew he was being selfish but he had to admit that he was still freaked out and he needed human contact right now. “Stay,” he pleaded with her softly as he squeezed the hand still holding one of his.

She looked conflicted for a moment, but eventually settled back to the ground. “A friend of mine growing up, Harper, had a heart condition. I had to help her through an episode a few times,” she explained quietly.

Bellamy sighed. He knew he shouldn’t have brought up her mom. It had just made logical sense to him that that’s where her knowledge would have come from. He took the hint to steer the conversation in a safer direction. “I think I remember Harper. Pretty… wore her hair in pigtails a lot.”

Clarke let a surprise snort of laughter escape. “Yeah… in the sixth grade.”

Bellamy smiled back, glad to see even the smallest spark of happiness in her. At this point Clarke had been imprisoned for nearly two months by his count. He was under no illusion that if they managed to escape, she would magically be alright psychologically. But seeing even a brief glimmer of joy in her expression gave him hope.

Clarke began to shift under him uncomfortably. Bellamy prepared to transfer his weight, thinking he had caused her legs to fall asleep, when suddenly she broke the silence.

“I should tell you what happened with my parents.”

Bellamy looked into her eyes, trying to read what was going on in her mind to make her bring this up. “You don’t need to.”

Clarke shook her head angrily. “No. You deserve to know what got us into this mess. Not that it will probably help you think any better of me. You always saw me for the spoiled little princess that I was.”

“Clarke-“ Bellamy’s protest was barely audible.

She sniffed and pulled her hand away from his hair to wipe harshly at the single tear that had
managed to leak from her eye. “My mom was in a car accident three years ago. It was bad. She injured her back pretty severely, making everything, even just standing for more than 10 minutes at a time, extremely painful. She recovered remarkably quickly and went back to work within a couple of months. I was off at college and living in my own wonderful little fantasy world so I didn’t notice anything was off. I was completely blind to the signs.” She paused there to take a deep quavering breath.

“I came home for Christmas break that year expecting everything to be normal. No one had said anything to me that would cause me to suspect differently. What I found instead was that the perfect family life I had been so used to, was torn to shreds. My parents were barely speaking to each other. My dad spent as much time as possible away from the house, and my mom was just so… out of it. I had no idea what had happened. The house was just so quiet and nobody was talking to me. One day I needed to get away, so I went over to visit Octavia. While I was there, Marcus pulled me aside and did his best to explain that my mom was hooked on prescription painkillers and my dad was in the process of filing for a divorce. I was blindsided.”

Bellamy blinked, a little shocked himself. The Griffins had always seemed like the picture perfect family living the American dream.

“Well, I was lead to believe that my dad was divorcing her due to the fact that he had just been re-elected, and having an addict for a wife would look bad to his constituents. It infuriated me. Addiction is an illness and you don’t just leave some one when they get sick. I hated my dad for breaking up our family. I didn’t speak to him for a year and a half. Then one day I was visiting my mom at work and talking to one of her coworkers about which med schools I’d applied to. Offhand, he mentioned how great it was to see my mom back on her feet and how in the end it was a good thing that the hospital’s disciplinary board had decided to give her another chance.

“See - it turns out that the reason for my parent’s divorce wasn’t just the drugs. It was the fact that my mom had been stealing drugs from the hospital. And if that wasn’t enough, she ended up getting caught because she went into a surgery so high that her hands were shaking, and punctured a patient’s aorta. He died on the table.”

He could feel Clarke literally vibrating beneath him with suppressed rage. He didn’t know what to say. Everything she was saying just didn’t compute with what he had known about the family that lived next door.

“She had fucking killed someone. People can say that it wasn’t her, it was the drugs all that they want, but that’s bull. Drugs don’t erase responsibility. She made her choices. And beyond that, she lied to me. She let me blame everything on my father and ruin our relationship, when everything was her fault all along.”

It sounded like it was a lot more complicated than that, but Bellamy really wasn’t one to judge. His own home life wasn’t exactly ideal either.

“Things at home were just so suffocating. My relationship with both of my parents is strained beyond repair. And then after everything, I found out that Marcus and my mom are getting married… and for some reason it just made everything so much worse. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t have anything against him and I get how it happened. Marcus took on my mom as one of his ‘projects’ and got her into rehab.”

Bellamy flinched slightly at the implication, but she wasn’t wrong. Kane had a penchant for taking on seemingly hopeless cases like him and his sister. Clarke didn’t appear to notice the unstated meaning behind what she had just said and continued.
“It just felt like she was shutting the door on our family for good, and I couldn’t take it. So I stormed off like a spoiled teenager and I dragged your sister along with me. And I’m so, so sorry Bellamy. I never meant for any of this to happen.”

Bellamy shifted his arms so that he could reach up and cup her cheek in his hand. Of course she hadn’t. There was no way that she possibly could have predicted that any of this would have happened. “Shh. None of this is your fault Clarke. And I’m going to keep telling you that until one day you believe it.”

She stared into his eyes searchingly, but didn’t seem to find what she was looking for and turned away. He could feel her breath begin to come quicker and her body begin to shake as a panic attack set in.

Afraid that she was going to go back to shutting him out and completely isolating herself if he didn’t back off, he made himself sit up and move away slightly to lean against the wall beside her. He didn’t want to push her too far too soon, but he kept holding her hand tightly as a silent reminder that he was there with her.

He sat quietly and tried to come up with something that might distract her. He ended up going back years in his mind, trying to come up with a reminder of a happier time. At one particular memory from their childhood he couldn’t stop a low laugh from bursting through his chapped lips.

Clarke gave him a weird look, not understanding what he could possibly find funny about their situation.

Bellamy bit the inside of his cheek and studied their entwined hands before turning to catch her gaze. “Remember that time O called me in the middle of the night because your little attempt at going full vigilante hadn’t gone the way that you two planned?”

Clarke flushed. “We were 12.”

Bellamy chuckled. “I feel like 12 is old enough to know better. What was that kid’s name again? The weird, skinny one you two were trying to defend.”

Clarke relaxed back slightly, becoming sidetracked by the memory. “Jasper. He was getting bullied at school.”

Bellamy nodded. “So the two of you decided to go toilet paper the biggest, meanest bully’s house.”

Clarke smiled slightly at the memory. “We left his parents a letter too, detailing what a little shit their son was.”

“Only the two of you weren’t expecting his parents to drive up while you were still outside, so you dropped everything and ran.”

Clarke sighed, leaning her head back against the wall. “Octavia twisted her ankle running through the ravine behind their house. She didn’t want to call you, but she couldn’t walk. I felt so bad for getting her into trouble—”

“Clarke, stop.” Bellamy interrupted her. She rolled the back of her head against the wall to meet his gaze and he gave her a wry smile. “I know it wasn’t your plan. That hair-brained scheme had Octavia’s name written all over it. Even though you insisted on taking the blame, I always knew it wasn’t your fault.”
A small blush colored Clarke’s cheeks as she rushed to stammer out an explanation. “Octavia was scared. She was afraid if she got into trouble, Marcus wouldn’t want her anymore and he’d kick her out. Looking back now I realize how ridiculous that was. Marcus always loved the two of you unconditionally. There isn’t a single thing either one of you could have done to change that.”

Bellamy felt his gut clench. She obviously didn’t know Marcus Kane as well as she thought she did. Someone who loved their adopted son unconditionally wouldn’t have sent him off into enemy territory with no plan and nearly no hope for escape, would he?

Trying to save face and not take a step back from the progress they’d made with trusting each other by contradicting her, he elected to change the subject.

“Thank you, Clarke,” he whispered to her quietly, giving her hand a firm squeeze. “I didn’t say it before, but I’m saying it now. What you did for me today and everything that you did to get Octavia home… You’re incredible. I want you to know that.”

She didn’t respond to his comment, but the corner of her lips twitched in what could almost be considered a smile. At least she hadn’t rushed to deny any form of praise this time.

He’d take that as a small victory.

Chapter End Notes

As always, comments and kudos give me motivation. Therefore, more comments and kudos will probably make me write faster :)
The street had the slightest haze to it, causing the colors to be just far enough off to be noticeable. It was almost like watching an old film. He spun in a slow circle, trying to orient himself to where he was.

The houses on either side of the street were small, old, and in need of repair. There was something familiar about the neighborhood that Bellamy couldn’t quite put his finger on. One house in particular drew his eye, its clapboard exterior weathered and greying. There was a small swing on the front porch that peeked something on the edge of his memory, just barely beyond his grasp.

“Bell,” at the sound of his name he turned around once more, to find Octavia standing in the middle of the street, staring at him expectantly. She looked positively radiant, a long white dress hugging her body, with intricate lace trailing out behind her.

Bellamy stared at her completely confused. What was she doing here? Where had she come from?

Octavia cocked an eyebrow at him and gave him a playful smile. “Why aren’t you dressed yet? You’re going to be late.”

Looking down at himself, he saw that he was wearing his fatigues, and they were filthy – caked in sand, dust, and worse. “Late?” he asked her, not really sure exactly where it was that he was expected to be.

Octavia gave him an exasperated sigh, throwing her hands up in the air, like she had so many times when she was a child. “To my wedding, you oaf.”

Something about that wasn’t sitting right with Bellamy. “Why didn’t I know that it was today?”

Octavia’s face instantly went back to one of her signature mischievous smiles. “Because Link and I wanted to surprise you. Now hurry up. You still have to pick up Clarke before you come.”

At the mention of her name, Bellamy became aware of the blonde, standing just on the edge of his peripheral vision. She was back to wearing the filthy cover up he had found her in, and her face and body were caked in dirt and grime.

Bellamy’s gut began to twist uncomfortably. There was no question that something about this wasn’t right.

He watched as Clarke casually strode barefoot towards an old pick up truck parked at one edge of the street. It was rusted out, the paint sandblasted in many places, to the point that it was hard to tell what color it had been to begin with.

That vehicle didn’t belong on this street - Bellamy was sure of that. There was something familiar
about it… something that continued to poke and nag at his brain.

Then suddenly it hit him, just as Clarke was reaching for the handle of the passenger door.

“Clarke! Get away from there!” He screamed, while in the same motion he turned back to his sister, tossing her unceremoniously over his shoulder, and sprinting as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

The shockwave hit with enough force that he was sent sprawling into the grass, unable to keep his hold on Octavia. He looked up, desperate to see if she had survived, but there was no one there.

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Bellamy jolted awake. He was breathing as heavily as if he really had just been running for his life. He blinked slowly, taking in the familiar walls of his drab cell. He must have drifted off.

Wiping sweat from his brow, he pushed himself into a sitting position. Clarke had left a bottle of water near his arm, and he brought it to his lips gratefully.

She was pacing, or the closest to pacing that she could manage in her condition, on the other side of their small prison. Bellamy grimaced at the stiltedness of her walk, the pained hunch to her body, and how labored her breathing had become. “Clarke, you need to save your strength,” he reminded her quietly.

Clarke started at the sound of his voice, obviously not having realized that he was awake. She whirled to face him, her eyes bright with dread. “There’s got to be a way.”

Bellamy sighed. He wasn’t in the mood to rehash this argument. Ever since his electrocution induced arrhythmia, Clarke had made it her mission to plan their escape. Unfortunately they were still working with the same lack of information, and therefore any conversations that they’d had on the topic had been short lived and teeming with frustration. She seemed more agitated today than usual though, and Bellamy idly wondered why.

“Clarke…” he started, unsure how to phrase things again without causing her to lose hope. “Even if we managed to make it out of this compound, we have no idea where we are anymore. It could be miles to the nearest town. In your condition I just don’t think…”

It was at that point that he clued into the set of her jaw and the steely determination in her eyes. “No,” he stammered, scrambling to his feet.

Clarke threw up her hands. “You were literally just in the process of telling me I’m not going to make it out anyway.”

Bellamy scoffed. “This is the same shit you pulled with Octavia to get her to leave, isn’t it?”

Clarke faltered, having the decency to look slightly ashamed. “We never would have both made it out. It was the right thing to do.”

Bellamy softened slightly. “I know. And as much as it pains me to say it, I’ll forever be grateful that you did. But this isn’t the same situation. It is literally my mission to get you out of here. There’s no way in hell you’re going to convince me to leave without you.”

Clarke turned away from him, her shoulders visibly tensing. Apparently, she could no longer meet his gaze. “What if you don’t have a choice?”
Bellamy felt his spine crawl at the tone of her voice. “What do you mean?”

Clarke sighed heavily. She turned back to face him but kept her eyes firmly glued to the floor. “When they sent the ransom message, they gave my parents two weeks. If what we’ve guessed about how often they bring us food is correct, that offer expires tomorrow.”

“Clarke-” he tried to interrupt her, but she continued on as if he hadn’t spoken.

“We both know that the ransom won’t be paid. Even if my parents liquidated their assets, the US government wouldn’t allow it. We’re out of time Bellamy.”

He shook his head. “The terrorists will stall and try again. You’re still worth more to them alive than dead.”

“Maybe so, but are you? They’re not going to let the deadline pass without consequences. And I’m not going to let you stay here and die for me.”

Bellamy ground his teeth. “That isn’t your decision to make.”

“Bellamy-“

“No,” he growled. This time it was his turn to interrupt her. “I’m not leaving you to die over a hypothetical. And nothing you say is going to change my mind.” He stepped back to the wall and sunk down to his butt signaling that he was ending the conversation.

Clarke continued to stand there and stare at him, literally shaking with frustration. Her breathing became more labored until she was back to another coughing fit, making Bellamy feel like a dick.

He groaned and sat up. “Come here,” he motioned her toward him. She glared at him suspiciously for a moment, but eventually relented, moving to kneel beside him.

When she was seated on the ground, he gently took her by the shoulders and leaned her torso against his broad chest. He could feel the tension thrumming throughout her body, causing her muscles to feel as tight as bowstrings. “Try to match my breathing,” he encouraged her softly.

She stubbornly remained rigid in his embrace for a moment, but quickly gave in, allowing herself to relax back against him and do her best to follow his directions.

When she had finally calmed down, she quietly admitted to him, “I can’t be the reason that Octavia loses her brother.”

He was utterly tempted to remind her for what felt like the thousandth time, that none of this was her fault, but he was fairly confident that the sentiment would once again fall on deaf ears. Instead he elected to wordlessly pull her in tighter until her head rested comfortably between the crook of his neck and his shoulder.

This was the most intimate that she had allowed him to be with her. Her walls were slowly breaking down and permitting her to let him in. It was a feeling that he himself was just as unfamiliar with. He hadn’t let anyone this close since his mom died. Not even Kane. He’d always viewed things as him and Octavia against the world.

But he knew that in this case they needed each other. There was no way around it. If worst came to worst and they didn’t make it past the next day, at least they’d have drawn some small measure of comfort from one another.
He sat and idly traced circles on her arm with his fingertips for a moment, still unable to relax his own thoughts. There was absolutely nothing calming or tranquil about the environment they were in right now. He admired Clarke’s ability to block it all out and re-center herself, but he wondered in there was something more he could do to help. “Tell me about the place in the world where you’ve felt the most at peace… like everything was perfect and you wish you could’ve just stay in that moment forever.”

Clarke’s answer was almost instantaneous. Maybe her thoughts had been straying along the same lines. “Colorado,” she responded with a small quirk to her lips. “My dad has a cabin in Rocky Mountain National Park. We used to go a lot when I was a kid.”

Bellamy couldn’t help but be a little surprised by her answer. From a girl who had travelled the world and probably ‘found her center’ doing yoga in a rainforest canopy somewhere, he hadn’t expected an answer so close to home.

“Back then my dad was rising through the political ranks and there was so much pressure to come across as the perfect family. But out in the mountains all of that disappeared. I was allowed to just be me. My parents probably gave me more freedom than they should have, and I was allowed to explore and go on hikes by myself. There’s something about how nature cuts you off from the outside world that just melts the stress away. Sometimes I’d just wander off, find a stump, and sit there and draw for hours.”

Bellamy did his best to picture it in his head. He’d never been to the Rockies, but he did his best, trying to imagine the birds singing, the light slanting through the trees, the smell of the pine needles…

“What about you? Where’s your happy place?” She turned her head slightly to look at him.

Bellamy actually had to stop and think for a moment. He hadn’t lived the same privileged childhood that Clarke had. Money had been tight, and he’d never felt comfortable accepting handouts from Kane. After that he’d joined the military, and though it had finally given him the opportunity to travel, those trips weren’t exactly filled with happy memories.

After racking his brain for a few moments, he finally came up with something, and allowed himself to smile fondly at the recollection. “Once when we were pretty little, mom had the day off and took us on a road trip. She just drove to the coast and headed south. Eventually we came across this little beach. There was no one else there, it wasn’t the type of beach that tourists flock to. Just a little stretch of sand separated from the highway by a stand of trees. I remember just sitting there and watching. The water in the sound was so calm. We didn’t stay very long. Octavia was afraid she’d get eaten by an alligator. She couldn’t have been much more than 3,” He added with a small smirk. “But I’d give anything to be back there right now.”

The two of them sat in companionable silence for a bit - Bellamy continuing to trace nonsensical patterns on her arm, while she worried the edge of the pocket on his fatigues between her fingertips.

“I’m going to take you back to the mountains someday,” He murmured into her hair.

Clarke pulled away, her eyebrows creasing. “Don’t-“

Bellamy silenced her with a look. “I will.”

The door opened with a creak. With a sigh, Bellamy gently pushed Clarke away from him in order to make sure that their captors didn’t think that she was trying to get in the way. Resignedly, he got
to his feet, keeping his eyes on Clarke the whole time. He knew that they were coming for him, and he wanted to reassure her that he would be alright.

Which is why it came as a shock when the cold muzzle of the gun was pressed into his forehead instead of hers. Bellamy’s eyes snapped to the relentless cold stare of the man in front of him, trying to prize out what was going on. Was Clarke right? Was this his execution?

Instinctively his hands reached toward where she had just been, aiming to give her one last reassuring hand squeeze. When his fingertips didn’t so much as brush her abaya, he whipped his head to see where she had gone.

Two men had grabbed her while he was distracted, and were currently wrestling her towards the door. She was doing her best to fight back, but was outmatched by a long shot. The man with the gun barked at Bellamy not to move, but he ignored him, trying to get to her before he ran out of chain. “What’s going on? Where are you taking her?” he demanded.

The butt of the pistol slammed into the side of his skull and he was left reeling, falling to his knees. His thoughts scattered once more, but he was able to make out the reply.

“It’s taking too long. The infidels need to be taught that we are not playing games,” the final man sneered at him, before following his colleagues and slamming the door behind him.

Bellamy gagged on a wave of nausea, his hand flying to the side of his head. He took a few deep breaths through his nose, fighting back the bile rising in his throat. He hadn’t expected this. They’d been leaving Clarke alone. He had grown complacent in the comfort that she wasn’t actively being harmed.

Bellamy did his best to blink the blurriness from the edges of his vision, as he scanned the room, trying to come up with anything that would help him form a plan. He needed to get to her. He couldn’t sit back and let this happen.

There was nothing. Just the mostly empty water bottle he’d discarded and the now empty plastic food tray sitting just out of his reach.

He pulled futilely at the chain securing his wrists to the wall. He’d tried this before, the last time they’d taken Clarke. It’d done nothing but bloody his wrists then. It was doing the same now.

He could vaguely hear muffled voices coming from down the hall- more intonations than actual words. Clarke’s voice stood out as being high pitched, terrified.

He gave one more hard pull at the cuffs and hissed as he felt his chafed skin give. He wondered idly about trying to slip the restraints off rather then pulling them free. Hunkering down against the pain, he tried different combinations of twisting and pulling the metal toward his fingers, but none of it worked. The cuffs were tight to his skin, and no matter what he did, his bones were not going to magically shift to fit through.

He’d read once about someone breaking their own thumb to get out of handcuffs, but he banished the thought immediately. Having broken hands would make him absolutely useless in a fight, and there was definitely no way that they would be getting out of this peacefully.

“No!” This time Clarke’s desperate scream was actually decipherable, and it caused his heart to give a lurching thud.

Fighting to remain as calm as he could, he examined the cuffs, trying to come up with a new plan. The bracket holding them to the wall was secured by a couple of screws. Flexing his wrist back
awkwardly, he managed to somewhat wedge part of the curved metal into the divot on the screw head. Now the problem was leverage. His arms only had so much range of motion.

He’d succeeded in making only about half a rotation, when the angle forced the lesion on his wrist wider. He felt his head spin dangerously, as a fresh wave of warm blood leaked toward his elbow. Falling back on his ass, he promised himself that he was only taking a short break to catch his breath and regroup. It wasn’t ideal. But at the moment this was the best option he’d come up with. He could push through it. Maybe. Or maybe he’d just make himself pass out from blood loss and what good would he be then?

“Stop… please,” Clarke’s pleas were like knives stabbing him in the gut. He’d thought she was safe, relatively speaking. He could handle whatever torture they piled upon him, but hearing Clarke go through it was infinitely worse. Why hadn’t he tried harder to find a way to get them out? Hell, how had he let things spiral down into being this dismal in the first place?

If only he’d managed to keep some of the supplies that he’d had with him before he was captured. The knife… the goddamn sat-phone… even the steel pin.

Bellamy’s gut lurched, gorge rising. He was still wearing his fatigue pants. Hastily, he turned down the edge of his waistband, and sure enough, the bare incandescent light of the room glinted off of the tiniest speck of metal.

He threw up.

He’d had a way to get out of the fucking cuffs this whole time and he’d forgotten about it. He didn’t care if he’d had a head injury. There was no excuse.

With shaking hands he tried to pull the small pin out, but was unsuccessful. Between the vertigo, the tremors, and the fact that the main sensation coming from his arms was still pins and needles, he couldn’t do it by himself. Sourly, he reminded himself that even if he did manage to get it out, he didn’t trust himself not to drop it and have it roll into a crack in the floor to be lost forever.

He’d have to wait for Clarke to come back… that was assuming that they ever brought her back.

He made a silent pledge to himself that he was never letting them take her out of his sight again. They’d have to go through his dead body.

Despondently, he settled back against the wall with his head in his hands. He couldn’t do anything now; he was going to have to wait.

Clarke’s cries continued to echo off the walls. With each new sound he hated himself more and more. He could have prevented this. He could have strategized with her. Anything would have been better than just dismissing any escape plans she’d brought up as hopeless.

This was his fault.

He felt salty tears trace their way down his cheeks. He didn’t have the energy to wipe them away.

Eventually the sounds coming from down the hall grew silent. Bellamy’s chest felt hollow as he waited to learn just how badly Clarke had been brutalized.

He didn’t have to wait long as the door creaked open once more. He lifted his head and watched as Clarke stumbled through on her own two feet, before the door was shut again.

Bellamy sat silently, ashamed. He wanted to say something, anything, but couldn’t bring himself
to do more than just watch her.

Without looking at him, Clarke crossed the room in short strides. She had a slight limp, and her body was more hunched than it had been in a while, as she clutched at her ribs and low belly. Other than that, Bellamy couldn’t pick out anything obvious that would indicate what had been done to her. He felt like he was holding his breath as he waited for the other shoe to drop.

Without a word, Clarke went back to that damn far corner out of his reach, the corner she hadn’t occupied once in the last week as they grew closer to one another. She kept her back turned to him as she sunk down, curling into herself.

“Clarke?” he called out to her, concern dripping from his voice.

Her shoulders began to shake with silent sobs, but she gave no other indication that she had heard him.

He waited, wanting to give her time to process. But as seconds turned into minutes, and those stretched even longer, he had to talk to her. Watching her like this was shattering whatever tiny piece of his heart was still whole.

“Clarke please… don’t shut me out again.”

Still nothing.

He tried a few more tactics that had worked to get her talking before: talking about Octavia, even asking if she would help bandage his wrists. Nothing got a reaction from her.

She was really starting to scare him.

Bumping his head back against the wall in frustration, and regretting it as a fresh wave of nausea rolled through his stomach, he resolved to just keep talking to her. Hopefully he’d stumble across something that would at least get her to look at him.

It turned out that the first thing that he said was the only thing that he needed.

“We’re getting out of here tonight.”

She lifted her head and turned to meet his gaze.

Chapter End Notes

TW: Non graphic implied rape

This chapter had content that was more on the triggering side, but it's super vague. My apologies if it offended any readers. I added a tag to indicate that there is triggering content in the work, but didn't want to spoil anything by detailing it in a note at the beginning of the chapter. That said, if you're concerned, things aren't going to get graphic on that front. It was an important plot point that I debated leaving out, but it's too important to Clarke's future interactions with everyone. Hopefully you'll still be willing to read.

Next chapter Clarke and Bellamy will be making their big move!
Please let me know if you're enjoying this work by leaving comments or kudos :)}
“We’re getting out of here tonight.”

Clarke stared at him, trying to assess whether he was telling the truth or simply trying to get a reaction out of her. She studied his face. He looked like hell – in far worse shape than he’d been in before she’d been taken. His skin was ashen, and his unruly curls were slicked with sweat to his forehead. His eyes were bright, almost feverish, but also set with determination.

He was serious.

Clarke shifted slightly, trying to get a better read on the situation. What had changed? An hour ago he had been convinced that they didn’t have any chance of escaping. She highly doubted that he’d come up with any new information to help him form a plan in her absence. Which could only mean that he’d learned something else about their situation that was forcing him to act. Surely he couldn’t know…

Don’t go there.

She inhaled sharply and shook her head, determined to distract herself from thinking about what she had just gone through. “How?”

Bellamy didn’t answer her right away. She studied him closer, taking in the set of his jaw, the tears gathered in the corners of his eyes, the slight trembling of his shoulders. What the hell? “Bellamy, wha-“

“I-“ Bellamy cut himself off sharply, shaking his head angrily. He took a slow, deliberate breath, obviously collecting himself. “I have a way out of the cuffs, but I need your help.”

Cautiously, she unfurled herself from the ball that she’d curled into in the corner. Slowly, painfully, she pulled herself to her feet, then hovered there unsure. Nothing that had happened was his fault, but she still didn’t want to go near him. She had a nigging, irrational fear that he’d be able to sense what she’d gone through, if he hadn’t figured it out already.

She felt dirty. More so now than before, which was ridiculous considering how caked in filth they both were. But she couldn’t bear the thought of him thinking that she was tainted in some way.

Bellamy gestured for her to come towards him, and with a sigh she took a couple of small steps in his direction, still keeping her distance.

Bellamy gave her a weary look, but didn’t comment on her reluctance. “There’s a small metal pin in my waistband by my right hip. I need you to take it out.”

Clarke’s spine crawled. It was such an odd request. He was pulling at the top of his pants, probably trying to make it easier for her to reach, but it caused her to flash to a different memory.
She felt bile rise in the back of her throat.

_This was Bellamy_, she reminded herself. He wasn’t going to hurt her. Taking a deep shuddering breath, she hesitated for only a moment with her trembling hand extended toward him, before shaking her mind back to the present and setting to work.

There was indeed a tiny bit of metal poking through the fabric. She did her best to maneuver it around, trying to find a way to pull it out. Bellamy’s hot breath ghosted across the back of her neck and she struggled to keep her shoulders from tensing.

Finally, she managed to pry it free. She was left with a thin but sturdy steel pin, only about an inch long, in the palm of her hand. She raised an eyebrow at him questioningly, unsure how this insignificant object was going to help them, unless it had been pulled from a grenade that he’d somehow failed to mention.

Bellamy extended both wrists toward her with his palms facing up. “You need to insert the shim where the teeth slide into the cuff.”

Clarke looked down at his wrists and blinked hard, realizing for the first time just how badly he was bleeding. How had she missed that? “Holy shit, Bellamy-“

He shook his head firmly. “Focus Clarke. You can worry about me later.”

She did as she was told, inserting the pin into his left cuff. When it was wedged in, he continued. “Now keep pushing on the shim while you tighten the cuff. It should release.”

Clarke looked at him sharply. “No way. Bellamy you’re already bleeding pretty badly. That’s just going to make the cuts deeper. You could bleed out.”

“I’ll be fine,” Bellamy’s voice was firm, leaving no room for argument. “You need to do this Clarke.”

She didn’t want to hurt him, but she knew she didn’t have a choice. Yes, the terrorists had gotten their message across by what they had just done, but she didn’t trust that they wouldn’t still kill Bellamy the next day. Or the day after. The time for stalling was over.

With a wince, she dug the bracket further into his already tormented flesh, and watched as a fresh rivulet of blood seeped up, then quickly rolled toward the floor. Bellamy was already pulling his hand free before she even realized that it had worked. She reached for it quickly, wanting to stem the bleeding, but he shook his head, gesturing to his remaining wrist. “If they come back, I’m going to need both hands. We’ve only got one shot.”

Clarke pursed her lips, but made quick work of the other side of the restraints. As soon as the echo of the handcuffs hitting the floor rattled, she was grabbing both of his wrists, applying firm pressure, and bringing them higher than the level of his heart.

Bellamy tried for an amused smile, but fell slightly short, his skin growing even more pallid. “Honestly Clarke, its not as bad as you think. I’ve always been a bleeder.”

Clarke was incredibly skeptical, but after holding his wrists for at least five minutes – long enough that her anxiety was ready to hurl her across the room – she released one hand to take a closer peek.

He was right. His wrist was incredibly raw, and it would certainly leave a hell of a scar, but it didn’t look like he’d damaged any major blood vessels. In fact, the bleeding had nearly stopped.
Which didn’t explain why he looked like he was about thirty seconds away from keeling over.

She pressed firmly on his shoulders, forcing him back until he was sitting propped up against the wall once again. Squatting in front of him, she took his face in her hands, turning it from side to side. She spotted a purpling bruise, just below his hairline. “What happened?”

Bellamy grimaced, in obvious pain from the way she was moving his head. “I got pistol whipped again. I’ll be fine.”

Clarke blocked the light from one of his eyes with her hand, then quickly moved it away, and watched as his pupil was slow to react. She cursed inwardly, feeling her chest constrict. This was not a good start to an escape attempt.

“You’re not fine,” she chided him. “Now sit here and don’t move.”

In an almost robotic state, she tore strips from the hem of her abaya and tightly bandaged his wrists. Then she retrieved the open handcuffs from the floor. Examining the heavy wall bracket that they were attached to, she made note of the fact that he had apparently already tried loosening one of the screws.

She plopped down cross-legged and began working on it herself.

“What are you doing?” Bellamy asked. She noted that he had actually followed her directions and hadn’t moved, though he was following her with his eyes.

She shrugged. “I highly doubt we’re going to get out of here using our bare hands and sheer force of will. And we’re kind of short on options for weapons.” She indicated the 6 feet of chain still attached to the wall pointedly.

If she were being honest, she was also making busy work. She didn’t want to think, didn’t want to have to reflect on what she’d just been through. In all likelihood, she wouldn’t make it through the next few hours. There was no point in torturing herself until then.

Her shoulders began to shake as forcing herself not to think about it just caused her to think about it even more. She did her best to hide the quiet hitches in her breath caused by her sobs from Bellamy, but was obviously doing a poor job of it.

“Clarke,” he whispered to her softly. He gingerly reached towards her, his fingertips barely brushing the center of her back. She nearly jumped out of her skin at the unexpected touch. “What did they-“

“Don’t,” she cut him off harshly. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Finishing her work on the last screw, she tossed the now freed chain into his lap, then quickly turned her back, striding away before he could see the tear tracks.

When she reached the door, she gave it an experimental tug, hoping that they’d have just one shred of luck. She’d never bothered to check if the terrorists had kept it locked before this point. She’d had no reason to. She would have never left Bellamy behind. After the third hard tug, she conceded that this wasn’t a break that they would catch tonight.

Through the door she heard raucous laughter. She froze – it was a sound that she now recognized-it would haunt her dreams. The voices were coming closer, probably seeking a round two. She did her best not to recoil, instead sinking back towards the door’s hinges, hoping that she might briefly hide and gain the element of surprise.
In her distracted state, she hadn’t noticed that Bellamy had joined her - his back pressed to the wall on the opposite side of the door, his stance poised and ready for a fight.

She looked into his deep brown eyes, only feet away. If this were to be the end, there was so much that she wanted to say. She wanted to thank him for risking everything, for never failing to be her rock, even when she’d done everything in her power to push him away. She wanted to assure him that even though she probably wouldn’t make it out of here, he needed to keep going and make it out himself.

She was stopped from expressing any of this by the door flying open. It was the same three men that had taken her earlier. Before any of them had the chance to compute what they were walking into, Bellamy had grabbed the head and shoulders of the first man and given a sharp wrench. The horrible crunch of his spine snapping would be seared into Clarke’s brain for the rest of her life. He fell limply to the floor.

The two remaining men shouted in outrage and both went after Bellamy, completely ignoring her existence. At his prime, Bellamy might have been able to hold them off, but in his weakened state, they managed to back him into a corner quickly, slashing at him brutally with knives until he was forced to his knees.

Clarke couldn’t just stand by and watch. Without thinking, she kicked the closest man in the side of the knee with everything she had, causing it to buckle. He lunged at her, knocking her to the ground. She felt her already damaged ribs give under the pressure and found herself gasping for air. Light glinted off the tip of a long knife, as the man raised it high above his head, straddling her hips, and pinning her to the concrete below.

She flailed her arms desperately, trying to find anything that might come to her aid. Fingers grasped around a plastic edge and she snapped what she was holding forward just in the nick of time. She watched as the blade stabbed through the center of the meal tray in her hands. He was so strong, she could do little more than push his momentum to the side, causing the blade to hit the floor harmlessly.

Just as the man reared back to try to hit her again, the length of chain appeared around his throat and his weight was rolled off of her.

Clarke scrambled back on her hands and feet, ignoring the pain that flared through her side. Bellamy was grappling on the floor with her attacker. She could tell that his strength was waning.

She reached beside her and retrieved the discarded knife. Not bothering to waste time by pulling it free from the tray, she slammed it into the terrorist’s side. He continued to struggle briefly, but quickly faded, his motions slowing into stillness. Bellamy continued to hold the chain taut across his neck for a few more minutes just to be sure.

Clarke surveyed the room, holding her side. The third man lay in the corner where she had last seen Bellamy, the handle of a knife protruding from his sternum.

Bellamy gingerly rose to his feet and glanced down the hall, assessing whether there was any more imminent danger headed their way. Apparently satisfied, he trotted back into the room and started to sort through what the dead men had that they could use.

Finding the first man’s handgun, he checked the clip to make sure that it was loaded. He held it up, aiming toward the open door, looking down the sight. Clarke watched his arm shake violently as he did his best to concentrate. She stayed silent as he swore a blue streak.
“Have you ever fired a gun?” he asked her through gritted teeth.

She doubted that her aim would be any better than his under their current circumstances, but she also wanted to reassure him. “My dad is a politician from Virginia with a hunting cabin in the Rockies,” she reminded him with a small smirk.

He nodded and handed her the heavy firearm. She accepted it with the hand she wasn’t currently using to stabilize her chest. She pulled herself back to the wall and used it to leverage herself into more of a seated position with a heavy wince.

Clarke inspected Bellamy from where she was sitting, trying to assess any further injuries he’d received while he continued to pick over the bodies. He had a split lip, and there was a deep cut oozing blood over one of his cheekbones, but other than that he looked none the worse for wear, despite having just taken on three men. It was a small miracle.

Bellamy examined the feet of each of the terrorists and began unlacing the boots of the one closest to his size. “They’re all too big for you,” he lamented as he began shoving his feet into his new footwear. He then pried out one of the knives and began cleaning it off on the dead man’s clothes before hiding it securely near his ankle.

Clarke rolled her eyes at him. “I’ll never be able to keep up with you anyway.”

Bellamy silenced her with a look as he made his way over to retrieve the second knife. He also stole the first man’s jacket, apparently in an attempt to better blend in.

When he appeared to be satisfied by his haul, he came back to where she was sitting. Grasping her firmly by the arm still holding the gun, he hauled her to her feet.

She couldn’t hold back the keening cry that escaped her lips as her ribs shifted under the change in pressure.

“Shit,” he muttered, just managing to get his shoulders under her extended arm before she fell.

She held the collar of his jacket in a white knuckled grip as he shifted her to face him. His fingers deftly palpated her chest. She let out a small whimper when she felt the crepitus as her bones shifted once again.

Bellamy pursed his lips, and began to squat down as if getting ready to carry her.

“No,” Clarke’s voice was firm. She feebly pushed at his shoulder, and to her surprise he stepped back.

“Clarke I’m not leaving this room without you,” he informed her.

Bracing a hand against the wall, she pulled herself up as tall as she could. Taking as deep of a breath as she could manage, she gave him a tight nod. She knew she wasn’t going to change his mind. Not yet at least. “I can do this,” she assured him.

Bellamy looked unconvinced, but relented nonetheless. “Stay close,” he ordered her, pulling her in so tightly behind him that she was practically leaning on his back. “Only fire the gun if absolutely necessary. We don’t want to draw attention and we have a limited number of bullets.”

Clarke nodded to show that she understood. They began their slow trek down the hallway, Bellamy doing his best to make himself big in front of her, like a human shield. Clarke hated how slow he had to move because of her. She was doing her best to keep up, but constantly had to pause
to catch her breath. He never allowed himself to move more than 3 feet away from her. If they kept this pace up, it might take them all day just to leave the building.

The lower floor of the complex was virtually deserted. They passed several rooms with closed doors and no light creeping out from underneath. Clarke shuddered involuntarily as she wondered which of these spaces had served as their torture chambers.

When they made it to a set of cement stairs, Bellamy reached back with his free hand, stilling her in her tracks. He nodded his head toward the top of the stairwell and she watched as a dark shadow made its way across. There was someone up there.

He gave her a meaningful look, obviously trying to communicate with her that she needed to stay there while he went up. She wanted to retort at him that he was being stupid, considering she was the one holding the gun. Instead she just nodded at him, understanding that the need for silence was paramount.

As he made his way up the steps, she crept up a few stairs as well, wanting to be ready to jump in at the first sign of trouble. Bellamy disappeared around the corner above, and her heart gave a jolt as adrenaline once again overwhelmed her system.

A strangled cry rang out, then abruptly cut off. Clarke made it up two more stairs before Bellamy’s head reappeared. He rolled his eyes at the fact that she hadn’t followed his unspoken order, but motioned her the rest of the way up.

When she made it to him, she was met with the sight of the lower level guard’s body sprawled on the floor. Bellamy leaned in close and whispered in her ear, “It looks like there’s an exit just down that hall.” He gestured to their right. He squatted down to retrieve the AK-47 still strapped to the dead guard’s body.

As he was still pulling on the strap, a shout echoed from the opposite hallway. Clarke’s head snapped towards the noise, where she found at least five heavily armed men barreling towards them.

“Fuck,” Bellamy grunted, dropping his prize and reaching for her hand instead. He pulled her towards the awaiting exit, this time unable to go slow. Clarke allowed him to give her momentum, her feet moving at a rapid rhythmic pace, just trying to keep up. She didn’t dare look behind them, focusing all of her concentration on just moving forward. A shot rang out, burying itself in the plaster wall just above Bellamy’s head. That gave her legs the incentive to move faster.

Bellamy propelled them through an open doorway, and cool evening air raced across her sweat drenched skin. Bellamy didn’t slow down, just continued to drag her towards a high chain-link fence. His running footsteps were almost silent as he stealthily made his way across the sand. The guards at the gate didn’t even turn around as they approached, simply continuing to chat quietly as they lounged at their posts.

Without a word, Bellamy took the handgun from her grasp, and continued forward, towards their destination. The men started to turn, hearing the shouts coming from their comrades who were just now leaving the facility.

Standing directly behind the first guard, Bellamy put a shot into the back of his head before he could even comprehend what was about to happen. Without pause, the SEAL turned and fired at the second man, hitting him right between the eyes. At such a close range, the shaking in his arms didn’t matter - his aim was true. A third bullet made quick work of the padlock holding the gate closed.
Clarke watched in awe at his brutal efficiency. She could see now that he was good at his job. Her confidence in the idea that he might actually survive this was instantly improved.

He placed the gun firmly back in her grip, then wrenched the gate open and propelled her through. Heavy gunfire crackled out from behind them. “Go!” Bellamy shouted to her, and they both set out at a breakneck pace down the dirt road before them.

Clarke could hear the stampede of heavy boots following hot on their heels. She tried to use that awareness to propel her forward, but the adrenaline could only do so much. The lack of oxygen made her light headed, and her ribs screamed in protest at every step. Her stride began to falter, but still she pushed herself to stay as close to Bellamy as possible.

Dimly, she became aware that they were in a valley nestled amongst mountainous terrain. Bullets continued to ricochet off of the hillside around them.

At a particularly close call, Clarke stumbled, going down on her hands and knees. She tried to push herself up, but instantly buckled, as pain lanced through her chest, stealing her breath.

“Bellamy!” she cried before she could stop herself. He skidded to a halt and looked back at her, panic evident in his eyes. She cursed herself. She should have just let him go.

He came back to her and hauled her back to her feet, ignoring the cries of pain she was emitting. Squatting down, he lifted her so that the majority of her weight rested on his shoulders, securing her there by placing an arm across her upper back and another behind her knees.

“Bellamy stop,” she objected feebly, barely getting enough air in to wheeze the words out. “I’ll only slow you down. You need to get yourself out.”

He ignored her protests, settling back into a steady jog.

Clarke curled in close to him, trying to prevent herself from becoming unwieldy and throwing him off balance. With her face pressed close to his jacket, she was overwhelmed with the scent of her attackers from earlier that day. Her mind began flashing back to that terrible room and what they had done. She bit her lip until she tasted copper. Now was not the time. She couldn’t afford to go back there.

She was roused from the memories as Bellamy jerked suddenly beneath her. He stuttered a step and grunted, but otherwise continued forward, his grip tightening around her. Clarke craned her neck to glance behind them. At their slowed pace, the enemy was gaining on them. If something wasn’t done, it wouldn’t be long before they were overtaken.

The gun was still firmly gripped in her right hand. She pulled her arm free from where it was pinned against Bellamy’s back. Straining painfully, she thumbed the safety and aimed towards the murderous group headed toward them.

She fired a shot. One of the men at the front went down clutching his side. She allowed herself a small grin in satisfaction.

Her next two shots went wild and her breath hitched. They couldn’t afford to waste bullets. By her count even if her aim were perfect, she still wouldn’t have enough to take all of them out.

She did her best to steady her arm – not an easy task when you’re being carried by someone who is literally running for his life - and squeezed off one more round. The shot split the air.

The rest of the group miraculously slowed down, yelling what Clarke could only guess
were obscenities after them.

When Clarke was satisfied that they were no longer being chased, she shifted to whisper into
Bellamy’s ear. “They’re falling back.”

He grunted to acknowledge that he’d heard her, but didn’t slow down.

“Bellamy, stop. I can walk.”

He ignored her statement, but did ease up by a fraction. She could feel his body straining with
fatigue, every ragged breath more labored than the last. He couldn’t keep this up. And when he
went down, completely exhausted, they’d both be screwed.

“Bell-

This time, he stopped so abruptly that she almost flew off his shoulders. Gently, he put her down
on her feet, resting his hands on her shoulders and staring deep into her eyes. “Stay right here and
don’t move. Please.”

Clarke just looked at him, confused. They were still standing in the middle of a narrow valley,
surrounded by jagged rock on both sides. The sun had set fast. When she looked back in the
direction that they’d come from, she could no longer see their assailants on their tail, but that didn’t
mean that they were far behind.

Bellamy began tenderly prying her fingers from the death grip they were still locked in around the
gun’s handle. When he had it in his own hand, he turned away and started to head further down the
path at a light jog.

“What-“ was he abandoning her? This was so unlike the Bellamy she’d come to know over the
last month.

“I’ll be right back,” he shot back over his shoulder, trying to reassure her.

She watched his figure get smaller and smaller as he disappeared into the distance. After a couple
of minutes, she began to stumble after him, her pace slow and arduous. She couldn’t just stand
there, defenseless, and wait for him return. As much as she’d begged him to leave her behind over
and over, at this moment she had to admit that she was terrified. She knew that he’d come back, but
she didn’t know how long whatever he was doing was going to take. She also didn’t know how far
behind them the terrorists were lurking. As much as she’d never planned to get this far, this little
taste of freedom had clarified things for her. She couldn’t go back. She wouldn’t let them take her
alive. But without a weapon, she didn’t have much of another option.

Up ahead, she could just start to make out shadows separating themselves from the darkness.
There were dozens of smaller shapes, crowded around one larger one, along with two figures.

“Give me the goddamn horse!” she heard Bellamy snarl in a voice she’d never heard him use
before. She quickened her pace.

Rounding a small bend in the path, she found herself surrounded by goats, all of them bleating
frantically, obviously picking up on their owner’s distress.

Bellamy stood with the gun pressed to the goat herder’s temple. The man was trembling
uncontrollably, trying to hand Bellamy his horse’s reins and mumbling in a language that Clarke
didn’t recognize.
She rushed forward. “Bellamy, what the hell are you doing? This man is innocent—”

Bellamy barely even turned toward her, “I told you to stay back.” His eyes were hard and unyielding, in an expression that Clarke didn’t recognize. She took an involuntary step back.

At the look of fright in her eyes, Bellamy softened slightly. “I won’t hurt him,” he assured her quietly, then gave her a light push further down the path. “Keep going, I’ll catch up in a minute.”

She hesitated. “But—”

“Go,” he commanded her, his tone leaving no room for argument.

She stumbled forward, turning her back on him. She had the sense that she wouldn’t like what she saw if she turned around.

Her gait was halting as she continued along the path. She may not have been the one that had been running for the majority of their escape, but the exhaustion still ran deep. She felt like she still hadn’t managed to catch a full breath since she’d been back in their cell. All at once, it seemed like the fatigue hit her system full force, and though her feet continued to stagger forward, she found herself careening toward the rock wall to her left.

Resting one arm against the rough surface, she vowed to just take a minute to recuperate before setting off once again, but the second her legs stopped moving, her eyes fluttered shut, head drooping toward her chest.

The sound of galloping hooves approached her from behind. She couldn’t even scrounge up the energy to lift her head. The noise stopped, and was followed by the soft thud of boots hitting the ground, followed by the unmistakable whoosh of fabric snapping in the air.

A hand tentatively touched her between the shoulder blades. She flinched and whipped around. Bellamy stood there, his hand still raised. He looked apologetic, the harsh set of his face from moments prior completely erased. Clarke noted that he now wore the goat herder’s complete outfit, obviously trying to throw off anyone who was still on their tail. Clarke cynically wondered what good it could possibly do. She’d still stick out like a sore thumb.

Bellamy motioned to a heavy woven blanket that now lay beside their feet. “Lie down.”

She looked at him, puzzled. They were obviously both tired, but this wasn’t the time to take a break.

Bellamy sighed heavily, running a shaking hand through his filth encrusted hair. “Please Clarke… just do it.”

She still didn’t understand, but she hesitantly did as she was told, laying down face up towards the night sky. Bellamy squatted down beside her and absently brushed a grime lock of hair back from her forehead. “I’m sorry – this is going to hurt,” he warned her. Slowly, he began rolling her up in the blanket. With every flip, her ribs screamed, and she couldn’t stop a small gasp from escaping.

She finally understood. He was camouflaging her too - making her look like a harmless thick roll of cloth. It was clever, if not insanely agonizing. He stopped when she was face down towards the ground. For a brief moment she panicked that she would suffocate if he left her in this position for too long.

Almost immediately, he snaked an arm under her thighs and another under her chest. She felt him struggle as he tried to lift her, and realized just how much his strength had faded. She finally
understood why he had done what he did. He was desperate.

He finally managed to get her off the ground. She felt herself get carried a short distance, before being lifted slightly higher and then placed back down. He had her balanced on the back of horse so that most of her weight rested on her pelvis while both her head and feet dangled toward the ground. She could tell that he’d tried to be as gentle as possible when putting her down, but she couldn’t help the coughing fit that ripped through her as her ribs were once again jostled. She felt the saddle shift as Bellamy swung himself up behind her. He placed a steadying hand on the small of her back before he kicked the horse into a slow trot. From her vantage point, she could see the ground race past dizzyingly, through the opening at the end of the rolled blanket. She closed her eyes in order to stop herself from throwing up.

They rode for what felt like hours to Clarke. Long enough that the blood had long since rushed to her head, and she was teetering on the edge of a fresh anxiety attack as it became harder and harder to breathe.

Finally the horse slowed, and her ears were met with new sounds. Though it was still quiet, she made out the unmistakable noises of inhabitation. They must have reached a village or a town.

She felt Bellamy’s thighs tense beside her.

She longed to ask him what had him so on edge, but understood that that would be more than a little conspicuous. She resolved herself to stay silent for the time being, hoping that Bellamy would choose a place to hideout and recuperate soon.

Within minutes, they had come to a stop. Clarke began to shift, readying herself to try to drop to her feet in the least painful way that she could manage. Bellamy’s hand pushing firmly on the small of her back stilled her.

“For the love of god, actually stay put this time. I’ll be right back.” His voice was just loud enough for her to hear.

There wasn’t much she could say to that, considering she was pretty sure that he’d already left. She laid there, helpless. Literally anyone could have walked up and taken the horse and there wasn’t a single thing that she could do about it. She waited there, nearly holding her breath, unsure of what to do.

There was a soft thud on the saddle beside her, followed by the horse beginning to walk at a slow pace once again. Clarke began to struggle against her wool prison, trying to wriggle an arm free, so that she might be able to pull her head out to see what was going on. The exposed edge of the blanket was pulled tighter, as if some one was trying to straighten out the roll.

“It’s just me princess,” Bellamy muttered to her, reassuringly. He continued to lead the horse through several more turns, before once again coming to a rest, this time in an even quieter area.

Clarke could make out the deep rumble of Bellamy’s voice speaking in a language she didn’t understand. His words were stilted, the phrases fragmented, but still, she’d never heard him speak any language other than English before. She wondered idly what else she didn’t know about him.

The world shifted as the roll was once again lifted into the air. She tried not to make a sound as her weight was adjusted several times, then tried not to worry too much at Bellamy’s staggering gait as he stumbled toward where ever they were going.

She heard a door close and the whir of blinds being drawn. Soon she was falteringly placed on a
soft surface. Bellamy made quick work of removing the folds of blanket from around her and she gasped in a deep breath, not even caring how much it hurt.

When she’d managed to take in enough oxygen that she could actually focus, she took a look around. She was lying on the bed of a dimly lit room. Bellamy stood at a small wooden desk tucked into one corner, riffling through a container.

Clarke pushed herself up, pausing for a moment at the sudden rush of lightheadedness she experienced. She joined Bellamy and saw that he had been sorting through a makeshift first aid kit. Rolls of gauze and tape and a bottle of antiseptic had been orderly laid out.

Bellamy awkwardly shrugged out of his new jacket, and Clarke gasped at the bloom of deep red blossoming under his left shoulder. She hurriedly helped him to remove the damaged side of his tunic, exposing a slowly weeping bullet wound in the flesh of his chest, just below where his arm met his body.

“When did this happen?!” She questioned him anxiously, pushing him back a couple of steps until the edge of the bed hit the back of his knees. He flopped down gracelessly and allowed her to continue to examine him.

“It doesn’t matter,” he muttered to her. But she knew. It must have been when he’d stumbled as they were running for their lives. He’d continued to carry her without saying a word. She wanted to cry.

“It looks like it’s just a flesh wound,” she assured him as she poured some of the antiseptic onto a piece of gauze. He let out a strangled yell as she applied it to the wound. “Sorry,” she mumbled, turning her head away.

“I’ve had worse,” he grunted, ducking his head.

When she was satisfied that it was as clean as it was going to get, she riffled back through the box of supplies, relieved when she found a small sewing kit. He grimaced at her when she held it up, but nodded, giving his ascent.

She made quick work of sewing up both the entrance and the exit wounds. Her stitches were crooked and uneven but they would have to do for now. After she had the injury neatly bandaged and taped, she turned back to the table, meaning to take care of the cut on his cheek as well.

Bellamy shook his head, grasping her by the waist and firmly pushing her toward the bed. She recoiled as her heart started to pound, the quietest whimper escaping her throat.

Bellamy didn’t seem to notice as he grabbed the cleansing liquid himself and flipped up the tattered hem of the abaya, revealing her ravaged feet. Clarke stared in horror, the memories that had been surfacing instantly forgotten. She’d never even felt it, but her feet were littered in tiny cuts, each caked with sand and who knows what else.

Bellamy pulled up a small, rickety looking chair that Clarke seriously doubted could even hold his weight, and began cleaning her feet in silence. She watched him work - made note of the hard set of his jaw and the tension still thrumming through his shoulders. If he were a wolf, his hackles would be raised, she mused. Clarke didn’t understand why he looked so stressed, possibly even more than he had when they’d been in the compound. Looking at their surroundings, she felt like they should have been relatively safe for the time being.

“What’s wrong Bellamy?” she asked him softly, afraid of what he’d answer.
Bellamy continued working without answering for so long that she was beginning to think that he hadn’t heard her. Eventually he sighed, turning to grab the tweezers from the table. “We’re in Iraq. Somewhere in the North based off of the terrain and the dialect.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed. “How? You said before that we were being held in Iran. That’s why you had to come alone.”

Bellamy shrugged, getting back to work and not meeting her gaze. “It must have been when they moved us.”

She was still confused. “But isn’t that a good thing? We can get help from the military.”

Bellamy nodded. “I’ll figure out a way to make contact in the morning. But until then, no, I wouldn’t consider being trapped in an area controlled by warring terrorist factions to be a good thing.”

That was a sobering thought. Clarke bit her lip. “We’ve made it this far against all odds Bellamy… you’ll get home soon. You’ll be able to see Octavia,” she reminded him quietly. She needed him to get through this, and sparking even a tiny bit of optimism in him couldn’t hurt.

Bellamy chuckled derisively, turning his back to her. “Clarke, If we get back to the States I’m going to prison.”

She felt like she’d been slapped. “What? No-“

Bellamy cut her off. “I knew what I was getting into when I left to go find you. It is what it is.”

Clarke shook her head futilely. “They won’t send you to prison for risking everything to save someone. That doesn’t make any sense.”

Bellamy finally turned back to look at her. “They will if that person went AWOL to do it. Not to mention breaking half a dozen other laws along the way.”

Clarke continued to shake her head vehemently. “No. I’ll be at your trial every step of the way. This is so wrong.”

He sighed heavily. Without comment, he helped her onto her newly cleansed feet and led her to the tiny adjoining room, flicking on the light.

It was a tiny bathroom. He handed her a threadbare towel and motioned toward the small shower stall in the corner. “I bet that will feel good.”

She took the offered cloth but turned back to him, not finished with her argument. He just bowed his head and shut the door. She stared at the wood paneling for a moment, ready to go after him, but ended up relenting. It could wait.

She was distracted by a small movement in her peripheral vision and whirled around, paranoid. It was just her reflection moving in a small, tarnished mirror.

This was the first time she’d seen herself since she’d been in Dubai. She didn’t even recognize what she saw. Her hair wasn’t blonde anymore. It fell in matted heaps caked in blood and grime. Her skin was a patchwork of new and old bruises, flecked here and there with tiny glistening scars. Her face was so gaunt she didn’t even look like herself.

She closed her eyes, unable to bear looking at her reflection any longer.
She began to tenderly pull off the soiled abaya. It was difficult, especially as the soreness from the day began to set in and each shift caused her ribs to grind against one another. She had half a mind to call Bellamy back to help, but stopped herself. She didn’t want him to see what lay underneath.

Finally free of the garment, she stepped toward the shower and turned it on. The water was lukewarm at best, and lacked pressure, but she didn’t care. She picked up the bar of soap from beside the sink, stepped under the spray, and began relentlessly scrubbing everywhere she could reach. Bellamy had been right. Though it didn’t feel good per se, it was still something that she utterly needed.

She continued scrubbing until even the unmarred areas of her flesh were raw, and she simply didn’t have the energy to keep going. She dropped to her knees, letting the soap fall from her fingers. The water continued to cascade over her head and back, pooling around her as she sank into the cold tile.

The events of the day finally began to catch up with her. Unable to stop the flood of emotions from overtaking her this time, she wept, trying to keep herself as quiet as possible.

Chapter End Notes

TW: Non graphic reference to past rape

So originally this chapter was going to detail their entire escape attempt... but then it turned into a 10000 word monster. The bad news is it took way longer than anticipated to write. The good news is that you just got a chapter that's twice as long as normal and you'll get another shorter one next Wednesday as long as nothing crazy happens in my life before then... you're welcome?

Let me know your thoughts. As always, comments and kudos are very much appreciated :)


Bellamy checked the clock again. Clarke had been in the bathroom for a long time. He wanted to give her space – the girl had gone through more in the last two months than many soldiers had been through in their whole lifetime – but he was also worried. She was pretty severely injured, not to mention malnourished and exhausted. She could have fainted, hit her head. She literally could be bleeding out on the floor right now and he was sitting out here twiddling his thumbs.

He sighed, resolving to give her five more minutes. He glared at the second hand on the old analog clock on the wall until it made its way past the 12 for the fifth time. His patience dissolved as he got to his feet and headed to the door. He knocked lightly, not wanting to scare her.

“Clarke, are you alright?” What a stupid question. Of course she wasn’t alright. Neither one of them was, and they likely wouldn’t be for a long time.

He heard frantic shuffling from the other side of the door, followed by a small gasp of pain. “Don’t come in,” was her muffled response.

He bit his lip. Something had obviously happened today. He wasn’t an idiot. He saw it every time she tried to hide the fact that she’d recoiled from his touch, or brushed off a topic of conversation. But he didn’t want to push. They were both barely holding it together as it was.

“I won’t,” he assured her quietly. Though really, he would if he had to.

Fumbling one-handed through the packages he’d picked up at the market earlier, he found what he was looking for. Opening the bathroom door just the slightest amount, he called out to her, “I’m just giving you something clean to wear.” He slipped the garment through the 3-inch opening he’d created and placed it on the counter, before pulling the door closed once again. He heard the water turn off.

Reluctantly, he retreated across the room, back to the flimsy chair that he had been keeping watch from. He flicked the curtain out once again and assured himself that the street outside was still empty.

The bathroom door creaked slightly as it opened and Clarke stepped through, still toweling off her hair.

In a way she looked even worse than she had earlier. At least before he could try to convince himself that some of the marks marring her skin were just dirt. Now he saw each bruise, cut, and scar in detailed relief against the milky white of the few patches of unblemished skin.

She was wearing the new abaya that he’d splurged on for her earlier. It hung limply on her bony frame, but at least the fabric was soft. Maybe it could give her some small measure of comfort.

“How did you get this?” she questioned him quietly, holding out one sleeve.

Bellamy didn’t answer, looking at the floor, slightly ashamed.

She waited for a moment, before obviously coming up with the answer on her own. “The goat herder. You took more than just his horse and his clothes.”
He looked up then, expecting to see disgust on her face. Instead, all he saw in her expression was resignation.

She took a small step toward the bed, allowing just enough room for him to get past. “You should get cleaned up too.”

Part of him wanted to talk this out, talk to her about anything really, but right now wasn’t the time.

He made to move past her, and without even giving it a second thought, reached out to give her shoulder a reassuring squeeze as he passed.

She jerked away from his touch so hard that she actually fell onto the bed. Instinctively he reached out to try to steady her, causing her to flinch once again, bat his hands away.

“Don’t… just don’t,” her hands fluttered uselessly as she fought an internal struggle, obviously frustrated by her own reaction.

Slowly, she crawled away from him to the top of the bed. She laid down facing the wall, curling her legs in toward her chest on top of the blankets.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered hoarsely, not sure how he could help.

“Just go,” was her weak reply.

Crestfallen, he did as she asked, heading toward the bathroom, but something stopped him and he found himself standing frozen, one hand resting on the doorjamb.

“They filmed it all,” Clarke’s voice was quiet and devoid of emotion as it cracked the silence in the room. “They livestreamed it to my parents as some kind of twisted threat. Now every time I see them I’ll see it in their eyes. The pity, the disgust, the shame.”

Bellamy’s blood ran cold. She still hadn’t told him what exactly they’d done, but he was fairly certain he could guess. He just didn’t want to believe it. He stayed there, hovering, unsure of what he could possibly say or do to comfort her.

“I just need to be alone right now,” her voice was haunted. “I’ll be fine,” she added unconvincingly.

Still he hesitated. He was uncomfortable having her leave his sight when she was feeling like this. He also didn’t want to betray her trust, considering what he suspected had been done to her.

Eventually he sighed, stepping into the bathroom and shutting the door most of the way. He’d respect her wishes, but he’d be at her side in an instant if she so much as a sounded like she needed help.

Shrugging off the tunic he’d stolen and stepping out of the pants, he went straight to the shower. Clarke had long since used up any warm water, but he didn’t mind. The cool spray was almost refreshing compared to the unrelenting heat he’d endured for the last month. And even before he’d been captured, the water in the barracks had always been cold too. Warm showers were reserved for home… if he ever managed to get back there.

He retrieved the mostly-used bar of soap from the shower floor and began scrubbing away the grime, watching as the water changed from clear to a muddled burgundy-brown. He did his best to keep the newly applied bandages on his chest dry, but wasn’t all that successful.
When he was as clean as he was going to get, he leaned his forehead against the cool tile and let the water just flow down the curve of his spine. His head was killing him, and though he’d hoped the cold water might give him the added boost of energy that he desperately needed, it instead only solidified how goddamn exhausted he was.

As much as part of him wanted to fall asleep right there, he knew that he couldn’t. They were still in danger and he needed to be on alert. With a sigh he turned the water off, grabbing the remaining towel to dry off.

Out of habit, he took a quick glance in the mirror. Aside from the obvious changes, like his beard growing in and his hair growing out of its military standard cut, he noted that he’d lost muscle mass. His skin was also patterned with bruises and electrical burns, but all of that would fade.

It seemed so unfair that a beautiful girl like Clarke would walk away from this ordeal maimed for the rest of her life, her skin riddled with a constant reminder of everything she’d been through, while he’d end up nearly scot free. It made rage boil in his gut, and at the same time made him long to hold her. At the moment he couldn’t do anything about either of those feelings, so instead he pushed them down, burying them under his soldier’s resolve.

He put his clothes back on and went back into the main room. Clarke had settled into a fitful slumber, each toss and turn punctuated by a broken gasp or moan. Part of him wanted to wake her, but she needed her rest, whether it came with nightmares or not. Instead, he pulled the sheet up and laid it gently over her. She stilled for a moment, her forehead creasing delicately. He turned away.

The silence was broken by the stuttering of automatic weapons fire in the distance.

Bellamy retrieved the gun from where he’d left it on the table and crept toward the window. Peeling back the blinds just the slightest amount, he surveyed the surrounding area. He caught the glint of light from a muzzle flash, but it was still far off in the distance, coming from the direction that they’d just left.

He wished he knew if this kind of violence was typical for the area that they were in, or if it indicated something more sinister headed their way.

As quietly as possible, he pulled the chair closer to the motel room door and settled in, resolving to continue to keep watch until he was sure.

With not much to do besides stay alert, he began to puzzle through just how he would go about getting in contact with the American military after the sun came up.

He’d traded the horse to the innkeeper for access to a room, leaving them on foot. Neither one of them was in any shape to travel long distances, so he’d have to make do with what was nearby. If he could get access to a radio he might be able to raise someone. It all depended on where the closest base was. If they were near Mosul it shouldn’t be a problem. If they weren’t… he’d just have to come up with a different plan.

His eyes drifted part way closed, and he shook himself, determined to stay awake. If they managed to pull this off, he’d have plenty of time for R and R. What else was there to do in a prison cell anyway?

He wondered idly if he might be able to visit Octavia before he was locked up. It had definitely given him some peace of mind to know that she should be safe at home, and that Lincoln should be back state-side taking care of her by now. But he wanted to make sure with his own eyes that she was adjusting. After seeing just what a toll all of this had had on Clarke, he was worried about her.
But he didn’t want her to visit him in prison. He didn’t want his little sister to see him like that. It just didn’t feel right.

Kane should be able to make it happen. The man owed him at least that much.

With those thoughts floating through his mind, he must have drifted in and out of consciousness a few times despite his best efforts.

He was roused from his musings by the faint sound of voices coming from across the lot. Checking through a small slit in the blinds once again, he found a man speaking in an abrasive tone with the inn’s manager.

He took a deep breath. It could just be a dissatisfied customer – but something about this wasn’t sitting right with Bellamy.

He cracked the door slightly open, hoping he might be able to hear what was being said more clearly. He still couldn’t catch all of it, especially not with the way that his head was still pounding, but what he did manage to hear set his adrenaline into high gear once again.

The man was looking for two Americans – a man and a young woman – both of them wounded. Bellamy caught a glint of metal in his hand. A knife? A gun? He wasn’t sure.

He had been extremely careful, making sure that the blinds were completely drawn before he’d let Clarke out of hiding. But his Arabic was flawed. It wouldn’t take much of a leap for the innkeeper to figure out where he was from, and Clarke’s disguise hadn’t exactly been foolproof.

The inn keep hesitated in his response, his posture fidgety with his eyes darting continuously toward their room. That was all of the confirmation that this new attacker needed.

Bellamy swore under his breath, cocking the gun. He took a steadying breath, watching through the small gap between the blinds and the windowsill for the man to get close enough that he was sure he wouldn’t miss.

He threw open the door and squeezed off two rounds, watching just long enough to confirm the man had fallen before slamming the door shut once again.

He turned to find Clarke out of bed and backed against the far wall, staring at him wide eyed.

“Well, at least that solved the problem of waking her up.

“We need to go,” he told her gruffly. Hurrying back to the table, he pulled out the rest of the package he’d purchased earlier. He handed her a pair of slippers. He’d had to guess at the size, but she made no comment as she put them on.

Finally, he pulled out a niqab, matching the abaya she already wore. He placed it over her head gently and allowed the fabric to fall down past her shoulders. “Keep your eyes down and stay close to me,” he instructed her.

She gave him a small nod, her eyes appearing terrified as he looked at them through the loose mesh. He secured a scarf over his own head, hoping that when combined with the facial hair, he would blend in well enough for it to serve as a disguise. When he was finished, she slipped her hand into his and he gave it a tight squeeze.

At the door, he scanned the street in both directions. The man appeared to have been alone, but that didn’t mean much. There had been literally dozens of men coming in and out of the training
facility where they’d been held. Any number of them could be after them now.

Keeping Clarke close, he set a brisk pace. He didn’t want to draw attention, but at this time in the morning the streets were near empty, it wasn’t like they could blend into a crowd.

He took turns at random. He didn’t have a plan. The steady pounding in his head intensified, echoing between his ears in a persistent beat. He could barely focus.

They rounded a building and almost ran right into two men carrying AK-47s. Bellamy stopped in his tracks, but didn’t dare turn around for fear of looking suspicious. He pulled Clarke’s arm until she was fully behind him, hopefully obscuring her from view, then led her to a nearby market stall, hoping he could pull off looking like he was setting it up for the day.

As he fiddled with straightening the table, he eavesdropped on the men’s muttered conversation. They were also from the terrorist compound and were growing tired of the wild goose chase they’d been sent on. One of them mentioned how if he found the pair of Americans, he’d just shoot them both and be done with it.

Unfortunately, it was at that moment that the other man noticed their presence. He called out to them, demanding to know why Bellamy had allowed his wife outdoors at such an early hour.

Unable to come up with a satisfactory answer, Bellamy began backing Clarke away from them slowly, still trying to block her from their view as he palmed the gun, disengaging the safety. By some freak occurrence of bad luck, Clarke’s niqab caught on the edge of the table and pulled free from her head. She lunged forward to grab it, but it was already too late, the damage was done.

Bellamy yanked her in the opposite direction just as the sharp crack of gunfire pierced the air. By some miracle, neither one of them was hit.

Heads turned in their direction, and the distinct thumping of running boots could be heard headed their way. He returned fire on the two assailants, but was met by an empty clicking after only three shots. He was out of bullets. Bellamy threw an arm around Clarke’s waist and began propelling her at a full sprint down the street, cursing as Clarke’s freshly washed blonde hair glinted like a beacon in the predawn light.

He heard shouts as more men joined the original group, all of them in hot pursuit. He and Clarke were like sitting ducks, running down the middle of this empty street, easy targets.

Bellamy risked a glance back and saw a few of the men had stopped, raising their rifles to take aim. He spied a narrow opening between buildings ahead and put all of the energy he had left into driving them forward with one final burst of speed.

He managed to literally throw Clarke into the mouth of the alley, watching as she crashed into its far wall, just as the heavy rat-tat-tat of gunfire rang out once again.

Pain ripped through his thigh, causing him to stumble, only his grip on the corner of the building keeping him upright. Without pausing to assess the damage, he once again hooked an arm around Clarke’s waist and did what he could to continue to push her forward, further into the alley.

The whirring in Bellamy’s ears grew louder, maybe from the blood loss. His leg would barely take his weight, but he kept pushing, making it maybe 100 feet before he realized something was wrong.

Clarke was getting heavier and heavier on his arm, her movements becoming more sluggish and ineffectual. Bellamy glanced back quickly and saw that the men still hadn’t made it to the mouth of
the alley, and so he made the split second decision to stop. He maneuvered them so that they were partially obscured behind some wooden crates, then propped her against the plaster wall, trying to figure out what was wrong.

Clarke was gasping, the tendons in her neck straining, as she tried unsuccessfully to take in more air. Her skin was taking on a bluish tinge and blood flecked her lips. He’d seen these symptoms before. Her broken ribs must have punctured her lung. She couldn’t breath.

“Go,” she wheezed, giving him a feeble push.

“No,” he lurched into an unstable lunge, pulling her back onto his shoulders like he had before. His injured leg instantly gave out the moment he tried to stand, and Clarke cried out weakly at the unexpected jolt.

She staggered back to her feet, placing a warm palm against his cheek, and rubbing it absently with her thumb. “Bel… plea…” He could tell it was a struggle to get even that much out.

Rising back to his feet, he pulled her towards him until she was enveloped in his chest, trying to shield as much of her body with his as he could. He could hear the heavy plod of boots approaching them now. “I’m not leaving you,” he whispered resolutely into her ear.

He felt her fists tighten in the linen of his tunic. He carded one hand through the hair at the base of her neck and pressed a firm kiss to her forehead. “I don’t have any regrets.”

He was still clutching her desperately, when he was wrenched backward by the collar of his shirt. He faltered, but was kept upright by strong arms. Hands tore her from his grasp, and he was left reaching for her as she was pulled away.

“Well, well… I never thought I’d be seeing your ugly mug again.”

Chapter End Notes

10 points to whoever guesses who that was at the end of the chapter!

The next update might take a while because it's finals, and I have my brother's destination wedding at the end of the month. But don't lose hope, it's already started.

As always, comments and kudos give me inspiration so please feel free to leave them :)


Bellamy blinked hard, wondering if his head injury was now causing hallucinations on top of everything else.

“Roan?” he grunted, unable to believe his eyes.

“You bet your ass. Now enough with the tearful reunions, we’ve gotta move,” Roan shifted so that Bellamy’s arm was wrapped over his shoulders, and slipped an arm around his waist, taking a significant portion of his weight.

Bellamy looked around, still disoriented. He caught sight of Clarke draped over uniformed shoulders, her head bobbing lifelessly as the SEAL carrying her ran towards the far end of the alley.

There were others, members of his team, strategically placed in tactical positions throughout the narrow inlet. Gunfire started from the alley opening that he’d just come from. The SEALs returned it in kind.

Roan gave him an impatient tug, and Bellamy relented. But the second he put weight on his freshly wounded leg, it gave out, nearly taking both men down.

Roan cursed loudly. “Dax, get over here and help out so we can blow this hellhole.”

One of the nearest figures stood from his crouch and spit, his face twisted with disgust, but he followed his commander’s orders, grabbing Bellamy’s other arm roughly and pushing him away from the firefight.

Bellamy was slightly perplexed by the man’s reaction. He and Dax had never been close, but they also were both a part of the team, and the team was family.

He didn’t have time to think too hard on it however, as the barrage raining down on them intensified. “Move, move, move!” Roan shouted.

As they continued to get closer to the far end of the alley, the pounding in Bellamy’s head got louder and louder until it resolved into the steady thump of helicopter blades. The chopper was hovering there waiting for them, Miller standing on one side of the doorway providing cover fire.

Dax shoved him unceremoniously into the open compartment and Roan let him fall, turning to monitor the progress of the rest of his men. Bellamy landed facedown with a grunt and could have sworn he felt the sharp thump of a boot against his side as he was still trying to get his bearings.

The floor dipped several times as each member of the team boarded. Bellamy struggled to push himself up so that he could see what was going on, but his arms were shaking too badly to hold his weight.

“Let’s go!” Roan called out to the pilot, the sound of his hand slapping against the hull echoing throughout the cramped compartment. Bellamy felt his stomach drop as the copter lurched upward, the sounds of machine gun fire still pinging off of the walls.
Without warning, he was flipped roughly onto his back and he groaned as each of his injuries was jostled once again. He could see Roan above him, checking him over.

“Woods! Looks like Blake has a GSW to the thigh.”

_Woods? Why would Lincoln be here..._ Bellamy thought to himself blearily. His friend should have been long gone by now, settling into civilian life back home. He pushed up onto one elbow, trying to see if he’d just misheard.

“I’ve kind of got my hands full here, so unless he’s about to bleed out, sedate him and keep pressure on it.” Lincoln didn’t even look up from what he was doing. He was working intensely over a small form on the other side of the floor, his fatigues stained with blood up to the elbow. “Miller, hand me that chest tube.”

“Linc-?” Bellamy managed before Roan pushed him back down roughly. Biting off the protective tip on a syringe he’d snagged from the open medical kit, the commander rucked up his subordinate’s tunic to get access to his skin.

“Shit, looks like he’s got another one. This one’s been patched up though,” Roan muttered, turning his head back towards the medic.

Bellamy barely even paid attention to what he was saying, his mind racing. Why the hell was Lincoln on this helicopter? And more importantly, that small body he had been working on had to have been Clarke. She hadn’t been bleeding that badly back in the alley... At least not that he could see.

What had happened to her and was she okay?

He was distracted by a sharp pinch in his deltoid. “Wait-” They couldn’t put him under yet, he needed to make sure that Clarke was alright.

But Roan wasn’t even looking at him, already shifting down his body to tourniquet his leg and take stock of the rest of his men. Bellamy tried to push himself up one more time, but his limbs were too heavy, he could barely even lift his head.

The edges of his vision blurred... he was vaguely aware of an immense vice-like pressure just below his hip, but it strangely felt like it was happening to someone else. “Clarke-” he barely managed to mumble before everything went black.

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Bellamy felt like he weighed a thousand pounds. It was a strange sensation, like someone had cut him open and sewn rocks under his skin. At the same time if felt like his head was filled with cotton, to the point that his skull might burst open from the pressure at any minute.

Voices drifted in and out of his head, some of them he didn’t recognize, some of them he did.

_ Lincoln. _ That voice nagged at him the most. And as he came closer to consciousness, he began to remember why: Lincoln shouldn’t be here. He should have been at home in Virginia, taking care of Octavia.

It was that thought that helped rouse him, and the anger that it brought with it. If Lincoln had reenlisted, Bellamy was going to kill him. He’d left Octavia alone trying to deal with all of this shit and Bellamy wanted to know why.
He snapped his eyes open abruptly, and gasped, immediately squeezing them shut again, as the bright lights caused pain to shoot through the top of his skull. He brought up his hands to shield his face, but his right arm stopped short with a metallic clink.

He blinked his eyes back open blearily, taking in the drab colored hospital sheets covering his legs, and the padded restraint attaching his wrist to the bed railing.

Scanning the cramped, unadorned room, he found it to be mostly empty, except for Lincoln, leaning against the small barred window in one of the walls. He was wearing a fresh set of fatigues, his brow creased and his arms folded tightly across his chest.

The two men stared each other down, neither speaking nor relenting. Bellamy grew increasingly agitated until he finally couldn’t take it any longer. “What the hell are you doing here man?”

Lincoln raised an eyebrow, his jaw noticeably clenching. “You’re seriously the one questioning me right now?” He ground out, his voice dangerously soft. “I think the better question is where have you been?”

Bellamy was stunned for a moment. He had never heard so much venom in the other man’s voice before. Not even in the heat of battle.

He opened his mouth, but only a dry clicking sound came out. He didn’t know how to answer that. It didn’t matter though. Apparently Lincoln wasn’t actually interested in an answer to his question because he kept going. “You were declared AWOL about 4 weeks ago. And you know what? I was almost glad. I figured that after everything that happened to Octavia, you decided you were done with all of this. I thought you were laying low, taking care of your sister.”

Bellamy’s gut clenched. That timeline didn’t make any sense… 4 weeks? Hadn’t Kane gotten him any leave at all? But his headache was slowing down his thought processes, and he didn’t have time to figure it out before Lincoln continued.

“I’m literally packing my things, ready to finally get out of here and go home, when I get a Skype call,” if possible Lincoln’s glare intensified. “In all of the time I’ve known her, I have never seen your sister cry. When I picked up that call she was inconsolable. I could barely even understand what she was saying. She begged me to tell her that I knew where you were, that you were safe. But I couldn’t do that, could I? Because you didn’t even have the common decency to send me a message after you visited her in the hospital, let alone tell me where you were going.”

Bellamy pressed the heel of his free hand into his forehead, trying futilely to ease the throbbing in his brain and sort through everything that Lincoln was saying. It wasn’t much help.

“My fiancé was tortured for weeks, and I couldn’t be there to put the pieces back together.” Lincoln’s voice was rising, not helping Bellamy’s headache at all. “The only consolation I had was that you were with her, holding her together until I could come back. But none of that was true was it? And now Octavia’s still alone because I’m still stuck here rescuing your sorry ass.”

“So why did you?” Bellamy finally blurted, throwing his hand down angrily.

Lincoln took a few deep breaths, pinching the bridge of his nose, obviously trying to regain some level of patience. “That same day I got a sat-call from Kane saying that they might have located you. They were putting together the intel and hoped to get an operation up and running within a couple of weeks. He requested that I extend my contract, just until the mission was over.”

Bellamy scoffed indignantly. “And you said yes? Jesus Link, you should have gone home to O-“
“She told me to stay!” Lincoln roared. “I’ve never wanted anything more in my life than to be able to just go home and be with her. But how could I say no?” Lincoln turned and punched the wall beside him in frustration. He took his time, deliberately shaking out his hand as he calmed down. He rested his forehead against the wall, refusing to even look at Bellamy. “I understand why you did what you did. Hell, I probably would have even done the same thing in your situation. Clarke didn’t deserve anything that happened to her. And she certainly didn’t deserve to be abandoned and just left to rot. But that doesn’t mean that I’m not mad as hell.”

Bellamy’s heart stopped. Clarke. How the hell had he forgotten about Clarke? “Is she-?”

Lincoln’s shoulders relaxed as he softened at his friend’s tone. “Alive,” he assured his comrade quietly. “She’s critical but stable. They’re med-evacing her to Germany in a couple of hours. I’m going with her. Escorting her home is my final mission.”

Bellamy released the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. He leaned back into his pillow and began examining the ceiling, willing the tears that had unexpectedly snuck up on him to disappear back behind his eyes.

Against all odds Clarke was going home. He’d gotten her out.

Lincoln squeezed his shoulder supportively. Bellamy hadn’t even heard him cross the room.

“You made it,” Lincoln assured him, most of the animosity that had been radiating off of him before had melted away.

Bellamy nodded tightly, not trusting his voice to remain steady if he tried to speak.

Lincoln pulled away slightly, giving him a stern look. “Listen man, if you think I’m mad… you have no idea. The other guys are calling you a deserter and worse. Octavia gave me the full story and I filled Roan in on what I could, but the rest of the guys…” He paused, trying to figure out how to word his next statement. “Everything that happened – with you, with Clarke, with O - was classified as need to know. Details on what happened, even on who Clarke is – it’s all being kept under wraps. A lot of the guys think that you’re a traitor. You need to watch your back.”

Bellamy swallowed hard. Well at least that explained Dax’s reaction during the extraction.

“And the charges being laid against you aren’t exactly helping,” Lincoln continued in a quiet voice, obviously trying not to be overheard. “I don’t know what’s going on with that, but anything you could offer up to help clear your name would help.”

Bellamy couldn’t help the derisive chuckle that escaped at the thought. “What are you suggesting? That I give them all of the intel I was magically able to gather while I was trying not to die in an underground cell?” He shook his head cynically. “I never even figured out why those monsters took the girls in the first place.”

The ashen look on Lincoln’s face said it all, especially when combined with the fact that he wouldn’t meet his friend’s eyes.

“Lincoln… what?” Bellamy stammered.

The medic fidgeted, obviously contemplating how much he should say. He sighed heavily, his eyes drilling a hole in the ground. “Kane told me. A couple of Belgian tourists went missing from Qatar - same MO. They resurfaced, out of the blue, three weeks ago on a busy street in Basrah. Their disappearance hadn’t been covered up like Clarke and Octavia’s had, so when they showed up with their faces uncovered, the soldiers nearby recognized them immediately and rushed in to
help. That’s when the IEDs in their vests were remotely detonated.”

A blow to the stomach would have hit Bellamy with less force. He felt a cold sweat break out across the back of his neck and forehead, and for a moment he thought he was going to be sick. “How many?” he asked quietly.

Lincoln didn’t sugarcoat it. “3 American, 2 Canadian, 1 Brit… 26 civilians. And of course the girls.”

It was a brilliant plan – and one that would continue to work. Even now that they knew what could be coming, their soldiers would still rush in. They couldn’t just leave innocent people to die.

If Clarke hadn’t fought back and gotten sick… that could have been her. That could have been O.

“Wait…” the timeline that had been bothering him before was once again brought to the forefront of his mind. He hadn’t seen any other hostages at the original compound that they’d been held in. It was possible that the terrorists had held the Belgian girls someplace else, but it didn’t seem likely considering they’d originally been held by a smaller off-shooting faction. “You said this happened three weeks ago… how long have I been gone?”

“You left camp to see Octavia 42 days ago.” Lincoln told him soberly.

42 days. 42 days. That meant Clarke had survived in that hell for close to 60.

“I don’t-“ Bellamy stammered.

Lincoln grasped his forearm firmly. “I know.”

There was the sound of boots on linoleum out in the hallway and Lincoln glanced back distractedly.

“Listen man, amongst all of your other injuries, you have a mild traumatic brain injury. They’re keeping you here in Baghdad until you’re declared safe to fly. I don’t know how long that’s going to be, but if you need me to get anything sorted out on the legal end back home just say the word.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow.

Lincoln gave him an exasperated look. “Obviously I’m still mad, and I’m probably going to be for a long time, but we’re brothers… in more ways than one.”

Bellamy nodded, giving him a small weary smile. “John Murphy. Octavia should have his information. Get him up to speed on everything.”

“You’ve got it,” Lincoln moved away from the hospital bed, getting ready to salute whoever came through the door.

“And Link,” the other man stopped, giving Bellamy his full attention. “Please… just keep Octavia away from all of this. Especially the trial. I saw a lot of what she went through first hand. I don’t want her to have to relive any of it… she’s been through too much already.”

Lincoln’s eyes hardened at the implication in what he’d said, but he quietly agreed nonetheless.

The door opened and Bellamy caught a glimpse of soldiers guarding the entrance, making way for the tall, lean figure walking through the door. He hadn’t realized it, but he’d been expecting Kane to be the commanding officer coming in to speak to him. He couldn’t explain why after everything
that had happened, but for some reason he was disappointed when it wasn’t.

As he entered the room, Roan gave Lincoln a look that clearly spelled out to Bellamy that the medic had been ordered to alert his CO the moment he’d woken up. It was a subtle confirmation of where Lincoln’s allegiances lie, despite his anger. Bellamy couldn’t help but be slightly relieved.

“Petty Officer Woods, shouldn’t you be checking on your patient and making any last minute preparations? Your transport leaves at 0900.” Roan asked the other man in an obvious dismissal.

“Yes sir,” Lincoln nodded to their CO and gave Bellamy one last meaningful look before exiting the room and shutting the door behind him.

Once they were alone, Roan continued to stand on the opposite side of the room silently, studying him longer than was strictly necessary.

Bellamy was unnerved. Yes, Lincoln had said that he’d explained everything to the Master Chief, however Roan had always been hard to read. It was anyone’s guess how he’d take all of this.

Finally Roan’s gravelly voice cracked the silence. “You couldn’t have waited 2 more damn hours for an extraction team before making a total mess of things yourself?”

Bellamy just stared at him.

Roan’s lips quirked slightly, but the smile didn’t reach anywhere near his eyes. “No – I suppose you couldn’t.”

Roan looked down and sighed. “Atom was shot when we were trying to find you during the extraction attempt at the compound. He’s likely.”

It was yet another shock that Bellamy wasn’t expecting. He hadn’t even seen Atom in the helicopter. The more he thought about it though… that would have explained the blood on Lincoln’s fatigues. It hadn’t been Clarke’s after all. He felt an immediate rush of relief, followed by a wave of self-loathing. It shouldn’t matter whose blood it was. In fact he should feel worse considering that the man had taken a bullet trying to rescue him.

Roan caused him to snap back to focusing on the conversation as he continued speaking. “Listen Blake, you’re in some pretty deep shit right now, and a lot of the guys aren’t going to have your back because they don’t know the whole story. That said, Woods filled me in and I want you to know that I’m proud of you. What you did took some serious balls, though I have no doubt you probably made things worse for yourself with your bone-headed rash decisions.”

That last part sounded more like the Roan that Bellamy knew.

“I’m sure that Kane has something up his sleeve, but if comes down to it and this thing goes to trial, I’ll be in your corner.”

Bellamy gave him a small nod of acknowledgement. He wished that he could show more gratitude, but the longer he kept his eyes open, the worse his headache was becoming. He felt like if he moved his head any further, he’d be at serious risk of leaving shards of skull on the pillow.

Roan studied him a moment longer, before exhaling and shaking his head. “I wish I didn’t have to do this.” He straightened and clasped his hands firmly behind his back, settling into the ramrod straight military posture that signaled that the time for camaraderie was over. “Petty Officer Bellamy Augustus Blake, you are hereby under arrest for the charges of desertion and the commission of treason against the United States of America.”
Chapter End Notes

Your guesses were so close! We’ll be meeting Murphy next chapter.

That said, this story is going on a (hopefully) short hiatus. As you can probably tell, the story will be headed in another direction from this point - still a ton of angst but less violence as Bellamy and Clarke learn how to live with what happened to them. I have the next two chapters planned as well as the end, but I'm still trying to figure out the in-between part. Input on any scenes you'd like to see is welcomed, although I don't make any promises that it will happen. You can expect the next chapter in about a month, but who knows - maybe I'll surprise myself and it'll be out earlier!

As always, your comments and kudos fuel my writing, so be sure to leave them :)}
He was back on the same worn down street, this time standing directly in front of the familiar house. This close, it was even more apparent how weathered the clapboard exterior had become, the navy blue storm shutters hanging askew on their hinges.

The porch swing tapped out a dull rhythm each time the wind caused it to bump against the railing. He walked at a measured pace towards the front door, unable to explain what was inexplicably pulling him to go inside.

The porch steps groaned in protest under his weight. He placed his feet carefully, avoiding the areas where the wood was nearly rotted through. The front door swung open at only the slightest touch. Inside, the house was empty, sunlight cutting beams through the dust filled air.

And at the center of it all stood a girl, her blonde hair shining where it flowed down her back. Apprehension coursed through his veins. That girl did not belong in this house.

Hesitantly, he reached a hand to her shoulder, not wanting to scare her. As if in slow motion, she turned to face him.

It was Clarke. She was wearing a summer dress that made her look stunning. Her skin was radiant, free from all of the blemishes that had marred it the last time they’d seen each other. But as his eyes travelled upward to study her face, he took a small step back.

Her lips were once again flecked red with blood and her eyes... Her once brilliant blue eyes were glassed over, empty... dead.

“You think you saved me?” her tone was flat but held a small hint of accusation. She cocked her head to the side, vacant gaze appraising him in an unsettling way.

“You didn’t.” A torrent of blood gushed past her lips, and her body collapsed as if suddenly boneless. He lunged forward to catch her, but his arms closed around empty air.

She was gone.

Bellamy snapped upright, his small, uncomfortable cot squeaking at the sudden movement. His chest heaved as he tried to get his breathing back under control. Looking around the small cell he worked on orienting himself in the low light.

He was back stateside. He’d arrived the previous day. He was in the brig.

Judging by the dull glow coming through the bars on the tiny window, it was almost dawn. No point in trying to go back to sleep then. He sighed deeply. Rest had been evading him for the last two months. Hell, he hadn’t gotten a true night’s sleep in years.

The problem was no longer combat, it was the nightmares. They woke him every night without fail. He figured the main reason that Clarke featured so prominently was because the last time he’d seen her, she really had been near death. Sure, Lincoln had told him that she’d been expected to survive, but he’d had no way of confirming it with his own eyes. As for the run down old house... he was still working on that.
Laying back in his bunk he elected to use the time by working on his physical therapy, flexing his leg up toward the ceiling, his thigh only giving a small ache at the movement, then lowering it slowly back to the mattress, then repeating the exercise. He still had a bit of a limp, but even that was fading. The burning numbness in his arms was improving as well. ‘Neuroregeneration occurs at a rate of 3 millimeters a day’ his nurse had constantly reminded him. At this point it felt like it would take years before he could properly feel his fingers again, but at least he was making progress.

He’d spent all of his time since he’d been taken into custody at the hospital in Iraq. They’d even kept him for two weeks after he could have sworn that his head injury was mostly healed. He’d no longer had a headache and had grown frustrated that he wasn’t on a plane yet. A small part of him wanted to believe that Kane was trying to buy time to build him a solid legal defense. A bigger part of him knew instinctually that the military was trying to punish him by leaving him in a location that had the potential to be bombed any day.

When he’d finally stepped off of the flight yesterday, he’d had to concede that it actually probably was due to medical reasons. He had been back to feeling like his head might split in two and had actually had to use an air-sick bag for the first time in his life.

Luckily the pain and the vertigo had faded quickly. His trial started tomorrow and he needed to have a clear head.

When the sun brightened his cell a marginal amount, a tray of food was pushed through the door, and he was warned by the guard on duty that his attorney had arrived on base.

Bellamy pushed the watery scrambled eggs around his plate with his plastic fork. He wasn’t hungry.

When the guard came back, he was put into cuffs and ankle shackles and lead to a small meeting room on another floor. John Murphy was sitting at the plastic table, an open file in front of him. Bellamy couldn’t help the smile pulling at one corner of his lips at the sight of his old friend.

“I never thought I’d see the day where I’d be happy to see your stupid face again,” Bellamy joked.

The tall, lanky man stood and pulled him into a one armed hug. “Right back at ya.” He motioned for Bellamy to take a seat.

Bellamy didn’t want to beat around the bush. “How’s Octavia?”

Murphy started leafing through pages in the open file absentmindedly. “Better last time I heard from her. She’s glad you were found. Worried that I won’t have my shit together though.” He straightened the documents in his hand with a loud crack against the table. “Listen Bellamy, are you sure you want a civilian attorney representing you for this?”

Bellamy leaned back in his seat with a scoff. “You’re one of the best criminal defense attorneys in the state.”

Murphy raised an eyebrow. “Because I’m too goddamn selfish to care whether my clients are actually guilty as long as they can pay my bill. But I’m serious. I really think you might be better off with someone that knows the ins and outs of a JAG court.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow, a little taken aback by his friend’s uncharacteristic lack of confidence. “You’re telling me John Murphy has found a case that he doesn’t know how to defend?”

“Yeah well, it’s pretty fucking hard to come up with a solid defence strategy when I keep getting
constant notifications that nearly every fact in this case is classified.” Murphy gritted out.

Bellamy’s gut tightened. A closer look over his lawyer’s shoulder revealed pages upon pages of heavy, blacked out lines indicative of all of the redacted information.

“Look man, obviously I’m going to do my best. I owe you that much. But I just want you to be prepared…”

Bellamy studied the table intently, trying to remain calm. “Worst case scenario, what am I looking at?”

Murphy scoffed, but there was little humor in his tone. “Well on the bright side, they haven’t killed you…”

“Murphy,” Bellamy warned, having no patience for his bullshit at a time like this.

“Life.” Murphy sighed, shaking his head. “You’re looking at life.”

It felt as if the walls were closing in on him. He thought back to all of the panic attacks he’d helped Clarke through and tried to slow down his breathing the same way. Murphy was still talking to him, but he wasn’t taking in any of it.

The door to the conference room opened and a tall, smug looking marine wearing his dress uniform walked in. “Lieutenant Cage Wallace. I’m the JAG prosecutor assigned to this case.” After the introduction, Bellamy zoned right back out. He was never going to freely see the light of day again. He was going to spend the rest of his life in a cement cage.

The prosecuting attorney continued on in a self-righteous tone, talking about how much the odds were stacked against him. Murphy didn’t seem to be paying much attention either, continuing to shuffle through the pages in front of him. Bellamy was close to smacking the file from his hands, the constant fidgeting getting on his last nerve.

“But despite all of this, I’ve been instructed to offer you a deal.” That finally got Bellamy’s attention. He looked up, meeting the lieutenant’s weasel-like eyes.

“In exchange for a guilty plea, we’re willing to give you 15 years. Personally I think that’s a stupidly generous offer considering you have no hope in hell of getting out of this. But the state would like to avoid a costly trial.” Cage informed him with a smirk.

Bellamy swallowed. 15 years was a long time. He’d be in his 40s by the time he got out. He’d miss a lot… Octavia and Lincoln’s wedding for sure, and if they had any kids they wouldn’t get to know him. But it was still a damn sight better than no hope of ever getting out.

“So, what’ll it be?” Cage pushed.

Murphy was still playing with the pages beside him. He felt a muscle in his temple twitch. It was hard to concentrate, but this seemed like the best option he had. “I-“

Out of nowhere, Murphy slammed his file shut, pushing it away from him. “No deal.”

Wallace seemed surprised, a small disbelieving laugh escaping his lips. “You do realize the maximum penalty for both desertion and treason is death right? This is a one-time offer that you’re going to regret not taking.”

“Oh cut the crap,” Murphy snarled. “Petty Officer Blake is no longer in an active war zone. The
death penalty doesn’t apply. He’ll take his chances. We’ll see you tomorrow in court.”

The lieutenant’s eyebrows rose until they were nearly touching his hairline. “Fine.” He made a
deliberate show of closing his own file and striding to the exit.

The second the door shut, Bellamy was on his feet. “What the hell Murphy?”

The other man didn’t get up. “Calm down.”

“You’re telling me to calm down? You’re the one that was just in the middle of explaining to me
how hopeless my case is. I had a chance at getting out one day and you just threw it away.”

Murphy rolled his eyes. “Cut the dramatics and sit down.”

Bellamy seethed, but dropped back to his seat with a hard thud.

Murphy pulled the file folder back toward him and pulled out the sheet sitting on top, handing it to
Bellamy wordlessly. It didn’t take him long to read, considering the brevity of the message. The
words ‘No Deal’ were scribbled hastily and underlined over top of Kane’s messy signature.
Bellamy just stared, not knowing what to think.

“I don’t know what the plan is, but we’re gonna go with it for now. And if the General doesn’t
come through, I’m still a half decent lawyer so hopefully I can stop them from frying your ass.” A
little bit of Murphy’s signature cocky attitude leached back through.

Bellamy just nodded, feeling numb. He didn’t trust Kane. Not anymore. But Murphy’s actions left
him with little choice.

His lawyer took the piece of paper back and folded it up, sliding it into the breast pocket of his
suit. He then gathered the rest of his file and made to leave. “Well now that I have my work cut out
for me, I better get to my office so I can figure out some form of angle to come at this from. Your
trial starts at 9am tomorrow or however you military folk say it.” He gave Bellamy a hard pat on
the back. “Get some sleep. You look like shit.”

Bellamy didn’t move from his spot until the guard came to take him back to his cell.

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He felt strangely claustrophobic in his dress blues. They were looser than they’d ever been and yet
as he walked into the courtroom, it felt like the collar was constricting around his throat. Murphy
was already seated at the defense table, doing a last minute revision of his notes. Bellamy was led
to his side, taking his seat quietly. Murphy didn’t look up right away, apparently too deep in
concentration.

Bellamy used the silence to take a quick glance around the courtroom. Cage was leaning back in
his chair, an arrogant smirk pulling at his lips. The jurors were going about their own business,
seemingly disinterested in his arrival. Beyond that, the room was empty.

Bellamy fidgeted uncomfortably. He knew he’d asked Lincoln to keep Octavia away, but a
friendly face would have been welcome to help soothe his nerves.

Even more than that though, he’d been hoping to see Clarke. He knew that it was completely
unfair to hold her to what she had said during that last night he’d spent with her. Hell, considering
he was a reminder of all of the horrible things that she’d had to endure, he couldn’t blame her if she
never wanted to see him again. But still, he’d held out hope that she might be here. Her presence
had kept him going throughout their captivity, and if nothing else, seeing her might help with reducing his nightmares.

“Who are you looking for?” Murphy’s unexpected question caused him to flinch in his chair.

He debated not answering for a moment, not knowing how Murphy would react to his response. But eventually he sighed. “Clarke.”

Murphy snorted, but seeing the dejected look on his friend’s face he quickly changed his tone. “This is a closed courtroom. They aren’t going to let any civilians come in to watch.” After a moment, in true Murphy fashion, he couldn’t resist adding a small jab at his friend. “Did you really think they were going to let her in here after they redacted any mention of her in your entire case?”

Bellamy groaned. It was so obvious that he really should have figured it out himself. But that also meant that there was still the possibility that she wanted to be there. He couldn’t explain why that mattered to him but it did. Changing the subject, he asked. “So what’s the plan?”

Murphy cracked his knuckles. “I got another note from Kane saying to proceed as if this were a regular trial. Someone really needs to tell that man that brevity is not his friend in these types of situations.”

Bellamy waited for more. When there was nothing forthcoming, he pressed. “That’s seriously all you’ve got?”

His lawyer rolled his eyes. “Of course not. From what I found, Lieutenant Cage Wallace, son of General Dante Wallace, made his way through the ranks on daddy’s coattails. He’s never had to work hard for anything in his life. We’ll use that to our advantage. Beyond that, I’m going to play on the way you were brought up. Try to drum up some empathy for the choices you made.”

“And?” Bellamy prompted.

“And pray that Kane pulls through.” Murphy squirmed a little in agitation. “I told you I’d do my best Bellamy, and I will. But you’re still in a tight spot.”

Bellamy nodded despondently, the deal he’d been offered the previous day haunting him with its seeming security.

The door at the back of the courtroom opened, and in walked a stern looking older man. The bailiff asked them all to rise and introduced the presiding officer as Colonel Charles Pike. Bellamy had never heard of him.

He’d barely sat back down, when the colonel was instructing him to stand back up. “Petty Officer Bellamy Augustus Blake, you stand accused in this court martial of desertion from your duty as well as the commission of treason against the United States of America. These are some very serious allegations. How do you plead?”

His throat went dry, and though he opened his mouth no sound came out. Maybe even without the deal, if he pleaded guilty they’d show him mercy. Or maybe they’d throw him in a cell and conveniently lose the key.

Murphy landed a hard kick to his shin beneath the table. Pike was still looking at him expectantly. “N-not guilty, sir,” he finally managed to stutter out.

The colonel nodded. “Very well, you may be seated. The prosecution may begin its opening arguments.”
And with that, the trial that would decide the rest of his life began. Bellamy tried to focus on what was being said, but he felt so agitated that most of it flew over his head. The prosecution’s strategy seemed to be a simple one: laying out the facts. And Bellamy couldn’t deny, without background information and context the case seemed pretty cut and dry. He’d been on duty in Iraq, he’d left his post without a word to his CO, he’d somehow ended up in the hands of his enemy, and at that point his captors seemed to have gained vital information. If Bellamy had been sitting on the juror’s panel, he knew which way the arguments would have swayed him.

John’s approach was commendable, considering the utter lack of hard facts he could base his rebuttal on. He built up Bellamy’s childhood - growing up not exactly in poverty, but certainly not rich - the tragic death of his mother, the responsibility he took for his sister (not in the context of the case, but to establish his character), being taken in by a general, joining the navy at a young age. It made him sound sympathetic but dependable. He wasn’t sure how much it would help.

Murphy’s statements had the unintended consequence of throwing Bellamy back to his childhood – something he’d rarely allowed himself to think about, trying to save himself from the pain. He thought back on Octavia’s skinned knees, and his mother’s warm smile. He remembered watching Octavia play in the park when they were both really too young to be out on their own, and the surprise he’d feel on the rare occasions he’d come home to a plate of his mother’s freshly baked cookies.

And with that flood of memories came a small epiphany. The house from his dreams – it was the house he’d grown up in.

He tried to focus back in on the trial, but thoughts about the house kept gnawing at him. What had caused him to remember it so suddenly? Why was it so commonly featured in his nightmares as of late?

The prosecution was laying out their case, bringing in experts to solidify their stand point. Lieutenant Wallace was currently questioning a psychologist about the prevalence of desertions amongst men who had joined the military at a young age. Bellamy tuned it out. He didn’t care, and he hoped the jury wouldn’t either. Statistics and psychological reasoning didn’t apply to every case.

As he continued to sit in silence, he allowed his mind to wander back to the house. He wondered what had happened to it after his mother died and he and Octavia had moved in with Kane. He wondered if it was even still standing or if it had been torn down to start a new development. Despite the way that it was portrayed in his dreams, most of Bellamy’s memories in that house had been good ones. Maybe if he ever got out of prison he would go back there to visit.

The prosecution continued to march out so-called experts, all of them damaging Bellamy’s character with their rationalization of what he’d supposedly done. He wondered idly why they hadn’t brought out the big guns by bring out a witness that would lay out the facts. He’d never denied that he’d left his post, in fact it was public record. That alone was enough to convict him. But then again, maybe the prosecution was in just as much of a difficult of a position as he was. They had to skate around just as many secrets as he did, and they probably didn’t even have the whole story to begin with.

For a fleeting moment, Bellamy felt like they might actually have a case.

Then a screen was rolled into the room.

Cage paced in front of the jurors. “The prosecution would like to introduce our next witness, attending the trail via Skype from the military barracks in Iraq, Petty Officer Dax Winslow.”
Bellamy’s gut clenched, remembering his last interaction with Dax. The screen came to life showing the somewhat grainy image of the soldier wearing his fatigues, the hustle and bustle of the barracks audible in the background.

“Petty Officer Winslow, thank you for taking the time to join us today. We’ll try not to keep you too long.”

Dax nodded, a scowl pulling at his features. Wallace continued. “Can you please recount for us anything that you found significant leading up to the disappearance of Petty Officer Blake?”

“For at least a week leading up to when he left, Blake was confined to quarters.”

Cage smirked knowingly. “And you and your team were not given any explanation for this detention?”

Dax shook his head. “No. I’m sure he talked to Petty Officer Woods about it. Both of them seemed pretty riled up and Woods seemed even more pissed when Blake disappeared and didn’t come back.”

Murphy stood abruptly. “Objection. The witness is speculating.”

Cage just shrugged. “It’s alright. The jury can disregard any testimony regarding Petty Officer Woods.” He turned back to the webcam as Murphy slouched back into his seat. “So what were you told?”

“When Blake didn’t show up for role call, Master Chief Azgeda told us that he’d been given two weeks leave back to America due to a family emergency.”

“And you didn’t believe this?” Cage prompted.

“I did at first,” Dax continued. “But when he didn’t come back to camp and was declared AWOL, things started to fall into place. See, Blake was raised by General Kane. It got him special treatment from time to time. It made total sense that if he were getting into trouble, the higher ups would at least try to cover things up.”

Murphy stood so quickly his chair screeched. “Objection!” he shouted in clear exasperation.

Cage held up a hand, his signature self-satisfied smirk very evident. “The jury will disregard the last part of the witness’ statement.”

Bellamy looked around the courtroom. Whether Dax’s words were ordered to be ignored or not, the damage seemed to have been done. The jurors were shifting uncomfortably in their seats giving him distasteful glances. Pike just sat behind his desk doing nothing, not even bothering to deal with the mention of Kane. Apparently since the reference was due to his relationship to Bellamy and not to his actual involvement in the case, it wasn’t covered under the redactions.

The sinking feeling that overcame Bellamy was overwhelming.

Cage persisted as if nothing had happened. “After Petty Officer Blake was declared AWOL, what was your next interaction with him?”

Dax’s eyes were venomous, even in the low quality video. “Our team received intel that Blake and a civilian were being held in a terrorist compound in Northern Iraq. We set up an operation to rescue them, but when we arrived, they weren’t there. A member of our team was killed in the ensuing fire fight. We eventually tracked down Blake and the civilian in the early morning hours
and evaced them to Baghdad. Then from what I understand, Petty Officer Blake was taken into custody."

Cage gave a satisfied nod. “Thank you, Petty Officer Winslow.” He returned to his table to take a seat.

Bellamy’s panic continued to build. Atom’s death had nothing to do with him or the charges laid against him. But the jury was made up entirely of service men and women who had likely all been affected by line of duty deaths. He watched as their brows began to furrow and their lips curled in disgust.

“Does the defense have any questions for the witness?” Pike asked, his fingers steepled in front of his face.

Murphy rose again, trying to exude calm and confidence. “Yes sir.” He addressed the colonel before turning his attention to the webcam. “Just to confirm Petty Officer, you were never told where Petty Officer Blake was, nor what he was doing during the time he was missing.”

“No sir. Those details were not relevant to the mission. It’s not uncommon for us not to be told specifics.”

Murphy nodded. “So essentially, one of your team members was found severely injured, trying to protect an American civilian and your automatic response is to assume the worst about him.”

Dax leaned forward in his chair, ready to make a retort, but Murphy held up his hand, warding him off. “I have no further questions sir.” He addressed Pike.

The older man turned back to Cage. “Do you have any other witnesses to bring in?”

Cage stood once more. “Not at this time Sir. The prosecution rests.”

Colonel Pike gathered the file on his desk. “Very well. We’ll finish here for the day. Tomorrow we’ll hear from the defense at 0900 hours. This court martial is adjourned.”

Bellamy leaned back in his chair, scrubbing roughly at his face. “Please tell me that didn’t go as badly as I think it did.”

Murphy ground his teeth. “Well it certainly didn’t go great.” He sat and contemplated for a moment. “The one thing we have going for us is that nobody actually knows what really happened other than you and Clarke. If we can establish you as reliable and loyal, we might be able to sway the jury to our side.”

Bellamy huffed, knowing that it was likely a long shot. He thought back over the day trying to decide when exactly things had seemed to slip so far off the rails. But a different train of thought continued to nag at him until he had to bring it up. If he did end up going to prison the next day, he might as well put his mind at ease about one thing. “Murphy?”

“Hmm?” His attorney looked up from the notes he’d been intently studying.

“I need you to look into something.” The other man raised an eyebrow, curious. Bellamy continued, “There’s this house…”

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When Bellamy arrived to the courtroom the next morning, he was exhausted. He hadn’t slept the
night before. He was set to take the stand first, and between the anxiety of that, and the dread associated with his nightmares, he’d ended up laying awake staring at the ceiling the whole night.

One look at Murphy’s face in the morning told him that Kane hadn’t been back in contact. It was all up to his testimony and whatever the jury decided.

The chair at the front of the courtroom was hard, its back digging into his ribs uncomfortably. For the first time in these proceedings, all eyes were focused on him and it made his skin crawl. His throat felt dry to the point that he was worried that he wouldn’t physically be able to answer Murphy’s questions. He squirmed in his seat uneasily.

“Petty Officer Blake,” Murphy began. “Tell me about your mother.”

“Objection. Relevance?” Cage sounded bored.

“I’m establishing my client’s character for the court,” Murphy explained innocently.

“I’ll allow it,” Pike grunted.

Bellamy sighed. “She was a hard worker. Had three jobs to keep food on the table for me and my sister. We didn’t see her much, but when we did she was very loving.”

Murphy continued. “And what happened to her?”

Bellamy bristled. He didn’t talk about his mother, certainly not to strangers. But if it was important to the case he’d have to... though he could still be sparse with the details. “She was a civilian killed as the result of an accident on base. General Marcus Kane felt that he held some of the responsibility for her death so he took me and my sister in.”

“You keep mentioning your sister. Are you two close?”

“Careful Mr. Murphy,” Pike warned. Bellamy had to hold in a derisive snort. He hadn’t been anywhere near as cautious about certain parties being mentioned the previous day. “Petty Officer Blake you may answer.”

“Of course we were close. I practically raised her,” Bellamy grumbled.

“That’s a lot of responsibility for someone so young. But if you were ‘practically raising her’ why’d you leave to join the navy at 18?”

Bellamy rocked back in his chair, hesitant to expose his feelings like this. “I was pretty resentful as a teen. Octavia was being fairly well taken care of and I knew that I had a lot of growing up to do. I thought that the navy was a good place to do that.”

“And was it?”

“It had its moments. I can’t say that I don’t regret anything I ever did in the military, but through my involvement with the SEALs I gained a second family. I went from feeling like my sister was the only person in the world that I could trust to knowing that I had a whole team of individuals at my back.”

Murphy gave him a small smile. “That doesn’t sound like someone who would abandon his post to betray his country.”

Bellamy was firm in his reply. “That’s because I wouldn’t.”
Murphy raised his eyebrow, playing into his role. “And yet you don’t deny that you went AWOL.”

Bellamy snorted. “That would be stupid, considering that it’s public record.”

“But you pled not guilty to desertion? You must have had a damn good reason to leave your post - one that you’re not able to state in this courtroom.”

Bellamy nodded. “I did.”

Murphy changed tact. “When you were rescued by SEAL Team 10, it was mentioned that you were with a civilian companion.”

“Yes sir.”

“I wonder… had you not been with this civilian, what do you think her likelihood of survival would have been?”

Bellamy chewed his lip. He didn’t want to diminish Clarke’s role in their escape, whether her identity was withheld or not. She was just as much of a factor in the fact that he was still alive as he was to her. “She played a big role herself in both of our continued survival, but…”

“But?” Murphy prompted.

“If I hadn’t been there she would have died,” Bellamy’s response was quiet. He didn’t care if they heard. His mind floated back to those first days he’d spent in captivity, when the most likely outcome had been that she wouldn’t make it. He couldn’t bear the thought of being in that kind of situation again, even now that they were safe.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, it’s no secret that huge parts of this case are being left out. But I posit that the man sitting in front of you – a man utterly devoted to his sister and his comrades, a man who is so obviously affected by even the thought of losing the civilian that he’d been held captive with – would not betray his country of his own volition.” Murphy turned to Pike. “I have no further questions Sir,” he inclined his head toward Wallace, “Your witness.”

Bellamy took the chance while Cage stood and straightened his uniform to take a quick glance at the jury. He still held their full attention and some of them even looked slightly sympathetic.

Cage still wore an arrogant smirk. “Petty Officer Blake, before I begin, I’d just like to remind you that lying under oath is a crime.”

Bellamy’s jaw clenched. He was about to get eviscerated and he knew it.

“So in your own defensive testimony, you’ve already openly admitted to desertion. Now as to the treason charge… Your captors had no idea what the identity of the civilian they were holding was, and then suddenly after your disappearance they knew. Care to explain that?”

Bellamy ground his teeth for a moment. There was no sense in beating around the bush. “I told them who she was.”

The silence in the room was broken as the jurors began to shift in their seats, some of them muttering under their breath. Bellamy tried to get Murphy’s attention, hoping for a little bit of help, but his lawyer was studiously avoiding his gaze.

Cage’s smile grew impossibly wider. “So you also admit to giving information to the enemy. Are
there any other felonies you wish to-“ Cage was cut off mid sentence by the courtroom door slamming open.

The same man that Bellamy had seen in the video chat in Baghdad all those months ago strode into the room looking incredibly disheveled. Clarke’s father, Senator Griffin.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, Colonel Pike, but I have some pertinent information that couldn’t wait. If I may approach?”

Cage looked irritated, and Murphy had stood from his chair. Pike nodded to the politician before addressing the two attorneys. “Lieutenant Wallace, Mr. Murphy, have a seat.”

Bellamy finally managed to catch his lawyer’s eye. Murphy just shrugged - he had no idea what was going on either.

The two older men were locked in a tense discussion at the judge’s bench. At times things got heated, but their hushed tones never rose high enough for anyone else to hear. Finally Pike nodded, and Senator Griffin turned to address the room.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, as servicemen and women it is expected of you that you will keep national security as your highest priority, and therefore I have received permission to disclose the real facts of this case to you, none of which may leave this room under any circumstances.”

Cage was leaning forward in his chair, his face a mix of exasperation and curiosity. Murphy looked relieved.

“I regret not being able to attend court sooner to avoid some unnecessary confusion. I was unavoidably detained by a family emergency.” That would explain the man’s haggard appearance, Bellamy thought. He felt rage simmering in the pit of his stomach, his own trepidation at the outcome of the trial momentarily forgotten. Clarke had mentioned that her mother suffered from a substance abuse problem. The thought that Dr. Griffin was causing her family even more grief at a time like this fueled his anger at the selfishness of a woman that he’d never even met.

“The civilian mentioned in the court documents is my daughter, and this young man,” he continued, indicating Bellamy, “Saved her life. He was following the orders of a superior officer who had sent him on an unauthorized mission. That superior officer has been disciplined accordingly. Any actions that Petty Officer Blake took in order to secure my daughter’s freedom have been deemed acceptable by the office of the President of the United States.”

The mumbling in the jury began to rise again until Senator Griffin held up his hand asking for silence. “Petty Officer Blake deserves a commendation, not prison time. But due to the sensitive nature of the information involved, for now he’ll just have to settle for my gratitude.”

Pike nodded. “Due to orders that this court has received from the highest authority, the charges against Petty Officer Blake have been dropped. That said, due to his unorthodox methods indicating a lack of good judgment in some cases, he will be discharged from the military, though he will be allowed to keep his rank and all of the benefits associated with it.” The colonel turned to Bellamy, not looking entirely pleased. “Congratulations son, you’re free to go. This court martial is dismissed.”

Bellamy sat stunned, still trying to allow his brain to catch up to everything that had just happened. Senator Griffin hurried from the room, making a hurried apology and explaining that he had somewhere to be. Cage followed him soon after.
Eventually the bailiff led Bellamy back to the defense table, seeing he was apparently unable to convince his legs to move on his own.

“Looks like Kane actually did come through,” Murphy commented, giving him a quick hug.

Bellamy just nodded, still numb.

“Listen man,” his lawyer continued after pulling away. “I pulled up the info on that house you mentioned and get this, it’s yours. Your mom willed it to you and your sister, and the General has actually been paying for upkeep on it all this time. Come stay with Emori and me tonight, and tomorrow we’ll head over and check it out. If it’s decent, we can get you moved in this weekend. One less thing to worry about.”

*One less thing to worry about*… that was helpful, because in that moment, facing unexpected freedom, he felt totally *lost*.

Chapter End Notes

Many apologies... I really struggled with writing this chapter, both because I have zero concept about anything regarding legal matters and it's mostly just filler setting up for future events.

In the midst of my writer's block, I started working on the next chapter so hopefully you shouldn't have to wait too long. I kind of recommend going back to the previous chapters and giving them a quick re-read. There are quite a few references to past events coming up so you might need a refresher... I know I did.

Hopefully this chapter wasn't too bad, and was successful at renewing interest in this story. There's tons of angst to come in the coming chapters... fasten your seat belts. Let me know your thoughts by leaving comments or kudos :)}
The house didn’t look anywhere near as run down as it did in his dreams. Sure it was dated, especially in comparison to the rezoned houses that dotted the street, but it looked clean and Marcus had obviously hired a landscaper as all of the hedges were neatly trimmed.

Stepping out of Murphy’s car, he glanced up and down the block, subconsciously scanning the street for anything that stood out as being out of place. He’d stumbled upon enough horrors in this setting during his nightmares to make him more than a little cautious.

His eyes locked on one truck in particular. The beat up Chevy was occupied by a man with close-cropped hair, his eyes hidden behind a pair of aviators. Bellamy’s legs started moving before his mind had even had a chance to catch up.

Lincoln stepped out of the vehicle and pulled his former colleague into a tight embrace, giving him a hard pat on the back. Bellamy took a step back, looking around, confused. “What are you doing here man?”

Lincoln nodded toward where Murphy was still slowly walking toward them. “He called me last night. I got the keys from Kane, and Octavia and I packed a couple boxes of your stuff. It’s a nice place, I’m sure you’ll like it.”

Bellamy finally noticed several moving boxes stacked in the bed of the truck. “And he gave you the keys just like that?”

Lincoln shrugged. “It’s your house. I know you probably don’t want to hear it, but Kane cares. He gets that you’re probably feeling betrayed right now, and he’s willing to give you space, but he still has your back Bellamy. He got demoted to Major General when all of this shit went down.”

Bellamy rolled his eyes, choosing not to comment on what could clearly become a contentious subject. Instead he hopped up into the bed of the truck and grabbed a box. “Where is Octavia anyway?” He was more than a little surprised to be reunited with Lincoln without his sister in tow.

Lincoln grabbed a box of his own and began following his friend toward the front porch. “She’s at work.”

Bellamy stopped in his tracks, causing Lincoln to nearly bump into him. “Work?” He’d thought Octavia would still be focusing on her recovery. Not to mention, it was a Saturday. Bellamy had watched his mother bury herself in work to hide from her problems until it literally killed her. He’d be damned if he stood by and watched as his sister did the same.

Lincoln sighed. “She needed it.”

Bellamy turned on him. “What the hell does that mean?”
His friend shook his head, obviously hiding something. “I’ll explain later. For now, let’s get this stuff inside.”

Bellamy wanted to argue, but he knew Lincoln. He wouldn’t get any information out of the man that he wasn’t already willing to give. He waited on the front steps while Lincoln fumbled with the keys, his eyes straying to the porch swing. Octavia had loved that swing when she was little. He’d usually have to chase her off of it to make her go to bed. His heart lurched at the memory.

The front door opened with a soft creak, and Lincoln motioned his friend inside. Bellamy stepped across the threshold and had to blink. Kane had obviously had renovations done. The front room was sparsely furnished into a cozy living space with no sign of the datedness that defined the exterior. Marcus had probably rented it out through the years. As a result, the space was essentially move-in ready.

Bellamy dumped his box near the couch and did a slow spin, taking in all of the changes. To be honest, he barely even remembered how this room had looked originally. He had a vague memory of floral upholstery and Octavia’s dolls in a messy pile in the corner. The image didn’t fit in with the modern furniture and minimalist fireplace in front of him, and he was glad. It would help him to start fresh and create new memories, rather than being buried in the old.

He was interrupted from his musings by Murphy entering the house and unceremoniously dumping the duffel bag of Bellamy’s personal effects that the Navy had provided him. “Well, I gotta get home. Nice place Bellamy.”

Bellamy nodded. Murphy had taken more than enough time away from his personal life to help him out over the past couple months. He’d noticed the tense looks that Emori had given him upon arrival at their house and again that morning. He didn’t want to get in the way of his old friend’s relationship. “Thanks again man. For everything.” He reached out, shaking Murphy’s hand firmly.

The lawyer gave him a cocky smirk. “Yeah, well, just don’t go needing my services again anytime soon, got it?”

Bellamy managed an amused smile and a nod. ”I’ll try my best.”

While Lincoln went out to get more boxes, Bellamy gave himself a tour. The kitchen had been completely redone, brand new appliances glinting in the sunlight streaming in through the large bay windows. The washroom was still cramped. His old room had been converted into an office. That left his mom’s room as the master and Octavia’s old room as the guest room. It was a tight fit for a family, but for him it would be more than enough space.

Lincoln spent the next few hours helping him unpack boxes. Bellamy was actually shocked by how much of his stuff Kane had kept. A lot of it no longer had any use to him, and he’d outgrown most of the clothes, but all in all when they were finished, the house no longer looked empty. He’d definitely need to pick up some things before it would be livable – first and foremost kitchenware – but between the provided furnishings and his stuff, he’d easily be able to make do.

As they were going through one of the last boxes, Bellamy noticed that Lincoln kept checking his watch. “Got somewhere to be?” Bellamy asked, genuinely curious.

Lincoln nodded. “I’ve gotta pick up O soon. I dropped her off this morning. You’re welcome to come along if you want.”

That was all of the invitation that Bellamy needed. After locking up, he followed Lincoln out to the truck silently, nervousness starting to creep down his spine. He’d had zero contact with his
sister since he’d left her at the hospital in Baghdad. He’d put her through hell since then. The logical part of his brain knew that Octavia loved him unconditionally, and especially considering his reception from Lincoln, things had cooled off. He still couldn’t help the feeling of trepidation nagging at every cell in his body that she would be cold towards him, unable to forgive his lies.

Lincoln seemed comfortable in the quiet, not interrupting his train of thought. They drove for quite a while. When the houses thinned and the road merged onto the highway, Bellamy’s brow began to furrow. He couldn’t comprehend why they’d be leaving the city. After all, Octavia had majored in business in college.

Before Bellamy could express his concern, Lincoln was already speaking, using his typical uncanny ability to read his friend’s thoughts. “She works at Ton DC. It’s a therapy ranch out in Acorn Acres. Her psychiatrist suggested she start going there to try to help with her anxiety and PTSD. She took to it so well that they actually ended up hiring her. The ranch was founded by a woman who was violently abused by her husband for years. They use equine therapy to help victims of trauma start to reconnect. Octavia mostly works with the kids.” Lincoln smiled proudly, “They really love her.”

Bellamy felt torn by mixed emotions. On the one hand it brought him joy to hear about what Octavia was doing. It wasn’t a path he’d ever thought she’d go down, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized that it fit. But at the same time, hearing about her struggles while he hadn’t been around to help her hurt him, tearing at the already ragged hole in his heart.

They continued to pass farmers’ fields, until Lincoln turned down a dirt path, leading them through an ornate gate signaling their destination. Bellamy stared out the window taking in the seemingly endless open pasture, a large barn and sizeable farmhouse visible in the distance. It was so quiet and serene. Bellamy could easily understand how this place might help soothe a traumatized soul.

As they rounded a final bend in the road, Bellamy caught sight of his sister, boosting herself up on the bottom wrung of a fence, brushing out the coat of a beautiful bay mare. As he watched, Octavia walked around to the front of the horse, her lips moving to form words he couldn’t make out. Finally, she stopped, resting her forehead against the horse’s snout, the creature whinnying gently. Bellamy swallowed. She looked so calm, peaceful. It was so unlike the sister he’d grown up with who was a constant spitfire, never able to stay still for more than a minute. If this place had helped her gain a sense of inner peace then he was grateful.

As the truck rolled to a stop, his sister looked up, her face melting into an easy grin the moment she recognized the vehicle. Bellamy had his seatbelt off in an instant, unable to stop himself from running to her, his arms outstretched. Octavia met him halfway.

And then he was clutching her body to his chest.

It was such a surreal moment for Bellamy - for so long he’d thought he’d never see her again. To feel her now, smell her hair, hear her laugh… it was more than he could have dreamed.

“Young home big brother,” she whispered in his ear. He let out a low relieved chuckle, slowly lowering her back to the ground. Her hands released from around his neck, one set of fingertips coming up to lightly trace the newly formed scar on his cheek.

At the sight of the corner of a white bandage poking out of the sleeve of her flannel, he seized her wrist. “What the hell O?” his voice was soft, even if he suddenly felt like adrenalin was burning through his veins.
She immediately snatched her arm away, taking half a step back. “It’s not what you think.”

He continued to stare at her skeptically, not letting it go. Finally she sighed, rolling up her sleeve. “The timing is shitty but…” She trailed off, her eyes wandering to a spot over his shoulder before returning to his own. “I just couldn’t deal with the constant reminder of seeing the scars staring back at me every day.” She peeled the dressing back gingerly, revealing what was underneath. “I had to make it my own – turn it into something beautiful.”

Though her skin was still streaked with glistening white scars, similar to the damage he’d witnessed on Clarke, dark lines had been added, twisting and swirling until they came together in an intricate tattoo, so fresh it was still pink around the edges. “Dahlias,” her voice was gentle. “They were mom’s favorite.

Bellamy found himself swallowing thickly, trying to fight back the burning sensation behind his eyes.

Octavia seemed to sense his dejection, and replaced the gauze, changing the subject. “So how’s your new place?”

Bellamy took a deep breath, running his hand through his hair. He took a moment, glancing back at the truck where Lincoln still sat, giving them their privacy. When he felt like he’d sufficiently regained his cool, he replied. “It’s our house, O. If you ever decide you don’t want to live with Kane anymore, the door is always open. Your name is on the deed.”

When she didn’t respond right away, he looked over. She was worrying her lip and studiously avoiding his gaze. “Actually… I’ve been staying with Lincoln most nights.”

Bellamy felt his shoulders tense, his instincts as an older brother automatically kicking in. “O-“

“No.” she cut him off unexpectedly, her tone firm. “You don’t get to do this. First of all, I’m 23 years old. Secondly, we’re engaged. There’s nothing inappropriate about what’s going on between us. I needed him, and he’s been there for me.”

Bellamy clenched his jaw, a little bit of the familiar hurt creeping back in and causing him to relent easily. “Okay.”

Octavia gave him a disbelieving look. “Okay?”

Bellamy rolled his eyes. “You’re right. You’re an adult. You can make your own decisions. God knows you could have picked far worse than Lincoln.”

Octavia’s lips twitched. “Well alright then. I’ve got to get Helios back to the barn. There’s supposed to be a storm tonight. But after that, you’re coming back to our place. We have a lot of catching up to do. Your new house can wait one more day.”

Bellamy just nodded, following along behind her as she took the animal’s reins and began leading it down the dirt path. He watched the way she interacted with her horse and was still in awe of the apparent bond she’d created with the animal. They’d barely been back in each other’s presence, but Bellamy’s mind was already starting to be put at ease by the amount of emotional healing his sister seemed to have gone through. He hoped that one day he might be able to achieve the same.

When they got back to the truck, Bellamy allowed his sister to take the front seat, sliding into the back without comment. Lincoln gave his fiancé a soft kiss on the cheek, before starting the engine. “How are you feeling?” He asked her quietly as he turned the vehicle around.
Octavia threaded her fingers through his where they rested on the gear shit. “Better,” her reply was equally soft. Bellamy knew that the conversation wasn’t meant for his ears, but he couldn’t help but be intrigued. He thought back on how Lincoln had mentioned that she’d needed to come in to work today, and couldn’t help but wonder why. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

Octavia met his eyes through the rearview mirror. “I’m okay Bellamy.” She fidgeted for a moment as if contemplating what exactly she should tell him. They pulled back onto the highway, watching several stands of trees whiz past before she continued. “Wells Jaha passed away a few days ago.”

Bellamy was embarrassed by how long it took him to place the name. He’d had a lot on his mind as of late.

“He hadn’t woken up since they found him, and his parents decided to terminate life support.” Octavia’s voice sounded uncharacteristically bitter, before turning flat again. “His memorial service is tomorrow. You should come.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow. “I never even met the guy.”

“Clarke will probably be there.” At this statement, Lincoln looked at her sharply, his eyebrows furrowed. Octavia shook her head, her expression unreadable. “I think it would be good for her to see you.”

Bellamy thought back on Clarke’s mental state throughout their captivity. He couldn’t even imagine how she’d be feeling after this new blow. He gave a subtle nod. “I’ll come.” In the end, he hoped it might end up helping him as well, seeing her alive easing his mind away from the nightmares.

Lincoln opened his mouth as if to say something, but before he could, Octavia turned in her seat. “So, what do you want for dinner?” The previous subject obviously closed.

Bellamy shrugged. He’d barely thought about food after months of starving, and before that, years of MREs.

Octavia looked unconcerned by his lack of interest. “Do you like Vietnamese? There’s this great little shop close to the apartment. We can order in.”

“Sounds great,” was Bellamy’s gruff reply. Octavia smiled and picked right back up into conversation, detailing to both men about how her day with Helios had gone. Bellamy zoned back out. Lincoln had obviously been skirting around something all day. It hadn’t slipped his notice that right when his friend had seemed like he might finally say something, Octavia had cut her fiancé off. It bothered Bellamy, putting him on edge.

Octavia kept the conversation going throughout dinner and through much of the evening as they slowly sipped beers on Lincoln’s small balcony. Bellamy never found the opportunity to ask Lincoln what was bothering him. And then Octavia was ushering him into the guestroom saying that he looked exhausted and he should try to get some sleep.

And he did try… but the nightmares were just as soul shattering - even with his sister safe in the next room.

***

By the time he convinced himself to get out of bed the next morning, both Lincoln and Octavia were already up and almost ready for the memorial service. He’d had to scramble through a quick shower, pulling on the suit that Lincoln had lent him. It was uncomfortably tight around his chest,
and the pant legs were a little too long, but it’d have to do. He didn’t exactly have another option.

When he’d finally come out of the bathroom, still toweling off the wet tips of his hair, Octavia had given him a warm hug. “Thank you for doing this,” her whisper sounded sincere.

When he looked up, he found Lincoln leaning back against the kitchen counter with his arms crossed, his lips pursed in obvious worry. Bellamy pulled away from his sister, once again wanting to ask, but Lincoln simply grabbed his suit jacket and his keys and headed for the door.

The drive to the service was somber. Bellamy caught his sister sniffling a few times, and when he looked at her face through the side mirror, he found tear tracks glistening down both of her cheeks. He wanted to reach out to her, but was unsure. This wasn’t the baby sister he’d used to be able to comfort through skinned knees and hurt feelings. He was still adjusting.

Instead Lincoln reached out, fishing for her hand, and threading his fingers through hers, his thumb tracing soothing circles across the back of her knuckles. When they arrived, she used her free hand to wipe hurriedly at her face, erasing any trace of the emotion that had been there moments before.

The moment they exited the vehicle, Lincoln was at his sister’s side, wrapping an arm protectively around her waist. Bellamy gave him a nod of thanks, still feeling incredibly uncomfortable at even being there.

“You two go on ahead. I think I’m going to find a spot at the back,” Bellamy told his companions softly. Octavia gave him a sad smile, reaching out and giving his hand a light squeeze, before the two of them made their way toward the already gathering crowd.

Bellamy stayed near the parking lot for a moment longer, taking some deep calming breaths. He hadn’t thought this far ahead, his only goal had always been just seeing Clarke. What would he say? What if she didn’t want to see him, his very presence an unrelenting reminder of the absolute hell she’d gone through?

It was a little late to back out now... the keys to the truck were with Lincoln. With a sigh, he slowly trudged through the grass in the direction Octavia and Lincoln had gone. The ceremony was being held outside in a beautiful public park. As he crested a hill, he saw that rows of white folding chairs had been set up under a sprawling oak tree. At the front sat a large portrait of a handsome smiling man, with a simple golden urn sitting on a table beneath it. He’d been so young - Bellamy thought bitterly – and he’d died trying to help Clarke and his sister. His heart ached.

Most of the gathering had already found their seats. Bellamy scanned the crowd, looking for a halo of long golden hair glinting in the warm autumn light. His eyes paused briefly when he saw Senator Griffin sitting at the front next to a couple who could only be Wells’ parents. On the other side of the aisle he spotted Dr. Griffin sitting next to Kane. Marcus locked eyes with him and immediately began to rise from his seat. Bellamy tensed, taking an involuntary step back. At his adoptive son’s obvious distress, Kane stopped, giving him a solemn nod and turning back to the front. He didn’t quite manage to hide his face before Bellamy could notice the hurt tightening the corners of his eyes.

Continuing his search, he eventually found Octavia and Lincoln, sitting amongst a group of other young people. But still there was no sign of Clarke.

Bellamy felt momentarily relieved, before disappointment churned his empty stomach. It was soon followed by a tinge of worry. This didn’t seem like the kind of event that she would miss without a very good reason. He found himself silently hoping that she was just running late.
An older man approached the pulpit at the front and Bellamy hurried to find an empty chair in the last row. Even if Clarke wasn’t here, this young man still deserved his respect.

The ceremony was beautiful. Bellamy gathered that Wells’ parents were diplomats and had instilled in him the importance of philanthropy. He had been heavily involved in volunteerism both in Virginia and abroad, and seemed to be well loved by everyone who knew him.

As the man continued the eulogy, Bellamy noticed that the circumstances of the young man’s death were simply referred to as ‘a tragic event that happened overseas’. Though Octavia and Clarke were briefly mentioned in the sense that he had been amongst friends, there was no comment on the fact that it had been an act of terrorism, or that the girls had been kidnapped. Obviously, the true nature of what had happened was still being heavily concealed, and that bothered Bellamy. He couldn’t imagine the weight of not being able to talk to your friends about what you were going through. At least Octavia had him and Lincoln, and even Kane. Clarke was estranged from her parents, and knowing her, she probably wouldn’t want to burden Octavia. He felt the knot of worry in his gut grow even heavier.

The memorial concluded with Wells’ parents releasing a lantern into the sky and the congregation’s whispers of “May we meet again.” Bellamy left, heading deliberately toward the parking lot. He had no appetite for trying to make small talk with strangers, especially not when he was caught up in his own head like this.

He found a group of pine trees close to where the truck was parked, and decided to wait in their shade. It wasn’t long before people began meandering their way past, showing various amounts of grief. Bellamy inched back toward the foliage, feeling out of place.

Unfortunately, he hadn’t managed to disappear completely, because Jake Griffin waved to him and started to head in his direction. Bellamy fought the urge to pretend that he hadn’t seen and walk away. This man had given him his freedom – at the very least, Bellamy owed him a moment of his time.

The Senator shook his hand firmly, giving him a pat on the back. “It’s good to see you walking the streets as a free man. I never had the opportunity to personally thank you for all that you did for my daughter, and I’m sorry again that I wasn’t able to come to your trial sooner.”

Bellamy managed a small smile. “I’m just glad that you made it eventually.” He sighed. “It’s a shame that Clarke wasn’t able to make it today…” At the confused look wrinkling the politician’s brow, Bellamy trailed off.

The man stared at him for a moment, his mouth opening and closing but no sound coming out. Finally he just nodded his head toward Bellamy’s left and balled his hands into the pockets of his dress pants.

Bellamy shifted his gaze to the direction the man was indicating and was shocked by what he saw. He hadn’t recognized her before due to the fact that her hair was cropped short. It had probably been the only way to deal with how her blonde waves had been so hopelessly matted.

Clarke Griffin was standing between a man and a woman that he didn’t recognize. She was wearing an oversized turtleneck sweater, the sleeves nearly reaching the tips of her pinkies. The outfit didn’t particularly stand out due to the cool fall weather, but he knew instinctually that she had chosen it to cover up as many of her scars as possible.

What alarmed him about her appearance even at this distance, was just how gaunt she still appeared after two months of freedom. He knew that it would take time for her to recover from
everything that had happened, but surely whatever hospital she’d been treated in would have made more of an effort to make sure she was eating.

“Excuse me,” Senator Griffin muttered as he slipped away from the now awkward moment. Bellamy barely even noticed. He took a few hesitant steps toward Clarke, still unsure what to say. Her gaze moved toward him and he stopped in his tracks. She was looking at him, but she obviously wasn’t seeing him, her eyes glassy and unfocused. He knew… he just knew that she was heavily drugged.

The woman on her right touched her elbow, and Clarke jumped at the unexpected contact. The woman whispered something in her ear and Clarke nodded before joining her two companions in walking toward the parking lot, her movements slow and uncoordinated.

Bellamy watched them until they disappeared into a black car, its windows tinted. The moment they left, he was turning on his heel, scanning the crowd for a familiar head of brunette hair.

He found his sister talking to a small group of what he could only assume were her college friends. Without bothering with pleasantries, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward a nearby stand of trees. He saw the tiny flash of fear in her eyes before she was able to tamp it down and felt a small amount of regret, but he ignored it. He needed answers.

Once they were out of earshot from everyone nearby, he came to an abrupt halt and turned to face her. “What the hell, O? A little warning would have been nice.”

Octavia snatched her wrist away and began to massage it lightly. “Would it have been?” Her tone was cutting. “Clarke tried to kill herself, so she’s been institutionalized.” Is that really what you wanted to hear? Would it have helped? Or would you have not been here today to support her and see for yourself?”

Bellamy’s skin crawled and he flinched back as if she’d slapped him. It probably would have hurt less.

Octavia sighed, softening after seeing the pain pinching her brother’s face. She reached out and grasped his hand lightly. “When Clarke found out about Wells, she took it hard. She already blames herself for everything that happened, and when he died… She slit her wrists. Her dad found her just in time. She’s been checked into a psychiatric facility for her own safety.”

Bellamy wanted to throw up. The family emergency that’d delayed Senator Griffin from his trial hadn’t been about Clarke’s mom after all, it had been about Clarke. He took a shaky breath, running his free hand through his hair and trying to blink back the stinging sensation in the bridge of his nose.

“She’s been pushing everyone away and not letting anyone help her. I just hoped maybe with everything you went through together, maybe you’ll be different. Maybe she’ll let you in.”

Lincoln approached the two of them, gently putting an arm around Octavia’s shoulders. “Is everything okay here?” His tone was cautious as he appraised Bellamy with a hard look.

Octavia leaned into him, quirking one corner of her lips into a sad smile to reassure her fiancé. “As okay as it can be considering the circumstances.”

Lincoln hesitated for a moment more before nodding. “I think maybe you should stay with us for one more night,” he told his friend quietly. Bellamy didn’t have the heart to argue. The three of them headed towards his truck.
That night, when the dream started, Bellamy was already inside of the house. He wandered through each room until he stumbled upon Clarke, sitting hunched over in a corner of the once again empty living room, facing away from him.

He moved toward her cautiously, as if approaching a wounded animal. The floorboards creaked under his weight. Her head snapped up.

“You think you saved me?” her voice was low, monotone, haunting.

She turned her head slowly to face him, her eyes as empty as ever. “I didn’t want to be saved.”

It was then that he noticed the blood flowing freely from her wrists and pooling around her on the floor.

Chapter End Notes

TW: mentions of attempted suicide

Wow... it's been a whole 3 chapters since Bellamy and Clarke have actually spoken to each other. Don't worry, they'll get a real reunion next chapter. Also, we made it to 50000 words! Woohoo!

Now, totally off topic rant time... If you haven't seen season 6 of the 100 stop reading. I have to say, I've been really enjoying this season, but there's one thing that really irks me. If you're going to continuously whump the hell out of your characters, at least let it have consequences. Like just within 6x10, Clarke had a horrible crash on her motorbike (ouch broken wrists), tons of brain hemorrhaging (in other words a massive stroke), and Bellamy would have at the very least broken a few of her ribs with his awful CPR (don't get me wrong, I loved it... but seriously with those useless chest blows?) and now she's walking around perfectly fine like none of it happened. And it's not just Clarke. Murphy supposedly had his femoral artery severed and is tromping through the woods the next day without a care (I had a small puncture in mine for a medical procedure and had to lie perfectly still for 3 hours and then watch it for the next couple days to make sure I didn't bleed out). They even had Clarke stab Bellamy in the leg in Episode 2 to explain Bob Morley's limp, and have since used body doubles on the more physical scenes so that he doesn't have one... Does this bother anyone else? Just me? Cool.

I don't know anyone else who watches the 100 so I can't get things off my chest haha.

Let me know what you think of the chapter to motivate me to finish writing the Bellarke reunion for you. Comments and kudos make me smile :).
Chapter Notes

Trigger warning - see end of chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After being jolted awake from his most recent nightmare, Bellamy was faced with yet another sleepless night. He stared at the ceiling long after the sun began brightening the guest room, listening to the quiet sounds of Lincoln and Octavia getting ready for their day, their voices a muffled hum.

At the moment he didn’t want to face either of them. He was still angry at the way that his sister had manipulated him, and for the life of him he couldn’t understand what benefit she thought would have come from it. At the same time, he wasn’t in the mood for an argument. He was exhausted and he didn’t want to say anything that he might regret later.

He heard the telltale bang of the apartment door closing, and waited in the ensuing silence for an extra ten minutes, just to be safe.

Finally, he scrubbed his hand roughly over his face and sat up with a groan. As usual, his recently healed injuries ached in protest. He massaged his thigh absently, then fumbled into the same pair of jeans and old t-shirt he’d arrived in two days ago, intending to try to wake himself up with a cup of coffee and a shower.

When he opened the door, he was met with the sight of Octavia leaning against the counter. He knew it was petty, but part of him wanted to quietly shut the door and pretend he was still asleep. Those thoughts evaporated when she met his eyes.

With a sigh, he walked slowly into the kitchen and slumped down onto one of the barstools. Octavia placed a steaming mug in front of him and he accepted it without comment. She studied him for a moment, but ultimately elected to go to the fridge. Scanning its contents, she selected a carton of eggs. “You still like scrambled?” she inquired quietly.

“I’m not hungry,” Bellamy mumbled his reply.

Her shoulders visibly tensed, but she collected herself quickly. “You barely ate yesterday.”

Bellamy ignored her comment, continuing to sip his coffee.

Octavia huffed in frustration, but pulled out a frying pan and started cracking eggs anyway. Luckily, cooking forced her to face away from him. He hoped that would be enough of a deterrent to curtail the conversation.

“So what did you and Clarke end up talking about?” she asked him, just as the butter in the pan began to sizzle.

Bellamy nearly choked. After yesterday, how could she think that they’d actually had a conversation?
When his silence continued, she placed her spatula down, fingers curling on the granite counter as her shoulders slowly rose to her ears. “I’m going to take that to mean that you didn’t actually speak to her…”

Bellamy put his mug down with a loud thud, unable to deal with how callous his sister was being. “Jesus Christ O, did you even see her? She was practically catatonic.”

Octavia whirled around sharply, fire in her eyes. “Of course I saw her. I’ve been seeing her for the past two months. I visited her in the hospital when she got back, I tried to help at her appointments at the rehabilitation clinic, and I checked up on her at home. Hell, I even saw her in the ER when they brought her in before she started screaming that she didn’t want to see any of us. Believe me – I know a hell of a lot better than you what kind of state she’s in.”

Bellamy’s mouth opened, but he didn’t know what to say. And it didn’t really matter because Octavia wasn’t finished.

“Through all of that, the only subject that brought any sort of life to her was you. So excuse me if I was hopeful that your presence might inspire something in my best friend. I don’t want to lose her.” Though her voice remained steady, tears began tracing their way down her cheeks. Bellamy longed to reach out to her. He’d never been good at dealing with his sister crying.

An acrid smell began to fill the air of the small apartment. They both realized where it was coming from at the same time. “Shit,” Octavia wiped her face hurriedly and reached for the pan of charred eggs, just as Bellamy leapt up from his seat to help her. He took the pan from her shaking hand and doused it with water, before dumping the soupy contents in the trash. Then he turned around and wrapped Octavia into a bear hug, resting his chin on top of her head.

“I know the way that I handled things yesterday wasn’t fair to you, but I didn’t know what else to do. I was scared of what the memorial might have done to her and I didn’t know if I could convince you to come if you had the whole story. Growing up you barely even knew Clarke, and she isn’t your responsibility.”

Bellamy shook his head. She was now. “For future reference, you could have just told the truth.” Octavia nodded her head against his chest with a muffled sniffle.

The moment was broken when the sluggish fire alarm finally decided to go off. Octavia groaned, pulling back. “So much for breakfast.”

Bellamy chuckled. “I’ve always been more of cereal kind of guy anyway.” He went to go fiddle with the smoke detector while she opened the windows, airing the place out.

When he returned to the kitchen, she was hunched over the counter, scrawling something on a post-it note. “What’s that?” he asked her warily.

She finished writing and ripped the note off, handing it to him. “The address of the facility where Clarke is staying.” She seemed to be a lot calmer now. “I won’t force you to go see her, but I hope you’ll at least consider it.” Her phone buzzed and she gave him a small smile. “That would be my ride. The keys to the truck are hanging by the door if you decide to go. Lincoln took the bus today. He’s taking classes at the college to become an EMT.”

Bellamy wrinkled his nose in disbelief. “They’re making him take classes? They do realize he spent the last 8 years doing field amputations and treating gun shot wounds right?”

Octavia rolled her eyes as she grabbed her jacket from the closet. “I think you’ll find that people
here are a lot more likely to try to sue you for saving their lives.” Bellamy reached over to help her as she struggled to get her arm into one of the sleeves. When she was ready to go, she leaned up onto her tiptoes and placed a light kiss on his cheek. “If you need anything call me - even if it’s just to talk. I’ll keep my phone on me all day.”

Bellamy nodded and mumbled his goodbye, closing the door behind her. He glanced down at the post-it note still in his hand, studying Octavia’s neat writing. With a sigh, he folded the note and shoved it into his pocket.

Though he truly wasn’t hungry, he decided to try to force down some food anyway. His sister had enough on her plate. She didn’t need to worry about whether he was eating on top of everything else. He managed to scrounge together everything that he needed to make toast, then went back to the stool that he’d vacated. The note burned a hole in the pocket of his jeans from the time he sat waiting for the toaster to pop to his last bite.

Finally letting go of his self-restraint, he pulled out the address and typed it into his phone. He was genuinely shocked by just how far away the facility was. With both of Clarke’s parents living in town he’d expected that they’d place her somewhere close enough to easily visit, but according to Google maps it would take him a couple of hours to get there. He contemplated for a few minutes, but in the end it really wasn’t a choice. Seeing the state she’d been in the previous day had almost physically hurt. He needed to at least try.

He decided to leave the apartment and take a shower at his house, allowing him to at last grab a change of clothes. Finally, he stopped at a convenience store to grab an energy drink and hit the road.

He honestly couldn’t remember if he’d ever travelled this far inland before. He watched as the landscape changed from swamps, to farmland, to forest, before finally gaining some elevation. The farther he travelled from the coast, the more sparse the development became, especially once his phone’s GPS directed him to switch to the back roads. He had to admit that it was beautiful, if not lonely. Bellamy had spent his whole life surrounded by people (the last few months notwithstanding). He didn’t know whether to find the countryside calming or disconcerting.

Lincoln’s old truck prattled along the dirt roads like a champ. The forest around the vehicle became more and more dense, closing in around the lane until light barely penetrated the foliage, and then all of the sudden everything opened up, dissolving into a large meadow crested by what was once probably a sprawling plantation house. If he didn’t know any better, he might have thought that he’d stumbled upon some sort of wilderness retreat for the rich elite.

But he did know better. According to his phone he’d arrived at the Mount Weather Institute. He pulled into the nearly empty lot around the side of the building and parked.

He sat there for a moment, just trying to dredge up the courage to go inside. He still didn’t know what it was he hoped to accomplish from this visit, or what Octavia expected for that matter. Clarke was obviously struggling, and his presence wasn’t going to cause some form of miracle. If anything, it was more likely to do the opposite. He stared at his phone, resisting the urge to call Octavia and explain to her that he just couldn’t do it. If he could storm into enemy territory without much of a plan in place, simply walking into a building shouldn’t be that hard.

He opened the truck door and forced his legs to move. There was literally no sound of civilization out here, just birds chirping and wind rustling through the leaves. He hurried to the front steps and tried the door, a little surprised when the handle didn’t easily give to his tug. He found a small buzzer and after a few seconds he was let in without question.
The only way he could describe the lobby of the building was luxurious but sterile. The couches and armchairs arranged artfully around the room looked expensive, but like they’d never actually been used for sitting. In fact, though the room was quite large, it was completely deserted except for a bored looking woman sitting behind a desk. Bellamy approached her cautiously. When she looked up, he shoved his hands into his pockets, trying to appear less nervous.

“Hi,” he kept his tone polite, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. “My name is Bellamy Blake. I’m here to see Clarke Griffin.”

The woman nodded and began typing on her computer. After a few seconds her brow furrowed into a frown. “It appears that Ms. Griffin has requested no visitors. I’m sorry you drove out all this way. Next time maybe call.”

Bellamy sighed, giving a small nod. At least he could tell Octavia that he tried. He took a dejected step, turning back towards the door.

“Wait!” A pretty young nurse with messy auburn curls rushed out from an adjacent hallway. “What did you say your name was?”

Bellamy paused, not really in the mood to get his hopes up. “Bellamy Blake.”

The nurse flipped through a file she was holding in her arm, tracing her finger down one sheet in particular. Her face relaxed into a soft smile. She turned to the receptionist, “It’s alright Anya.” She discarded the file onto the desk then turned back to him. Her eyes traced him for a moment before her smile grew even brighter. “Follow me Mr. Blake.”

He trailed after her down the hall, taking in door after door, all of them plain white with a small window above the handle. The building was eerily quiet, even worse than outside. Bellamy felt the little hairs on the back of his neck rise, but he couldn’t quite put his finger on what made him feel so unsettled.

They made it to their destination and the nurse tapped lightly on the door before using her keycard on the lock. The room was nice enough. There was a single bed and a small sitting area in front of a door that Bellamy guessed led to the ensuite bathroom. The room was flooded with natural light streaming in from windows placed high up on the walls. Bellamy noticed that they were barred from the inside.

Clarke sat in front of an easel on the far side of the room. “Ms. Griffin,” the nurse addressed her patient gently. “There’s someone here to see you.”

Clarke didn’t even bother to look up from what she was doing. “Gina, I told you I don’t want to see anyone.” She sounded annoyed.

“I thought you might want to make an exception,” Bellamy could hear the smile in the nurse’s voice and apparently Clarke could too. She sighed, but looked up, putting her paintbrush down. Then she froze.

Bellamy’s heart skipped several beats. He didn’t know what to do. It was like his mind went blank.

“Bellamy?” Clarke’s voice faltered.

All he could manage was a nod.

She took a few hesitant steps toward him, then quickened her pace, deftly dodging furniture until
she was standing directly in front of him. And then her hands were everywhere, fingertips running along his collarbones, tracing his jaw, threading through his hair. At her touch, something in him snapped. His arms latched around her desperately, pulling her close into his chest.

He heard the door close behind them, the sound of the lock whirring closed causing her to flinch in his embrace. He tried to pull back slightly, wanting to ask if she was alright, but her grip tightened, effectively stopping the words in his mouth.

As he held her, he began to notice more about the state of her health. The sharp edges of her ribs dug into his forearms, and the t-shirt she was wearing hung limply off her frame. He released a shaky breath, not knowing where to start.

Her head shifted until she was looking up at him, her chin resting against his chest. “How are you here?” Her crystal blue eyes were clear today, and he let out a small sigh of relief.

“Octavia gave me the address,” he told her gently.

Her lips twitched in a small smirk that didn’t reach her eyes. “That’s not what I meant.” She pulled back slightly, one hand tracing from his back, across his shoulder, and down his arm until it reached his hand, threading her fingers through his and squeezing tightly as if she needed the reassurance that he was actually in her presence. He knew the feeling.

Bellamy shrugged, running his free hand through his curls nervously. “I-uh… things went to trial but… um… your dad helped. The charges were dropped.” He rushed through the mention of her father, not knowing how she would react, but she just nodded solemnly.

She tugged on his hand, pulling him toward the small bed until the two of them were sitting on its edge, hands still intertwined. Clarke’s forearm rested on top of her lap facing up. Even though he tried not to look, he couldn’t stop his gaze from being drawn to it. At the center of her arm lay a long incision, almost surgical in its precision. It ran all the way from the crease of her elbow to her wrist, cutting through all of the other scars that laid in its path. The wound was being held closed by a line of neat stitches, too many for him to count. He now understood how serious Octavia had been when she’d said Senator Griffin had found her just in time. Clarke knew what she was doing. He swallowed back bile, rubbing his jaw uneasily.

He was snapped out of his dark train of thought by Clarke’s voice. “I’m so sorry Bellamy. When I woke up in Germany, all anyone would tell me was that you’d still been alive when we left Iraq. Anything beyond that was ‘classified’. Every time that I’ve tried to find out anything I’ve been stonewalled. I wanted to help…”

His free hand came to her cheek, thumb tracing a path just below her eyelashes. The dark circles under her eyes were so deep, they rivaled his own. “Hey… You have nothing to be sorry for, do you hear me? Besides, everything worked out.” She bit her lip but nodded slightly.

Bellamy looked around the room once again. His eyes caught on the locked door, the walls starting to feel like they were pressing in. He couldn’t imagine how Clarke dealt with living in this enclosed space. “So… uh. How are things…” He winced. He didn’t mean to be so awkward, but he didn’t know how not to be considering the circumstances.

Clarke didn’t seem to notice. ”They’re alright I guess.” She followed his gaze to the door. “I’m not always cooped up in here. There’s therapy, and we usually have supper as a group. There was even a hike around the grounds a couple days back…” She trailed off, shifting back until she could lean against the headboard, pulling her knees into her chest. “Look Bellamy, I understand why I’m here. Things got to be too much. They still are half the time, but I promise I’m trying. I realize that
you’re probably incredibly disappointed in me. You risked everything to save my life and I tried to throw it all away.”

He rocked forward, making sure he had her full attention. “No Clarke. Don’t you dare start thinking that way. I’m just grateful that you’re still here.” She didn’t answer him, intensely studying a small imperfection in the sheets.

They both sat in silence for a few minutes, until Clarke grew too unnerved and spoke out. “Talk to me. What have you been doing since you got back?”

Bellamy studied her face for a minute. She obviously didn’t remember seeing him at the funeral, and he didn’t want to bring it up. That didn’t leave him with much else to talk about. He settled on the house, telling her all about how it had changed since the last time he’d been there and everything he still needed to buy. She listened to him in silence, nodding when applicable, and slowly he began to relax. When he trailed off, having run out of things to say, she told him a little bit about how she’d started painting again as part of her therapy, while still managing to skirt around the heavier subjects. He studied her as she spoke. Though she kept her tone light, it was empty. By contrast, her eyes spoke volumes about how she was really feeling. They held a deep hopelessness that caused his stomach to churn and his heart to ache. His grip on her hand tightened.

Before he knew it, a couple of hours had passed, both of them easily falling back into the dynamic they’d had during the later days of their captivity.

The click of the door opening caused both of them to jump, Bellamy tensing instinctively at the sound that had signaled danger to him for weeks on end. The nurse – Gina – poked her head into the room. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but Ms. Griffin it’s time for you to take your medications.” Clarke dropped his hand and recoiled, her whole demeanor changing.

“You should go,” her voice was hollow.

Bellamy bristled. He thought back to the way she’d reacted when she’d talked to him about her mother’s addiction and felt dread knotting his stomach. “Are you sure?” He kept his voice soft.

Her nod had a note of finality to it. She forced a smile. “Thank you for coming today. I honestly really do appreciate it.”

Bellamy stood up from the bed and gently pulled her into one last embrace, one hand resting on her shoulder, while the other threaded through her hair, pulling her head to lay against his abdomen. Her hand came up and squeezed his elbow in return. “I’ll come back to visit if you want me to,” he promised her.

This time her nod was more hesitant, a single tear escaping down her cheek as he released her. He wiped it away with the pad of his thumb.

“I’ll be okay,” she reassured him so softly that he barely heard it.

He walked out into the hallway and waited while Gina reminded her that she’d be right back with her meds. The door closed and the lock buzzed once again. Bellamy stiffened. He turned to the nurse, trying to keep his anger in check. “You know what she went through right? Is it really necessary to keep her locked up like that?” he questioned her tersely as they headed back towards the lobby.

Gina’s smile faltered. “It’s protocol for her own safety. When the patients are in their rooms we know that they don’t have access to anything that they could use to hurt themselves. And besides
that, Clarke isn’t the only patient here. Some of the others suffer from delusions. We don’t house anyone with violent tendencies, but the potential is there.”

Bellamy shook his head, but let it go for the time being. Chewing out a nurse wasn’t going to result in any meaningful changes.

Gina led him back to the reception desk. “I really hope you were serious when you offered to come back. Today was the most calm I’ve seen Ms. Griffin since she arrived. She’s not like most of our other patients, and if I’m being honest I don’t think that being here is doing her a lot of good.”

Bellamy’s eyebrows shot up, surprised by the nurse’s candor. She flipped open the file she’d been carrying and pulled out a business card, handing it to him with a warm smile. “Next time just call before you come. We can make sure that you have as much time with her while she’s lucid as possible.”

Bellamy’s gut roiled again, his skin absolutely crawling from hearing such a nonchalant reference to the drugs Clarke was being made to take. He took the card with barely a nod and turned away, right in the middle of Gina’s farewell.

He kept walking until he got back to the truck and immediately put it in gear the second he got inside, wanting to get as far away from that place as he could. As soon as he was on the road, he fumbled his phone from his pocket and dialed Octavia, putting her on speaker.

She answered on the third ring. “Bellamy?”

He didn’t beat around the bush. “How could they put her in a place like that?”

He heard her sharp intake of breath crackling through the speaker. “Bellamy, they-“

He cut her off. “She’s in another fucking cage O. How the hell is she supposed to get better if she’s constantly reminded of being in that goddamn cell.”

He hit a pothole particularly hard, causing his head to crack back off of his headrest. He eased his foot off of the accelerator, but only slightly.

He heard his sister whisper something to someone on her end before she started speaking to him again. “Bellamy are you driving right now? Pull over.”

He ground his teeth together. “No.”

Octavia huffed in frustration. “Well then at least slow down and listen to me.”

He let his silence be his answer.

“Clarke was put on a 72 hour hold like every other patient after a suicide attempt. Her parents had her placed at Mount Weather thinking it would be better than just leaving her in the psych ward at Independence, but now that the 72 hours are over she’s stuck there. She refuses to go home with either Jake or Abby and the doctors won’t release her unless she’ll be supervised by a competent caregiver.”

Bellamy groaned. “Well she can’t stay there. She’s literally wasting away, O. Mark my words – no matter how much of a brave face she puts on - if they make her stay in that facility it’s going to kill her.”

“I know. I’ve tried okay?” Octavia’s voice sounded heartbroken. “I even offered for her to come
stay with us until she can get back on her feet. But she doesn’t want to be a burden to me, and she can’t even look Lincoln in the eye. He was the first person to examine her when you guys were found and he saw everything.”

Bellamy’s grip tightened on the steering wheel. “Lincoln told you what happened to her?”

Octavia made an exasperated noise. “He didn’t go into detail. All of this has hurt him too, Bell. He needed a safe space to vent.” That didn’t do much to soothe his irritation. “But that isn’t the point. I don’t know what to do… they aren’t going to release her if she doesn’t get better, and she won’t get better if she stays there.”

Octavia kept talking, but he tuned her out, his mind too busy racing.

Maybe Clarke’s parents didn’t realize how bad things had gotten…

He dismissed that thought almost immediately. They’d both been at the funeral the previous day and he’d seen the torment in Jake Griffin’s eyes. But the Griffins were loaded. If there were a better option available they would have already taken it. Bellamy knew that Clarke was stubborn as hell, so if she was refusing her parents’ help there wasn’t much to do on that front. But he simply couldn’t accept having risked so much to save her, only for her to die when she should have finally been safe.

And then suddenly it dawned on him.

He hit the brakes so hard they let out a piercing screech, gravel flying as the truck skidded slightly before coming to a halt.

“Shit, Bellamy are you okay? Please say something,” Octavia’s panicked voice echoed from his phone where it had fallen beneath the seat. He cursed and fished it out.

“I’m fine, O. But I’ve gotta go. I’ll call you later.”

“Bell wait-“ He hit the end button, cutting her off. He needed to concentrate in order to turn the truck around on the narrow road. And he didn’t need anyone trying to talk some sense into him.

He drove back to the Mount Weather Institute at a much more reasonable speed. It wouldn’t help his case if he came tearing in like a madman. He parked slightly haphazardly and jogged back to the building.

Inside, Gina was helping an elderly patient maneuver her walker through the lobby. She looked up, her smile looking hopeful, but quickly faltering at the look of determination on his face. “Mr. Blake, I didn’t expect to see you again so soon. Is everything alright?”

Bellamy didn’t bother to beat around the bush. “What would it take for Clarke to be released to stay with me?”

The nurse straightened up, looking slightly taken aback. “Mr. Blake, I’m not sure that-“

Bellamy cut her off impatiently. “You said yourself that you didn’t think this place was good for her. Now what would it take?”

Gina studied him for a moment, as if measuring him up. “First off, Ms. Griffin would have to agree to it, and then her doctor would have to sign off.”

Bellamy nodded. “So let’s ask her.”
Gina rolled her eyes. “Dr. Tsing is on shift at another hospital right now. She won’t be doing her rounds here until this evening.”

“Not the doctor, Clarke.” Bellamy was already walking towards the hallway. His phone was vibrating incessantly in his pocket, but he didn’t have time to deal with it. Without looking, he clicked the button to send the call to voicemail.

He could hear the nurse let out an exasperated noise in the lobby, calling out to the receptionist to take her patient back to her room before she hurried after him. When she finally caught up to him, she tried to slow him down, grabbing his elbow. “This really isn’t a good time.”

He ignored her warning, knocking lightly on Clarke’s door. Before she’d even had the chance to realize what he was about to do, he’d snatched Gina’s keycard out of her hand and used it to open the lock.

As he walked in, Clarke was in the middle of walking out of the washroom, her hand wiping the side of her mouth. She stared at him for a moment, looking like a deer caught in the headlights. “B-bellamy? What are you doing here?” she finally managed to stutter out.

He kept moving until he was right in front of her, reaching for her hands. She flinched back slightly but then held her ground. He studied her face, noting how dilated her pupils had become. He bit back a wave of anxiety – now was not a great time to be having this conversation, but it’d have to do.

“Clarke, I want you to come stay with me. I have a spare room. It’s yours for as long as you need it.”

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “What? Bell… No – I can-” she swayed slightly on her feet, and he had to tighten his grip on her wrists in order to keep her upright.

“You can. Clarke I know that you know that this place isn’t helping you. I want you to stay with me.” I need you to stay alive. “Say yes. Please.” He allowed some of his emotion and vulnerability to show - something that he would only do in front of a very limited number of people - but he needed her to agree.

“I-“ she studied his face, looking conflicted. She must have found what she was looking for, because when she looked away, the words that slipped out of her lips were “Okay… yes.”

Bellamy pulled her into his chest, placing a soft kiss to the wavy hair at the crown of her head. When he opened his eyes, he found that Gina was still standing in the doorway, looking exceedingly displeased. “Clarke, this isn’t a done deal. You’ll still need Dr. Tsing’s approval.” Her voice held a note of warning to it. Bellamy had never heard her use Clarke’s first name before. It sounded patronizing coming from her lips.

Clarke just nodded, pulling away from Bellamy. She swayed one more time, and Bellamy instinctively reached out to steady her. “I’m sorry, I’m just exhausted.” She gave his hand a gentle squeeze. “I’ll see you soon?”

Bellamy walked her to the bed, giving her a reassuring nod. “I’ll come pick you up as soon as I’m allowed.”

Gina impatiently tapped her foot in the doorway, and used her head to motion that he needed to leave the room. He took a second to pull a blanket over Clarke’s tiny frame, then followed her out.
They didn’t make it five doors down the hallway before Gina was whirling on him. “This won’t be as easy as you think it will. She still needs to see her doctor, take her meds, attend therapy appointments…”

Bellamy didn’t rise to the bait. “So write me a list.”

Gina’s teeth clicked as she ground her jaw. “It was cruel of you to get her hopes up.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow. “Not as cruel as it is to keep her locked up.”

The nurse turned her back and strode off down the hall, her shoulders tense. “I’ll speak with Dr. Tsing tonight. Leave your number at reception. I’ll have Anya call you with the decision.”

His phone buzzed in his pocket again. In fact, it had been vibrating almost non-stop. He sighed, silencing it once again. He did as Gina had instructed, stopping at the front desk on his way out. He left feeling better, if only slightly.

When he was safely back in the cab of the truck, he decided to finally check the screen of his phone. He had five missed calls from Octavia, as well as a string of rambling texts. All of that was followed by a single call from Lincoln and a simple text.

*Call me.*

How very like the medic.

With a sigh, he dialed his friend’s number as he once again pulled out of the lot.

“Tell me you didn’t do something stupid.” That was how Lincoln answered the phone. No greeting, no small talk, just getting right to business.

Bellamy chewed the inside of his cheek. “Depends on your definition of stupid.”

Lincoln let his silence tell him that he wasn’t in the mood for joking around.

Bellamy exhaled, knowing that this likely wasn’t going to be a pleasant conversation. “I asked Clarke to move in with me.”

“Bellamy-” there was a distinct edge of disapproval in Lincoln’s voice.

“I’m not going to watch her die Link. I’ve already been there – more than once I might add – and it’s not something that I care to repeat.”

Lincoln’s end of the line was silent for a moment, as if he were carefully selecting his next words. “I understand where you’re coming from Bellamy, but you’re being reckless. You may be putting on a brave face for Octavia, but we both know that it’s shit. How the hell do you expect to help Clarke when you’re not even taking care of yourself?”

Bellamy flinched. “I’m fine.”

“Bullshit.” Lincoln sighed heavily. “Bellamy you’ve seen guys come back from combat. You know what it does to people. And that doesn’t even come close to touching on the shit that you went through. You’re not okay, and that’s fine. But if you think that this is going to end in any way other than with both of you getting even more fucked up, you’re delusional.”

Bellamy shook his head angrily. “And what about you? You’re such a hypocrite. You just got back too, and yet you couldn’t wait to have my sister move in with you.”
Bellamy could tell by the tone of his voice that Lincoln’s patience was wearing thin. “That’s not the same thing and you know it. And besides, you’ve seen for yourself that my judgment when it comes to Octavia is clouded. Just look at the way that I let her deal with telling you about Clarke. That shouldn’t have happened.” Lincoln paused for a second, regaining his cool. “Clarke needs professional help man… and so do you.”

“She’ll have professional help,” Bellamy said through clenched teeth. He slowed the truck down as he approached a major intersection. “I’ve got to go, I’m getting back on the highway.”

He could practically hear Lincoln pacing through the phone. “This is a bad idea Bellamy.”

He rolled his eyes, “I’ll see you later.” He disconnected the call. The minute he was back on the open road, he tried to clear the conversation from his head. He still had a lot to do to get the house ready.

Chapter End Notes

TW: description of a past suicide attempt.

Yay! Clarke and Bellamy have finally reunited! I had to majorly shift my head canon on this one. Clarke was originally going to be a total mess when he visited her, but after putting more thought into it, she definitely would be putting up a front for everyone. Don't be too mad at Lincoln. He's right.

And now begins the part of the story where Clarke and Bellamy try to fix each other while simultaneously being total idiots.

I'm jetting off to Iceland in a couple of days without access to a computer. Luckily the next chapter is 95% written. It should be updated at the usual time (2 weeks from today). If it's not... send a search party?

Comments and kudos make me smile :}


He hadn’t expected the phone call from Mount Weather to come the very next day. But sure enough, he’d received a call from Dr. Tsing herself, seeming to almost interrogate him to assess whether he knew what he was committing himself to. Evidently he passed whatever criteria she’d set out, because he was told that Clarke was working on packing her things and would be ready for him to pick her up later in the day.

He’d had to ask Lincoln to borrow his truck again. That hadn’t been an easy conversation. Reluctantly, his friend eventually relented - which is how he ended up driving back to Virginia Beach with Clarke sitting in the passenger seat, staring blankly out of her window. The sun had recently set, bringing with it an added chill, but Clarke made no comment. Bellamy wordlessly turned up the heat.

She’d barely said two words to him since he’d picked her up, and he’d had a fleeting concern that this had been a mistake. But after a few more moments of taking in her shattered appearance, he knew he’d made the right decision. She needed to get out of that institution.

He pulled up in front of the house and hazarded another glance in her direction. She still hadn’t moved. With a sigh, he got out of the truck, pausing to grab her duffel bag from the back seat and intending to come back to grab the box holding her painting supplies later. He made his way around the back of the truck to open her door for her.

He offered his hand to assist her in stepping down from the high seat, and she accepted his help with a muttered thanks. Her eyes scanned the street wearily, before her shoulders set, chin lifting in an attempted show of determination.

He angled his head toward the small bungalow directly in front of them. “This is us.”

Her features were carefully schooled so that he couldn’t tell what her true reaction was. She simply nodded and followed him onto the porch. He felt nervousness begin to inexplicably twist in his gut.

He let her in and appraised the front room with new eyes, for the first time thinking about what this house would look like to someone who had grown up in the lap of luxury. He shifted his feet. “I know it’s not much…”

She managed a small quirk of one side of her lips. “It’s great.”

He exhaled in relief. He led her down the short hallway to Octavia’s old room. It, like the rest of the house, was still sparsely decorated, but she could change that if she wanted to. He set her bag on the bed gently. “I hope this is okay. The bathroom is right next door…” He scratched his neck awkwardly. “I guess I’ll just let you get settled in. I’ll be in the kitchen.”

He wanted to give her space, not wanting her to feel crowded or uncomfortable while she unpacked. As he left the room, she brushed past him and walked to the picture window, pulling back the drapes to stare out into the small yard.

He did his best to keep himself busy while she got settled, still filled with an anxious energy. He grabbed a beer from the fridge, hoping to calm himself down, and set about washing his newly
purchased kitchenware, knowing that he’d likely be needing at least some of it later that night.

He’d just finished arranging the pots and pans in one of the cupboards, when an odd clinking sound coming from down the hall caught his attention. He thought about ignoring it, but quickly thought better of it.

He found Clarke standing over the toilet, a nearly empty bottle of pills in her hand, several more bottles lined up along the edge of the counter.

He lunged forward, grabbing her wrist harder than he’d intended, and quickly wrestled the remaining pills away from her. “What the hell are you doing?”

Her lip quivered as she whirled to face him, tear-filled eyes glaring daggers.

He tensed briefly, unprepared for the animosity in her features, before he felt his shoulders deflate. “Clarke…”

She backed away from him until her calves hit the tub. Sinking down onto its edge, she fisted her hands into her hair.

His heart lurched. He was once again reminded of the way that Clarke had talked about her family’s issues. That had to have taken a toll on her. But he couldn’t just let her self-destruct like this - he’d made a promise to help. Cautiously, he deposited the vial back onto the counter and approached her until he was squatting down in front of her, trying to meet her eyes. “Hey… these aren’t opioids Clarke. And you aren’t your mother.”

She dropped one hand, giving him an incredulous look. “Does it matter? Sedatives and antidepressants are still addicting. And besides, it’s not just about that. I hate the way that they make me feel. I’d rather actually experience my pain than be stuck in a muddled fog where I can’t concentrate. They make me feel empty.”

Bellamy allowed himself to absorb that. He had a feeling that any side effects she was suffering from could be resolved by shifting dosages or changing which medication she was taking. But he also figured that drugs of any kind would be a major sticking point for her considering her family history. “Alright. But I know that you know that going cold turkey isn’t the right way to go about this.” He paused, trying to choose his words carefully. “I need you to keep taking them, at least until you’ve worked out a new plan with your doctor.”

She took a deep shuddering breath and he braced himself for an argument, but shockingly it didn’t come. She caved and stood up, skirting around him to close the open bottle, and put all of the small cases away in the medicine cabinet. “I’m assuming you’re not going to make me go fishing for the rest?”

Bellamy nearly gagged. He shook his head, reaching for the toilet handle and giving it a flush.

An awkward silence opened up between them. Clearing his throat, Bellamy brushed past her, ready to move on to an easier subject. “What do you want for dinner?” He asked over his shoulder. He’d gone on a fairly massive grocery haul the night before, and he said a silent prayer that he’d have the ingredients to make whatever she asked for.

Clarke hung back. “I’m not really hungry.”

Bellamy stiffened, the feel of her ribs pressing into his forearms the previous day haunting him. Maybe Lincoln was right. Maybe he hadn’t been prepared to deal with this. He didn’t turn around, feeling like he would falter if he looked at her during this conversation. “Clarke, I want to help
you, but if you’re not eating… I don’t have the skills or the resources to deal with that. I need your help if you’re going to get better. The last thing either of us wants is for you to have to go back there.”

Minutes ticked by in silence as more and more dread accumulated beneath his ribs. Finally, he couldn’t stand it, turning around with an apology ready on his lips. She hadn’t agreed to come stay with him for an intervention and confronting her about everything when she’d barely even been there for an hour wouldn’t serve any purpose other than to alienate her.

Unexpectedly, it wasn’t hostility that he found on her face, but rather confusion. “What are you talking about?” she asked him quietly.

He shuffled his feet, having lost any appetite for this to turn into an argument. “Come on Clarke… I saw you come out of the bathroom yesterday.” The wrinkles on her forehead only deepened. “And how thin you’ve become…” he trailed off.

Tension thrummed through the air as her eyebrows rose in shock. She shook her head caustically. ”The medications that they have me on make me unbearably nauseous. I can barely keep anything down. It’s one of the many reasons that I want to get off of them.” She scoffed disbelievingly. “I was serious yesterday when I said that I’m making an effort to get better. I’m not looking for you to be my knight in shining armor or to save me from myself. If that’s all that this was, I’m sorry. Thank you for getting me out, but I can find someplace else to stay.” She turned back toward her bedroom.

He felt like such an ass. “Clarke…”

She just kept walking. He jogged to catch up, gently reaching for her hand to stop her momentum. “Clarke, please… I’m sorry.”

She froze, anxiety tightening her shoulders together. She didn’t turn back to him, but she didn’t pull away either. It was like they were in a stalemate, neither knowing how to make this better, but also afraid to make it worse.

“Chicken soup,” Clarke’s voice was nearly a whisper, but he still heard it.

His mind stuttered for a moment. “What?”

As she finally spun back to face him, she tugged her hand away to brush her hair out of her face while also covertly wiping a tear from her eye. “You asked me what I wanted for dinner.”

He ducked his head. “Right.” He hesitated for a second, then headed back to the kitchen, pulling out a large pot and setting some chicken broth to boil on the stove. He gathered some vegetables from the fridge and began chopping them up, forcing himself to concentrate on what he was doing rather than how badly he’d just screwed up.

He hadn’t noticed Clarke follow him back into the kitchen. When she spoke, it startled him enough to cause him to drop the knife.

“You’re making it from scratch?” she asked him skeptically, from where she was sitting across from him at the small island.

He looked at her from under his messy fringe of hair, managing a small smirk. “I practically raised Octavia and Kane wasn’t much of a cook. I learned a few things along the way.”

She reached across the counter and pulled the cutting board closer to her. Picking up the knife, she
resumed slicing the carrots for him. Without missing a beat he went to the pantry and pulled out a package of egg noodles. “Didn’t your housekeeper do that for you growing up?” he shot over his shoulder in a teasing tone.

Clarke’s lips quirked in a small smile. “Rosa raised me more than my mother did. I can chop vegetables.” As if she just realized what she was doing, her hand stilled as she stared at the knife for a moment. Slowly, she raised her gaze to meet his eyes as if she was waiting for him to tell her to let go of the sharp object. He just shrugged, pulling out the kettle, filling it, and setting it on the stove.

After the water had come to a rigorous boil, he picked out a mug and some honey and went about mixing together a hot drink. He traded the beverage for the now full cutting board, placing it down in front of her. “Mint tea,” he told her by way of explanation. “It used to help when O would have an upset stomach.”

Clarke nodded, letting out an appreciative hum as she inhaled the fragrant steam. She sipped at her drink, watching while Bellamy finished making the soup. When he ladled out a bowl and set it down in front of her she sighed, shifting in her seat. “I’m sorry about earlier,” she said softly, her eyes drilling holes through her placemat.

Bellamy just barely held in a humorless laugh. “I’m the one who should be apologizing.”

Her lips tightened. “Stop.” She let out a breathy exhale. “I don’t think either one of us really thought about what we were getting ourselves into or how we were going to deal with it.” She paused for a moment, idly stirring her soup with her spoon. “If you’ve changed your mind about letting me stay, I understand. I won’t hold it against you.”

Bellamy shook his head resolutely. “We’ll figure it out.”

She seemed to consider him for a moment, then nodded, finally bringing the spoon to her lips. Her body seemed to relax as the taste flooded her mouth, a small moan escaping her lips. “Octavia never told me you could cook.”

Bellamy leaned back against the counter with his arms crossed, an arrogant smirk curling his lips. “It’s just soup.” He watched her eat for a while, starting to feel a little better. As crazy as he was starting to realize this whole arrangement was, he began to feel like just maybe they’d be able to handle it, and eventually they would end up okay.

Clarke made it through about three quarters of her bowl before she started to go pale, Bellamy noticing sweat starting to break out along her hairline. He was about to comment, when she pushed back from the table. “I’m really sorry. The soup was great but I’m… I think I need to lie down.” She fidgeted like she was trying to figure out how not to seem ungrateful or make him worry. “I’ll see you in the morning?”

He was tempted to reach out to her, offer to help her to bed, but he knew she didn’t need him hovering. “Of course,” he replied to her quietly. He almost fell into the habit of telling her to have a good sleep, but stopped himself. If her nights were anything like his, the thought was laughable.

After hearing the muffled sound of her door closing, he dished his own meal out and ate in silence. He then occupied himself with cleaning up the kitchen, all the while listening for any indication that Clarke might need his help. Everything on her side of the house was quiet.

When he ran out of things to do, he didn’t have any more excuses and decided to go to bed himself. After washing up and changing, he checked his phone. He had a text from Lincoln.
Just checking in. Everything okay?

He ground his teeth for a second, irrationally irritated that his friend had been right to worry. When he regained his cool, he typed out a terse reply.

Fine.

He chucked his phone onto his nightstand and turned off the light.

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The room was dark, but he still recognized it as his own. Slowly he rose out of bed, wondering what could have possibly woken him up. A thump from down the hall caused adrenalin to start coursing through his veins. His eyes scanned the room, trying to find his old baseball bat.

“No! Please…” his blood ran cold. It was unmistakably Clarke’s voice. He rushed for the door, absolutely yanking on the knob. It was no use - it was locked.

“Help me…” Clarke’s breathless shriek ripped at his soul. No. Not again. He shouted for her to hold on, before shouldering the door. It didn’t budge. He spun around, searching for anything that might help him pick the lock.

The room was now empty.

Panicked, he spun back to the door, but now even the handle was gone. He pounded the wood with the flats of his hands, but it was useless, the door barely even shook. Clarke’s screams increased in pitch until they were all that he could hear. He clenched his hands over his ears, sinking down to the floor. He tried yelling out to her until he was hoarse, hoping that if nothing else she could take comfort from the sound of his voice – from knowing that she wasn’t alone.

“Bellamy.”

Warm tears coated his cheeks. He pounded the door with the side of his fist in desperation.

“Bellamy, wake up.”

He lurched upright, scrabbling backwards until his back hit the headboard.

Two eyes stared at him through the dark.

“Shh Bellamy, it was just a dream. You’re okay.”

His heart felt like it might beat its way out of his chest at any moment. He gasped, trying to catch his breath. Small hands gripped his shoulders, grounding him.

“Clarke?”

She nodded, relaxing her grip. “We’re at your house. Everything is fine.”

He sniffled, then wiped hurriedly at his cheeks when he realized he was crying. “You’re safe.” It was part statement and part question.

She nodded once more, before crawling off of the bed and standing up.

“Wait,” he caught her hand before she could get too far. “Stay,” his voice broke, betraying the distressed state he was still battling.
She tensed, but relented, hesitantly lying down and aligning her body with the very edge of his bed so that there was as much space between them as physically possible. He relaxed back down to the mattress as well, trying to respect her personal space.

He closed his eyes, but as soon as he was met with total darkness, her screams echoed in his mind. He shifted. Then a few minutes later, fidgeted again. And again… until he was tossing and turning, the sheets tangling around his legs.

Clarke sighed, reaching for his hand and placing it lightly against the side of her neck. Her pulse raced beneath his fingertips, ratcheted up by her anxiety at being in such a vulnerable position. He recoiled, trying to pull away, but her grip on his wrist tightened. He gave in and slowly but surely, after some deep breaths, her heart rate began to slow.

The steady beat beneath his fingers became a calming rhythm. Within minutes, his eyelashes were fluttering closed, his mind shutting down, allowing him to sink into peaceful oblivion.

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In the morning, he awoke to find that he was alone. His arm instinctively reached to his side, only to find that the sheets were cold. He rolled over, blinking blearily, trying to decipher if Clarke’s presence had just been another dream. Early morning sunlight glinted off of a strand of golden hair on the pillow. He flopped back onto his back scrubbing at his face with his hands. She hadn’t even been at his house for a full 24 hours and already she was sacrificing her own wellbeing to comfort him.

He pulled himself out of bed with a groan, expecting to find her in the living room or the kitchen, but both were empty. Her bedroom door was closed, so he elected to just let her be. She needed her rest.

When she finally made an appearance a couple of hours later, she made no comment about the night before, and though he wanted to apologize, he let it go. They had more important things to deal with.

The next few nights, though he was still plagued by nightmares, they were less intense. From what he could remember, Clarke hadn’t had to come back to his room and he was glad. At this point he was willing to shrug the whole thing off as a freak occurrence and put it behind him.

During the day, he fought his overbearing nature, doing his best to let Clarke settle in on her own. Slowly but surely, she began to leave the confines of her room more and more. She was still withdrawn from him, but they enjoyed their meals in companionable silence, and the previous night she’d even hazarded sitting on the edge of the couch with a sketchbook while he sat in an armchair reading.

They’d made it to the weekend and he was expecting Octavia to come over later in the morning. When his sister had asked, Bellamy had been a little worried about how Clarke would take it, but when he’d mentioned it to her, she’d seemed unfazed.

He got up extra early, wanting to make blueberry pancakes before his sister arrived, hoping to ease any possible tension with food. He’d just finished mixing all of the necessary ingredients together when he was interrupted by a knock at the door.

Bellamy frowned, glancing at the digital clock on the stove. He hadn’t expected Octavia this early. And besides, he’d given her a key, wanting her to feel like she could come and go anytime she needed to.
Scratching the back of his neck, he made his way to the front of the house, seeing the silhouette of a person through the sheer curtains. The visitor knocked again, and Bellamy cursed under his breath, hoping the noise wouldn’t wake Clarke. He no longer thought that it might be Octavia. His sister was impatient about a lot of things, but she could wait for someone to answer a door.

He cracked the door open, ready to give the intruder a piece of his mind. He froze when he recognized the person on the other side of the frame. Clarke’s mom.

He slid out of the house and closed the door gently behind him. “Dr. Griffin,” he said by way of greeting. A heavy uneasy feeling settled into the pit of his stomach at the idea of her visiting without calling him first.

“I’d like to see my daughter;” her words were curt, lacking warmth.

Bellamy studied her for a moment, taking in her disheveled clothing and her pinpoint pupils. “Does Marcus know that you’re here?” he asked her tersely. Then, watching her hands shake uncontrollably, he added as an after thought, “Does he know that you’re high?”

Abby looked as if she were about 3 seconds away from decking him. He planted his feet, blocking the doorway and standing firm.

“How dare you…”

Bellamy shrugged, raising his hands, showing her that he refused to get physical in return. “Actually, Clarke has a right to try to heal without anyone making it more difficult for her. But you’re right. I’m not your daughter’s keeper. I am however, trying to keep her best interests in mind. And— He made a show of looking her up and down, “Clearly you aren’t.”

Abby practically hissed, one hand balling into a fist, while she jabbed at his chest with the other. “How dare you…”

Bellamy held up a hand, cutting her off. “Look Dr. Griffin. I’m not trying to keep Clarke away from you, but she needs a stable environment and above anything else, she needs to not have to deal with any more heartbreak. Right now you’re being incredibly selfish. Get clean, and I swear that this conversation will go differently.” He lowered his arms slowly. “But for now, I’m going to kindly ask you to get off of my property or else I’ll have to call Kane.” It was a fairly empty threat. He had no desire to reopen communication with his former mentor. But she didn’t need to know that.

Abby stood there stubbornly for another full minute, before stamping her foot like a child and turning on her heel to head back to her car. He remained planted on the porch until she’d driven off. He had half a mind to call her in for a DUI, but he chose not to. Like he’d just said, Clarke didn’t need any more heartbreak.

He leaned back against the door, collecting his thoughts. That certainly wasn’t how he’d expected his morning to go. He took some deep breaths, trying to let the fresh air clear his mind. He definitely might have just overstepped, and he wondered idly if it would be better to come clean to Clarke, or just act like this whole conversation never happened. With a sigh he headed back into the house.

He pulled up short when he caught a glimpse of Clarke standing at the counter, sipping at a glass of orange juice. Guardedly, he walked back into the kitchen to turn on the griddle. “You’re up early,” he commented as he passed by.
Clarke rolled her eyes. “Just because I haven’t left my room, doesn’t mean I’m not awake.”

He conceded that that was a fair point. “Are you sure that you’re okay with O coming over? I can call her if it’s too much. She’d understand.”

Clarke tensed, then slowly forced herself to relax. “It’ll be nice to catch up,” she told him without meeting his eyes. He waited for her to go on, but she didn’t, still quietly drinking her juice.

Bellamy began pouring rounds of batter onto the hot surface in front of him. He watched as the thick liquid began to bubble, and the aroma of fresh pancake filled the air. He grabbed a spatula from beside the stove and began flipping each circle over, making sure they were a perfect golden brown.

“She wasn’t always like that you know,” Clarke’s voice was quiet. Low enough that she seemed to be giving him the choice whether to acknowledge that she’d spoken, or just drop it and move on. He glanced at her sheepishly. From the quaver in her voice he knew she was talking about Abby. He bit the inside of his cheek.

She twitched. “Growing up she was great… opinionated and pushy, but she really cared. She fell on some hard times and ended up turning to drugs when she felt like it was the only way for her to cope. And I… I haven’t exactly been helpful with that…”

Bellamy stopped what he was doing and reached for her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. It sickened him that she felt she had to defend her mother's actions. “Clarke, your mom is an adult. She makes her own decisions. None of this is on you.”

She bit her lip and shook her head, pulling her hand back gently. “Thank you for sending her away. I’m not ready to see her yet.”

Bellamy tried his best not to be hurt by her recoiling from his touch. He gave her a small nod, turning back to the pancakes and flipping them onto a plate before they could burn.

He opened his mouth to tell her that he was proud of how she was taking everything, but just then the door opened and he lost his nerve. He grabbed the ladle and started making more pancakes.

Octavia came into the kitchen like a storm, depositing a cardboard cup holder on the counter. “I know I’m early,” she said by way of greeting, “But I couldn’t sleep and I figured there was no point in not just starting my day.”

She picked up one of the cups and handed it to him. “Black and boring as per usual,” she gave him a light peck on the cheek. Then more tentatively, she picked up a second cup and offered it to Clarke. “I got you a London fog like you used to get on campus. I hope that’s okay.”

Clarke hesitated for a second, but accepted, offering her friend a small smile in thanks.

Bellamy watched their exchange and felt a little bit of the tension in his shoulders evaporate. He looked around the kitchen for a second, before his eyes locked back on his sister. “Lincoln didn’t come with you?”

Octavia’s eyes flicked briefly to Clarke, who had gone rigid, before coming back to him. “No. He has some sort of big test on Monday. He decided to stay home to study.”

Bellamy nodded, his gaze also travelling to Clarke. She fidgeted uncomfortably in her chair for a moment before sighing and standing up. “You know what… I think I’m going to go read in the front room for a bit, let you two talk. Thanks for the drink O.” She ducked her head and began
heading to the hallway but paused when Bellamy cleared his throat.

He stacked two pancakes on a plate for her and got the syrup down from the cupboard. She nodded sheepishly, fixing her meal and grabbing utensils before hurrying from the room.

Octavia sat in silence for a couple of minutes, not commenting on what just happened. He knew that it had upset her, and she was still probably just trying to process what she wanted to say. He finished making the last batch of pancakes, adding them to the high stack in the center of the counter. He handed Octavia a plate so she could take her share, before taking a couple for himself, adding a generous helping of butter and syrup.

“How’s she been?” Octavia finally asked him quietly.

He pushed a piece of pancake around with his fork. “She has her ups and downs. I haven’t exactly been a breeze to be around either.” He stilled, giving Octavia a serious look. “Don’t you dare tell Lincoln he was right.”

Octavia chuckled humorlessly. “Believe me, he’s not going to hear it from me. I know that his intentions are good, but none of us really know what we’re doing in this type of situation. If this helps her… I honestly can’t really bring myself to care if it’s unorthodox.”

They ate in relative silence, both of them deep in thought. When they were finished, Octavia got up to help her brother with the dishes. “So she’s been going to her therapy appointments?” she asked him, keeping her eyes carefully trained on the task at hand.

“She’s only had one so far this week but yeah, she went.” He scrubbed at a particularly stubborn patch of syrup on one of the plates. “I’m going to need to get a car,” he continued, talking more to himself than he was to her. “I can’t keep borrowing Lincoln’s.”

Octavia arranged the cutlery in the drawer warily. “Have you considered talking to Kane-“

Bellamy’s fists clenched in the soapy water. “O-“

She stopped and looked at him. “He feels awful Bellamy. He wants to help you. God knows he can afford it.”

He leaned heavily on the edge of the sink, trying to keep his emotions in check. “I don’t need his pity gifts. If he feels bad, that’s on him.”

He could see Octavia’s jaw clenching, but she didn’t try to convince him any harder. Instead she changed the subject. “Have you thought about what you want to do now that you’re returning to civilian life?”

That gave him pause. He honestly hadn’t.

Octavia rolled her eyes. “You know a big part of adjusting is actually rejoining society. Or at least that’s what my therapist has said about a thousand times. You need to get into a routine. And as nice as it is to not have to worry about rent, those utility bills aren’t going to pay themselves.”

Bellamy scoffed, going back to cleaning the dishes. “You know I have some savings O. Not everything went to your tuition. I’m not exactly worried that the water is going to be shut off and the power company is going to be banging at the door.”

“Not really my point.”
He ducked forward, letting his unruly curls partially obscure his face. “No I haven’t thought about it.” He admitted quietly.

She hopped up onto the counter, reaching for her coffee. “Well I think brooding cover model is out... you’re too old now,” she teased. She studied him for a moment. “Protecting people has always kind of been you shtick. I saw a sign that the police department is taking on new recruits. Maybe you could look into that.”

Bellamy physically shuddered as an icy feeling crawled down his spine. “No,” his answer was determined. “I was already planning to leave the navy before any of this shit happened. I’m not going into any kind of job where I’m obligated to carry around a gun, with the potential of having to make the decision to use it.”

She looked at him with her eyebrows raised, obviously not having expected that answer. “Okay, um...” She scrambled, trying to come up with a different idea. “I mean you could always become an EMT like Link. I never pictured you doing something like that, but I’m sure he’d love getting to work with you again.”

Bellamy snorted derisively, drying his hands on a dishrag. “I barely even know the difference between an artery and a vein. And I don’t care enough to figure it out.”

“What about a firefighter?” The quiet voice coming from the doorway was so unexpected that it startled him. Clarke was standing there holding her empty plate, looking for all the world like she might bolt again at any second.

He seriously contemplated her suggestion for a moment, before a small smile crept across his face. “Good idea Princess, I’ll look into it.”

A light flush colored Clarke’s cheeks, but she didn’t run, instead coming closer to help clean up. Octavia’s eyes darted between the two of them suspiciously.

Bellamy backed out of the way, allowing Clarke to use the sink, but still staying close enough that they were almost touching.

Eventually Octavia broke the silence. “Listen Clarke,” her hand hovered over her friend’s forearm, afraid to touch her. “I actually came here today to ask you something.” She took a deep breath, collecting her courage. “I know everything has been a lot, and by no means are you obligated to say yes, but... Harper’s birthday is next week and the usual gang is going out for drinks. There would be no pressure. You could leave whenever you want. But I know that everyone would really appreciate seeing you and I think it might be good for you to get a change of scenery.”

Bellamy immediately noticed the slight tremor running through Clarke’s hands. He leaned against her subtly, trying to comfort her with his presence like she’d done for him. It was incredibly unfair for Octavia to ambush her like that. He chewed his lip, ready to tell his sister off.

To his surprise, Clarke spoke first. “Can Bellamy come?” She still hadn’t looked up from what she was doing, examining the plate in her hands with a growing intensity. Bellamy shifted.

Octavia’s eyes flitted from her brother to her best friend once again, as if trying to figure out a difficult puzzle. “Uh... yeah, sure...” she finally managed to splutter out.

Clarke took a deep breath, using one hand to pull her hair away from her face while tugging at the roots lightly. Her eyes flicked to Bellamy, and he saw fear there, but also determination. “Then sure, I guess.”
Chapter End Notes

Anybody ever had their computer decide to randomly erase a huge chunk of one of their chapters before? I'm currently in that boat. Hopefully the next chapter will still come out on time.

You guys have all been so patient with the slow burn in this story. It'll finally have some pay off in the next few chapters (kind of). I can't wait. Hopefully I was able to tide you over with Clarke and Bellamy sharing a bed in this chapter. Personally I love that scene and if I had any talent when it comes to visual art whatsoever I would make it into a fan piece for you to enjoy haha.

Also side note, the rating on this story will be switching to Explicit in the near future. You guys have stuck with it this long so I hope that won't have any effect on your willingness to read.

Next chapter we check back in with Clarke's POV (It's been a while). Feed my inspiration with comments and kudos ;)

Bellamy straightened, still trying to catch up with what had just happened.
Chapter Notes

Wow, we've now been on this journey together for almost exactly a year. A major thank you to everyone who has stuck to this story from the beginning, and a huge welcome to all of you who have joined along the way :)

Clarke leaned against her headboard, feet tucked in close, a sketchpad balanced on her thigh. Dr. Tsing had encouraged her to get back into painting, channeling her emotions into abstract swirls and angry bursts of color… But sketching had always been her passion.

She never even really had to think about it. Her hand would move on its own as if possessed, outlining, shading, smudging, until suddenly a picture would be staring back at her. Oddly, she could never really tell just what she was drawing until the piece was finished, spending too much time concentrating on the individual parts rather than the whole. Today was no exception.

Her fingers brushed over the angular curve of a jaw, created dark eyebrows, glided through a set of full lips. The sketch was nearing completion and she studied it for a moment through narrowed eyes.

Wells Jaha stared back at her, his forehead creased with determination, his eyes sparkling with fear, his mouth trying to form words, yelling at her to fight, to protect herself.

The lead of her pencil snapped.

She let out a shuddering breath and quickly closed her notebook with a crack. She dropped it to the mattress as if it burned her. Standing hurriedly, she paced her small room, looking for something—anything—that could distract her. It was of little use. Wells’ final moments were now seared into her brain and the more she tried not to think about it, the more his face consumed her thoughts.

Her nails bit into her palms as tension flooded her chest, making her feel like she was drowning. She needed a release.

Her eyes darted to the bedside table where she’d hidden an unopened package of razors. She had no intention of using them, didn’t want to allow herself to be that weak again, but the urge was still there.

The sound of the front door closing caught her attention. She took a couple of deep breaths, trying to put the calm front she’d been hiding behind back up. Bellamy was home.

He’d gone out and bought a car a few days ago. She swore it was older than she was, rust blooming out from the wheel wells, but it ran, and that was all that he’d needed.

He’d told her he’d be spending the morning getting paperwork in order. Kane had managed to sneak him into the latest recruitment class at the fire academy. Initially he’d been furious at Marcus’ interference, but eventually he’d realized that it wasn’t an opportunity that he should pass up.
She tried to steady herself, but her hands still shook, and she knew she was close to hyperventilating. Things were not going to go her way today. She needed to get out, and she knew that Bellamy could provide her with an escape. She snatched her jacket off of the back of her desk chair and hurried from the room.

Bellamy was still kneeling in the entranceway, tugging off his boots. She steeled herself, trying to fight off the panic, doing her best to look normal.

She gently touched his elbow to get his attention.

He started slightly, before looking up at her, a small smile tugging at his lips. She felt herself relax the slightest amount. She couldn’t explain why his presence had such a calming effect on her, but she wasn’t going to fight it.

“Can we go out?” she asked him quietly, trying not to fidget.

His forehead creased in confusion for a moment as he studied her more closely. “Is everything alright?” She watched as his gaze locked onto her still-shaking hands. She hastily hid them behind her back.

“Yes,” her response was too quick. She backtracked, instantly feeling remorse for lying. “No… I just- I need to get out of here. Please.” Her voice was barely above a whisper, and she briefly felt a pang of worry that he’d ask her to repeat herself.

He examined her for a moment longer before he busied himself with retying his shoes. “Yeah. Where do you want to go?”

She managed a small nod at that, putting on her own sneakers. She followed him out to the car where he opened the door for her, waiting to make sure that she was properly buckled in before going to his own side. He pulled the car out onto the road without comment, allowing her to take control of the situation whenever she chose.

He’d attached a vanilla scented air freshener to the rear view mirror and her eyes traced its path as it swayed lazily like a metronome. Slowly, her grip on the door handle began to relax, her lungs loosening so she could take in more air. She tilted her head back against the headrest and sighed.

The car slowed as they approached a red light and Bellamy cleared his throat. “Have you decided on a destination yet?”

Clarke snapped back into focus. She blinked, taking a moment to get her bearings. They were in a commercial district in an area of town she didn’t frequent very often. Her eyes traced her surroundings until they finally landed on a billboard, and she smiled, taking it as a sign. “First Landing State Park.”

Bellamy quirked an eyebrow at her, but didn’t argue. He fished his phone out of his pocket and handed it to her as the light turned green again. “I’m gonna need directions on that one.”

They drove the rest of the way once again in silence, but this time it was different. Most of the tension had evaporated. Clarke paid their admission fee, and Bellamy easily found a spot in the parking lot. It was nearly empty considering it was the middle of the day on a Wednesday and the
weather was starting to turn.

Clarke hopped out of the car and stretched, taking in a deep breath of the fresh air and feeling it flow through her body. Despite it being late November, most of the leaves still clung to the trees, painting their surroundings a fiery orange. She tried to commit it to memory, wanting to try her hand at recreating it with her acrylics later.

She turned around to find Bellamy standing just outside of the driver side of the car, his hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans, shoulders tense. He looked like he needed a distraction just as much as she did.

Without a word, Clarke started off towards the trailhead leading out of the parking lot. After a moment, she heard the crunch of gravel as Bellamy fell into step behind her. She continued forward, holding onto the implicit trust that he’d be at her back.

It was a relatively easy hike through the wilderness as she let the feeling of nature seep into her skin to rejuvenate her. She followed the boardwalk until it eventually came to a stop at a landing enclosed by tall trees. She leaned into the railing and just breathed, feeling small patches of sunlight caress her face.

Bellamy hadn’t followed her past the divergence in the path, so she turned around, finding that he’d stopped a respectful distance back. He stood there, blowing into his large hands, trying to ward off the chill brought on by the cooler weather. Clarke blinked. She hadn’t even felt the cold.

She studied him closer, taking in the rigidity of his frame, and the dark circles set firmly beneath his eyes with a twinge of guilt. Considering the fact that she rarely slept, and the close proximity of her room to his, she’d heard him suffering through his nightmares every night. None of them had been nearly as bad as that first night, when his muffled screams had nearly sent her into a panic attack before sending her running to his side. But they were still enough for her to have to consciously ignore the sounds of tossing and turning and pained moans coming from down the hall.

She knew he’d actually slept peacefully after she’d laid down beside him, and truth be told, it had been one of her most restful nights in recent memory as well. But she was afraid of overstepping, or causing an unnecessary strain in their already precarious relationship, and so she’d remained silent and alone in her room every night since.

She bit her lip, wondering idly if she should address the situation now, but he ended up being the one to speak first.

“Clarke, if this is about the party…” He exhaled, running a hand roughly through his untamed hair. “It’s alright. I’ll tell Octavia to back off.”

Clarke quirked her head, her brow furrowing in confusion. She hadn’t even thought about Harper’s birthday, having forgotten that they were set to meet up with her friends later that day. “It’s not.”

Some of the stiffness melted from his shoulders. “Then what’s going on?”

“I…” She inhaled shakily, the distraction fading as the reason that they’d come all the way out here in the first place came flooding back. Bellamy moved cautiously toward her, and suddenly she zoned in on the way that his arms trembled at his sides. “Are you okay?”

Bellamy bit off a derisive laugh, obviously deflecting. “Am I okay?”
Clarke shook her head, not letting it slide. She took him by the wrist and held up his hand so that
the tremor was more visible.

Bellamy groaned, pulling away to cross his arms over his chest. “Don’t worry about it.”

She gave him a pointed look and he sighed, leaning back against the railing beside her. She subtly
took a small step back and hopped up so that she could sit perched on the wood just beyond his
touch.

Bellamy studied the boardwalk at their feet for a moment, his posture still closed off, before he
tried to explain. “Everything in my life has always been loud. I mean, I grew up with Octavia. Can
you even picture that girl sitting still for a minute?” He looked up at her from under his fringe of
curls and she allowed herself a small grin.

“No.”

Bellamy nodded before continuing. “Then on the base, the activity was constant. Even at night
people were still running patrols. And in the barracks – you get up to 16 guys in a small space like
that and you better bet there’s going to be noise.” He unfolded his arms and studied his hands for a
moment, snapping them back to grasp the railing in a white-knuckled grip when they wouldn’t
stop shaking.

“Quiet meant that shit was about to hit the fan, that we literally couldn’t make any noise or the
insurgents would know our position. Or that split second of silence before an IED goes off. And
then, I was captured and it was all just so damn quiet, especially during those first few days when I
wasn’t sure if you were… sometimes I couldn’t even hear you breathing.” He trailed off, his
shoulders caving inward.

Clarke looked around, seeing the serenity of their surroundings in a new light for the first time.
Suddenly, the silence without even the wind whispering through the trees was deafening. She
shuddered. It had been selfish to bring him out here. She knew that he was suffering too, and yet
she’d asked him to do this for her without a second thought. She poised herself to jump down,
ready to head back to the car where she could apologize profusely.

His voice stopped her. “I see the way you are out here and… I want that for me. I want to be able
to let the peaceful energy out here calm me down. I just don’t know how.”

She allowed herself to really study him for a moment. The molten brown of his eyes looked so
lost. She really wished she could help him, but Bellamy wasn’t the type to accept other people’s
support, and she could still barely stand being in the same room with someone else.

She traced her fingertips lightly along the backs of his knuckles, not allowing herself the intimacy
of holding his hand. His breath hitched and he tried to cover it by clearing his throat. He pulled
away slightly, making a show of looking at his watch. “If you still want to go out tonight, we
should probably think about starting to head back.”

They drove back to the apartment with the radio on, and Bellamy finally seemed to relax back into
his chair. “Octavia said 7 right?” he confirmed with her when they got near the house. When
Clarke nodded. “That gives us a little over an hour still before we need to leave. Meet you by the door at 6:30?”

Clarke acknowledged what he said, her teeth sawing at her bottom lip as apprehension began creeping in. As soon as they arrived, she headed to her room, her nerves getting the best of her. She rummaged through her closet, trying to find something to wear. Nearly everything she owned felt too bright, not to mention too revealing. She kept digging through the hangers until she landed on an oversized cowl-necked navy sweater and a pair of black leggings. The pants hung loosely around her hips and the sweater looked like it might swallow her whole, but they would have to do. With a sigh, she grabbed her bag of cosmetics and headed to the small washroom.

She gripped the edge of the sink as she examined her appearance in the vanity. The Clarke Griffin she was used to seeing in her reflection was long gone, leaving in her place a sad, tired-looking shell. Her once shiny blonde hair hung limp and dull around her ears. She briefly considered braiding it back, but then it would leave her nothing to hide behind. She sighed. It was what it was.

Clarke had never really been one for makeup. It wasn’t that she didn’t find it pretty, she just didn’t have the patience to waste time applying it everyday. But right now she needed it, if for nothing else than to make herself look more alive.

She started by liberally applying concealer to the scar on her neck. It was mostly covered by the high collar of her shirt, but she didn’t want to take any chances. Her friends knew that something had happened – after all, most of them had been with her earlier in the trip, and when she didn’t come back, and especially when Wells died, they had to have become suspicious. They just didn’t know the details, and it wasn’t like Clarke was about to tell them. The very thought of people prying into what had happened to her made her skin crawl. Beyond that, her father’s aides had warned her that the more people that knew, the more likely it was that the press would get a hold of the story. That would just be a nightmare for everyone involved.

She moved on to covering the dark circles under her eyes, then tried to use bronzer and blush to add color back to her sallow skin. It was no expert makeover by any stretch, but by the time she was done, at least she looked normal enough that she wouldn’t be turning heads on the street.

She heard Bellamy’s heavy footsteps pause outside the bathroom door, but he didn’t say anything before moving on. She checked her phone and realized that she only had five minutes left before they’d planned to leave. Flipping open the medicine cabinet, she eyed the pill bottles lined up neatly along the shelf. Dr. Tsing had already drastically cut her dosages, and Clarke had further reduced that amount by half. She wanted to push it more, but knew that tonight wouldn’t be the night to do so. She could already feel the prickly claws of anxiety beginning to dig into the back of her neck.

She hurriedly washed down her meds with a swig of water and took one last glance at her reflection, before sighing and leaving the room. She made a final stop in her room to grab a jacket and some boots before rolling her shoulders back and forcing herself to stand a little taller as she walked to the front of the house.

Bellamy was sitting in one of the armchairs waiting for her, but he stood up as soon as she walked in. She watched as his gaze travelled up and down her figure. He opened his mouth like he wanted to say something but no words came out.

Clarke shifted nervously. “I swear, if you ask me one more time if I want to call this off…” Her tone was teasing, but she was really just trying to break the silence.

Bellamy swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing. Finally, he shook his head and looked away, eyes
locking in on an unobtrusive spot on the wall to her left. “I was just going to say that you look really nice.”

Clarke felt unexpected warmth flood through her chest, but she quickly quashed it. If he’d actually meant what he’d said, he’d have been able to look at her while he said it.

She shoved her feet into her boots and followed him back out to the car, already losing some of the confident façade she’d fought to put on. She slouched into her chair and turned her face toward the window, watching the streetlights fly past overhead.

She didn’t know why she suddenly cared what Bellamy thought about her appearance. He had literally seen her at her lowest point. Not to mention, he’d probably always associate her with the worst days of his life. Romantic feelings seemed like a non-starter. Deep down, she knew that he’d only asked her to stay with him due to some kind of warped sense of obligation.

She chalked it up to the fact that he was literally the only person in the world that she still felt even remotely comfortable around. Of course her mind would try to morph that into something more. She wasn’t used to being isolated on this level.

Bellamy pulled up to a parking spot in front of The Ark Pub and drummed his fingers on the steering wheel for a minute. Clarke finally allowed herself to turn her head to look at him. He was clenching his teeth to the point that she could see the muscles in his jaw straining, his eyes still trained straight forward.

Clarke bit the inside of her cheek, feeling a rush of guilt. “I’m sorry I made you come out here. If you’re uncomfortable you can-“

Bellamy blinked hard, as if snapping out of a daze. “No. I – uh… I’m good.” He ran a hand through his hair, causing the curls to fall into an even more unruly mess. “We should get going. Your friends are probably waiting.”

She wanted to ask what was bothering him, but decided not to. She’d already pushed him for answers once that day.

The Ark had been her friends’ hangout whenever they’d been back home in Virginia Beach. It wasn’t as familiar or as comfortable as the Dropship was on campus, but she was still fairly accustomed to its dim lighting, quiet music, and moderately busy atmosphere. She automatically headed for the booth in the back corner, knowing it was their usual haunt.

Bellamy hung back from her as she walked, keeping his distance. She was tempted to ask him to come closer. She felt like she needed him, almost like a weird form of security blanket, but she couldn’t exactly tell him that.

Her train of thought was broken by a melancholy voice that she recognized. “Look who’s still alive!”

The table jumped as Monty quite noticeably kicked Jasper in the shins. She felt Bellamy tense behind her - he’d obviously caught up. Her hand instinctively reached back until her fingers wrapped around his wrist, trying to soothe his agitation.

Harper jumped up after giving Jasper a death glare of her own. She bounded towards Clarke with her arms outstretched, but pulled back at the last second, apparently thinking better of it. Clarke forced on a small smile and gave her a side hug, nowhere near the level of affection the two girls normally shared, but she was trying. When Harper pulled back her smile was genuine. “I’m so glad
you decided to come,” she gushed, giving Clarke’s free hand a tight squeeze. Harper’s eyes darted over her shoulder, and Clarke flushed slightly, forgetting she needed to make some introductions.

“Um… this is Bellamy Blake.”

Harper’s eyes widened almost comically as she gave him an obvious once over. “As in, really hot, super soldier, older brother Bellamy Blake?”

Clarke felt a blush heat her face to the point that it felt like it might cause her to spontaneously combust. She dropped Bellamy’s wrist as if it were on fire. He had no way of knowing how they’d talked about him as teenagers, and she had really hoped he’d never find out.

Octavia cleared her throat from where she was still sitting at the table. “Clarke and Bell are roommates.”

Now it was Harper’s turn to blush. “Oh.”

Clarke shrugged, then sheepishly turned to Bellamy. “This is Harper McIntyre, you’ve met, but it was a really long time ago.” She angled toward the table so that she could continue the introductions. “That’s Monty Green, Harper’s boyfriend that she met at UVA. And that’s Jasper Jordan, he also went to school with us when we were kids. And this is… uh-” Clarke trailed off when she didn’t recognize the last girl sitting at the table.

“She’s Maya Vie,” The girl provided. “Jasper’s girlfriend. Ignore him, he’s already had a few - drowning his sorrows after he got kicked out of grad school. I warned him that he actually had to show up to the classes he was assigned to TA, but he didn’t listen.”

The girl’s smile was warm and genuine, but Clarke was still uncomfortable. She hadn’t prepared herself to have to interact with someone she didn’t know.

Sensing the awkwardness, Harper quickly jumped back in. “Why don’t you two sit down and I’ll see about getting you some drinks?”

Clarke cringed slightly. She definitely felt like she could use a drink or two, but she wasn’t going to risk mixing alcohol with her antidepressants. She had enough other problems to deal with. “Just water for me,” she muttered.

Bellamy grunted something about having a beer. Harper nodded and hurried off to the bar. Clarke studied the table. There were open spots on both ends, but she couldn’t bring herself to sit with Octavia and Lincoln, even though that would have been kinder to Bellamy. She could already feel Link’s gaze drilling holes through the armor she had put up and it made her want to throw up.

With a sigh, she slid into the booth next to Monty, effectively cutting off the other soldier’s line of sight. Bellamy slumped into the chair beside her. Monty gave her a soft smile, and she exhaled, relaxing back in her seat. She’d missed his calm demeanor.

“Jesus Griffin… always the party pooper. Have a drink, live a little.” Jasper slurred.

Maya nudged him, giving him a warning look. “Jasper.”

He picked up his drink and held it out toward Clarke, his hand swaying slightly. “Here, you can have mine.”

Bellamy sent the smaller man a glare, and Jasper’s arm dropped instantly, the tumbler landing on the table with a thud.
“If she doesn’t want to drink, she doesn’t have to. Have some respect.” Bellamy’s voice was low, but undeniably authoritative.

The table sat in an uneasy silence for a moment, and Clarke shifted uncomfortably. She needed to break the tension and shift the focus away from herself. She looked at Jasper. “You got kicked out of grad school?” She tried to keep her voice strong, but it came out as more of a squeak.

To her surprise he laughed. “More like suspended. The Dean is reviewing my case. I’ll most likely be back on campus by January.” He brought his glass back to his lips and tipped his head back, finishing it off.

Monty shook his head derisively. “You’d think that just barely squeaking back into his undergrad would have taught him a lesson, but apparently not.”

Maya smirked and rolled her eyes knowingly.

At this point, Harper had returned, placing a drink down in front of each of her new guests. “Are you still planning on going back to finish up at UVA in the winter O?” she asked, looking over at the brunette as she sat down.

Octavia hazarded a cautious glance at Bellamy. “Uh… actually no. I wanted to stick closer to home. With Link and I working on planning the wedding and my work at the ranch it just seemed like an easy decision to make. There’s always the possibility that I could go back in the fall though. Who knows?” Her eyes remained intent on her brother the whole time, trying to gage his reaction. Clarke looked over at him as well, but he didn’t seem to be paying any attention to what was being said, staring down the neck of his beer.

Clarke’s eyebrows scrunched together, trying to figure out why he was acting so off.

A round of nachos that the group had apparently ordered before they’d come arrived at the table and everyone started divvying up the food onto smaller plates. Harper laughed at the face Monty made when she started transferring all of her black olives onto his plate, and Clarke smiled, enjoying the couple’s antics. She picked at her own portion a bit before stopping. She wasn’t used to eating greasy food anymore, and she felt the first telltale signs of nausea rolling through her gut.

She caught Bellamy’s eyes on her and offered him a shrug, knowing he’d probably understand why she wasn’t eating. He didn’t react.

The conversation moved on to more mundane topics after that. Maya regaled them with the tale of how she’d met Jasper, and Monty and Harper talked about their plans to head south to visit his family over Christmas. Clarke felt herself start to relax slightly in her seat. As long as the attention was focused elsewhere, she could actually somewhat enjoy her friend’s company. She’d missed them even if she hadn’t allowed herself to admit it. And above everything else, she’d missed feeling normal, even if she knew that it was only temporary.

At a lull in the conversation, Lincoln cleared his throat. “Bellamy, do you mind helping me grab another round of drinks?”

Bellamy shifted in his seat for a moment, before nodding. He had remained silently stoic beside her since telling Jasper off, and Clarke was beginning to worry. She was glad Lincoln had apparently decided to step in. Despite her personal reservations toward the medic, she knew that he was a good man, and Bellamy obviously needed someone to talk to.

What she wasn’t expecting, was the sudden feeling of dread that washed over her as soon as the older Blake left her side. Her hands clenched in her lap, and her chest tightened, causing her
breathing to pick up. She did her best to hide it, but Monty still gave her a subtle questioning look.

She managed to plaster on a fake smile for him and nodded that she was okay, her thigh bouncing beneath the table anxiously.

It was becoming more and more obvious to her that she was using Bellamy as some kind of coping mechanism, and she didn’t know when that had started. The thought unsettled her. She tried to focus back in on what the others were talking about - something about the likelihood of Virginia ever legalizing marijuana – but she was sinking back into her own head. Her eyes roamed the room until she caught sight of Bellamy over by the bar, his head bowed close to Lincoln’s as they talked.

She reassured herself that he was close and started in on one of the breathing exercises that Dr. Tsing had taught her. Her friends started to turn their heads, sensing that something was up. Her awareness of their anxious stares wasn’t helping the situation. She closed her eyes, trying to block them out.

“Clarke is everything okay?” Harper’s worried voice made her wince.

She opened her eyes briefly and gave a short nod. “I’m fine, I promise.”

Octavia seemed to pick up on what was going on, likely due to her own experiences. She gave Clarke a knowing look and quickly went about diverting everyone’s attention. “So… Link and I are trying to decide on a venue, but nothing seems to feel right you know? We thought about a beach wedding, but that just seems cliché especially without a destination. Do you guys have any suggestions?”

Harper’s eyes lit up. “Oh my god, I love weddings. What time of year are you guys thinking?”

Clarke managed to catch Octavia’s eye to convey her gratitude and her friend smiled in return. In a heartbeat, she felt a warm presence behind her, and a steaming mug was placed on the table. Bellamy sat back down in his chair just as she leaned forward to inhale the fragrant steam. Mint tea. The tight band squeezing her chest instantly seemed to loosen.

Instinctually her hand reached towards his knee, seeking physical contact out of reach of prying eyes. He looked at her for a moment, dark eyes studying her features, before he intertwined his fingers with hers, squeezing gently.

After that, things seemed to shift. Clarke relaxed more and actually started to genuinely enjoy herself. Bellamy got more involved in the conversation, and the group seemed to accept him into the fold. By the end of the night Clarke felt lighter than she had in recent memory and she had to admit that she was proud of herself for making it through the entire event. Even Lincoln’s presence had begun to feel less unsettling.

When they stood up to leave, Clarke exchanged a brief hug with each of her friends, and even a small smile with Maya, and was able to leave the bar with her head held high.

Bellamy seemed to be doing better as well, having lost the funk that he’d been in earlier. He gave her a small smile after he started the car, and reached across the console to hold her hand once again.

“So that Jasper’s a real piece of work, huh?” he asked her wryly, pulling back onto the road.

Clarke cringed. “He’s actually a really funny guy. He’s just going through some stuff.” Bellamy gave her a pointed look and she rolled her eyes. “I’m still trying to wrap my head around how he landed a sweet girl like Maya though.”
Bellamy chuckled. “Never underestimate the power of hormones.”

Clarke pulled her hand away to whack him on the arm and he winced at her playfully.

They drove in silence for a couple minutes before Bellamy spoke again. “Your friends seem like really great people Clarke.”

She smiled down at her lap. “They are.” She played with her fingers for a moment before she looked back up at him. “I really appreciate you being there for me tonight.”

The smile he gave her was genuine. “Anything for you, Princess.”

Clarke felt a flush heat her face, but this time it wasn’t due to embarrassment, but some other emotion she couldn’t name. She ducked her head forward, letting her hair hide her face.

When they got back to the house, she bade Bellamy goodnight, and headed to her room, still in a good mood. Her phone buzzed in her pocket, and she pulled it out, expecting a message from one of the friends they’d just left.

Instead the screen flashed with an incoming call from her father.

Clarke chewed her bottom lip for a moment, contemplating her options. Buoyed by her boost in confidence from earlier in the night, she picked up.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure how I feel about this chapter. I always struggle with Clarke's POV, thus why I try to avoid it like the plague. But it was necessary for future events to not completely come out of the blue. Bellamy only sees things from his perspective which can be pretty biased. We needed to see what was really going on with Clarke.

I feel like it's been a really long time since I've said this, but I also just wanted to remind everyone that I'm not American. I'm sure I've probably screwed a lot of things up about Virginia in the last few chapters. The closest I've ever been is Maine and I was like 3, so take that for what it is. Also, if it's super weird for Clarke to have gone to the University of Virginia with most of the friends that she grew up with (except for Wells. He went to Yale) then I apologize. I really don't get the college system in the States. In Canada we don't have to write the SATs and most people just go to the closest major university for their undergrad and only worry about names for grad school.

I figure we're around halfway in this story, maybe a little more. It's hard to say - I don't have a firm plan in place for the rest of the chapters like I did when they were in captivity. There's still lots more ups and downs in the healing process to come though and I'm hoping that you'll stay with me.

A huge thanks goes out for all of the love I received on the last chapter. Let me know your thoughts on this one by leaving your comments and kudos!
The first thing Bellamy did when he opened his locker was check his phone. He wasn’t sure why he felt compelled to do so, he rarely had any messages, but it had become a force of habit over the last week or so.

He frowned seeing he had a text from an unknown number. He opened it as he grabbed his bag and jacket, and allowed himself a small smile when the words appeared on his screen.

*Hey Blake, it’s Miller. We’re getting a few days of shore leave over the holidays and I decided I’m going to stick around Virginia instead of heading home. Any chance you want to grab a beer or something when I’m back?*

Bellamy sent him a quick reply, letting his friend know that all he needed to do was send him a time and place, and that he was also more than welcome to spend Christmas at the house with him, Link, and Octavia.

It was the first he’d really heard from anyone on his unit since the trial, and honestly, it felt good that Miller had reached out. He had a feeling that a lot of the team still held quite a bit of ill will towards him, but Nate had always been a steadfast and loyal friend and Bellamy had missed him.

He let the good feeling buoy him as he left the fire academy and headed to his car. Things seemed to be looking up. Octavia had been right - getting his life back into a routine had been helpful, giving him direction. Having been in the Navy for nearly a decade, he was used to having a regimented life, and now, being back on a mentally and physically demanding schedule was giving him back a sense of normalcy that he hadn’t even realized he’d been lacking.

It certainly wasn’t the same as his life had been while he was enlisted, but it was different in a good way. He knew he was still struggling with a lot of what happened, but he was telling himself that he was coping.

Now, it seemed that the biggest source of trepidation in his life was the short blonde living in his spare room.

He and Clarke had been fighting for nearly two weeks – that is, if you could call him getting more and more frustrated while she continued to withdraw ‘fighting’.

It really shouldn’t have been a big deal. But Bellamy’s trust issues and overbearing protective streak had kicked into overdrive, and he’d berated her for agreeing. She’d looked hurt and retreated into her room. They’d barely spoken since. When they did, it always started polite, but somehow he would manage to bring up the dinner, and things would devolve quickly from there.

Now, the day of the actual event, he wasn’t eager to start the same arguments all over again.

Part of him knew that he was doing it on purpose. Something in him had shifted the night of the party. When he’d watched her walk out of the hallway from her room, his heart had skipped a beat and his mouth had gone dry… and he’d immediately reprimanded himself for even letting his
thoughts stray in that direction.

Clarke needed someone in her corner - someone to be her rock and help her through all of the horrible shit she’d had to endure – not someone who was trying to get into her pants. He’d been trying to keep his distance ever since, but it was exceedingly obvious that he was going about it the wrong way, pushing things too far in the opposite direction.

Just like he had every other day that week, he made a promise to himself that today he’d do better.

When he arrived home, he saw that Clarke was lying on the couch in the front room under a mass of blankets. He did his best to take off his boots and hang up his coat quietly. Clarke constantly looked exhausted - he didn’t want to wake her up. Besides, if he was really lucky, she might even sleep right through when they were supposed to leave for dinner.

“Hey,” her partially muffled voice reached him from across the room. Bellamy cringed - so much for his wishful thinking.

“Hey yourself,” he muttered over his shoulder keeping his tone light. He stored his duffle bag in the front closet, then walked over, sitting on the edge of the couch close to her feet.

He exhaled heavily through his nose, eyes glued to his hands. There was no better time to start trying to make amends than the present. “Clarke, I’m sorry I’ve been acting like such a dick. It was uncalled for and it’s on me. I don’t know what’s come over me lately.”

The blankets shifted as she pulled them down just far enough that he had a clear view of her face. She looked pale and bone weary, deep creases making patterns across her forehead. “I understand that going to see my dad might make you uncomfortable. But I need to do this after everything he did…”

Bellamy tried to hold his tongue, but his self control hadn’t been great as of late. “That’s crap Clarke. You need to think more about taking care of yourself. You don’t owe him anything.”

“I owe him everything.” Clarke’s voice was harsh. She balled up the blankets from off of her lap, and stood up, shoving them back down into a messy pile on the couch. “If it weren’t for my dad, we might still be in Iraq, or more than likely we’d be dead. Literal best case, you’d still be in prison. So if my dad asks me to join him for dinner, then yeah, I’m going to be there. I can live with being uncomfortable for a few hours if it’s the price to pay for the fact that you’re safe.”

Bellamy sat in stunned silence for a minute. Clarke’s hands slowly came up to cover her face, clutching at her temples, fingers pulling at her roots. After a few heavy breaths, she seemed to relax, her voice becoming much softer. “Bellamy I can understand if you don’t want to go. I shouldn’t have said yes without talking to you first. You don’t have to. I’ll just call a cab or something…”

The thought of Clarke in a taxi driven by a stranger she didn’t know made his gut roil with anxiety. “No.” He shuffled around for a bit as she watched him, waiting for him to explain what he meant. His shoulders slouched, her words had hit home. “No, you’re right. It’s just dinner. I’ll go.”

He rubbed roughly at his chin and was slightly shocked by the scraping feel of stubble under his palm. He needed to shave. “So exactly how fancy is this going to be?”

Clarke sighed in relief. She managed a small smile. “Casual. It’s just going to be you, me, and him. No expectations, just food and my dad wanting to catch up.”

Bellamy still felt uneasy. The Griffin’s definition of casual was a hell of a lot different than his.
“Do you need the washroom? I could use a shower.”

Clarke shook her head. “Can you be ready in about 45 minutes? Dad always drilled me on the importance of punctuality.”

Bellamy nodded. He got straight to work on making himself presentable. He cleaned himself up as best as he could. There was only so much he could do about his messy hair though – he needed a haircut. He didn’t own much in the way of nice clothes outside of his dress uniform, but he managed to scrounge up a pair of dress pants and a shirt that wasn’t too badly wrinkled.

He finished up well within the time limit she had given him and decided to once again wait for her in the front room.

It didn’t take long for her to appear from the hallway, still trying to secure one of her earrings. “Ready to go?” she asked him with one of her eyebrows raised delicately.

He took in her appearance. She looked nearly flawless, her legs wrapped in thin shimmering tights, a sweater dress showing off her slowly reappearing curves, her make up highlighting her beautiful eyes. She’d added a scarf tied artfully around her neck to the ensemble, and somehow she’d managed to make it look like a fashion statement rather than a hastily applied accessory.

He swallowed and shifted uncomfortably, feeling drab in just a dress shirt and slacks. He hadn’t even bothered with a tie, but looking at her, he had regrets.

“You’re sure this isn’t some kind of formal event? I can go change…”

Clarke let out a light laugh and rolled her eyes. “You’re fine. It’s just dinner with my dad. There should be nothing fancy about it.”

He gave her a pointed look, his eyebrows disappearing behind his curls. “Your appearance would suggest otherwise.”

She grabbed his pea coat from the front closet and handed it to him, before pulling out hers as well. “The man put me in etiquette lessons when I was 5. I have a bit of a complex when it comes to being in his presence.” When he still hesitated to put on his jacket, she sighed, reaching up and brushing back a particularly untamed curl from his face. It immediately fell right back down onto his forehead. “You could show up in a paper bag and he’d still make you feel like the most welcome guest he ever invited into his home. That’s just the way he is. You have nothing to worry about.”

Bellamy sighed heavily, but relented, allowing them to leave. As they walked down the front steps, his hand automatically went to the small of her back and it felt like a dull electric current ran through his arm. He hastily pulled back, clearing his throat, then reached around her to open the car door. To his relief she didn’t seem to notice anything amiss.

They started the long trek clear across town to the Dam Neck neighborhood and the type of affluence Bellamy hadn’t even dreamed of as a kid. It always bothered him to go back there. He knew he didn’t belong. But he’d have to hide his discomfort to get through the night.

He caught Clarke studying him out of the corner of his eye and shifted subconsciously in his seat. He was close to asking if there was something on his face, when she finally spoke.

“How are things going at the academy?” Bellamy exhaled in relief. She was just making polite conversation – a habit she’d picked up after he’d revealed to her how vulnerable silence made him feel. Somehow, the knowledge that it was Clarke putting in the effort to comfort him seemed to
multiply the calming effect tenfold.

The corners of his lips curled up into a genuine smile. “Actually, it’s been pretty great.” He paused to shoulder check before changing lanes. “Thank you for suggesting it to me. It’s something I never would have thought of on my own, but it fits.”

He chanced a quick glance in her direction and thought that the grin he saw looked pretty real. It warmed his heart.

“What about you? I think O mentioned that you’d been planning to go to some fancy medical school. Is that still the direction you’re headed?”

Clarke drummed her fingers against her thigh, but didn’t show any other outward signs of being distressed by the question. After a brief pause she answered him. “Johns Hopkins contacted me to tell me that they’d defer my admission to next fall, but…” She squared her shoulders, sitting up taller, her body language showing that she was resolute in her decision. “That was always my mother’s dream. It’s not me.” From there she started to falter. “And I don’t know if I… I’m not sure I could handle—”

Bellamy reached out and grasped one of her hands. “Hey. It’s okay. Have you thought about anything else you might want to do?”

She bit her lip, eyes downcast. “Honestly no, not really.”

He squeezed her hand. “And that’s okay too. There’s no rush. But if you need help brainstorming I’m all ears. You know… returning the favor.”

One side of her mouth twisted upward. “Thanks Bellamy.”

“Don’t mention it.”

The conversation was a huge reminder of how much he’d missed their friendship without all of the tension he’d unnecessarily piled onto it. He was an adult, and he needed to act like it. Clarke didn’t deserve to bear the brunt of his apparent inability to deal with his feelings.

They were getting close to their destination and Bellamy pulled his hand away to grip the steering wheel tighter. The Griffin’s mansion was in one of the most secluded parts of the subdivision, surrounded by forest on all sides to the point that most people wouldn’t even realize there was a house hidden amongst all of the trees. Kane was their closest neighbor, and even he had lived so far away that Octavia had usually begged for a ride rather than walking over.

He turned down the winding driveway and tried not to let his unease get the best of him as the sprawling manor started to come into view. This was the closest he’d ever been to the house, having never actually been inside, but even from just the exterior he could already tell that this place made Kane’s look small.

The Griffins were old money. Bellamy knew that. But his conversations with Clarke had become so ordinary that he’d allowed himself to forget why he’d started calling her Princess in the first place. His palms grew sweaty, sticking to the steering wheel, as old anxieties threatened to come to the surface.

Clarke directed him to just park however he wanted at the end of the circular driveway, muttering something about how the butler would move the car if it was in the way. By the time he exited the vehicle, his jaw was clenched and his body felt stiff from the amount of tension coursing through his frame. Clarke shuffled a bit on her side of the car, fussing with the hemline of her skirt.
Apparently she was nervous too. They made quite the pair.

They fell into step side by side. The front door opened before they’d even made it to the top step, revealing Jake Griffin standing in the archway smiling warmly at them.

When they reached him, he immediately pulled Clarke into a hug. Bellamy noted how tense she was in the embrace. As she stepped back almost too quickly to be polite, he noticed that she’d slipped back into the mask that she hid behind more often than not these days, the relaxed manner she’d had in the car having disappeared.

“Sweetheart, I’m so glad you could make it,” the senator didn’t seem to detect anything off. He turned to Bellamy and extended his hand. Bellamy took it, returning his firm shake. “Petty Officer Blake, it’s great to see you again. Please, make yourself at home.”

They walked in, and Bellamy was immediately stunned by the opulence. A crystal chandelier hung over their heads, framed by twin curved staircases leading to the second floor. Bellamy didn’t think anyone actually lived like this outside of the movies. Apparently he was wrong.

Senator Griffin had his butler take their jackets before leading them towards the formal dining room where a huge spread of food was already laid out. “Petty Officer Blake do you drink bourbon?” Jake asked, waving his hand toward a crystal decanter filled with amber liquid.

Bellamy managed to nod numbly, then forced himself to concentrate on the moment rather than allowing himself to get overwhelmed. “Please, just call me Bellamy.”

He pulled out Clarke’s chair for her, before getting settled himself. Jake placed a drink in front of him before taking his seat at the head of the table. “I had Rosa prepare your favorite Clarke, feel free to dig in.”

Bellamy watched as she served herself a sensible portion of salad and chicken and dumplings before passing them along to him. He had to admit that the food smelled divine, but when he took a bite, he could barely taste it, too wrapped up in his own head.

Jake started eating as well, before turning his gaze upon his daughter. “So Sweetheart, how are things going? Are your therapy sessions going okay, or do you want me to get a new recommendation? What about your visits with Dr. Tsing?”

Bellamy nearly choked. The man really didn’t waste any time beating around the bush. He looked over at Clarke, trying to gage how she’d react to the abrupt line of questioning.

“Everything is going great Dad. Nothing to worry about.” The smile she plastered on was so fake it pained Bellamy. She didn’t elaborate.

Senator Griffin appeared to take her words at face value, turning his attentions to his guest. “And you, Pet- Bellamy… I can’t thank you enough for once again making such a huge sacrifice to help my daughter. Your selflessness seems to know no bounds.” He pulled an enameled business card from his breast pocket, and placed it on the table near Bellamy’s plate. “I’m giving you my personal cellphone number. If there’s anything you need – and I mean anything at all – you don’t hesitate to call me.”

Bellamy took the card and forced a smile of his own. It wasn’t some great sacrifice for him to have Clarke in his life - quite the opposite actually. He didn’t like the implication in what the senator was saying.

He once again glanced over at Clarke, but she didn’t appear to be listening, picking at her food.
without actually eating anything substantial. He nudged her leg with his knee under the table, hoping to convey with his eyes that he wanted to know if she was okay. She just put on another phony smile for him, covering up any real emotions in what he could now tell was a well practiced act.

Senator Griffin continued on with small talk after he’d gotten the important orders of business out of the way. Bellamy tuned him out. He really couldn’t care less about the state of trade with China, or the repercussions of some states tightening their abortion laws – at least not in that moment. Clarke continued to nod along politely, still completely hidden behind her cheerful façade.

Bellamy began to realize just how much the impression he’d had of the Griffins as a perfect family had always been a performance, something that they put on for the benefit of Jake’s political career. Watching the way that Clarke was trying so hard to act like nothing was wrong gave Bellamy a better understanding of just how awful things had to have been for her. It would have been exhausting to keep the pretense up at the best of times, let alone when she was trying to deal with the aftermath of what she’d been through. He was starting to see with overwhelming clarity how things had built up until she’d snapped.

He longed to reach out and wrap her in his arms.

But now wasn’t the time or place.

As they were finishing their plates, the butler reentered the dining room and gave the senator a pointed look that Bellamy couldn’t decipher. Jake nodded, then turned back to his guests.

“Sweetheart it really is great to see that you are doing so much better.” He paused, folding his napkin before placing it back on the table. “As you know honey, the next senatorial election is coming up and sponsors are more important than ever. I wasn’t going to ask, but seeing how wonderful you look and considering that you’re already here… I’m having a small gathering in the ballroom and I was hoping that you two would stay. It’s only a few guests - people that you already know – and I’m certain that they would appreciate seeing you after all of this time.”

Bellamy bristled, his eyes locking onto Clarke’s reaction. She placed a calming hand onto his knee beneath the table, keeping her attention focused on her father. The corners of her lips had noticeably tightened, but somehow she had managed to keep her smile in place. “Of course Dad, whatever you need.”

Bellamy tensed even further as he stood up, preparing himself to step in because he knew that she wouldn’t. She rose up beside him, subtly shaking her head before latching onto his hand, her palm feeling clammy in his grip.

Jake stood as well, clapping his hands together. “Alright then, if you’d both just follow me.”

Bellamy didn’t like it, but when Clarke started following her father he had no choice but to go along. They were led down a long hallway until they came upon another sprawling room, complete with a bar and a baby grand piano in one corner. Somewhere around ten or fifteen smartly dressed men and women were standing throughout the room, all of their gazes intent upon the politician as he entered.

Jake was immediately absorbed in the role of the charismatic man Bellamy remembered from seeing him on TV over the years. He spread his arms wide in a welcoming gesture. “My dearest friends, thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here tonight. As you all know, my latest campaign is nearing its launch, and I’m hoping that you will enjoy this evening as a sign of my gratitude for your continued support. It means the world to me and my family to have
people like you in our corner. We all know that America is facing some tough times, and it’s due to
your sponsorship that we are able to make a difference in the lives of Virginians.” He picked up a
flute of champagne from a nearby tray and held it high. “To the people of Virginia, that we as a
state will continue to grow and prosper.”

There was a polite cheer from the rest of the guests before they sipped at their drinks, and turned
back to the conversations they’d been having before the senator had arrived. Jake handed them
each a glass of their own, before ushering them towards the nearest couple.

“This is Russell Lightbourne and his wife Simone. Russell is the CEO of Sanctum Tech.” Jake
began introducing them. “I’m sure that you remember my daughter, Clarke.”

Russell reached for her hand, taking it away from Bellamy’s reassuring grip and kissed it. “Of
course. I’m charmed as always.” Clarke’s spine straightened and Bellamy noticed a slight quiver in
her jaw. She gave the older man a tight-lipped smile, then pulled back towards Bellamy as soon as
she’d been released. Bellamy’s hand automatically went to the small of her back, and she leaned
into his touch. He was about to whisper something into her ear, but was distracted by Jake’s
continued introduction.

“And this is Bellamy Blake, a Petty Officer First Class who recently came back from his latest
tour with SEAL team 10. He was a ward of General Kane’s and is becoming a fast friend of my
family’s”

Russell’s eyes twinkled as he extended his hand. “Thank you for your service. We are so lucky to
have brave young men like you willing to defend us and fight the good fight.”

Bellamy seethed silently, refusing to comment. He hated the way that rich people always seemed
to nonchalantly comment on the military without putting any real thought into the consequences of
its actions. He reluctantly shook the man’s hand with a nod of acknowledgement, before turning his
attention back to Clarke.

She’d gone even paler than usual, but was still trying to hold onto her brave face. Bellamy admired
her fortitude, but wished wholeheartedly that she didn’t need it.

They continued their rounds, the senator making sure to acquaint them with everyone in
attendance. Bellamy barely listened. He didn’t give a crap about who any of these people were, or
about Senator Griffin’s reelection campaign. His sole focus was the young woman beside him,
who obviously was becoming more and more affected as the evening wore on. By the time Jake
finally relinquished them from their duties, Clarke was leaning so heavily into him that he was
practically holding her up.

He dragged her off to the side, out of anyone’s earshot, and was about to suggest that they call it a
night, when he was interrupted by what could only be described as a choked wail.

“Clarke, baby, I’m so sorry about everything,” Dr. Griffin plowed into her daughter hard enough
to cause Bellamy to stumble.

He turned back to find Abby gripping at one of Clarke’s arms, her other hand pawing at her face in
a somewhat uncoordinated fashion.

Clarke’s brow creased as she scrambled to try to keep her mother upright. “Mom?” her quiet voice
was riddled with confusion.

The older woman burst into tears. “Oh Sweetie, I can’t believe we let such horrible things happen
to you. I can’t even imagine. And in the video…” Abby’s voice was too loud, people were starting to turn their heads, trying to figure out what the commotion was about.

Clarke blanched, retreating back out of her mother’s grip. “I can’t do this right now,” she whispered thickly. She wiped hurriedly under one eye, then rushed out of the room, heels clicking on the hardwood as she went.

Everything seemed to be silent for a moment, the whole room frozen in shock.

Then Abby crashed to her knees, collapsing into a sobbing fit on the floor. He spotted Senator Griffin headed towards his ex-wife, a look of consternation coloring his face.

That meant no one was following Clarke. Bellamy jogged out of the room after her, just managing to catch a glimpse of her blonde hair disappearing down the hall that lead towards the front of the house. By the time he’d almost made it to the lobby, he could hear Clarke’s heavy tread thundering up the stairs.

He barely even noticed the man headed in the opposite direction, until he was pulled up short, a hand holding firm around his bicep.

“Bellamy son, it’s good to see you.” Marcus Kane looked surprised at their unexpected meeting, having apparently just arrived at the party.

Bellamy pulled his arm back roughly, agitated at being diverted from his goal. “I’m not your son, and I really don’t have time for this right now.”

Kane held up his hand, as if to convey that what he had to say would only take a minute. “Bellamy, please. I can understand what you might be feeling. I realize that you probably resent me and I can only hope that that will get better with time. I made some rash decisions and my recklessness nearly cost you your life. But please – I’m asking your forgiveness. You and your sister are the closest thing that I have to a family. Please don’t shut me out of your life. I can handle giving you your space for the time being but… please just think about it. I hope that one day you can learn to trust me again.”

Bellamy snorted bitterly and shook his head, not trusting himself to speak.

Kane’s face dropped, creasing with pain. He dug into the breast pocket of his suit and pulled out a slip of paper, handing it to his former charge. “Then I hope that you can at least accept this.”

Bellamy took the note, allowing his curiosity to get the better of him. He unfolded it to find that it was a cheque with his name on it….

A cheque for $100000.

Bellamy just barely resisted the urge to rip the paper to shreds on the spot.

“I know that you think that anything that I give you is somehow done out of pity, but this money is actually yours. It’s half of what I made renting out your mother’s house over the years. I gave the rest to Octavia. You can use it for whatever you want: a new car, a trip, a down payment on a bigger house. I think your sister is putting most of it towards her wedding.”

Bellamy’s eyes were still glued to all of the zeros. He’d never seen that kind of money in his life.

Kane’s hand landing firmly on his shoulder caused him to jump. “Please just take the money Bellamy.” The general shuffled his feet for a moment before backing away. “I hope that I’ll hear
from you soon, but if I don’t… I understand.”

And then Kane was gone, leaving Bellamy still shocked and standing alone in the middle of the entryway. It took almost a full two minutes for his brain to kick back in again and remind him of why he’d left the ballroom in the first place. He shoved the cheque into the pocket of his pants unceremoniously and resumed his search for Clarke. He could figure out what he was going to do about the money later.

He finally made it to the top of the stairs, but was immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number of doors facing him in every direction. He could spend all night looking for her. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and fired Octavia a quick text.

*Where’s Clarke’s room at her parent’s house?*

He didn’t have to wait long for a response - the little bubbles indicating she was typing popped up almost immediately.

*West wing 3rd door on the left*

Then just a few seconds later:

*What’s going on?*

Bellamy still couldn’t quite rein in his anger over the whole situation.

*Clarke’s parents are assholes.*

He stared at his message for a moment after he’d sent it. He knew that it really hadn’t been an adequate answer, but he didn’t want to waste time going into the full story either. He hastily typed in a follow up.

*I’ll call you later.*

He made his way to the door that his sister had indicated, before rapping his knuckles lightly on the wood. “Clarke, it’s me. Can I come in?”

He waited a full 30 seconds for her soft response. “Yeah.”

He opened the door almost shyly. Clarke was sitting on the edge of her childhood bed, the scarf that had been around her neck removed and clenched tightly in her fists. Her eyes were red-rimmed, and her skin was flushed, but overall she looked relatively calmer than she had downstairs.

Bellamy let out a sigh of relief and allowed himself to look around the room. The whole space was a sharp juxtaposition between what looked like two completely incompatible ideas. The walls were a powder pink, the bed fit for a princess, lacy curtains hanging over the window… all things that Bellamy would never have associated with the Clarke he now knew. In contrast, the walls were spotted with artsy prints, her desk was messy, covered in various gadgets and photos, and her headboard was plastered with a map of the world.

She’d been warring between her true self and the upbringing she’d had far longer than he’d known her. His opinion of her shifted yet again, and once again he felt like an ass for the way that he’d treated her when they were kids.

“You can say ‘I told you so’ at any time,” Clarke muttered, dejectedly.
Bellamy cringed, shaking his head. “That isn’t what I was going to say.”

Clarke rubbed her temples tiredly. “He means well,” she exhaled heavily. “The most important thing to my dad has always been his constituents. It’s what makes him a great politician. Sometimes he just loses sight of the effect that it has on those around him.”

Bellamy crossed to her side quickly and sat beside her on the bed, pulling her head onto his shoulder. “Clarke, please stop trying to defend everyone else’s actions. Your dad is in the wrong. If he can’t see that what he did tonight was harming you, then he was being willfully ignorant. And your mom… I don’t even know what to say about what happened there. I’m not even sure what she was doing here.”

He trailed off, unsure of how to make her understand what he was trying to say. He shifted off of the bed to squat down in front of her until she was forced to meet his eyes, both of her hands clutched tightly within his own.

“Clarke, your priority needs to be you. I know that it’s hard, because you care so much about other people, but right now you need to focus on your own feelings. If something is making you uncomfortable, you aren’t obligated to stick it out.”

Clarke closed her eyes. “But these are my parents.” Her voice was weak, carrying a slight tremor.

Bellamy reached up a hand, brushing her hair behind her ear. “I know. Which is why I’m not telling you to shut them out – just take a step back.”

Her eyes blinked back open and she chewed at her lip. She nodded her head slowly. “I don’t know if I can do this alone.”

He smiled softly at her, hand still resting over her cheek. “You’re not alone.”

He thought he might have seen a brief twinkle in her eyes, but it was gone so quickly he dismissed it as a trick of the light. She made to stand up, and he helped her to her feet gently. They were so close together that he could feel each of her warm breaths sweep across his face. She stared into his eyes for a moment as if reading his soul.

“Thank you for always being there for me.” She reached up to cup the side of his head and leaned forward, placing a chaste kiss to the corner of his mouth. His heart hammered so hard he swore she could probably hear it.

Then she stepped back, taking his hand, fingers threading together. “Shall we get this over with?”

Bellamy blinked hard, trying to catch up. He studied her face, attempting to glean what she was feeling in that moment, but her expression was just as unreadable as ever.

He forced on a strained smile and nodded to her, leading the way out of the room. He hoped that they’d be able to slip out of the house without running into anyone, but it wasn’t meant to be.

Senator Griffin was leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs waiting for them. He straightened as soon as he heard them approach.

“Sweetheart,” he started, reaching for his daughter even as she shied away, trying to hide behind Bellamy’s larger frame. His eyes darted to the jarring scar on her neck and Bellamy watched him noticeably pale. “I’m so sorry. When I invited your mother I didn’t think that she’d behave that way. I had no intention of upsetting you—“

Bellamy blocked the man’s path. “With all due respect sir, don’t.”
The politician barely even spared a glance in his direction, continuing to address Clarke. “I swear that it won’t happen again. But honey, I know that you know how important it is for us to present a united front right now.”

He saw Clarke begin to waver, so he squeezed her hand. Her eyes turned to his and he saw her expression harden as she straightened. “Dad I’m sorry, but I can’t worry about your campaign right now. I need some time to sort myself out. I’ll contact you when I’m ready, but for now I need you to just let me be.”

Jake looked stricken. “Clarke you can’t mean that. It’s the holidays. You need to be with your family.”

Clarke sniffled and placed a hand on his arm, rising up on her toes to softly kiss his cheek. “I’m sorry.”

She tugged Bellamy’s hand, leading him around her father to the closet. She grabbed both of their jackets, handing Bellamy his and walking out the front door without even bothering to put on her own.

He jogged after her, catching up just as she wiped a tear from under her eye. She shook the moisture from her fingers angrily, keeping her eyes focused forward. “I’m fine. Let’s just go.”

He fumbled his keys out of his pocket, and before they knew it, they were back on the road.

Clarke searched through the radio stations, never pausing on one for long. He could tell she was doing it out of anxiety so he reached out to still her hand.

“You’ll spend Christmas with us,” he told her calmly.

Clarke turned in her seat. “What? No – my dad was right, the holidays are meant to be spent with your family.”

He shook his head. You are my family. But he couldn’t say that out loud. Instead he fumbled to make up something that would mollify her. “Nonsense. My friend Miller from the Navy is already coming. If anything, you being there would make it less awkward for him. I’m not forcing you to come if you don’t want to, but it would make both me and Octavia really happy if you decided to spend the day with us.”

She was silent for a long time - long enough for him to worry about sounding like a hypocrite after everything he’d just preached to her about how she shouldn’t do things to make other people feel better.

Finally she spoke. “Okay.”

He looked over at her, still wary, but her lips were turned up into a sweet little smile that was hesitant but real.

He grinned back, relaxing into the driver’s seat. Now he just had to make sure that Miller would be showing up, even if he had to beg.

He wondered how his perspective had shifted so much over the course of the day. He’d started out by trying to push her away and ended up with… whatever this was.

He couldn’t bring himself to regret it.
Ahh.... so this chapter really got away from me in terms of length. What does that mean for you guys? You should get a bonus Christmas chapter (about 90% fluff) a week from today. Consider it a thank you for the surprise nomination in the Bellarke Fanwork Awards :)

As always, please leave comments and kudos to keep me going!
When his alarm went off at 8am it felt way too early. Even though it was a relative sleep-in compared to the time he usually had to wake up to be at the fire academy, he felt like he’d just barely fallen asleep again after being startled awake by yet another vivid nightmare. The obnoxious tune coming from his phone tempted him to throw it across the room.

He shut it off with a huff and contented himself to just stare at the ceiling for a bit. Getting started with the cooking could wait.

By the time 9 o’clock rolled around, he couldn’t convince himself to stay in bed any longer. He shrugged into a pair of sweats and an old t-shirt, running his fingers through his hair in an attempt to comb it, then headed towards the kitchen.

He was surprised to find Clarke already sitting at the island, sipping a cup of tea. When she saw him, she flicked the coffee maker on and stood up to wash her hands. “I was beginning to wonder if you were ever going to get out of bed.”

He gave her a blank look, still feeling half asleep without his daily dose of caffeine. “What are you doing up?”

She rolled her eyes. “Were you planning on making all of Christmas dinner by yourself?”

He walked over to the fridge and pulled out the turkey he’d left there to thaw. “Octavia’s helping.”

Clarke’s nose scrunched in disbelief. “Octavia could burn the house down making nachos.”

Bellamy grinned, remembering the incident that she was referring to. “That’s why she’s in charge of the salad.”

Clarke’s eyes sparkled as she let out a small laugh, and Bellamy tried not to get too distracted by them. She poured him a steaming mug of the fresh brew and he accepted it with a muttered thanks, his fingers accidentally brushing hers as he took the cup.

She pulled out a stool and climbed onto it in an attempt to take down the roasting pan that he’d stored above the cabinets. “We’re having turkey?”

Bellamy shrugged, letting the burning hot liquid try to clear his head. “We kind of missed Thanksgiving this year, and it’s O’s favorite.” He steadied the stool as she wobbled slightly, then offered her an arm to help her hop down, prize in hand.

“What else is on the menu?” she asked lightly.

Bellamy thought about it for a minute. “Stuffing, mashed potatoes, green beans, carrots, Miller mentioned something about bringing some kind of wild rice casserole… I bought an apple pie.”

Clarke scratched her head. “I still can’t believe you cook.”

Bellamy looked at her with humor crinkling the skin around his eyes. “I’ve been cooking for you for over a month.”
She nudged his arm playfully. “And I’m still waiting to wake up from this strange parallel universe.”

That sobered Bellamy slightly, even if it wasn’t her intention. He understood the sense that their situation still didn’t feel real. More often than he’d like to admit he entertained the fear that one day he would wake up back in their cell, the last few months of freedom nothing but a fever dream.

He reached past her to turn the oven on and adjust the racks to the proper height.

She eyed the massive bird that he then moved on to seasoning. “Are you sure that’s going to be enough to feed all of us?” She teased.

“I hope so. Miller eats like he has 5 stomachs and a hollow leg.”

She beamed at him impishly. “Then you won’t mind if I contribute a dish of my own.”

Bellamy eyed her apprehensively. It was a small kitchen, and they would more than likely just get in each other’s way. But he had never seen her act this playful or carefree in all of the time that she’d been living with him and he didn’t want to ruin the mood. He nodded.

Her smile grew. She skirted past him and opened the fridge, scanning the shelves.

“What are you planning on making?” he asked her skeptically.

She closed the fridge door with a snap, looking at him over her shoulder. “It’s a surprise.”

He rolled his eyes, but he was laughing under his breath. He sliced up some aromatics to roast with the turkey and placed them in the pan.

She leaned her elbows on the counter beside him. “My dish doesn’t need to be started right away. What can I do to help in the meantime?”

Bellamy glanced at the clock. They still had lots of time. “Start peeling potatoes I guess.”

And she did without complaint. He needn’t have been worried. They worked around each other in the kitchen like they’d been doing it for years, never getting in the way and seeming to know what the other was looking for without even asking.

By the early afternoon, the house was starting to smell wonderful, and they had nearly all of the prep for the other dishes complete. Clarke regained the mischievous look in her eye, and began to pull ingredients down while he was putting the stuffing together.

She crossed to the far side of the cramped counter, and began mixing together whatever it was she’d decided to make. When Bellamy had everything assembled together on the stove, he made an attempt to peek over her shoulder to see what she was doing.

Without warning, she pelted him in the chest with the flour she’d been holding in her hand.

He froze for a moment, eyebrows raised in shock as his gaze darted between her own stunned face and the powdery white splatter on his black shirt.

“Oops.” Her voice was quiet, but he still caught the barely held in snicker that she’d tried to cover up.

He burst out laughing, reaching over her shoulder and grabbing some flour of his own to rub into her hair. Things devolved pretty quickly after that, both of them wrestling each other to get their
hands on more of the white powder and spread it on the other. He was pretty sure he ended up with some in his ear, not to mention the amount that he’d accidentally inhaled.

She reached for some more, and he lunged forward to stop her, his hand landing on exposed skin where her shirt had ridden up.

Both of them froze, chests heaving, eyes locked. Once again, he couldn’t read what was in her expression. After a moment he pulled back sharply, clearing his throat. “I think the turkey’s overdue to be basted.” He turned his back to her, trying to hide the flush in his cheeks.

She turned around as well, finishing whatever it was she’d been doing and covering a bowl with plastic wrap. She then skirted past him, arms protectively hiding her creation until she could stow it in the fridge.

Bellamy surveyed the small kitchen, which now looked like a disaster zone that had been ravaged by some form of dust storm, then took in Clarke’s appearance as well. She was so covered in white that she looked like she could star in an old-timey low budget film about a ghost. He was sure he didn’t look much better.

“If you want you can go get ready,” He suggested, trying to ignore the awkwardness from a few minutes earlier. “I think I’ve got everything under control in here, and O and Link should be coming in just over an hour.”

Clarke nodded. He thought he might have been able to see just a hint of a blush coloring her cheeks. He wondered what it meant. He turned away before he could read too much into it.

He heard the shower start up, signaling that he was now alone in the kitchen. He surveyed the mess, wondering just where he should start. Grabbing a cloth, he began sweeping off the counters, then shifted his focus to scrubbing the door to the fridge.

By the time he had the room back to being somewhat acceptable for receiving company, the shower had turned off and he’d heard the light footfalls of Clarke heading back to her room. He glanced at the clock again, to find that it wouldn’t be long before their guests started arriving. He quickly checked on all of the food, making sure that nothing was going to go up in flames if left unattended, then hurried to get himself ready as well.

He made quick work of a shower, then toweled off his hair, throwing on a pair of jeans and a nice sweater that Octavia had gifted him years ago. When he left the bathroom, he found Clarke standing at the front window, staring out into the street.

He walked up behind her, wondering what she was looking at.

She turned her head, smiling at him softly. “It’s not often that we get snow on Christmas day.”

He peered out over her shoulder and gasped. The scene before them looked like it belonged in a snow globe. Large white flakes drifted lazily down from the sky. Everything looked so peaceful, undisturbed as most people stayed indoors, spending time with their families.

“I haven’t seen snow in years,” he admitted to her quietly.

She leaned back into him, eyes roaming over his face. After a moment, she pulled away. “Keep enjoying the view, I’ll go check on dinner.” She squeezed his shoulder lightly as she passed him.

He took her advice, watching the world outside. For the first time he thought he might have had a glimpse of how Clarke felt when she was enjoying the serenity of nature. He’d never thought he’d
see something like this ever again. He stood transfixed by the glittering snow, so focused that he didn’t even notice Lincoln pull up.

The sound of boots clomping up the front steps finally broke him out of his reverie. He made it to the front door at the same time as Octavia opened it.

“Merry Christmas bitches!” O declared, a large bowl of salad under one arm, a bottle of wine clutched in the other.

Behind her, Lincoln raised an eyebrow, but there was humor in his smile. “Someone might have dipped into the eggnog before we came.”

Bellamy pulled his sister into a one armed hug, before taking the food out of her hands.

Lincoln held up the item he’d been carrying - a miniature tree strung with lights and tiny ornaments. “I figured thinking about actual Christmas traditions wasn’t going to be high on your priority list.”

Bellamy scoffed good-naturedly. “There are Christmas traditions beyond stuffing your face?”

Lincoln laughed setting the tree down in the center of the coffee table. “My point exactly.”

Bellamy took the salad into the kitchen, calling over his shoulder. “Nate should be here soon.”

Octavia had followed him, and Clarke smiled at her as she turned away from the stove. “Merry Christmas O.” She pulled his sister into a tight hug.

Octavia looked shocked at first, but quickly relaxed into the embrace, one hand coming up to the center of Clarke’s back. “And a Festivus for the rest of us,” she joked with a chuckle. Pulling back she surveyed the kitchen. “Bell’s had you slaving away in here all day?”

Bellamy made a disbelieving noise. “She offered. I had things under control.”

“Maybe… if we wanted to eat at midnight,” Clarke teased. She looked over Octavia’s shoulder. “Hi Lincoln.”

Lincoln barely managed to cover his surprise at being directly addressed by her. “Hello Clarke. It’s good to see you.”

Clarke’s smile was shy, but it looked pretty genuine to Bellamy. He let out a sigh of relief. “O, do you mind setting the table, food should be ready in about half an hour.”

Octavia gave him a mock salute and started taking down plates to spread out on the small table. He checked the temperature on the turkey and satisfied, leaned forward to pull it out to rest. When he was back to standing upright, with the meat securely on the counter, he felt a small hand touch his shoulder.

“I think we’ve got it from here Bell. Go, put your feet up.”

He looked at Clarke, a protest ready on his lips, but her face was set in determination. If he argued, he wasn’t going to win.

She gave him a gentle push toward the front room. “Go.”

He exhaled dramatically, but did as she said, walking out into the sitting room not knowing what to do with himself. He was soon followed by Lincoln, carrying a glass of whiskey in each hand. He
handed one to Bellamy before reclining on the sofa. Bellamy chose to remain standing.

“So…” Lincoln started after taking a sip from his drink. “How are things?”

Bellamy stared down into the amber liquid he was absentmindedly swirling for a moment before answering. “Honestly great. Today’s been one of the best days I can remember.”

Lincoln raised his eyebrows and relaxed back into the cushions. “I’m glad to hear it.”

Bellamy swallowed a mouthful of liquor, grimacing slightly at the burn at the back of his throat. “What about you?”

Lincoln beamed. “Octavia and I are doing really well - maybe even the best we’ve ever been. As awful as everything was, it brought me home and it brought us closer together, and I’m grateful for that.”

Bellamy’s lips twitched. “I’m happy for you.” And he truly was. But he didn’t think he’d ever get to the point of being ‘grateful’ for being held prisoner and tortured for weeks and nearly losing two women that he cared deeply about.

There was a hard knock on the door. Bellamy excused himself with a look and opened it to find Miller bundled up and shivering on the front steps. “I never thought I’d say this, but I kind of miss the desert.” He joked darkly.

Bellamy laughed and pulled him into a firm hug. “It’s good to see you man.” He backed up, letting his friend inside, and jumped slightly when he caught sight of the second figure standing on the porch.

Miller looked back and grinned sheepishly. “I hope you don’t mind. This is Eric. I’ve been seeing him whenever I’ve been back stateside and it seemed wrong not to spend Christmas together the one year that we get the opportunity to.”

Bellamy hesitated, staring blankly for a moment. He glanced over his shoulder toward the kitchen, thinking of Clarke and worried about how she’d react to having a total stranger in the house. His jaw worked, thinking of what to say. He watched as Miller’s face fell slightly and hurried to try to smooth things over. Bellamy knew what his friend must have been thinking and it hurt him. He hoped Miller would know him better than to think it was because he was gay. Bellamy had known for years, and it had never been an issue before.

“I’m sorry… I-” he finally managed to stammer before freezing again, the words to explain the situation refusing to come.

The sound of light footsteps in the hall caused his spine to stiffen, bracing for the possible fallout of the impending situation.

“Dinner is pretty much served. You guys should…” Clarke’s voice trailed off as she stepped into the front room. “Jackson?”

A blur of blonde hair shot past his face. Before he knew it Clarke had flung herself into the new man’s arms.

Their guest chuckled, casually swaying her back and forth for a moment. “Clarke. What are you doing here?”

She took a small step back and blushed. “I’m Bellamy’s… roommate. God, we haven’t talked in
forever. I’ve missed you.” She turned and zeroed in on Bellamy’s deeply puzzled expression. She shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly, shoving her hands into her pockets. “When Jackson was a resident he worked under my mom. He used to hang out with me in the boardroom and help me study for my exams. He’s a great guy. Your friend is lucky to have him.” She added with a pointed look in Miller’s direction.

Nate smiled back at her warmly, then did a double take, studying her up and down with his brow furrowed. “Wait, aren’t you-“

Bellamy kicked him in the instep, just hard enough to tell him to shut up. “We’re happy to have both of you. I’ll take your coats.”

He helped get them settled in the living room, then took the casserole dish that Jackson had been holding, giving him an excuse to follow Clarke back to the kitchen.

When he walked in, Clarke was stirring the gravy over the stove, while Octavia artfully arranged napkins on the place settings. He sidled up beside the blonde, stilling her arm with a touch to the elbow. “You’re sure you’re okay with this?” He kept his voice low enough that only she would hear.

She nudged his hand away, resuming cooking. “Like I said before, I haven’t seen Jackson in years. He doesn’t know anything about what happened and I’d like to keep it that way. This can just be a regular night.”

Bellamy continued to analyze everything about her body language to the point that she started to squirm. She sighed, her arm stilling its movement on its own this time.

“Seriously Bellamy. This isn’t me doing something to make other people happy. I want this. If things get to be too much, I’ll just excuse myself to my room until I feel better. It isn’t a big deal so stop making it one.” She grabbed the gravy boat from the shelf and shoved it lightly into his chest. “Fill this.” She wiped her hands on a dishtowel, then swept out of the room to corral their guests.

Octavia raised an eyebrow at him. He just shook his head and did as he’d been asked.

Once they were all gathered in the kitchen, Octavia quickly put together an extra place setting for their unexpected guest and Bellamy snagged a stool from the island. It was tight fit – the table certainly hadn’t been made to seat six people, especially when three of them had a military build, but they managed to all cram in. It helped that Clarke had arranged all the food on the counter to save space.

They loaded up their plates until they couldn’t hold any more food, then each found a spot to dig in. Octavia brought the bottle of wine back with her, and began pouring everyone a glass. “Clarke?” she asked when she got to the blonde.

Clarke hesitated for a moment before nodding. “Just a little.” Octavia poured her about half the amount that she gave everyone else without comment. Lincoln gave Clarke a strange look, but was quickly distracted as Octavia fumbled with her own glass, nearly knocking it over as she filled it with a slightly drunken giggle.

The food was great, and the homemade butter and chive biscuits that Clarke had made were the stars of the plate. She’d blushed when everyone had fawned over how deliciously flaky they were and explained that she’d learned the recipe from her housekeeper growing up.

They kept the conversation light throughout the meal, everyone playing catch up with one another.
They learned the story about how Miller and Jackson had met by chance while out for a run at the park. Lincoln and Bellamy each told their comrade a little about their future job prospects. Clarke asked Jackson about his neurosurgery fellowship.

Everything was going really smoothly until Miller took it upon himself to sort out something that had apparently been bothering him since he’d arrived. “So Clarke, how exactly did you and Blake meet?”

Bellamy’s fork clanked against his plate as his jaw worked, ready to lay into his friend. For his part, Miller looked totally innocent, just trying to make sense of the mystery he’d seemed to stumble upon.

Clarke’s mouth opened, but before she could say anything, Octavia had cut in. “Clarke and I met when I got transferred to private school when I was 8. She’s been my best friend ever since. She was looking for a place to stay and Bellamy had just moved in here and didn’t want to live alone, so I suggested that they help each other out.”

Bellamy slouched back in his chair. Technically speaking, nothing that she’d said had been a lie, but it wasn’t exactly the information that Miller had been looking for either. His friend raised an eyebrow but he let it go, choosing to ask about dessert instead.

Throughout the rest of the meal, he periodically caught Miller’s eyes on him. He sighed, knowing that the subject wasn’t buried.

When all of them had eaten enough to feel like they might burst, Bellamy told everyone to head to the living room, then asked Miller to stay and help him clean up. Clarke had hesitated, but Octavia had pulled her along, calling back over her shoulder that everyone would enjoy the evening better if Bellamy made some hot chocolate – especially if that hot chocolate was spiked with Baileys.

Bellamy and Nate cleared the plates in silence. They even managed to get part way through the dishes – Bellamy washing while he dried – before Miller decided to speak. “You mind telling me why you just happen to be living with the girl we rescued you with?”

Bellamy’s jaw was tight. “It’s not what it looks like,” he muttered, focusing very hard on trying to scrub the burnt-on mess at the bottom of the mashed potato pot.

Miller crossed his arms leaning back against the opposite counter, his dishtowel thrown over his shoulder. “Well that’s a relief, because right now it looks like you fell in love, deserted, then somehow managed to get captured, nearly getting yourselves and all of us killed.”

Bellamy looked over sharply. “Come on Miller, you know me better than that,” he rumbled angrily. He took a deep breath, trying to convince himself to calm down. “Everything Octavia said at dinner was true. Beyond that, I honestly don’t know what to tell you. All of the details about our captivity are classified.”

Miller quirked an eyebrow disbelievingly. “So you’re not in love with her?”

Bellamy dropped the wooden spoon he was cleaning back into the soapy water and turned around. “What?”

Miller gave him a pointed look. “You look at her the same way I look at Jackson.”

Bellamy shook his head. “We’re both just trying to help each other through some serious shit man.”
Miller inclined his head. “Maybe so. But I’m not imagining the constant casual touches you give her or the fact you can’t take your eyes off of her for more than 5 minutes. I saw the way you were clinging to her back in that alleyway. You need to figure your shit out Blake.” He grabbed his dishtowel and resumed his duties.

Bellamy rolled his shoulders, trying to get a grip on what his friend had just said. Obviously Miller had to be wrong. It was true that he and Clarke cared deeply about each other, but that was where the feelings had to end. There wasn’t room for anything else – not with all of the emotional baggage they were both nearly drowning in.

And yet he couldn’t deny the spark that had been slowly overtaking him, ever since the night of that damn party. What if it did have some kind of meaning?

He didn’t want to dwell on it any further. Instead he changed the subject.

“How are things going with the team?”

Miller’s face instantly darkened. “Remember how bad things got after the bombing in Munirah? It’s like that only worse.”

Bellamy’s brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

Miller’s posture had changed, the lightness from earlier having disappeared. “You went missing, then we lost Atom, then Lincoln left. Morale is in the pits. The whole team is divided… some people stuck by you even after the charges were laid, the others openly talk trash. Half the time we’re at each other’s throats more than we’re fighting the enemy. Roan is trying to do his best to keep things together, but he’s not a miracle worker. If things don’t change soon there’s going to have to be reassignments – preferably before someone else gets killed.”

Bellamy felt like he’d been punched in the gut. “I never meant-“

Miller shook his head. “I know you can’t tell me why you did what you did. Roan has always had your back and that’s good enough for me. But still- shit has consequences.”

Bellamy bit the inside of his cheek, at a loss for words.

Miller watched him for a moment, then shrugged. “Enough with being all dire and serious. It’s Christmas. We should be drinking and laughing around a fireplace.”

Bellamy couldn’t let it go that easily. He placed a firm hand on Nate’s shoulder, his tone deadly serious. “You keep your head up and you watch your back. Take care of yourself.”

Miller seemed uncomfortable. “Didn’t your sister ask for hot chocolate?”

Bellamy tightened his grip. “I mean it Nate.”

Miller sighed, studying the ground before meeting Bellamy’s eyes. “I know.” He stepped back until Bellamy was forced to drop his hand. “I think I’ve left Eric at everyone’s mercy for long enough. Time for me to go rescue him.” When he got to the threshold to the hallway, he shot back over his shoulder. “I was serious about the drinks.”

Bellamy stood idly alone in the kitchen for a moment, trying to regain his composure. In an attempt at distracting himself, he took out the kettle and set some water to boil, then pulled out the tin of hot chocolate mix. While he waited, he also took out a bottle of whiskey, downing a shot. It burned all of the way down his esophagus, but it also helped to clear his head.
He managed to scrounge up a tray, and set to work making cocoa for everyone. He grabbed the Irish cream from the liquor cabinet as well and placed it on the tray next to the whiskey. He’d let his guests create their own concoctions.

When he walked in, everyone was sacked out around the front room in various states of recovery from their large meal. His eyes automatically found Clarke, where she was huddled into the corner of the couch, a small contented smile on her lips. Octavia was sprawled out on the floor nearby with her head in Lincoln’s lap, but she instantly perked up when the chocolaty aroma filled the air.

“Thank god - finally,” she was the first person to snatch a mug when he placed the tray on the coffee table. She unscrewed the cap on the bottle of baileys and kept pouring until her cup threatened to overflow. She raised an eyebrow in Clarke’s direction. “Griffin?”

The blonde scooted off of the edge of the seat she’d been occupying and grabbed a cup of her own. She accepted the liqueur that O was offering her and drizzled a thin stream into her own drink.

Lincoln straightened, clearing his throat. “Clarke, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Clarke’s forehead wrinkled in consternation as she handed the bottle off to Miller. “I’m fine.”

Bellamy watched the exchange in confusion - Link never addressed Clarke directly, not wanting to make her uncomfortable.

Lincoln’s brow shot up, a look of concern heavy on his face - but he didn’t push. Clarke fidgeted in her spot on the floor briefly before she huffed out a sigh. “I should probably stick to tea at this time of the night anyway.” She stood up and pressed her warm mug into Bellamy’s hands before disappearing into the kitchen. He made to go after her, but Lincoln caught his eye, shaking his head.

The rest of their company didn’t seem to pick up on the odd exchange - each focused on preparing their drinks. Miller stood up and flicked on the gas fireplace, bathing the room in a warm orange glow.

Clarke returned and Bellamy followed her to the couch, where they settled in beside each other. She leaned into his side as she swirled freshly boiled water around her tea bag. He watched her for a moment, but she seemed content, so he relaxed back into the overstuffed cushions.

The conversation shifted back into the easy rhythm they’d had at dinner, everyone just relaxing and enjoying each other’s company.

The hour grew late and eventually Miller stood up, stretching his back. “Jackson and I should probably head out. We were planning on driving to the mountains in the morning to get in a couple of days of skiing before I have to fly back.”

Lincoln smiled. “That sounds great man. Have an awesome time, and say hi to the team for me.”

At some point, Clarke had grabbed a blanket and shifted to lay across the couch with her feet in Bellamy’s lap. She looked like she was nearly asleep, her eyes almost closed and her lips slightly parted. He gently moved her legs, doing his best not to disturb her as he slid out to walk his friend to the door.

Jackson reached out to shake his hand. “It was really nice to meet you.”

Bellamy’s smile was genuine as he returned the gesture. “Likewise. I’m glad that Nate has you to
keep him in line.”

He then turned to Miller, grasping his hand and pulling him into a hug. He couldn’t help but allow his earlier worry to creep back in. When the SEAL team wasn’t functioning as a cohesive unit, bad things tended to happen. He prayed his friend would be alright. “You be careful. Take care of yourself and don’t be a stranger.” He slapped his friend’s back and Miller nodded at him.

The two men waved a final goodbye, then disappeared into the chilly night.

When Bellamy turned back to the room, he found that Lincoln was standing beside him, while Octavia sat on the edge of the couch beside Clarke. “It was really great to spend Christmas with you,” He heard his sister whisper to her best friend, before leaning forward and placing a gentle kiss on Clarke’s cheek.

Bellamy averted his eyes, feeling like he was intruding on a private moment. Lincoln grasped his shoulder. “We’re gonna head out too. Thanks for the amazing meal.”

Bellamy smiled, “Anytime, man.”

Octavia ducked under her fiancé’s arm and jumped up, wrapping her arms around her brother’s neck. “Merry Christmas. I love you.”

Bellamy held her close, threading one hand into her long hair. “I love you too, O.” Suddenly his chest felt tight with emotion, thinking about how close they’d come to never having this again. He squeezed her tighter for a moment, before letting her down and trying to cover up his reaction with a small cough.

Octavia smiled knowingly at him, for once not trying to play things off with a laugh. Her green eyes roamed his face for a moment before her nose wrinkled as she swiped a thumb behind his ear. “How did you get flour all the way back there?”

Bellamy scratched the back of his neck with a timid grin and just shrugged, remembering the antics from earlier in the day.

They exchanged their goodbyes, then Link and O departed as well, leaving him and Clarke alone in the now quiet house.

Bellamy stood there, deep in thought for a moment. He exhaled heavily and set about cleaning up, putting all of the empty mugs back onto the tray. Clarke yawned, making to sit up. “I should probably head to bed.”

Bellamy grinned at her sleepy expression, slightly entranced by the way that the lights from the Christmas tree danced in her eyes. He shook his head. “Stay just a little longer. I have something to give you. I’ll be right back.”

He dropped the dirty dishes off in the kitchen, before retrieving what he was looking for from his room.

When he returned, Clarke had gotten up and was once again standing beside the front window, wrapped in her blanket. She looked almost ethereal as the light from the streetlamps reflected off of the freshly fallen snow and cast her in a soft glow.

She turned her head as he approached, a subtle smile curling her lips. Her eyes widened when she took in the gift that he held in his hands. “What’s that?”
Bellamy shrugged, trying to look nonchalant. “It’s Christmas.”

She shook her head slightly, a tiny crease appearing between her eyebrows. “But I didn’t get you anything.”

He reached out and squeezed her hand lightly. “You didn’t need to. Your being here is more than enough.”

Clarke still looked unsure, but she took the package when he handed it to her. She slid her fingers delicately beneath the tape, pulling the foil apart to reveal what lay underneath. Her face lit up as she took in the set of graphite pencils, as well as the soft, leather-bound sketchbook he’d bought for her one day on his way back from the academy. He’d picked it because the blue reminded him of her eyes.

She ran her hand lightly over the cover before flipping through the pages with a smile. Her eyes shone as she looked up at him. “It’s beautiful.”

The next thing he knew, her arms were around his shoulders, hugging him close. He held her just as tightly. She pulled back slightly, and he could feel her breath washing over his face, still smelling of mint from the tea she’d been drinking. Her head tilted, eyes raking over his face and it was like she could see right into him, laying him bare. She leaned in toward him and he felt his heart begin to race.

Hastily, he backed away, scratching the back of his neck. He wasn’t sure he could handle another kiss on the cheek. “Uh, it’s getting pretty late. We should probably try to get some sleep.”

She stared at him for a moment, lips parted like there was something she wanted to say. Finally, her gaze dropped. “You’re right. Thank you for the gift. I really do love it.”

Bellamy smiled warmly. “I’m glad.”

They stood there in awkward silence for a moment, neither one of them moving.

Eventually Clarke turned towards her room. “Goodnight.”

Bellamy watched her until her door closed. “’Night.”

He chewed his lip, then turned off the fireplace and the lights, walking towards his own room. He changed into his pajama pants and slipped under the covers, but as soon as his head hit the pillow his mind raced. It had been a really good day – one of the best he could remember. But there had been some troubling moments too – especially talking to Miller. He tossed and turned for what felt like hours until sleep finally took him.

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This time, when the faded old pickup truck appeared in his dream, he recognized it immediately. It was parked in the middle of a busy street, crowds of people milling around. As they passed, Bellamy recognized more and more faces. Roan was leaning against a building, chatting with Atom and Miller. Lincoln was squatting in front of a little girl holding a teddy bear. Even Clarke and O were there, strolling down the road lazily like they didn’t have a care in the world.

Some distant part of his brain nagged at him that what he was seeing wasn’t right. This wasn’t how the events had unfolded... But that was irrelevant. He still needed to warn them.

He started screaming at all of them to run, but it was like he was behind a heavy pane of glass.
None of them heard him. None of them even acknowledged his existence.

He ran towards them, but no matter how fast he forced himself to go they never got any closer. He continued to yell, but to no avail.

And then it was like time stood still. Everything stopped moving, and it was so silent he could have heard a pin drop. Everyone’s eyes snapped to him, heavy with accusation.

Then a blinding flash started to envelop each-

His eyes snapped open. He gasped for breath, searching for what had woken him up.

He felt the covers beside him shift, and the mattress dip. A warm hand wedged under his arm, sliding down until their fingers intertwined.

He turned his head. Clarke was laying beside him, her features shadowed in the dim light. She remained silent, eyes glued to the ceiling, but she didn’t need to say anything. Her presence said more than enough.

He squeezed her hand.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the fluff :). This story needed some happiness before the doozy that is the next update. Fair warning, the next chapter is going to be hard, but it also signals a turning point in the story - at least in my head it does. I'm both excited and terrified about what you'll think. As previously stated, I'm considering this a 'bonus' chapter, so the next one will be up when I'd originally intended to update next Wednesday.

Side note: I know from a few of the reviews that some of you are upset with Clarke's parents after the events of the previous chapter. Please keep in mind that Bellamy sees everything through the lens of PTSD, one of the symptoms of which is distorted blame for the consequences of the event causing the illness. He also has an intense distrust of the older male figures in his life that'll be explained in a few chapters. So - yes - Jake is an oblivious ass, but he didn't set out to maliciously hurt Clarke and he feels bad about it. And Abby is an addict... that's pretty self explanatory.

Thank you as always for reading. Leave your comments or kudos to let me know your thoughts!
The lull between Christmas and New Years had been nice at first, but now Bellamy found himself becoming restless. He’d had almost a full two days to think about everything that Miller had said to him… and overthink it. By this point he was stuck in his own head and he needed to distract himself. He needed to get out of the house.

He’d made a plan that he would ask Clarke if she wanted to go for a hike. From there, he could assess the situation, try to suss out what Clarke’s feelings were, if she had any. Then they could talk things out, or – if she seemed completely disinterested – he could spend the rest of the walk trying to pull his head out of his ass.

It’d sounded like a good idea to him at first, but the more he thought about it, the more he saw the flaws. He didn’t want to tell her that he was developing feelings for her, only for her to feel awkward and like she couldn’t stay with him any longer. Hell, he still wasn’t really sure what he was feeling himself. It didn’t seem worth it to risk what they had.

He flopped down into one of the armchairs with a heavy sigh. Scrubbing his palms roughly over his face, he changed his mind. How he felt didn’t matter. He needed to make sure that Clarke didn’t feel pressured – that she felt safe.

He could still ask her about the hike though. He was pretty sure that she would enjoy it. And he could try to use the fresh early evening air to clear his head.

He was snapped out of his musings by Clarke walking into the room. She looked absolutely gorgeous in a deep purple knee length dress. The style reminded him of something you would see in an old movie, buttons threading it closed all the way from the hem to the high neckline. She’d done her hair and makeup as well, and a pair of heels dangled daintily from her fingertips.

Bellamy swallowed, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. He was surprised to see her so done up considering she hadn’t mentioned anything to him. “You have a hot date?” he asked her, trying to keep his tone teasing.

The rosy blush that crept into her cheeks caused his heart to drop. “Clarke…” he trailed off, not knowing what to say.

She sighed, eyes glued to her feet. “Octavia and I talked a bit at Christmas. After things went so smoothly with Jackson, she suggested it might help if I try to hang out a bit with people that have no idea what happened. It might take some of the pressure off… help me feel more normal.”

Bellamy was going to kill his sister. “I’m not sure testing things out with a stranger right now is the smartest idea.”
Clarke toed the edge of the area rug uncertainly. “He’s not a stranger. We’ve met. He had classes with O and sometimes he’d come hang out with us at the Dropship. He’s just down here for the holidays before he heads back to campus. This isn’t going to last so there’s no pressure.”

Bellamy shook his head, trying to come up with a sensible argument, but drawing a blank.

She began to slide on her shoes. “I promise Cillian’s a really great guy. And I’ll make sure we don’t stay out very late.” She nibbled at her bottom lip and peeked out the front window. “He’s here,” she tried for a small smile against the tortured look he knew he was probably giving her. “You don’t need to worry Bell.” And then her blonde hair was disappearing out the front door.

But he was worried. The good mood that she’d been in at Christmas had been fading steadily over the last couple days. A nagging feeling was telling him that now wasn’t the time to try to push things. He rolled his shoulders telling himself it was probably just jealousy rearing its ugly head.

His plans having gone to shit, he pushed out of his chair and walked to the kitchen, snagging a bottle of cold beer from the fridge. He took a couple of quick sips, pacing the small room, before heading back to the living area. He sank back down into his chair, mind suddenly buzzing with all of the reasons that he was now able to come up with for why Clarke shouldn’t have gone out.

Chief among them was that her date had been her ride. Bellamy knew her. If things started to go sideways, she wasn’t going to ask the guy to drive her back. She’d try to cover it up and stick it out. He eyed his cellphone where it was sitting on the coffee table. It wouldn’t take much for him to just send her a quick text, telling her that he could come get her if she needed.

He reached his hand toward his phone, but at the last minute grabbed the remote instead. He was being ridiculous and obsessive, and he knew it wasn’t healthy.

Bellamy switched the TV on and began flipping through the channels. He came across Die Hard and settled into his chair. He’d loved this movie as a kid, always getting a kick out of how some of the networks managed to get away with classifying it as a ‘Christmas movie’.

He let John McClane’s antics divert his attention, resting back into the cushions. For a movie filmed in the 80s, it surprisingly still held up. He allowed himself to get wrapped up in the ridiculousness of the plot and started to relax.

Machine gun fire broke out on the screen, and he fell out of his chair.

He stayed on the floor for a moment, breathing heavily. He felt stupid. The movie was nothing like dealing with actual terrorists and the sound wasn’t even quite right. And yet, he was huddled on the floor like a scared kid.

More gunfire echoed in the room, causing his muscles to clench. He reached for the remote and turned the volume way down until it was barely audible.

Slowly, he got back up, pulling himself into his seat. He forced himself to keep watching, refusing to let himself be disturbed by something so banal. He reached for the bottle he’d left on the coffee table and brought it to his lips. Tipping it back, he found it to be empty.

A cold sweat prickled across his back, making his t-shirt stick to his skin. He put the bottle down with a clack and stood up, scrubbing a hand across the back of his neck.
He walked to the fridge and cracked open a second beer, looking for a new distraction. He held the frosty bottle to his forehead for a moment and felt a bit of the tension subside. As he took a long pull, his eyes caught on the Mount Weather business card that he’d stuck to the fridge with a magnet. He took it down with a smirk, glancing at the phone number that had been scrawled on the back. At the time that he’d first seen it, he’d been annoyed, thinking that the nurse should have been more focused on doing her job rather than on trying to get a date.

Now, he was actually contemplating it. Maybe Clarke was right. Maybe the healthy thing to do was to try to move on, start meeting new people. He walked back to the front room and flopped down onto the couch, flipping the card over and over in his hands. On the screen, Bruce Willis was now trying to pick broken glass out of his feet. Bellamy cringed.

He looked back at the neatly printed numbers. There was no denying that Gina was a very pretty girl. And from the little bit that he’d talked to her, she’d seemed smart and relatively kindhearted. At the end of the day, calling her couldn’t hurt.

He took another gulp of beer and rubbed at his jaw, trying to talk himself out of it.

He nearly jumped half a foot when his phone buzzed against the coffee table.

Clarke’s name lit up on the screen. He frowned. She’d only been gone for a little over an hour. Even if it were a bad date, he would have thought she’d stick it out longer, or that she would have called Octavia. He brought the beer bottle to his lips one more time, draining the rest, before he accepted the call. “Clarke?”

He was met with nothing but static. He tried calling her name again, but still didn’t receive an answer. He groaned. She’d probably butt dialed him.

His thumb hovered over the end call button, but something about it bothered him, making the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He listened closer for a few more seconds, and suddenly it dawned on him. It wasn’t static he was hearing, but heavy breathing - like someone was hyperventilating.

He sat up straighter. “Clarke, are you okay?”

A soft moan cut through the other noises and his heart clenched. He pushed himself out of the chair and started shoving his feet into his boots and struggling into his jacket while still holding the phone to his ear. “Clarke, where are you?”

A strangled gasp was all that answered him. She couldn’t take in enough air to actually form words. He started to pace, feeling helpless. “Clarke listen to me, I know you can’t talk right now, but I need you to drop a pin on your phone so I can find you. Can you do that for me?”

Her breathing got quieter, and he clenched his jaw, hoping that it wasn’t because she was passing out. After what felt like forever, his phone dinged. “Okay,” he looked down at it. She was at a fancy bistro downtown. His phone told him it was a 20-minute drive. He’d make it there in 15.

“Okay. Clarke I’ve got it. I’ll be there as soon as I can. You just hold on alright?”

He jogged to his car and started the engine. A whimper in his ear caused him to flinch. He chewed his tongue for a second, but knew the decision he had to make. He’d be no use to Clarke if he ended up dead on the side of the road. “Clarke I’ve gotta hang up so I can concentrate on driving, but I promise I’m on my way. Just try to breathe.” He reluctantly ended the call and tossed his phone onto the passenger seat. Then he was off, going 10 over the whole way and running more than a few late yellows. He made it to the restaurant in record time, cutting someone off in order to
snag a parking spot.

The second he entered the building he was on high alert, trying to figure out where Clarke could be. He had just glanced at his phone, contemplating whether he should try calling her back, when he spotted a manager-looking type looking stressed, speaking to the hostess who had the house phone pressed to her ear. Both of them were standing near the sign for the washrooms and Bellamy just knew - Clarke wouldn’t have wanted to have her breakdown publicly.

He rushed past them, ignoring their yells of protest, and right into the lady’s room. A waitress was crouched outside of the farthest stall, so he headed in her direction.

The woman looked up at him sharply. “Sir, you can’t be in-“

He ignored her, gently swinging the door of the stall open. Clarke was lying on the tile floor, curled into the fetal position. Her hair was slicked to her cheeks by a mixture of sweat and tears, and her lips were turning blue.

“Clarke…” at the sound of his voice, she looked up, and her fingers latched onto his wrist in a vice-like grip. She whimpered and tried to pull him closer, but instead he just scooped her up, stumbling out of the stall until his back hit the wall beside the sinks. Slowly, he sank back down to the floor, holding her so that her back was curled into his chest. He threaded the fingers of one of his hands through hers, and brought their joined hands to rest on his chest, deliberately taking slow exaggerated breaths so she could feel the steady rise and fall. “It’s okay, I’m here, just breathe,” he whispered into her ear soothingly.

He hadn’t seen her this bad since they were still captives in that damn basement. It broke his heart, and made his blood boil with rage as his mind raced through possibilities of what could have set her off.

Slowly, her breathing started to calm down. He continued to murmur in her ear, walking her through it. Seeing that Clarke was apparently in good hands, the waitress backed off, giving both of them a disconcerted look. Bellamy ignored her. His free hand made it’s way into Clarke’s hair, his fingertips massaging soothingly across her scalp. She started to sag back into his embrace, her chest heaving, but at a much slower pace. He shifted to get a better look at her. Some of her color was returning, but she still had a vacant look in her eyes. Bellamy moved so that he could more easily pick her up, wanting to get her someplace more comfortable than the floor of a public restroom.

He slipped an arm under her legs, but her hand grasped his forearm, stopping him. She shook her head. “No. I can walk.” Her voice was hoarse and cracked, but he still heard her.

Bellamy wanted to protest, but at the flush of embarrassment creeping above her collar he relented, allowing her to just use him as a support. He’d let her preserve whatever dignity she could.

Their progress was slow as they made their way out of the back hallway. When they rounded the corner back into the main restaurant, the manager held up his hand. “Miss, we’ve already called an ambulance. They’re on their way.”

A well-dressed man at a table for two stood up, blocking their way. “Clarke?”
Bellamy bristled, his whole body thrumming with tension. This had to be the asshole that Clarke had been there with. He paused to make sure that Clarke was steady, before slipping out from under her arm and getting to the man in two powerful strides. “What the hell did you do?” he seethed, grabbing a fistful of the man’s dress shirt.

“Bellamy stop, he didn’t do anything,” Clarke’s voice was barely audible, not strong enough to break through the haze of his anger.

To his credit, the man stood his ground, though he also raised his hands, palms out in surrender. “We just ordered drinks and she excused herself to go to the washroom, I swear to god.”

Bellamy shoved the man and pulled him back sharply, causing him to lose his balance. “I don’t think—”

“Bellamy please,” the desperation in Clarke’s voice finally gave him pause. “I just want to go home.”

Bellamy let his rage boil for a moment longer before he dropped the man, allowing himself a small amount of satisfaction when he stumbled. He fixed him with one last death glare. “Don’t you ever go near her again. Understand?”

The man barely managed a pitiful nod, but it was enough. Bellamy turned on his heel, and bundled Clarke under his arm as he headed towards his car. He got her into her seat and buckled her belt for her, recognizing that her shaking hands weren’t capable of doing the task.

She spent the entire car ride hunched into herself with her face pressed against window, silently sobbing. He reached out a hand to put it on her shoulder, but she shrugged it off. He sighed, placing both hands on the wheel and focusing on the road.

When they pulled up to the house, he felt like he needed to say something, if only to break the silence. “Clarke…”

She fumbled to get her seatbelt undone, then threw her door open, hurrying to the front door and stumbling through. He’d forgotten to lock it in his haste to get to her. He rushed after her, but only made it to the house in time to hear her bedroom door slam shut.

He contemplated going after her, knowing that she shouldn’t be alone in the state she was in, but he also didn’t want to invade her privacy. He stood frozen in the entryway for a few minutes, before groaning and heading to the kitchen. Beer wasn’t going to be enough to calm him down this time. He reached up into the cabinet over the stove, and pulled down a bottle of whiskey.

The first glass went down way too quickly, so he poured himself another. When that one disappeared too, he allowed himself a third, but made himself nurse it. He staggered back to the couch with his tumbler, feeling warmth spread through his chest. The movie on the TV had switched to one of the old Star Treks, but it was really just lights and noise for all that he was taking in.

He continued sipping at his drink, feeling the pleasant haze start to take over his mind. When he hadn’t heard so much as a peep come from Clarke for more than half an hour, he pulled out his phone, contemplating calling Lincoln. Whatever this was, it seemed so much more serious than anything they’d been through since she moved in, and for the life of him he didn’t know how he should be handling it.

He hesitated with his thumb hovering over the call button. Maybe she’d just cried herself to sleep.
But then again, maybe she hadn’t. Maybe he shouldn’t have let her be alone in the first place.

“Bellamy,” her broken call startled him. He dropped his empty glass and his phone to the coffee table and hurried to her room, finding the door still closed. He considered knocking but immediately thought better of it. She had called him. That should be invitation enough.

The door creaked as he pushed it open. He took in the sight before him. Clarke was sitting on the floor near her bed, arms curled around her legs, face pressed against her knees, a discarded razor on the hardwood near her feet. The similarity of the image to one of the recurring nightmares he’d had knocked the breath right out of his lungs.

He was at her side in an instant, pulling at both of her wrists until he could see them. His panicked mind raced to the phone that he’d left in the other room, cursing himself for not being able to call 911 immediately. He wrenched the sleeves of her dress upward, afraid of what he’d find-

But there was nothing.

No fresh cuts marred her skin.

He kept searching and Clarke made no attempt at stopping him, continuing to cry with her head slumped forward, refusing to look at him. Slowly his mind caught up. There was no blood on the razor. She hadn’t used it.

He paused, trying to catch his breath. Finally he managed to ask her. “Clarke when was the last time you took your antidepressants?”

She let out a shuddering breath, eyes still glued to the floor. “Four days ago.”

He stiffened, but didn’t comment. Pulling her to her feet, he gathered her into his arms, wanting to get her away from anything she might use to hurt herself. She automatically wrapped her legs around his waist and clung to him like a small child.

He thought about taking her to the hospital, but knew he was too drunk to drive. He also knew that she would be put under another psych hold, and this time they weren’t likely to release her back into his custody. He couldn’t betray her trust like that.

Ultimately, he just took her to his own room. Keeping the lights shut off, he sat on the edge of his bed, Clarke still shaking and wrapped tightly around him, her arms clutching the back of his neck.

He ducked his head down to rest his forehead against hers. “Clarke, talk to me. Tell me what happened.” His voice was gentle but urgent.

Her sweet breath washed across his face. “I-“ She stuttered, unable to find the words. She worried her teeth across her bottom lip.

Bellamy just sat there, waiting patiently for her to go on.

She sighed. “Cillian didn’t do anything, it was me. Everything was fine, but then I started thinking about what would happen if he wanted to take things further. And I just panicked.”

Her breathing rate started to increase again, and he let one hand creep higher on her back, rubbing it gently. Whether Clarke thought that he’d done something or not, Bellamy was still angry at the guy for making her feel pressured.

“That last night in Iraq…” Bellamy’s heart faltered. As far as he knew, she’d never opened up to
anyone about that. She certainly hadn’t to him. “Those men they… they took turns as they raped me. But it wasn’t about the sex. They were doing everything they could to hurt me - to make me scream. What they did left scars and now… I can’t even look at myself in the mirror without being thrown right back into that disgusting room, smelling their rancid breath… feeling their filthy nails raking over my skin.”

His grip tightened around her waist and he raised his head until his chin rested on her crown, trying to hide the tears that were rapidly collecting in the corners of his eyes. He felt awful for not protecting her, even though he knew that there was no way that he possibly could have. He just wished that he’d been able to grant her one small mercy.

Clarke continued. “Now I know that every time I get close to someone, they’ll see those scars. They’ll have questions, and even if they’re too polite to ask them, I’ll still see it in their eyes. I’ll get thrown back there over and over again and it’ll never stop.” She broke off into a sob, her tiny form nearly vibrating within his embrace.

He pulled her in closer to his chest, nose buried in her hair, trying to rub soothing circles into her upper arm. He was so out of his depth, he had no idea what to do.

Clarke’s fingers clenched in the fabric of his shirt, right over his heart. Her voice was a cracked whisper, so soft he could barely hear it. “Make me forget.”

He froze for a moment, then pulled back so he could see her face. She was staring up at him, crystal blue eyes pleading, tear tracks tracing patterns over her flushed cheeks. Even completely wrecked, she was beautiful. But she couldn’t possibly mean what he thought she did.

She leaned closer, and he closed his eyes. “Please Bellamy,” her lips ghosted over his as she said the words. He tensed slightly, preparing himself to pull away and explain to her just how wrong this was. Even through the slight fog of intoxication clouding his brain, he knew that this wasn’t how he wanted this to happen. Of course he wanted her, but everything about this situation didn’t feel right – like he was taking advantage of her vulnerable state. But then she rolled her hips against his and something inside of him snapped.

Without even thinking he’d flipped them over, pressing her down into the mattress beneath them. His lips crashed into hers hungrily, tongue darting out to taste her. She gasped, and he blinked hard, his mind finally starting to catch up. He made to pull back once again, only to have her hand tighten in his hair, keeping him close.

“Clarke-” his voice was breathy, strained.

“Shh. Stop thinking. Just feel,” she dragged her nails lightly over his pec, causing his hips to buck involuntarily. Her hand continued to feel it’s way down until it reached the hem of his shirt, tugging up on it insistently. His mind made one final attempt to reason with him, but it was futile. He could never deny her.

He rocked back on his heels and whipped his shirt off, tossing it to the floor. In an instant he was back over her, craving her touch. His nose traced the angle of her jaw as he made quick work of the buttons down the front of her dress. She arched into him, helping him slip the fabric free of her body. His fingers brushed over the rough, raised skin littering her arms and he paused, studying the marks. Hesitantly, he raised one wrist to his lips and began raining light kisses onto each scar.

Her breath hitched, and suddenly she was the one making to pull away. He immediately stopped, but his grip remained firm. “Bellamy,” her voice was barely audible, but it held a note of warning. “Don’t. I- they’re ugly and I don’t-“
Bellamy cut her off by ghosting his lips over a particularly nasty burn on the front of her shoulder. “They mean that you survived.” He finally looked up and met her eyes. She was biting her lip, tears barely held at bay. He waited for her shuddering breaths to calm slightly before asking, “Are you okay?”

She held his gaze for a moment longer before nodding, one hand coming up to cup his cheek tenderly. He leaned into her touch before continuing his exploration until he made it to the small dip between her collarbones. He eased one hand behind her back and deftly undid the clasp on her bra, then gently slid the straps down her arms and pulled the garment out from in between them.

He pulled back once again to take her in, and his heart clenched, threatening to nearly stop. Even in the dim light, he could see that her creamy white skin was stained by a dark patterning of small nicks and cruel bite marks. - the permanent reminder of that last horrible night that she’d never be able to get rid of. He dove his head forward to suck at her pulse point, hiding his face before she could be upset by the pain in his eyes. Steeling himself, he palmed one breast, gently rolling her nipple under his thumb. She moaned, pressing herself impossibly closer into him.

He turned his head, her short hair tickling his nose. “Are you sure you want this Princess?” His words were whispered softly against her ear. He was giving her an out, a small logical part of his brain begging her to take it.

Wordlessly, she took his hand in her own and slowly slid it down her taut stomach until his fingers were slipping beneath the lace of her underwear. He nipped lightly at her earlobe, giving in as he felt the moisture gathered between her thighs. His fingers started a slow, gentle rhythm moving along her slit, dipping in, and pausing every so often to circle around her small bundle of nerves. She gasped and he pulled back slightly, examining her reaction. “Clarke if you ever need me to stop all you have to do is say the word.”

Her eyes were intense as she stared at him through hooded lids. “Don’t stop.” Her voice was steady, sure. She leaned up and captured his lips once again, using her tongue to start a rhythm of her own. He sped his fingers up and she panted into his mouth, arching against his chest. Her hands slid into the tight space between their bodies and began working on his belt, getting it loose enough that she could slide his jeans and boxers down his hips. He helped her by kicking them off his legs. Her panties soon followed, landing somewhere on the floor. And then he was back over her, bare skin pressing against bare skin.

Her hands roamed, spreading over his back, then kneading down over his ass, before palming his length and giving him a few impatient tugs. He kissed his way back up her neck and across her jaw to her ear. “Condom?” he asked her, voice slightly strained from her ministrations.

She shook her head. “I want to feel you. I trust you.”

That was all he needed to hear. He groaned as he slowly sank into her, her tight walls clenching around him. Clarke gasped, and he stilled with his forehead resting against hers, allowing her to adjust to his size. She panted softly as she threaded her fingers back into his hair, one leg coming up to wrap around his hips, allowing him to sink deeper.

A single tear slid down her cheek, and he shifted his weight to free an arm so he could wipe it away with his thumb. Before he could ask if she was alright, she nodded, rolling her hips, urging him to move. One hand released his hair and found his, intertwining their fingers tightly on the pillow above her head. He rocked into her, losing himself in the feel of her warmth enveloping him.

He shook his head, trying to clear it. This wasn’t about him. It had to be about Clarke. He shifted
his angle, working to find her sweet spot. She moaned, her free hand flying down to the sheets, gripping them with white knuckles. Bellamy fought to control his pace, keeping it slow, sensual, his eyes glued to her face, making sure he could gage her reaction. She met his thrusts easily, letting out soft gasps and squeezing his hand as her pleasure continued to build.

Her walls began to flutter around him. He maneuvered his free hand between their bodies, middle finger rubbing tight circles over her clit. Her back arched impossibly high as her eyebrows furrowed tightly together, eyes closing. He nipped at her earlobe one more time, making sure she was listening. “Let go for me Clarke.”

She came with a cry, her hand clutching his almost painfully. Her clenching walls tipped him over the edge soon after, and he spilled into her, the muscles of his back tensing with each aftershook.

He stayed there, just feeling the steady rise and fall of her chest against his until he caught his breath. He kissed the tip of her nose tenderly, then released her hand, reluctantly making to roll off of her.

She whimpered, both hands flying up to grip his shoulders. “Please don’t go.”

He wavered, knowing they should both get cleaned up, but the fear in her eyes pulled him back. He shifted both of them around so that he could free the covers and pulled the soft linen up over their bodies. The second he was lying back down on the bed, Clarke was curled into his side, head resting on his chest. “Are you okay?” He asked her softly, worry evident in his voice.

She hesitated for a moment, before nodding. He watched her in the dim light from his window, but all he could make out from this angle was the back of her head. He sighed, then pressed a firm kiss into her messy blonde hair.

Lying back, he circled an arm around her, hand resting over her ribs. He drew lazy patterns with his thumb against her skin as he closed his eyes.

It didn’t take long for the steady beat of her heart against his side to lull him. Exhaustion pulled him down into the peaceful abyss.

Chapter End Notes

TW: Severe panic attack, mild alcoholism, suicidal ideation, Clarke (briefly) talks to Bellamy about her gang rape at the hands of the terrorists, mildly dubious consent - Bellamy is intoxicated enough to lower his inhibitions and seriously questions Clarke's ability to give consent in her current mental/emotional state. This will be addressed in the next chapter.

So... that happened. Of course for my first ever attempt at writing anything smut related, I would pick an incredibly emotionally charged event. I might currently be freaking out a little bit.

The next chapter is going to start out awkward when Bellamy soberes up. It'll double down on the awkwardness because neither of these two idiots can talk about their feelings. But have no fear - by the end we will be back into some cute Bellarke moments.
We have now officially burned through all of the chapters that I had pre-written. Back to the regular update schedule - two weeks from today.

If you liked this chapter, please ease this author's anxiety by leaving comments or kudos. If you didn't... be kind?
When he woke up the next morning, the first thing he became aware of was the dull throbbing at
the front of his skull.

The next was the warm weight on the left side of his body and the musky scent of coconut
shampoo. He took a deep breath, feeling something tickle lightly over his lips.

His eyes snapped open.

In the pale morning light, Clarke’s blonde hair shone like it was infused with spun gold where it
laid fanned out over his chest. He blinked hard. She’d never stayed in his bed until morning before.

He shifted slightly, feeling her soft skin slide against his.

Her bare skin.

Suddenly, the events of the previous night came flooding back to him, soon followed by a wave of
shame. His stomach rolled, making him feel nauseous – and he doubted it was from the hangover.

Carefully, he slid out from under her, doing everything in his power not to wake her up. The
minute he’d freed himself, he snagged his boxers off of the floor and tugged them back on.

He started pacing the small open space between the dresser and the bed, hands raking through his
hair. He couldn’t believe he’d let himself be so stupid. Clarke had been vulnerable - he knew that.
And yet, he apparently couldn’t convince himself to just say no.

He let out a low growl and kicked his dresser, cursing when he stubbed his toe.

A soft moan caused him to freeze, then slowly turn back towards the bed. Clarke stretched her
arms over her head, her expression still relaxed in a rare moment of peace. Her eyes blinked
languidly open, her gaze immediately locking in on him.

At his distressed appearance her face immediately fell. Her small hands scrambled to clutch the
sheet to her breasts as she sat up, and he felt himself blush as he turned his head to look away.

“Clarke, I’m so sorry,” he stammered, his arms crossed over his chest as if he were trying to shrink
himself, attempting to disappear.

“What?” her fingertips landed on his forearm, and it was like a bolt of electricity jolted through his
body, forcing him to look at her. She studied his expression for a moment, trying to figure out why
he was so upset. “Bellamy I asked you to. It’s what I wanted.”

Bellamy stepped back, out of range of her touch, feeling like he didn’t deserve it. He bit his lip. “I
still took advantage of you.”

Clarke just shook her head, eyebrows drawing together as she shifted back to lean against the
headboard. She stayed like that for a few minutes before her voice once again cracked the silence.
“It didn’t mean anything. I just needed to feel like I could be close to someone.” Her eyes remained
 glued to the sheets, messy hair falling forward to hide her face.
He tried to swallow, but it was as if his mouth had suddenly gone bone dry. He may have regretted his actions, but her words still hurt like a knife to the gut. He tried to shake them off, but the sharp sting behind his eyes was hard to ignore. He went back to pacing.

As his feet tangled in their discarded clothes, a new thought dawned on him. He stopped, rubbing at his chin, fingers digging painfully into his jaw. “Jesus Clarke, we weren’t even safe.”

Now it was Clarke’s turn to look away – head twisting sharply toward the far wall as if she’d been slapped. Her voice was quiet and resentful. “The doctors did tests after… I’m clean.”

Bellamy whirled. That thought had never even crossed his mind. He hadn’t intended to make her feel like he was judging her, or to remind her of that night in any way. He smacked his fist down against the outside of his thigh angrily. “That isn’t what I-“ he stopped, took a deep breath through his nose, lowered his voice. “Do you need me to go out and get you Plan B, or-“

Clarke blushed furiously, still turned away from him. Her voice was whisper-soft. “I have an IUD.”

They lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, just cementing how monumentally he’d screwed up. He thought he heard a soft sniffle coming from her direction, but he still couldn’t see her face. He didn’t deserve to comfort her anyway.

Eventually, she seemed to grow impatient. “I need to take a shower.” She finally looked at him, eyes hard and unyielding.

He just stared at her until he managed to clue in to the pointed look she was giving him and her white knuckled grip on the bed sheet hiding her body.

He scrubbed his hands through his hair one last time. “Right.” He grabbed a fresh t-shirt from his drawer and threw it on. “I’ll be in the office.” He ducked out of the room without allowing her time to respond.

He walked into the barely used room and closed the door most of the way, waiting until he heard the distinct sound of the shower turning on. When he knew that the coast was clear, he slipped into her bedroom, retrieving the razor blade that he remembered was still on the floor. It was a futile gesture – if she wanted to, there was nothing stopping her from getting another one – but at least he could prevent her from being triggered by the sight of it the second she walked through the door.

Next he grabbed his phone from where he’d left it on the coffee table the previous night. He had an idea about how he thought he could start making up for what he’d done. Maybe it was stupid, but he at least wanted to try.

He returned to the office, shuffling through the random stacks of paper he’d messily deposited on the desk, until he found what he’d been looking for. He sat down heavily on the desk chair and scrubbed tiredly at his forehead.

Glancing at his phone, he noticed that it was just after 7am. Offhand, he noted that it’d been the longest uninterrupted sleep he’d had in ages. The consequences of it all made it hardly seem worth it.

He chewed at his lip, hoping that it wasn’t too early to call. The drawn out sound of the phone ringing echoed in his ear until he’d nearly convinced himself to just hang up.

“Jake Griffin,” the man’s voice sounded wide-awake despite the early hour. Bellamy sighed in relief.
“Senator Griffin, hi. This is uh… Bellamy Blake.”

There was a short pause in which Bellamy could hear the rustling of papers and a whispered conversation before the politician’s voice came back clearer. “What can I do for you, son?”

And with that, Bellamy laid out his case. It honestly didn’t take much convincing. For his part, the senator seemed genuinely remorseful for pushing his daughter’s limits, and was very receptive to Bellamy’s idea. The majority of the phone call ended up being spent figuring out logistics and even that was easier than he’d thought it’d be. Apparently it paid to have an ungodly amount of money and a personal assistant.

After hanging up, he still felt like crap, but at least he had a plan in place. Settling back into the chair, he finally allowed himself to check his messages from the previous night.

He’d missed a few calls from Octavia. He decided to check his texts before his voicemail, feeling too emotionally drained to actually speak to her at the moment.

*Have you seen Clarke? Cillian said something happened on their date and she left. She isn’t answering me. I’m worried. Call me.*

The first message carried the gist of all the rest, just getting more and more impatient when he hadn’t responded.

Bellamy sighed. Truth be told, he was still mad at his sister for pushing Clarke to go out in the first place. It was irrational – O hadn’t forced her to go off her meds, and she couldn’t have known the consequences – but he still didn’t trust himself to be sensible if he actually spoke to her. He typed out a quick response instead.

*Clarke’s safe. She’s with me. We’re going away for a few days. Probably won’t have cell reception. Will call when we get back.*

From there he turned off his ringer. There was still a lot to do on his end, and he was on a schedule.

He got washed up and changed, then managed to find a couple of duffel bags in his closet. Packing for himself was easy. He didn’t own a lot of clothes, so it didn’t take long to throw a few pairs of jeans and some warm sweaters together.

His next stop was the bathroom. He packed up both of their toothbrushes and all of the other toiletries that were easy to find. Finally, he opened the medicine cabinet.

It only took one glance to tell him that all of the pill bottles were way fuller than they should have been. He gnawed at the inside of his cheek, throwing each container in with the rest of his stuff unceremoniously.

The final thing he had to do was pack for Clarke. Sure, she was fully capable of doing it herself, but he wasn’t in the mood to argue with her when she found out his plans. It would be better to just keep their destination a surprise – which meant that he would have to be the one to ensure that she had enough layers packed.

The door to her room was slightly ajar, but he tapped on it anyway, making sure she had fair warning before he just walked in. She came into view, sitting on one corner of her bed, knees tucked into her chest, just staring out the window. She didn’t bother looking up when he entered - there was really only one person it could be.
He walked to her closet and began filling the second bag without comment, trying to give her some practical options. He was lucky that her clothing was meticulously organized. It wasn’t hard to find everything she would need.

“Bellamy…” At the sound of his name he turned to look at her, only to find that she was just moving to do the same. Taking in the lumpy bag at his feet and the half filled one in his hand, her forehead wrinkled in confusion. But that expression quickly morphed into one of recognition, followed by resignation. She buried her face against one arm, trying to hide the hurt that glinted in her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, her quiet voice breaking his heart.

He shook his head quickly. “No, Clarke. That’s not-“ He put the duffel down on the floor, taking two steps toward her before pulling up short. “We’re going on a trip for a few days. That’s all.”

If possible, she looked even more bewildered. Her mouth opened and closed a couple of times with no words coming out.

Bellamy shrugged, trying to put on a small sheepish smile. “It’s a surprise. But we’ve got to get going. Go grab your warmest coat… and mittens… and probably a hat.”

She looked at him like he was insane, but she did as he asked, going to the front closet. He checked through the bag he’d packed one more time, making sure he hadn’t missed anything essential. As he was leaving the room, the sketchbook that he’d given her caught his eye. He quickly grabbed it and added it to her things.

The drive to the airport was mostly quiet, the silence only broken by the radio. Bellamy was nervous – continuously checking Jake’s instructions that he’d scribbled onto a post-it. He didn’t want to screw this up. Clarke still looked like she didn’t know what to make of things. She was biting her lip so hard it had gone bloodless and her fingers picked at the fabric of her leggings relentlessly.

As they approached the back entrance to the airfield, the familiarity started to change her expression. Her eyes snapped to the private plane that was waiting for them and her hand clenched at the armrest. “What’s going on?” She seemed to think it over for a minute, before understanding knit her eyebrows. “You called my dad?”

Bellamy held up his hand in a placating gesture. “I made you a promise a long time ago, and I wanted to fulfill it. I needed your father’s help to make that happen, and when he offered the jet, it just seemed easier than driving for more than a day straight in each direction.”

“A promise…” she trailed off, trying to remember what he was talking about. After a few minutes, her eyes glimmered. “Really?”

Bellamy just nodded.

A man was waiting for them at the base of the stairs to the aircraft. He shook both of their hands. “Petty Officer Blake, Ms. Griffin, it’s nice to meet you. My name is Captain Shumway, and I’ll be the one flying you to Boulder today. If everything is in order, we can get underway. I should have you at your destination in about 4 hours.”

Bellamy nodded to the man, allowing him to make his way toward the cockpit. Bellamy was about to follow him up the stairs, but he noticed that Clarke was still hesitating on the tarmac.

“Why?” she asked him quietly.

Bellamy let out a long breath. He couldn’t explain it to her. Not really – at least not yet. “Like I
said I made a promise.” He just hoped that she could still trust him enough to go along.

She studied his face for a bit, but eventually went up the steps. Bellamy felt some of the tension release from his shoulders. He followed her.

The inside of the plane was small, but it could have passed for an expensive conference room, if it weren’t for the seatbelts. The chairs were plush and overstuffed and there definitely wasn’t a concern about lack of legroom. It was a far cry from the military planes that he was used to. Clarke took a seat at the far side of the closest table, looking out the window. Bellamy stowed their luggage then sat down across from her. He waited for her to ask him to move – they had the whole plane to themselves after all – but the words never came.

Clarke closed her eyes before they even took off. Bellamy had the sense she was just feigning sleep so that they wouldn’t have to talk, but he was okay with that. They’d have plenty of time once they got to their destination.

The plane rumbled as it accelerated up the runway. Bellamy gripped his chair, pushing his head back into the headrest. He’d never been a nervous flier, but something about being in the air again filled him with dread and nervous anticipation. He’d never in his life actually flown somewhere for fun - it was always because he was being deployed or coming home. He wished he could just relax, maybe catch up on some of the sleep that he’d missed over the last few years, but it wasn’t happening. Instead, he occupied himself by looking out the window, watching the miniature cities go by underneath them and the scenery slowly change. He got his first ever view of the Rocky Mountains and was a little stunned by their grandeur. Sure, it definitely wasn’t the first mountain range he’d ever seen, but something about the snow-covered peaks below was just different.

Clarke finally opened her eyes when they touched back down. They gathered their things and exited the aircraft. The cold hit Bellamy like a punch in the face. Clarke must have seen because he thought he heard her try to hold in a muffled snort. After the initial blast, it wasn’t as bad – but he still couldn’t say that he was a fan of all of his exposed skin feeling like it was being stabbed with a million tiny daggers.

A man met them on the tarmac and handed Bellamy the keys to a fancy SUV, along with a map and directions. Once they got settled into the car with the heat set on high, Bellamy took out his phone and checked his email while he still had reception. As expected, he had an email from Senator Griffin. He sighed in relief. He then shifted his focus to carefully studying the map he’d been given. Clarke let him be for at least 10 minutes before gently pushing the map down so that he would look at her.

“Assuming our destination is my family’s cabin, I can help you navigate. I have been there before,” she quirked one corner of her lips to go along with her sarcastic tone. Bellamy smiled sheepishly and handed over the paper.

Clarke nodded. “We should get something to eat before we leave town. It’s a long drive, especially in the snow.”

And so they set off on their journey. For the most part, both of them remained quiet aside from the few times that Clarke gave him advice about driving on the icy roads. Their path wound through the mountains and though he was sure the scenery was beautiful, he hardly noticed. The previous night weighed heavily on his mind, but he wasn’t ready to address it yet. He convinced himself that he had the perfect excuse – he had to concentrate instead on not sending them careening off of a cliff.

After a couple of hours, they turned off of the main road under the shadow of a tall mountain.
Clarke’s eyes stayed trained on where the summit sat amongst the clouds. “Clark Peak,” she commented lightly. “My namesake. We’re close.”

Bellamy had serious doubts about whether the break in the trees that they’d turned down was actually a road, but there were recent tire tracks and Clarke seemed confident enough.

After several miles of rough terrain, the forest opened up slightly wider to reveal a quaint log cabin nestled in amongst the trees. Bellamy didn’t know what he had expected, but it certainly wasn’t what he saw. He pulled the vehicle up near the front door and just stared for a moment.

Clarke seemed to notice his confusion and smiled softly. “The cabin has been in my family for generations. It’s always seemed wrong to tear it down and build something more upscale. Don’t worry, my dad had a generator installed and there’s modern plumbing.”

Bellamy nodded. He wasn’t sure why he’d reacted negatively. It was a palace compared to many of the places he’d had to stay in throughout his life. It was probably just apprehension at the thought of being stuck in such close quarters after the impending argument that he expected they’d be having.

Clarke turned in her seat to look at him square on. “Bellamy, I-“

He swallowed and looked down at his lap. “Let’s just get settled in before we do this, okay?”

Her forehead creased, but she seemed to agree. She climbed out of the vehicle and grabbed her bag, kneeling down in the entryway to retrieve the key from its hiding place under a small stone. He followed, trailing behind her.

“This area is so remote… Dad always wanted people to have a way to get in if they were lost or stranded,” she explained as she unlocked the door.

Bellamy frowned. It made sense that Clarke would have gotten her self-sacrificing streak from somewhere. But for the life of him, he couldn’t justify the way Clarke seemed to see Jake Griffin, with his own interactions with the man. Most of all, he didn’t understand why the senator’s altruism didn’t seem to extend to his own daughter’s wellbeing half the time.

Clarke ushered Bellamy through the door before closing it quickly behind him, trying to stop the warm air from escaping. “The heating isn’t great, but we can light a fire while we’re awake. And there should be electric blankets in the closet if you need them.”

She gestured across the cozy living space and kitchen area towards two doors at the far side of the cabin. “The bedroom and bathroom are over there if you want to put your stuff away. I’ll uh… I’m just going to-“ she scratched behind her ear anxiously. “My dad converted the attic into a space for me when we came here when I was a kid. I’ll just stay up there. I’ll meet you at the table in a bit so we can get this over with, okay?”

She didn’t wait for his answer, hurrying toward an old ladder near the couch with her bag slung over her shoulder. Bellamy sighed.

He dumped his things onto the large wood-framed bed in his room then went to the kitchen, setting a kettle over the gas stove. Searching through the cupboards, he was a little taken aback. He knew that Senator Griffin had sent someone to stock the cabin with food before they arrived, but he hadn’t expected to find both the pantry and fridge jam-packed. They were only staying for 4 days. This was much closer to the excess that he was accustomed to the Griffin’s showing. He found it oddly comforting.
He made them each a cup of tea then sat down at the rustic dining table to wait. He was more than a little nervous about how their talk was going to go. It wasn’t meant to be an attack, though he supposed it was kind of an intervention. He allowed himself to get inside his own head again, questioning whether addressing things was really a good idea. They were literally isolated in the middle of the wilderness. If Clarke got upset and left, she could easily get lost and the chances of him finding her out here were slim. But he also couldn’t just let this go. Clarke was balanced on a razor’s edge — literally in the case of the previous night. Losing her wasn’t an option.

Clarke stayed in the attic so long he began to think that she was avoiding him. He really couldn’t blame her if she was. Finally she appeared and silently sat down across from him, not even touching her steaming mug.

He watched her for a long moment — took in her defeated posture, the dark circles under her sad eyes, and the way her shoulders caved in on themselves like she was trying to disappear — and knew that he was seeing the real Clarke. This wasn’t the mask she put on when she was trying to convince everyone — including him — that she was okay. Sure, a lot of the happiness over the past week or so had been real too, but it didn’t mean that he could just ignore the darkness that was threatening to overtake her, no matter how much she wanted him to.

He leaned forward in his chair to rest his elbows on the table and scrubbed his hands over his face a few times. “Clarke… last night scared the shit out of me.”

She didn’t respond, eyes lowering to study the wood grain in front of her.

Bellamy rolled his words over in his mind before speaking, wanting to choose them carefully. “Believe me, I get it. I understand wanting to be able to forget, to just be able to put everything behind you and feel normal and god — I wish it were that simple.” After that, words failed him. He wasn’t a psychologist, he didn’t know how to fix this. He wasn’t even really sure where things had started spiraling in the first place. “I… Clarke-why?”

She scraped at a spot on the table with the edge of her nail, still refusing to look at him. When she spoke, her voice was quiet and lacking emotion. “Things were getting better. I’d been weaning myself off the pills pretty much since I left Mount Weather. On Christmas Eve I didn’t take anything and nothing bad happened, and then Christmas was such a good day. I thought I had things under control. I wanted to believe that I could take my life back, maybe start working towards being the old Clarke again.”

Her hand balled into a fist, stopping her fidgeting. “But the old Clarke is dead. She was murdered on the dirt floor of that godforsaken basement and I need to accept that.” Bellamy reached out to touch the back of her hand but she pulled away from him sharply. “It’s not an excuse for my behavior. I’m educated. I took my pre-med courses - I should have known better. I’m sorry you had to see that Bellamy.”

He clasped his hands on the table in front of him to stop himself from reaching for her again. “Clarke you never have to apologize to me - especially not for struggling with this. And yes you’ve changed, but your happiness isn’t dead. It’s going to be a fight, but eventually things will get better.”

Clarke slouched further into her chair. “I’m just so tired.”

“I know.” Bellamy rocked back in his seat. “That’s a big part of the reason I thought we should come out here.” His mind flashed back to that cold cement room, cuffs biting into his wrists, her emaciated body cradled into his chest, every breath a struggle. “You told me once that this is the place that you felt the most at peace, so maybe it can remind you of that feeling now. Maybe it can
serve as a reset – for both of us.”

She finally looked up, her bottom lip trapped between her teeth, moisture gathered in the corners of her eyes with a single tear slowly trailing down. She wiped at it hastily with her sleeve-covered wrist. “Maybe.”

Bellamy exhaled. He reached for his tea and took a sip of the now barely lukewarm liquid, then watched as Clarke did the same. He slowly put his mug down on the table and played with the handle a little bit. If he thought that their conversation so far was hard, it had nothing on what he was about to say.

“Clarke…” he trailed off, scared of the effect his words might have. “I need you to just hear me out for a minute.” She raised an eyebrow. “I… I asked your father to talk to Dr. Tsing.” Her eyes widened and he scrambled to keep talking. “I didn’t tell him what happened yesterday - only that you hadn’t been taking your meds and that you needed a new plan.” He turned his phone screen on and slid it across the table so that she could read the forwarded message. “I know that you want to be off of the pills, but it isn’t working. I can’t make you take them, but I’m asking... Please. There are so many people that care about you, and we don’t want to lose you.”

She read through the email, her brow furrowing further and further as she went. Eventually she put the phone down with a sigh. She worried her lips for a minute while Bellamy held his breath. Finally, she nodded and Bellamy deflated.

“I brought everything you had at the house with me. I’ll give it all back to you in a bit.”

Clarke raked her nails across her scalp a few times before rolling her shoulders and slouching into the seat back, apparently having come to terms with their agreement. She looked up at him and raised an eyebrow a little. “So… what’s your plan for this trip?”

Bellamy relaxed slightly, glad for the change in topic. “Whatever you want. I was kind of hoping that you’d take the lead since this is your family’s place, but seriously – these next few days are meant to be whatever you need them to be. We’re flying back on the 1st so I can get back in time for my classes at the academy, but that’s the only thing that’s solid.”

She nodded, seeming to think his words over before eyeing the old analog clock on the wall. “In that case, I’d say it’s time to start getting some food ready. Do you know how to make a fire? We should make sure that there’s wood before it gets dark.”

Bellamy let out a low, slightly bitter chuckle. “I’m pretty sure they wouldn’t have let me be a SEAL if I didn’t have the most basic survival skills.” Her lips quirked up a touch as she stood up and went to the stove.

He glanced out the window and noticed that dusk was starting to fall. “You have an ax?”

She pulled a cast iron skillet out from under the oven. “Should be resting against the woodpile out back. You know… just in case there’s wandering souls in need of kindling and all that.”

Bellamy rolled his eyes, going to the door to bundle himself up. When he opened the door the cold hit him hard once again, and he had to fight off a shiver as he rounded the cabin. He found the ax right where she said it would be, leaning against a huge pile of logs – more than enough to last the entirety of their stay. They just needed to be chopped down to a more reasonable size. He got to work.

It didn’t take him long. The sun had just sunk beyond the horizon by the time he had a heavy stack
of firewood in his arms. The darkness would have been overwhelming if it weren’t for the fullness of the moon overhead. He carefully walked back into the small house, and was hit with a wave of a delicious aroma.

Clarke was leaning against the counter, licking daintily at a spatula. He tried to ignore the fact that the sight made his heart race. After talking about everything else, they hadn’t addressed the sex, and he wasn’t planning to. He was willing to write it off as a one-off lapse in judgment on both of their parts. No need to make things awkward again.

Bellamy set to work at building the fire. The dry tinder lit up quickly, and within minutes, the room was lit with a soft glow from the roaring flames.

When he’d warmed up enough, he walked back to the kitchen and took a peek into the oven at the bubbling concoction Clarke had made. “Healthy,” he commented playfully.

She swatted his arm and he tried not to grin at the revelation that she hadn’t gone back to shutting him out like he’d feared.

“You told me this trip was about whatever I needed. Right now, I need chocolate for dinner.” She checked the freezer to make sure that there was ice cream. “And besides, peanuts are a vegetable.”

He raised an eyebrow at her skeptically. She raised her crossed fingers for him to see. “Scout’s honor. But if you want something else to eat I won’t be offended.”

Bellamy shook his head. “Whatever you want is good with me Princess.”

She used oven mitts to take the pan of peanut butter blondies out and dolloped a few scoops of vanilla ice cream onto it while it was still piping hot. She carried it to the thick shaggy rug in front of the fire, moving carefully so as not to spill while she stooped to sit down cross-legged. With a flourish, she brandished two spoons that she’d stored in her pocket and raised an eyebrow in invitation. “Get it while it’s hot, or you get none.”

He couldn’t argue with that. He flopped down beside her and grabbed the offered utensil, scooping up a huge bite. His eyes watered as his mouth nearly blistered from the temperature, but he couldn’t help the moan that escaped his lips at the sweet but slightly salty assault on his taste buds.

Clarke seemed amused by the apparent dilemma between pleasure and pain on his face. “There’s a reason I put ice cream on it,” she teased, taking a spoonful of her own and not seeming to have a problem.

Bellamy finally managed to swallow, feeling the heat scorch all the way down his esophagus. “Another one of Rosa’s recipes?”

Clarke shook her head. “Chrissy Teigen. She has good recipes. Don’t judge.”

Bellamy had no idea who she was talking about. They ate the rest in companionable silence, clearing out the entire pan. Bellamy did the dishes, and when he came back to the living room he found that Clarke had pulled out a deck of cards and a crib board.

She grinned up at him. “After dinner games are a tradition out here,” she informed him shyly.

He sat down across from her and automatically reached out to shuffle the cards. She touched his wrist gently giving him pause. “Thank you for all of this Bellamy. It means a lot.” He looked up to meet her eyes, finding the sincerity that they held to be intense in the glow from the fire. He
swallowed and nodded. He wasn’t ready to accept any praise yet. He was still angry at himself and it was yet to be seen if any of this would actually help.

They ended up playing several rounds of crib and Bellamy was surprised to learn just how competitive Clarke could be. He got his ass kicked, barely managing to avoid getting skunked in most of the games.

After a couple of hours, Clarke started yawning, her skin paling even more than usual as exhaustion started to take hold. She didn’t say anything, but Bellamy could tell she was fading pretty fast. When the next game ended, he started to put the cards back into their box. Clarke gave him a questioning look.

“I think it’s time both of us hit the sack. We’ve still got a few more days out here. You can continue deflating my ego tomorrow,” he teased her gently.

Clarke looked uneasy, but she nodded, taking a little longer than usual to force her body to stand up after sitting on the floor for so long. She brushed her hands off on her pants while she looked around the room blearily. “Can I get you anything before you go to sleep? Extra blankets?”

Bellamy just shook his head. Truth be told, he’d barely even looked at his room yet, but considering he’d slept on the open sand in the middle of the desert before, he was pretty sure that he could handle a cozy little cabin. “Will you be alright?”

Clarke just nodded, looking distracted. She turned towards the ladder in the corner and took a few deep breaths. Her shoulders tensed slightly, before she shook herself. “Well, goodnight,” she mumbled over her shoulder, then started slowly heading toward her room.

“’Night,” he mumbled back, watching her go. He shifted uncomfortably. She’d seemed to be doing fine all evening. Her behavior puzzled him because he wasn’t sure what had suddenly changed.

He sighed, deciding it was a problem for him to deal with in the morning. He stirred the embers in the fireplace, making sure that the whole place wouldn’t go up in flames while they were sleeping, then shut off all the lights and went to his own room to get settled in.

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The nightmares hadn’t even had a chance to catch up with him when a loud creak from the next room startled him awake. He scrambled around for a moment, tangling himself in the sheets when he didn’t recognize his surroundings. Slowly he calmed down as he remembered that he was at the Griffin’s cabin.

The door to his room scraped open, and he could just barely make out Clarke’s blonde hair in the darkness. He tensed. This wasn’t her coming in to comfort him after a night terror and he couldn’t think of why else she would be in his room.

She slid under the covers then stilled when she saw that his eyes were open and staring at her questioningly. She hesitated for a moment, looking unsure, before biting her lip and settling in with her head on the pillow beside his. “It’s cold,” she explained quietly, nuzzling in a little closer.

Her feet were like icicles against his shins and despite the heat sapping from his body, he melted, pulling her in close to his chest.

She exhaled in relief and snuggled against his side, her eyelashes lightly tickling him as they fluttered closed. He calmed as well, letting sleep pull him back.
I have so much gratitude for all of the love that I received on the last chapter. You guys are seriously the best 😊.

I had to post this one in a hurry. I'll probably come back to edit any major mistakes tonight.

Next update will be in 2 weeks again and will be another Clarke check in.

Your comments and kudos always put a smile on my face. Please leave some more! :)

Also side note: Chrissy Teigen really does have the best recipes. Check them out
Clarke indulged in the warmth radiating off of Bellamy’s chest, trying to convince herself that she needed to get up. It was hard, considering being this close to him was the only place where she felt completely safe, but being reliant on him was too unfair. She needed to learn how to be self-sufficient so that he’d be able to move on with his life.

The very knowledge that he’d been thoughtful enough to bring her to the mountains in the first place made her chest ache. She was still struggling just to get herself through most days and yet he’d managed to pull off something so meaningful to her. She knew that she didn’t deserve him in her life.

Clarke groaned quietly, pulling herself away from his comfortable embrace. Bellamy’s arms tightened briefly before releasing her as he muttered something unintelligible and turned onto his side. She smiled slightly, taking a second to just appreciate how relaxed he looked. She wished she could see the concerned wrinkle in his brow erased more often.

She slipped away into the kitchen, deciding she was going to make him breakfast. She put a pot of coffee on to boil, then set about making French toast and crisping a pan of bacon. She set everything out on plates while she nibbled at a piece of the salty meat, then grabbed a pad of paper, scribbling a note for Bellamy to find.

She was frankly a little surprised that he hadn’t woken up yet, but she was glad. He looked so haggard most of the time, and she knew at least some of the sleep deprivation came from worrying about her. She hoped he managed to sleep in for at least a little while longer.

It would also make things so much easier if she managed to get on her way before he was up to question her.

She had definitely enjoyed the previous day. After they’d gotten up, Clarke had given Bellamy a tour of the property, they’d spent their afternoon playing board games, and Bellamy had whipped up a delicious (and much more healthy) meal for dinner. They’d gone to bed separately before she’d snuck back into his room again and he’d accepted her presence without comment.

But she knew deep in her soul that she needed to take some time alone to reconnect. She wasn’t sure when she would get an opportunity like this again.

She went to her room and layered up, took her meds, then grabbed the sketchbook Bellamy had brought her. Finally, she crept back into the kitchen and snagged a protein bar from the pantry to shove into her pocket – she didn’t know how long she’d be gone.

She bundled up in boots, gloves, and a beanie, then stepped out into the freshly fallen snow. Her lips curved up as the early morning sun warmed her cheeks. As if on autopilot, her feet took her towards the wooded path behind the cabin that led further up the mountain. The familiarity of her
surroundings soothed her and she felt a little bit of the tension that had built up throughout her body start to release.

After maybe a mile, she turned off onto a smaller deer trail that led to one of her favorite clearings. She’d always liked it because there was a wide old stump shaped vaguely like a chair conveniently placed at one end. She dusted it off, then got comfortable, taking a few minutes to just feel the cool mountain air fill her lungs.

She hadn’t realized just how badly she had needed this. She marveled a little at the fact that Bellamy somehow seemed to understand where she was at mentally better than she did. Not for the first time, she felt guilty for what she was putting him through. He’d nearly been killed trying to save her life and now she could see just how anguished trying to help her was making him. She wasn’t oblivious - she saw how he’d been watching her like a hawk since they’d arrived, just waiting for her to get pulled under by the darkness again.

She sighed. She’d come out here to reconnect to what made her happy, not to dwell on what made her anxious.

She opened up her sketchbook to a fresh page and began to draw, focusing on the landscape in front of her instead of letting her hands take on a mind of their own like she usually would. Her bulky gloves made the graphite strokes clumsy, so she ripped them off and dropped them to the ground near her feet.

She concentrated on the way that the snow settled on the branches of the pines, paying special attention to the slanted beams of sunlight as they pierced through the boughs, and the tiny radiant glints of brightness that seemed to dance off of the icy crystals.

Soon her stomach was growling, so she pulled the protein bar out of her pocket and took a break. As she nibbled, she became aware of a little grey squirrel watching her from on top of a high branch. She smiled, remembering how she used to name all of the squirrels around the cabin when she was a girl. They were all probably long dead by now, but the small hint of nostalgia made her feel a little lighter.

When she finished her meal, she went about adding the little critter to her sketch. It was turning out well, but the longer she worked, the less the scenery was able to keep her attention. She chewed at the chapped skin of her lower lip, but when she found her focus drifting for the third time in almost as many minutes, she turned the page with a huff.

She briefly closed her eyes, allowing her intuition to take over. Her hand started gliding in long strokes through the curve of a jaw, followed by strongly defined cheekbones. By the time she was sketching out the straight nose, she knew she was working on a portrait of Bellamy. She labored for a while, trying to get his tousled curls just right. Next she shaded in the crease between his eyebrows that seemed to have become a permanent fixture. She wished she could rub it off of his face in real life just as easily as she could erase the pencil marks.

She saved his eyes for last. There was such a depth to them. She’d never seen such caring eyes before, and yet they always held a hint of sadness. It took her a while to make them passably accurate, and even then they still paled in comparison to the real thing, looking too flat. An image on a page could never truly do them justice.

She finished shading, then sat back, examining her work. Bellamy’s sorrowful expression cut into her like tiny blades. She knew she was a major source of his despondency and it hurt. She needed to do better. Bellamy deserved better.
She absently traced a thumb over one of his sketched in eyebrows, as if she could smudge away the wary wrinkles set in above it with just a touch.

"Clarke!" Bellamy’s shout might as well have been a gunshot for the way that it resonated throughout the tall pines. She jumped, her heart giving a painful thud against her ribs.

She turned, catching a glimpse of his dark silhouette through the tall trees. She hurriedly tried to flip the book closed, but only managed to turn the page, her fingers having grown painfully stiff without her noticing.

Bellamy was moving quickly toward her, his footsteps heavy as he trampled through the brush. He was still at the other end of the clearing when he started to yell at her. “What the hell are you doing out here? You’re smarter than this.”

Clarke shrank back from him slightly. She’d never seen his anger directed toward her before and it unnerved her to no end. When she responded, her voice was quiet, lacking confidence. “I left you a note. I told you not to-”

By that point he was right in front of her. “Don’t worry!!” He pulled her to her feet roughly. “Christ Clarke, it’s been hours. It’s barely 5 degrees out and the sun will be going down any minute. But you think I shouldn’t be worried about you?”

She looked up sharply and finally noticed that the sun had disappeared down past the tree line. Her shoulders deflated slightly.

It was then that he seemed to notice her bare hands. He grabbed them in his own causing the sketchbook to fall onto the stump with a clatter. He pulled his own gloves off and encased her icy skin with his own, flinching slightly at the chill.

Clarke cowered away from his wrath. “I’m sorry Bellamy. I didn’t realize…”

The apprehension in her voice and face seemed to break him out of the furious state he’d been in. He checked himself, gaze dropping towards the ground as he let out a heavy exhale. “I’m not mad at you Clarke.” His voice was suddenly lower, more gentle. ”I was just scared.” It finally clicked in her mind that he was shaking.

His words stung more than he could have anticipated. Hadn’t she just told herself that she needed to do better? She blinked rapidly as moisture suddenly flooded her vision. The wrinkles around his eyes deepened in concern as he brought up a thumb to wipe away the lone tear that had escaped. He sighed. “Let’s just head back to the cabin, okay?”

He snatched his gloves back up and pulled them over her hands. They were still warm from his skin and the heat burned as her frozen flesh began to thaw. He picked up her sketchbook and gloves with one hand and placed the other on the small of her back, steering her insistently back towards the path.

They walked back to the house in silence, both of them fighting their own thoughts. They got back relatively quickly, Bellamy setting a fast pace to get them indoors before the sun set and they ran out of light.

The cold didn’t really hit Clarke until she stepped inside and felt the temperature difference. Almost immediately she began to shiver violently. Bellamy frowned, going to the sink and filling a large bowl with lukewarm water.

He came back and walked her to the kitchen table. Sitting her in one of the chairs, he slowly
peeled off the gloves and submerged her bare hands one at a time. She hissed, trying to pull away as sharp pain shot up her forearms. Bellamy shook his head. “You might have frostbite,” he muttered. He grabbed a heavy throw blanket off of the sofa and draped it over her shoulders. He then strode back into the kitchen, pulling out a pot and a can of soup.

She watched him as he prepared the food. He may have said that he wasn’t angry, but he certainly looked disappointed considering the way that his shoulders were tensed and he was purposefully keeping his back turned. She shifted her gaze to her hands, glowing an irritated red where they rested in the tepid liquid. Self-loathing flooded her system as she sat there, imagining how he must have felt thinking she’d disappeared only days after he’d found her curled up on the floor and nearly catatonic. She bit down on the inside of her cheek, trying to focus on the pain instead of letting her thoughts run rampant.

Bellamy came back to sit beside her, replacing the water with a steaming bowl of soup. She forced her fingers to grip around the spoon, ignoring the harsh ache. It was hard to swallow with the way that her teeth were chattering, but she somehow managed to eat without making too much of a fool of herself.

Bellamy watched her with his dark brows knitted together. When she’d finished her meal and her shivering still hadn’t subsided, he placed a gentle hand on her thigh. “Go take a hot shower. It’ll help you warm up.”

She scooted her chair back with a loud screech and stumbled away, eager to get away from his piercing gaze. She deposited the blanket back onto the couch as she went and hurriedly closed the door to the bathroom.

Getting each layer off was a struggle. Her freezing limbs lacked coordination, and the more of her skin that was exposed, the colder she seemed to feel. She knew that she was probably mildly hypothermic, and it just made her feel worse mentally. She’d been an idiot. This wasn’t her first experience with real winter conditions. She knew how to take care of herself. But once she’d started drawing, the weather or the amount of time passing had never once crossed her mind. And because of that she’d hurt Bellamy once again.

Anxiety started creeping across the back of her neck causing her shoulders to pinch and her lungs to tighten. By now she could easily recognize the signs of an impending panic attack, but the problem was she still wasn’t very effective at stopping it.

Bellamy always seemed to be the one thing that could pull her out, but that was so unfair. She couldn’t bring herself to ask for his help. Not when she’d just put him through hell again.

She leaned into the shower and turned on the water, knowing that it always took a few minutes to fully warm up. Her mind started shifting ideas around. She didn’t need Bellamy’s help necessarily - just his presence tended to have a calming effect on her.

And he must have been cold too after searching for her for god knows how long. The cabin’s hot water tank wasn’t very big. She bit her lip at the questionable reasoning she’d invented. But as the air seemed to get more viscous with each labored breath, her mind struggled to come up with any alternative.

She grabbed a fluffy towel off of the hook and wrapped it around her body. Her stomach had begun to flutter with nervous anticipation. She tried to take a deep steadying breath, but her chest wouldn’t cooperate. She braced herself, holding the towel tightly to her breasts, and opened the door, poking her head into the short hallway.
Bellamy was standing in front of the fire, stoking the flames with a wrought iron poker. Shadows danced across his face, masking his expression.

“Bell,” she couldn’t coax her voice to be any louder, part of her brain still trying to convince her that this was a monumentally bad idea.

He looked up instantly, as if he’d been just waiting to hear her voice. She ducked back into the bathroom before he could say anything, flipping to press her back against the wall and taking short shaky breaths.

Within seconds Bellamy was sharing the cramped room with her, concern written all over his face. “Are you alright?” he asked her gently.

She nodded hastily, letting her hair fall forward to shield her face. “Yeah um… I just-“ the words wouldn’t come out. She wasn’t exactly selling this. “T-there isn’t a lot of hot water, and I thought-“

“Clarke,” Bellamy’s gravelly voice sounded a little exasperated. His eyebrows rose as he started backing towards the door.

She reached out desperately and grabbed his forearm. “Bellamy, please.”

He stiffened under her touch, but he didn’t leave.

She took a deep breath. “I know that you’re cold too, and I’m worried. This doesn’t have to be anything else. Just get in the shower.” Her voice was steadier now. None of it was a lie, but her gut still twisted with guilt as the words left her mouth. She watched a muscle in his jaw tick as he studied her wearily. Finally he seemed to relent, reaching a hand back to pull his Henley over his head.

Clarke’s sigh of relief was short lived. She really hadn’t thought this through. She’d have to be naked in front of him, and the lights were on this time. There was no chance of hiding the horrendous marks littering her skin. The crawling sensation across the top of her spine intensified, but she did her best to push it down. Self consciously, she turned her back to him, then let the towel drop.

She heard him swallow, followed by the light tinkle of him undoing his belt. Without waiting for him to fully disrobe, she stepped into the small shower stall.

A pained whine escaped her lips as the water seared across her skin. She closed her eyes, cowering slightly away from the main stream to lessen the sting. Within a minute he was there, shielding her from the worst of the spray. The confined space forced them so close together that they were practically touching. She fluttered her eyes open to find him staring at her, eyes glued respectfully to her face. He reached up, brushing her damp hair back. She exhaled. She was a fool for deluding herself into thinking that just being in his presence would be enough. The moment she felt the electric ripple spreading from his fingertips to her cheek she knew she needed more.

He picked up the shower gel and began to methodically rub it to her skin in an almost clinical fashion, starting at her shoulders and working his way down, studiously avoiding any intimate areas. When he was finished, he slowly shuffled them around so that she could be rinsed off under the cascade from the showerhead. She had become accustomed to the temperature as he worked, and the water now soothed as it rolled down her body.

But it still wasn’t enough.

She grabbed the shampoo off of the shelf and squirted some into her palm. She lathered it between
her hands, then massaged it soothingly into his scalp. His eyes drifted closed as his lips parted on a low moan. She leaned into him, rising up on her toes to capture his lower lip between her teeth and give it a light tug, before covering his mouth with hers.

He pulled back as far as the shower would allow, eyelids opening languidly. “Clarke…” he chastised her softly.

She just ducked back in closer to him, lips closing over his collarbone as she sucked it gently. “I want to make it up to you.”

She felt his muscles stiffen.

She tried again, changing her semantics to hopefully ease his hesitation. “Let me make you feel good,” she pleaded. She trailed her lips over to his sternum then started slowly kissing her way down, tracing her fingertips over his defined pecs then down his sides. She felt him hardening against her stomach and knew that he wouldn’t stop her. She paid special attention to etching out the lines of his abs with a feather light scrape of her nails, then her lips peppered a searing path along the side of his shaft, making him twitch.

When her lips closed around his head, his hand tangled into her hair, but instead of pulling her closer like she was expecting, he carefully tugged her away, using his other arm to drag her back to her feet. “Clarke, stop” his voice was hoarse.

She stared into the liquid brown of his eyes, taking in the concern pinching at the corners and the damn wrinkle heavily cemented back between his brows. He seemed to be studying her just as closely, his hand migrating from her hair to rest on her cheek, thumb rubbing gently.

“Clarke…” he trailed off, bit his lip for a moment, shuffled his feet. “What would have happened if I hadn’t found you today?”

Clarke tried to turn her head, but his grip stopped her, forcing her to look at him. “Today was just a mistake. I lost track of time. I swear I didn’t mean to upset you,” she admitted softly.

His thumb stilled as he searched her face for whether or not she was telling the truth. Finally he sighed. “I know. But it was a mistake that could have caused me to lose you. What if I can’t be there next time?”

Her throat felt like it was closing. She forced herself to suck in a breath and pushed closer to him insistently. His hands slipped on her wet skin. “Bellamy, please. I don’t want to think right now. With you is the only time everything goes away,” she admitted. She was begging now but she didn’t care.

She could tell that he was wavering. He leaned his forehead against hers, arms coming back up to rest his expansive palms against her hipbones. She slid her hands up his chest, clasping her fingers behind his neck. Finally he leaned forward, capturing her lips with his.

He turned them around once more so that her back was pressed flat against the wall of the shower. She rose back onto her toes trying to grant him easier access to her mouth. One of his hands glided down, closer to where she needed and she mewedled.

He slid one finger inside of her and her head thumped back against the tile, chest heaving. She scampered her feet, fingers digging into his shoulders as she tried to encourage him to give her more without words. He bowed his shoulders forward, mouthing at the curve of her breast as he added a second finger, causing a delicious stretch.
But even that didn’t satisfy her for long. He still wasn’t close enough to fill the hollowness inside of her. She scrambled for balance as she raked her nails along his shoulder blades, trying to get his attention. “Bell, I need more – I need you.”

He groaned, removing his hand to hook it under her knee and pull her body flush against his. She snaked one arm down and guided him to press into her core. He thrust forward, sheathing himself to the hilt and just held her there, the two of them panting, breath mixing between them. Water dripped off of Bellamy’s wet curls, landing on her chest and slowly rolling down, causing her to shudder.

The moment broke, and he leaned forward once again, tongue exploring her mouth as his hips started an unhurried rhythmic roll. One of her hands flew back, scrabbling for purchase and failing as it slipped across the wet tile. He hoisted her higher until her toes barely touched the ground and she was completely at his mercy.

Then he gasped as cold water shocked across both of their systems. Clarke scrabbled blindly behind him to turn the handle and shut the shower off, refusing to let anything shatter what they were feeling in that moment. But she soon began to shiver again and Bellamy pulled back looking concerned.

“No, please…” Clarke knew she sounded pathetic but she felt like she had never needed anything more in her life than for him to keep going.

He seemed to understand. He easily lifted her other leg, wrapping it around his waist, then walked them out into the living space, still seated deeply inside of her. He sunk to his knees so that her back was to the roaring fire, the heat licking at her wet skin and making her arch in pleasure. He kept adjusting until he was sitting with her cradled between his legs, the shaggy carpet lightly tickling her ass. He gently hoisted one leg higher until her calf was resting on his broad shoulder and she let out a keening cry. She had never felt anything so deep in her life.

This position gave her control, and she quickly took it, grinding down on him in just the right way so that she felt a perfect little jolt of pleasure every time she sank along his length. Bellamy moved his head so that he could suck at the angle of her jaw, then continued lower, raining tiny nips all the way down her neck. She kept climbing higher and higher until everything burst and she was in free fall, Bellamy’s strong arms the only thing holding her up.

She stayed in his embrace, chest heaving, mind floating in a clear state of ecstasy for a moment - but then everything just came crashing back.

She hadn’t managed to turn everything off yet. She still needed more.

Bellamy was still hard inside of her, easing her down from her high with gentle kisses to her temple. Suddenly the feel of his soft skin under her thighs just wasn’t enough anymore. She wanted to feel more of him, until she was totally encased - melting into him until she didn’t know where he ended and she began.

She eased herself down onto the rug, laying on her side, then tugged his arm until he was pressed in behind her, every possible inch of them touching. She could literally feel his heart pounding against her back. She hooked one leg over his, opening herself up for him to slip back in and he didn’t waste any time, looping one arm around her hips to secure her flush against his pelvis.

He took back control, but she didn’t mind. It allowed her to lose herself in the rush of his heat, feel him soaking into her pores. He was so gentle with her, rocking against her in a slow rhythm that was both too much and not enough at the same time.
All too soon, she felt his thrusts begin to stutter. He was getting close. The hand that he wasn’t using to hold her felt its way down between her spread thighs, easily finding her small bundle of nerves and teasing it until she felt every muscle in her body coil tight. She threw her head back, landing on the curve of his shoulder, one hand tangling into his hair. She could hear his labored breathing – feel each warm exhale against the side of her neck. She knew he was holding back until she let go again.

His lips landed on the junction between her neck and her shoulder, sucking hard, and her world just shattered.

Everything was blissfully silent - nothing else existed. She held onto the moment, riding wave after wave with everything that she had, refusing to come down.

When she finally reluctantly returned to her body, the lights were off. Bellamy wasn’t beside her anymore, but she could make out his shadow by her feet, adding another log to the fire.

He grabbed the heavy throw off of the sofa and settled back in behind her, spreading the blanket so that they were both completely covered. He gently lifted her head, resting it so that it was pillowed on his bicep. She didn’t have the energy to help him. She felt boneless.

He placed a gentle kiss down each vertebra at the back of her neck, then relaxed down into the rug, one hand playing with her hair lazily. She let her eyes flutter closed.

They stayed like that for a long time, maybe even hours. She could tell he wasn’t asleep – she wasn’t either. Apparently neither one of their brains would cooperate enough to shut down.

Eventually he spoke, his weary voice a low rumble that reverberated through her chest. “Clarke, what are we doing?”

She didn’t answer – couldn’t. She feigned sleep, praying that he would buy it.

The silence was deafening, only broken by the crackling of the wood as the minutes ticked by.

Ultimately he gave up. With a sigh, he rolled onto his back, one arm still wrapped protectively around her.

Clarke bit her lip.

Chapter End Notes

TW: Panic attack, sex as an unhealthy coping mechanism

Okay, so first off I solemnly swear that they will no longer use sex as an unhealthy coping mechanism... I think. My writing is character driven, and sometimes they just run away with what they want to do.

But I promise the two of them will actually start talking to each other over the next couple of chapters (shocking, i know). This is a good thing!

Next chapter will be their last day in the mountains together, and as I mentioned, they're going to start to open up - especially Bellamy.
I've been on a huge writing kick lately, so the next two chapters are already fully written and I'm so eager to post them. Unfortunately, November and December are always crazy months for me, and I know I'm about to hit a bit of writers block when things get happier in a few chapters, so I'm probably going to stick to the normal update schedule for now.

Also, side note: I'm spending this weekend in New Jersey/New York which is probably the closest to Virginia that I'll ever get, so maybe I can find some extra inspiration!

Please leave some comments and/or kudos if you feel that I deserve them, and have a happy halloween!
Bellamy barely slept. As much as he tried to tell himself that he was just keeping an eye on the fire, making sure they didn’t burn to death, he knew that wasn’t it. The source of his trepidation was lying beside him, using his arm for a pillow.

He knew the moment that Clarke woke up - felt the change in her breathing and the way that her muscles tensed as soon as the world caught back up with her. He swallowed, still staring at the logs making up the ceiling, waiting for her to make the first move.

Her hair tickled him as she carefully rolled over, probably trying to gage whether she’d be able to sneak away without waking him up. When she saw that his eyes were already open she froze.

He slowly turned his head until he was looking back at her, their noses only inches apart. She looked scared, afraid of how he was going to react, and it broke his heart.

“Clarke…” he whispered, his voice rough from lack of sleep.

She sat up quickly, arms covering her chest. Her eyes searched the floor around them before she seemed to remember that they’d left their clothes in the bathroom.

He sighed, reaching up a hand and gently stroking his thumb across her cheek. “Clarke we need to talk about this.”

She glanced around the room again, eyes looking anywhere but at him. She absently ran a hand through her hair and cringed when she realized it had dried into a frizzy mess. Finally she seemed to give up, shoulders slouching forward. “We will... I promise. Can we just have some time to wake up first?”

Bellamy chewed the inside of his cheek. He wanted to say no, knowing that she was just trying to avoid the issue, but he could use a coffee, and probably some clothes, if he was going to trust himself to speak rationally. He nodded.

Clarke shifted to cover herself better, cranking her neck to look away from him. “Um…”

Bellamy’s gut clenched at the knowledge that she was still so embarrassed about her body in front of him. It was hard to compute that they’d had sex more than once and yet outside of the heat of the moment she apparently still didn’t trust him enough to let her guard down. But who was he to judge? He couldn’t even imagine what she’d been through.

He cleared his throat and slid out from under the blanket, walking to his room and closing the door. As was seeming to become routine, he waited for the sound of the shower turning off and Clarke’s light footfalls fading back toward her room, signaling that the coast was clear.

He took a quick (cold) shower of his own and got dressed, heading to the kitchen to make breakfast. After starting a pot of coffee for himself and a mug of tea for Clarke, he set about making omelets. He was pretty sure that she had barely eaten the previous day, and he wanted to make sure she got her protein. When he finished cooking, he sat down at the table, just staring at his food, dread heavy in his stomach.
The sketchbook that he’d discarded the previous night caught his eye, and he slid it toward him. The picture that Clarke had been working on was good – like really good. He heard Clarke coming down the ladder and felt a little bad about looking at her art without permission, but he couldn’t help himself. He thumbed the page, about to flip to the next sketch-

Clarke’s hand slapped down on the paper, knocking it out of his grip. He looked up at her only to find that she had already dressed in layers, looking like she was ready for the day. The art forgotten, Bellamy raised an eyebrow, unable to keep some of the disbelief out of his voice. “Going somewhere?”

Clarke grabbed her plate and leaned against the counter, picking through her food with her fork. “It’s our last day here. I’m not going to waste it.”

Bellamy started to stand from his chair. “Clarke—”

She held up her utensil, signaling for him to stop. “You wanted to talk. This is how we talk. We’ll go for a hike. It’ll make me feel better and maybe you can learn to relax too like you keep saying you want to.”

He was still skeptical. “After yesterday I don’t think it’s a good idea. We should be keeping you away from the cold, not making things worse.”

She strode over and held out her hand in front of his face. The flesh looked angry and pink, but there were no blisters. “No frostbite,” she informed him, wiggling her fingers. “I’m fine Bellamy. And besides, you’ll be right beside me every step of the way.” The look she gave him held a clear challenge.

He couldn’t believe he was falling for it. He ground his teeth together for a moment but ended up nodding in spite of himself. “We’re heading back the moment you start to feel off.”

She grinned in victory, taking a bite of her food. “I’m serious Clarke,” he tried to keep his tone grave, but seeing her happy had always had a softening effect on him.

And that’s how he somehow ended up parking the SUV an hour later near Chambers Lake. Clarke hopped out almost as soon as the vehicle was stopped and pulled out a large bag that she’d stored in the trunk. Wordlessly she handed him a pair of strange looking metal contraptions and he just stared at them for a moment.

Clarke chuckled lightly. “You’ve never seen snowshoes before?”

He had – back in training. But that had been years ago. The more he thought about it though, the more it made sense. The roads had barely been plowed on the way up. Nobody would be out clearing the trails. He knelt down and secured the devices over his boots, then adjusted his hat and his scarf. It was shaping up to be a much milder day - which he was grateful for - but it was still chilly.

Clarke handed him his pack, then grabbed his hand and started steering him in the opposite direction of the other families gearing up for some New Years Eve winter sports. “We’ll hike up towards Blue Lake. It’ll be quieter,” she told him softly.

He followed behind her, his gait slightly clumsy. The snow was pretty deep and probably would have come up past his knees until they made it to heavier tree cover. Once they entered the more secluded area beyond the edge of the lake, the trail was literally empty, cutting off all sounds of
civilization. It was just him, Clarke and a few birds flitting between the tall pines. They continued to forge ahead.

“The anxiety hits a lot harder at night,” Clarke eventually broke the silence, fulfilling her promise. Her voice was soft, but not to the point that he had to strain to hear it – more like she was afraid of breaking the tranquility around them. “There’s just nothing left to distract me and everything comes rushing back until I feel like I’m suffocating.” She paused for a moment, collecting herself. “I was being honest last night when I told you that being around you was one of the few things that I’ve found that helps.”

Bellamy skirted around a low hanging branch, thumbs hooked through the straps of his bag. “But you have to know that what we’re doing isn’t healthy-“

Clarke cut him off. “And it’s not fair to you. I know, and I’m so sorry Bellamy. I’ve been following Dr. Tsing’s new plan and hopefully the medications will start to take the edge off. I don’t want to put you into that position again.”

Bellamy bit his lip. She obviously felt like she was using him, but he hadn’t exactly been unwilling – especially the previous night. “It’s not me that I’m worried about,” he muttered under his breath. He continued to walk before adding a little louder, “My door is always open Clarke, and you know that I want to help in any way that I can. I just don’t think that we should keep crossing the line like we have been.”

She looked at him over her shoulder for a few paces, studying his face. He did the same. Her cheeks were lightly flushed with her lips slightly parted, letting out tiny puffs of breath made visible by the cold air. She looked absolutely gorgeous.

She nodded her head and changed her focus back to the trail. He quickly turned his head away as well, trying not to think about the way those lips had looked as he’d kissed them.

They continued crunching through the snow for maybe another mile before she spoke again. “You know Bellamy, you aren’t obligated to try to fix me. I know I’m a mess. You could walk away at any time, cut your losses.”

Bellamy shook his head. “I want to help you Clarke. You aren’t some hardship.”

“But why? I have eyes. I can see how troubled I make you… how much you worry. I’m just bringing you down.” She ducked her head, pouring on a little more speed to get ahead of him so that he couldn’t see her face. “I could understand why you stuck around while we were captured. You felt like you owed me for Octavia. But that’s been over for a while now. You’re free.”

He caught her wrist and stopped her. “Hey. This doesn’t have anything to do with Octavia or anyone else. I care about you Clarke. I want you in my life.”

She chuckled bitterly. “Again, why? My own parents don’t know what to do with me anymore. My dad only wants me around when it’ll help his campaign.” She jerked her arm away and resumed walking.

“And I thought things with my dad were fucked up,” he mumbled quietly.

Apparently it was loud enough for Clarke to overhear because she turned her head sharply, pouncing on the change in topic. “I’ve never heard Octavia mention your father before.”

He shook his head scornfully. “That’s because Octavia never met him.”
She blanched slightly. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to pry. If you don’t want to talk about it…”

He thought it over for a minute. It wasn’t exactly fair that he was intimately acquainted with all of her family drama, and yet she knew next to none of his. He sighed. “My father was in the marine corps. I was the byproduct of a one night stand.” He contemplated how to phrase what he wanted to say. He’d never actually said any of this out loud before. “My mom was a waitress at a café near the harbor. My father was shipping out to the Gulf War the next day. They met, hit it off, decided to have some fun. She had no way of contacting him to let him know.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed. “Wait… does that mean that Octavia’s your half sister? I thought-“

Bellamy shook his head, snagging a dry branch as he passed and yanking it free. “They met again by chance when I was 4. Mom was still working in the same place and he just happened to stop by. Mom told him about me and he came home with her.”

He had to stop his story for a moment, take a deep breath. “Those few months hold some of the happiest memories of my childhood - which is so fucked up. But he was great. He took me to college football games and played with me in the yard and Mom was so happy. She got pregnant again. I know she told him. And all of the sudden he was deployed to Bosnia. We never saw him again.”

It took him a minute to be able to go on. Clarke just continued to walk beside him, appearing to be deep in thought.

“I was pretty young when all of that happened so I don’t know the details. But my mom couldn’t handle a second kid. We were already living paycheck to paycheck before O was born. My mom had to take on more jobs just to keep food on the table. Octavia became my responsibility.” He ripped off another branch, then began breaking it into smaller pieces. “You know what’s really fucked up? Part of me hopes that he died. Because if he didn’t, what does that say about us? That he just didn’t care?”

Clarke didn’t answer him, correctly assuming that the question was rhetorical.

Bellamy huffed out a heavy breath, tossing the small pieces of wood into a bush beside him. “Kane knows what happened to him. He tried contacting all of our relatives after Mom died, trying to find someone that would take us in. But I’ve never asked. I don’t know what would be worse – finding out that he’s been dead all along, or that he just didn’t want us.”

The incline of the trail started to increase, making the hike a little more difficult. Clarke leaned forward against the weight of her pack, still pushing on ahead. “I don’t think that you’re fucked up Bellamy,” she eventually informed him in a quiet voice.

He shook his head sullenly. “I don’t need your pity Clarke.”

She trudged on. “It’s not pity. That’s a lot for anybody to deal with. And considering I don’t think that Octavia knows any of that, I’m sure you’ve been keeping it bottled up without telling anyone.”

Bellamy took a few more steps before responding. “I’m sure O’s wondered, but she’s never asked. And I’m not going to say anything. She doesn’t need to carry the weight of that doubt around with her.”

Clarke looked thoughtful. “You bear it so she doesn’t have to.”

One corner of Bellamy’s lips turned up into a sad smirk. “Exactly.”
“Seems like you bear a whole lot of things,” she quipped.

He looked over at her, trying to figure out where that comment had come from. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“How have you talked to anyone about what happened to us?” she sounded a little breathless, but he wasn’t sure whether it was from the question or the exertion.

“It’s kind of hard when the military basically told me to keep my mouth shut or I’d be back under arrest.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Therapists have confidentiality agreements for a reason. And beyond that, I know that I’m a mess, but I don’t think you’ve talked to O or Lincoln either. You literally went through hell Bellamy. Trust me when I say you can’t just keep it bottled up.” She paused in order to cough into her elbow.

He glanced at her briefly before shifting his eyes back to the trail. “I’m fine Clarke.”

“No,” she coughed a little harder, “You’re not.” Her breathing got more ragged, crackling every time she inhaled.

Bellamy looked over at her sharply and finally noticed the red flush of her skin. Without a word, he turned and picked her up around the waist, then awkwardly carried her to the edge of the path, plopping her down to sit on a large boulder. “You’re not fine,” he chastised her disbelievingly. He began cursing under his breath, trying to figure out how he was going to get her back to the car.

Clarke hacked a few more times, then pulled out a bottle of water from her pack, taking a few measured sips. By the time she was finished drinking, she already sounded better, but Bellamy was still worried.

Noting the look of consternation on his face, Clarke shook her head. “I’m okay Bellamy,” she told him shortly.

He crouched down in front of her, taking her gloved hand in his. “You promised me we’d head back the moment you started to feel off.”

Clarke looked down, eyes drilling a hole through the snow near their feet. “I’m not sick. Having unchecked pneumonia - not to mention a traumatic pneumothorax – damaged my lungs. I just need a minute to catch my breath.”

Bellamy tensed, a protest immediately springing to his lips. “Clarke-“

But she squeezed his hand, cutting him off. “You took me on this trip to give me what I needed.” Tears brimmed in her eyes, but they weren’t out of sadness. Instead her face was set with fierce determination. “Well I need this. So much has been taken away from me, Bell. I need to prove to myself that I can still do this.” She cleared her throat, doing her best to try to push herself to stand up in her unwieldy footwear. “We’re almost at the lake.”

Bellamy watched her struggle for a moment, still wanting to tell her that they needed to head back. When she almost gave herself a face full of snow, he huffed out a sigh and offered her a hand to help pull her up. “You’re stubborn as hell, you know that?”

“I learned from the best,” was her cheeky reply. He was overcome by the sudden urge to kiss the satisfied smirk off her face.
He took a step back.

It was slower going from that point on – Bellamy deliberately measuring his pace to put less strain on his companion. Clarke had been right – the trees grew significantly more sparse over the next mile, allowing them to catch glimpses of Clark Peak towering above them. And then suddenly they came upon a spectacular view of an open valley with a sizeable frozen lake at its base.

Clarke smiled, tilting her chin up to let the breeze buffet her hair. Bellamy watched her and felt some of the tension release from his frame, taking in the serenity of her expression. She unsnapped the chest strap on her pack and let it fall to the ground at her feet, then started to work on the buckles of her snowshoes. Bellamy quickly did the same.

Clarke dropped to her butt in a snowdrift, then wiggled in, fashioning herself a kind of seat. She dug into her bag and flourished a sandwich and a bag of chips, handing them over to Bellamy before pulling out a second set for herself.

They both ate quietly, the food tasting amazing after hours of hiking. When she finished, Clarke flopped back into the snow, letting out a contented moan as she was enveloped in its cool embrace. “This is what I love so much about being out here,” she informed him, her voice almost a purr.

She tugged on his sleeve until he laid down beside her. The cold was shocking anywhere the tiny ice crystals found his exposed skin, but not in an unpleasant way.

“What do you hear?” she asked him quietly.

At first all he heard was silence, and tiny prickles of anxiety started to creep across his neck. But that couldn’t be what Clarke meant. He closed his eyes, trying to concentrate.

The more he focused, the more he realized that it wasn’t silent. Wind rustled through the trees, there was the distant call of songbirds, and even the barest trickle of water, maybe from a not-quite-frozen creek somewhere. Slowly he opened his eyes, only to find that Clarke had been watching him. She turned her head back towards the sky and he did the same.

“Out here, its hard to believe that wars could ever happen. There are no people treating each other like shit. There’s no violence, there’s no hurt, there’s not even any sign of civilization. There’s just this.”

And she was right. It was like everything else in his life, every problem, every stress, every heartache, had simply ceased to exist. The feeling was overwhelming. Instinctively he reached for her hand, needing to ground himself. She gripped it back reassuringly.

They lay there, watching the clouds dance past. With every breath, the tight band around his chest that he hadn’t even realized was there seemed to loosen. He felt Clarke move slightly, squeezing his hand again to get his attention. He turned his head toward her, only to see a deer standing just inside the tree line, poking through the brush looking for a meal.

His eyes widened. It wasn’t that he’d never seen a deer before – but he’d never seen one so calm, or unbothered by the presence of humans. It was like they were in a completely different world.

They watched it for a while, until somewhere in the distance, a tree cracked and the deer jolted, before sprinting off. Bellamy sat up, watching its white tail bound off between the pines.

Clarke slowly got up as well, a small, relaxed grin softening her features.

“I think I’m starting to get it,” he admitted to her softly. Her smile widened.
She began to dust some of the snow off of her pants, getting ready to get back up. Bellamy glanced at his watch and almost had a heart attack. It was nearly 3:30 in the afternoon. It had been getting dark by 5 and it had taken them almost 4 hours to hike up there in the first place. The trek should be easier on the way back considering it would be all downhill, but there was no chance they’d make it back to the SUV before the sun went down.

He began hurriedly making sure that his backpack was repacked while simultaneously trying to come up with a game plan for what they were going to do.

Clarke seemed to sense his sudden apprehension. She tentatively touched his arm. “Is everything alright?”

He spared a quick glance in her direction to assure himself that she was almost ready to leave as well. “I didn’t realize how late it was getting. It’ll be dark in no time.”

Wordlessly, Clarke opened a side pocket on her bag and took out a couple of headlamps. Bellamy gritted his teeth but nodded. It wasn’t ideal, but it was better than nothing.

He snatched his snowshoes from where he’d left them and began jamming his boots back into the latches, cursing under his breath when his clumsy fingers fumbled on the buckles.

Clarke grabbed his sleeve, stilling his movement, then deftly did it for him. He stood up abruptly, but she stayed right in front of him, invading his personal space. His eyes darted to the trail, then snapped back to her when she gently laid a palm on his cheek. “Hey,” she searched his eyes for a moment. When he realized she wasn’t going to back off, he huffed out an exasperated breath.

Her fingers twitched against his face. “Don’t lose everything you just gained Bellamy. You’re okay. We’re okay.” Her voice had a calming lilt that slowly managed to seep through. He nodded tentatively, allowing a small amount of the tightness thrumming through his frame to evaporate. He resumed packing them up, but his movements were no longer frantic.

Clarke let him know that she was ready to go, and they both started heading back down the path. His strides started off long as he pushed forward, and he had to force himself to slow down when he realized Clarke was struggling to keep up.

“We really are going to be fine Bellamy,” she muttered in his general direction.

He rolled his eyes. “Remind me you said that when we get eaten by a grizzly.”

Clarke actually laughed, and his head whipped toward her, clearly startled by the sound. “Bears hibernate in the winter,” she reminded him like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

He thought about it, then allowed himself to smirk. It had been kind of a stupid statement. “Squirrels then,” he conceded with a small chuckle of his own. “We’ll get eaten by rabid squirrels.”

“Well then it’s a good thing I’ve got a big strong SEAL here to protect me,” she teased him with a small glint in her eye.

Their easy banter did wonders to further soothe him as they walked. They made decent progress, but they were still in dense woods by the time that dusk fell like a heavy blanket. Clarke turned on her headlamp without a word, but it wasn’t enough for Bellamy, his protective instinct stubbornly rearing its head. He began shifting his back, adjusting it so that he could wear it across his chest.

Clarke realized what he was doing and shook her head. “Bellamy… I told you—“
He cut her off, voice a little sharper than he’d intended. “Just humor me, okay? Consider this you helping me out. I’ve been a lazy ass over the last week. You’re just helping me train for carrying a 200 pound dummy down twenty flights of stairs.”

She sighed, but didn’t fight him, allowing him to help her hop up into a piggyback position. It was definitely awkward carrying her while trying to navigate the path in snowshoes, but it was manageable. Though she’d been making progress towards getting back to a healthy weight, she still couldn’t have weighed much more than 120 pounds – with the weight of her equipment included.

She kept talking to him as he hiked, flitting between mundane subjects. He got the impression that she was doing it to monitor his level of exertion, making sure that she didn’t become too heavy for him to hold up his end of the conversation. Between her soothing voice and the knowledge that he had her safely in his grip, the nervous energy in his body began to ease. By the time he caught sight of the moonlight glinting off of the SUV in the distance, his heart rate had almost calmed down to its regular pace.

When they were past the tree line, and the stars illuminated the path with their soft glow, Clarke tapped him on the shoulder indicating that she wanted to be let down. He reluctantly complied, setting her back on her feet so she could walk the rest of the way beside him. He still stayed close, his hand almost brushing hers with every step.

She looked over at him, her light flashing wildly across the ground. “I know that this last bit stressed you out, but I’m still thankful we had the chance to do this,” she told him quietly.

He smiled, keeping his eyes trained on the trail ahead of them. “I’m glad that you managed to convince me. Honestly Clarke – I feel like we’re in a better place now. Thank you for trusting me enough to open up.”

She reached out a gloved hand and squeezed his. “Trust goes both ways. I appreciate that you feel like you can talk to me too.”

They’d made it to the vehicle. Bellamy opened up the trunk, and they put away all of their gear. Clarke paused to do a couple of stretches after the load was taken off – loosening up before she’d have to get back into the car. He smirked as her yoga pose slowly sank into the soft snow.

She ignored him, and switched into a side bend. “What time do we have to-“

A loud explosion ripped through his chest, forcing the air from his lungs.

Without a second thought, he lunged at Clarke, one arm thrown around her waist while the other protected her head as they both crashed to the ground. He instantly rolled on top of her, shielding her body with his own.

He felt her try to push up just as another explosion went off. He shoved her back down, trapping her legs between his own and pulling her torso closer to his chest, making sure as little of her body was exposed as possible.

“Bell-“ he heard her squeak from underneath him, but he couldn’t let himself get distracted. More blasts continued to go off - now more rapid fire. He tried to get a glimpse of where they were coming from, but the back tire of the SUV was blocking his view and his vision was hazy around the edges like he couldn’t quite make things snap into focus.

He had to figure out where the explosions were coming from. He didn’t know if they were safe. For all he knew the vehicle they were lying beside could explode at any minute. His heartbeat
jackhammered in his ears at the thought.

“Bellamy,” Clarke struggled again. This time he was shaking too much to hold her still. She managed to get a knee underneath her. With the leverage she’d gained, she rammed an elbow back into his ribs, then pushed up with all of her might.

It was just enough to shift his weight over onto his side. She rolled out from underneath him hurriedly, breathing hard. He reached out toward her, about to pull her back, when a bright flash of color caught his eye.

Another loud bang caused him to flinch, but this time he was able to see that it was followed by a shimmering burst of gold sparks.

Clarke had managed to make it onto her hands and knees beside him. Slowly she sat back on her haunches. “Bellamy where are the keys?” she wheezed.

Another burst stole his breath so that he couldn’t answer. She leaned over him, digging through his pockets until she came up with them on her own.

She was able to get to her feet, where she hooked her arms under his armpits, trying to drag him into standing. He somehow managed to help her even though he was in a trancelike state. The explosions had stopped, leaving behind an eerie silence that swept goose bumps across every inch of his skin.

She led him to the passenger seat and got him inside, before jogging back around the vehicle and getting it started. The silence had transformed in his mind into anguished screams. He brought his hands over his ears, squeezing tightly.

He blinked hard several times. His eyes were still working - he knew he wasn’t in the desert. He could see the icy road flying past in the glow of the headlights. He kept reminding himself of where he was, begging his brain to compute. Slowly the screams started to fade and he hesitantly lowered his shaking arms.

A muffled cough brought his attention to the woman sitting beside him, and he glanced over at her, ashamed. She must have noticed his change in demeanor, though she kept her eyes trained through the windshield. “There was a family out on the edge of Chambers Lake. They were setting off fireworks for New Years,” she explained to him gently, her voice slightly hoarse.

His jaw worked, but the only sound that came out was a breathless groan.

She reached out a hand, threading her fingers through his, and he clutched it back desperately, like it was the only thing tethering him to the present. He realized that she’d turned the radio up, and felt a little pang of gratitude at her thoughtfulness. He pushed his skull back against the headrest, allowing the mindless bass of whatever song was playing to wash over him.

They made it back to the cabin and Clarke immediately set off toward the kitchen to make them dinner. He made to follow her, but she pushed on his shoulders firmly until he was sitting in one of the dining chairs.

Clarke flitted around busily, cooking and getting a fire going, but all Bellamy could do was stare. It was like all that his mind could focus on were the tremors running through his arms where they rested on the table in front of him.

Clarke placed a bowl of pasta in between his outstretched hands, then sat down on the other side of the table. “I’ve always been more of a baker than a cook, but it should at least be edible,” she
commented quietly, as if trying not to spook him.

He blinked for a moment, then robotically picked up his fork and took a bite. In reality the food was probably fine, but it tasted like ash in his mouth. He put his fork down with a clatter.

The silence stretched between them for a long moment.

“How long has this been going on Bellamy?” her voice was soft but firm, demanding answers.

He grimaced, shaking his head. “This isn’t—“

She reached forward and gripped his hands tightly. “Bellamy, look at me.”

He shifted uncomfortably, but slowly raised his gaze. It was only then that he noticed the angry red abrasion across the top of her cheek and the slight tinge of fear in her eyes.

“Don’t you dare tell me that this was nothing. I’ve lived through the nightmares with you – heard them every night even when I stayed away.” She took a deep breath. “I get that there’s a stigma and that you feel like you can’t admit that you have a problem. But I need you to deal with this. I need you.”

He felt his chest tighten all over again, as a sharp sting pierced the bridge of his nose. “I don’t know how,” he admitted weakly.

She got out of her chair and walked around the edge of the table, never letting go of her tight grasp on his hands. When she was right in front of him, she squatted down so that she could look into his eyes. “We can figure it out okay?”

He tentatively let go with one hand and brushed his thumb lightly over the small wound. She couldn’t hide her slight wince, and it was like his stomach dropped through the floor. “I hurt you,” he managed to gasp out.

She shook her head hurriedly, covering his hand with her own and holding it in place on her cheek. “I know that you were trying to protect me. Besides… I hurt you back.”

That wasn’t exactly true. He could barely even feel the ache where her elbow had connected with his side. And she had been acting out of self-defense. He had no idea how she’d been able to stay so calm in that type of situation. It was just one more thing for him to admire about her.

Her thumb rubbed across his knuckles a few times. Her eyes darted to the floor before snapping back up to his. “Bellamy, I want you to come to my next PTSD support group meeting.”

He pulled back slightly, ready to protest.

She forged on ahead. “You can tell people that you’re just there for me if you want. And you don’t have to do or say anything. But I want you to see that you aren’t in this alone. Please Bellamy.”

He chewed at his lip, bouncing his leg anxiously to try to burn off some of the restless energy that he was suddenly filled with. He wanted to say no - wanted to scream it with every fiber of his being. But all he had to do was take another look at that scrape near her eye to know that ‘no’ wasn’t an option.

He opened his mouth to answer, but literally could not force his lungs to make the sound. He settled for a small nod.
Clarke sighed. He could see the relief sweep over her face. She rocked back on her heels and gave his hands one more reassuring squeeze before standing up.

“I know from experience that eating is probably the last thing that you want to do right now, but you’ve got to try,” she nodded toward his bowl. He picked it up unenthusiastically, but did as he was told. “When you’re finished you should try to get some sleep.”

Bellamy grimaced. He certainly didn’t feel like he’d be restfully closing his eyes anytime soon.

Clarke went back to her seat and picked through her food as well. He kept sneaking anxious glances at her, trying to ensure that she was okay. She seemed to be doing better than she had before they’d talked, no longer looking afraid of him, but it was always hard to read her emotions.

When he finished his food, Clarke gave up on hers, taking both of their bowls to the sink. He stood awkwardly for a moment, not really knowing what to say. Eventually he decided to just go to bed, hoping he’d find a way to collect himself by the morning.

He wandered into the bedroom, peeling off his clothes layer by layer as he went. After a couple of minutes, he was surprised to hear Clarke’s light foot falls approach him from behind.

She quietly closed the door, then started to shed her attire as well.

“Clarke…” he started, feeling slightly ill but also not finding the energy to get into an argument.

“Stop.” She sounded tired and she was giving him a no nonsense look. “This isn’t about crossing a line. You need this right now.”

He couldn’t really deny that. She stopped undressing when she was still in a t-shirt and her underwear. She nodded towards the bed. He sighed, still feeling uncomfortable, then crawled under the covers and curled into himself facing the wall.

The light was switched off, then she slithered in behind him, slotting in until she was pressed tightly against his back. Her arms hooked in under his so that she could apply even pressure across his chest, and then - he couldn’t explain why - but he just broke down.

Clarke didn’t comment. She just continued to hold him until his tears dried and his chest stopped heaving. Eventually his breathing calmed to match hers, then continued to slow until they were both asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! I got excited and ended up posting a couple of days early. It seemed appropriate considering it's Remembrance/Veteran's Day and Bellamy is finally acknowledging his PTSD.

This chapter ended up being way more of a rollercoaster of emotions than I thought it would. I feel like I kept telling myself Bellamy was fine because he was so busy trying to help Clarke in the same way he was telling himself the same thing. When he broke down it hit hard. But now he's on the road to healing as well.

Next chapter will have some more important conversations, especially between Bellamy and Octavia and Bellamy and Clarke. Not sure when I'll post, but it'll be on or
before 2 weeks from now.

Let me know what you think with your comments and kudos!
He awoke to Clarke’s warmth still wrapped soothingly around his back. He blinked his eyes open slowly, but didn’t move – unwilling to lose the refuge he’d felt in her arms.

Clarke must have felt the change in his body. “How are you feeling?” She mumbled against his shoulder, her voice sounding cautious, but wide-awake.

“What time is it?”

She backed off a little bit, and Bellamy had to suppress the rush of loss that he felt as cool air replaced her touch. “Just after seven,” she commented lightly, seemingly unaffected.

He groaned, forcing himself to sit up. “We should pack up. We need to be hitting the road pretty soon if we’re going to make it to Boulder in time for our flight.”

They had a quiet breakfast of cereal and fruit, before tidying up the cabin and getting on their way. Bellamy automatically got into the drivers seat, but they’d only been on the road for a few minutes when he glanced over at Clarke, the previous evening starting to come back to him.

“I didn’t know that you drove,” he commented as they rounded a bend.

Clarke gave him a disbelieving look. “I’m 24 years old Bellamy. Of course I can drive. I had a life before all of this happened. My car is in storage at my dad’s.”

Bellamy scrunched up his brow. “Don’t take this the wrong way – I have no problem taking you anywhere you need to go… But don’t you miss the independence of driving yourself?”

She watched the trees fly past for a bit, seeming to have to gather some courage before she answered. “I don’t trust myself behind the wheel.”

Bellamy looked over, trying to read her expression. It was carefully blank as always. “What does that mean?” he tried to clarify.

She sighed, reaching forward to fiddle with the radio. “I don’t trust myself with a lot of things.” She turned the volume up signaling that the subject was closed, before settling back in her seat.

They still talked, but they stuck to much less personal subjects for the rest of the ride.

The plane was waiting for them when they arrived at the airfield. After they exited the vehicle, Clarke paused beside the SUV and took a deep breath. She looked over at him with a hint of sadness in her smile. “I’m going to miss the mountain air,” she admitted.

Bellamy nodded, shouldering both of their bags. “We’ll come back.”

Clarke appeared a little surprised as she glanced at him over her shoulder. “We will?”

Bellamy shrugged with a small smile. “I hope so.”
That seemed to be enough to set a grin onto her face as she walked up the steps. Her expression buoyed his mood as he followed her onto the plane.

Shortly after take off, Clarke pulled out her sketchbook and started drawing. Bellamy contented himself with watching her for a while. Her skill with a pencil blew his mind. He had no idea how she could go from what looked like arbitrary brush strokes all over a page to an easily recognizable masterpiece.

He watched her fill in all of the small details of the deer that they’d seen the previous day, almost as if she’d captured it in a photograph. When she paused, examining her work to determine what still needed to be added, he decided to speak.

“Remember when I told you I’d return the favor one day?” he asked her, leaning back in his chair.

She jumped slightly at the unexpected noise, but didn’t seem to be too bothered by being interrupted. She nodded her head slightly, looking curious.

He allowed one side of his lips to quir up as he reached for the artwork in front of her and held it up. “I think I have my answer.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed as she shook her head and quickly reached for the book, gently pulling it from his hands. “I can’t. My art is too personal.”

He studied her for a moment, cocking his head. The couple of sketches that he’d seen were just landscapes. They didn’t seem to hold any kind of intimate meaning. But he also knew that art was a part of her therapy. He probably shouldn’t push the subject.

He had another idea. “So don’t sell your art – teach it.”

She seemed to shrink in on herself. “Bellamy, I can barely even talk to you. I don’t know how you could possibly think I-“

Bellamy reached forward and grabbed one of her hands, effectively stopping her rambled argument. “But you did talk to me. Clarke, being with you yesterday in that clearing was amazing. You changed my perspective on things. You have a gift.”

Her expression softened, but she was still shaking her head.

Bellamy exhaled, rubbing a thumb across her knuckles. “I’m not telling you to make a career out of it. I’m just asking you to try. I’m sure there’s some sort of program that offers art therapy classes to people. Volunteer at one to try it out and just see how it goes. It’ll give you a chance to get out of the house and get your mind off of things. And if you hate it, we can just pretend that this conversation never happened.”

She watched him for several long moments, a muscle ticking in her temple. “Maybe,” she finally relented.

He allowed himself a small victorious smile. “Maybe is better than ‘no’.”

She raised an eyebrow at him, then pulled her sketchbook into her lap, angling it away from him so that he could no longer see what she was drawing.

He didn’t pry. Instead he switched his focus to once again stare out the window at the scenery floating past.
The flight was smooth, and they seemed to arrive back at Virginia Beach in no time.

Bellamy finally switched his phone back on and was honestly shocked when he wasn’t inundated with a barrage of notifications. He opened up a new text to Octavia and sent her a message letting her know that they were back in town.

The little dots indicating that she was writing a reply appeared almost immediately, before disappearing. They did that several times as they walked back toward where they’d left the car. A message finally materialized just as he’d gotten into the driver’s seat.

*Lincoln and I would like to talk to the two of you. Meet us at the ranch?*

He looked over at Clarke. She seemed tired, but not exceedingly so. They could also both use a shower, and he wasn’t looking forward to the conversation that he knew was coming about how Clarke had gotten the scrape on her cheek. His sister would know that something was up the second she saw her. But he knew if they went back to the house, they’d never leave. It was now or never.

“You up for a little detour to see O before we head home?” he asked her.

Clarke shrugged. “We kind of left out of the blue. It probably wouldn’t hurt to apologize.”

Bellamy nodded, then replied that they were on their way. The little bubble popped up again, before vanishing once more. This time it didn’t return. Bellamy frowned - that was strange. He felt a little bit of apprehension claw across his back, but tried not to let it get to him.

He pulled up directions to Ton DC on his maps application and started to drive.

The ranch was a lot closer to the airport than his house was, so they made good time. It was still the early afternoon by the time he caught sight of the ornate gate between the trees.

They pulled up outside of the farmhouse just as Octavia was coming down the front steps, pulling work gloves over her hands. She looked slightly wary as she appraised them when they stepped out of the car, though she managed a small smile for Clarke. She approached her best friend, but pulled up short when she noticed the small wound on Clarke’s face. O’s fingers twitched up. “You okay Griffin?” she asked worriedly.

Bellamy’s shoulders tensed up as he waited to hear the damning words. Instead, Clarke let out an uneasy chuckle. “Just had a typical Clarke moment… tripped over my own feet and face-planted on the trail. It’s not a big deal.”

She stepped back, just out of his sister’s reach. Octavia considered her for a moment, obviously not completely buying the story, but she dropped it anyway.

She looked over the roof of the car and met Bellamy’s gaze for a moment before looking away. “Lincoln had to go on a ride-along today, but he’s going to come up once he’s done. In the meantime, I have some work to do in the barn. Bellamy, do you mind helping me?” She gave him a pointed look that he took to mean that she wasn’t just asking so that he would muck out the stalls for her. She didn’t give him a chance to answer before she’d turned on her heel and started down the path.

He scanned over to Clarke to see if she would be okay with being left alone for a bit. She just shrugged, ducking back into the car to grab her sketchbook. He watched her until she’d settled into the wide porch swing on the veranda before finally electing to follow Octavia toward the other building.
His sister continued walking without so much as a glance back, until she’d reached the large mound of hay in the back corner of the barn and began stabbing savagely into it with a pitchfork. “You can’t keep doing this Bellamy.” He could tell that her teeth were gritted together by the tone of her voice.

He was confused. “Doing what?”

She jabbed the tool down again with a clang so that it was standing straight up, then pushed heavily against the shaft as she turned to face him. “Are you serious right now? The two of you disappear without a trace after I’d been out of my mind worrying about what could have happened. And all I get is one fucking text basically telling me to shove off and not expect to hear from you? Did you even tell anyone where you were going?”

Bellamy winced. “Clarke’s dad knew... We were staying at their cabin.”

Octavia looked towards the sky as if searching for patience. “Jesus Christ.”

He took a couple of hesitant steps forward but stopped when she held up her hand. “I’m sorry O…” he stammered out.

She shook her head angrily. “So… what? The two of you just ran off on some kind of romantic getaway in the mountains?” she bit off sarcastically.

He froze with what he was sure was a supremely guilty look on his face. The moment she saw it, her expression darkened as the pieces started to fall into place. “Oh my god. You slept with her. Are you fucking kidding me Bellamy?”

Bellamy’s stomach churned as the familiar remorse crept its way back in. He subconsciously started to pace, trying to figure out a way to adequately explain his actions. But then he stopped. He whirled around to face his sister, his own frustration coming to a head.

“No.” his voice was laced with steel. “You don’t get to judge me. You don’t get to judge either of us.” He breathed heavily for a moment, trying to collect his thoughts. “I know that what you went through was awful too, but you have no idea what it was like O. And I’m so grateful for that. But you didn’t have to sit there holding her hand knowing that every breath she struggled to take could be her last. You didn’t sit chained to a wall listening to her screams having no idea what was happening but knowing that there wasn’t a goddamn thing you could do about it.” He paused, took a deep breath. He was fighting back tears for the second time in less than 24 hours. “You didn’t hold her dying in your arms with a bullet in your leg knowing that you were out of options-”

Octavia looked stricken, but he couldn’t stop himself.

“And you certainly weren’t scared out your mind while she begged you to just make the memory of it all go away for a little while.” He scuffed his boot against the floor, feeling a lot of the fight leave him.

“I’m not saying that what I did was right,” he added quietly, “But it was the best that I could manage under the circumstances.”

He tried for another deep breath, but it was like the air got lodged halfway down his throat. He turned away from her and walked to the nearest stall, leaning heavily on the low door. His fingers dug into the decaying wood as he clenched his hands.

“Bell,” Octavia touched his shoulder lightly, making him jump. He shrugged her off and wiped hurriedly under his eyes.
“I’m sorry O. That was uncalled for.” He sighed, hunching a little further into his shoulders.

She didn’t try to touch him again, but he could feel her presence right behind him. “No, you’re right. I don’t know what any of that was like. But I do know what it’s like to worry about you - about both of you. All I’m asking is that you do more than blow me off with a single text when things aren’t okay.”

She turned and rested her back against the post beside him looking tired.

“You don’t know what it was like either… I was alone here, Bellamy when I got that phone call from Murphy. I thought that both of you were dead. I thought I’d never see either one of you again, and I thought it was my fault. I left Clarke behind and I’m the reason you went after her… And then I got another phone call about Wells when he died, and one about Clarke on the same day. I still feel that same panic every time I don’t hear from either of you and even with all of the therapy in the world I don’t think that’s ever going to go away.”

Bellamy’s legs felt like jelly. He’d never really thought about the way he’d discounted his sister’s concerned texts and phone calls. And he’d done it more than once. It made so much sense that she would feel that way.

He reached out an arm toward her and pulled her into his chest, craning his neck down to place a firm kiss into her hair as he closed his eyes. “I’m so sorry O - for everything.”

She sniffled against his jacket, her fists curling into the fabric at the small of his back. “I’m sorry too.”

They held each other for a long time, Bellamy rocking Octavia back and forth like she was 8 years old again and her clinging to him just as tightly.

He felt a slight tickle across the back of his neck, and then out of nowhere, a horse snorted into his hair.

Octavia lost it, nearly doubling over from laughing so hard as he swiped at the back of his neck in disgust. “Helios has never been a fan of things getting too serious,” she quipped with a wide smile, wiping the tears from her cheeks. She sobered slightly as she unhooked the gate and took her horse’s reins. “Just promise me you’ll be careful with Clarke. She doesn’t need any more heartbreak in her life.”

He barely managed to suppress his eye roll. “You think I don’t know that?” He knew it better than anyone.

He followed as O led Helios out of the barn. They quickly found that Lincoln had arrived in their absence and was sitting on the porch steps near where Clarke was waiting. The two of them weren’t talking, but they weren’t openly avoiding each other either, which in a way felt like progress.

When they got close, Lincoln gave Octavia a questioning look, and she replied with a tight smile and a nod. He seemed to relax. By contrast, O looked like she was getting more nervous by the second. “Uh…” she started, then had to pause in order to find her words. “We were actually kind of hoping that we could talk to you guys separately.”

Bellamy raised his eyebrows, genuinely having no idea where this was going.

His sister shifted her weight a couple of times before continuing nervously with her eyes focused on Clarke, “Helios needs to spend some time out in the pasture. Walk with me?”
Clarke gave her friend an unsure smile, then slowly got up to follow after her, glancing back at Bellamy apprehensively as she passed. He subtly caught her hand and gave it a squeeze before she was out of reach.

Once they were left alone, he went to sit on the lower step across from Lincoln, giving the other man his full attention.

“Clarke mentioned that the two of you spent the last few days in the mountains?” Link broke the ice.

Bellamy couldn’t help but feel a little shocked, first that they’d actually spoken to each other and second that Lincoln was attempting to make small talk. That usually wasn’t his style. “Yeah,” he finally managed to stammer out. “We talked… a lot.” He paused. If he’d been opening up to people, he might as well keep the trend going. “She actually convinced me to join her for her next support group meeting.”

Now it was Lincoln’s turn to raise his eyebrows. “Wow-“ he needed to take a second to process that information. “That’s- that’s actually great man. I’m really proud of you.”

Bellamy just grunted in response, back to feeling awkward at the display of emotion.

Lincoln clasped his hands between his knees and looked to be deep in thought for a moment. He bounced his heels a few times before seeming to dredge up the nerve to say what he needed to. “Look Bellamy, I know we’ve been at odds on a lot of things recently. But you’re still the person that I can always trust to have my back no matter what. We’ve been through a lot, and I can’t imagine what my life would be like without your support. With that said, I would be honored if you’d agree to stand beside me at my wedding as my best man.”

Bellamy felt his eyebrows shoot up past his hairline. That hadn’t been what he was expecting at all. Nevertheless he let out a happy laugh. “Of course Link.” Then added as an afterthought, “Let me wear a normal suit and we have a deal.”

He smirked. “No uniforms – got it.” Lincoln’s face split into a broad grin as he grasped Bellamy’s hand and pulled him into a firm hug. “I knew one day you’d get over the fact I was dating your sister,” he teased.

Bellamy whacked him on the back of the head playfully. “Don’t push your luck. I’ll still have your balls if you ever break her heart.”

Lincoln just shook his head, the thought of ever doing anything to hurt his fiancé a totally foreign concept. And that was why Bellamy had no real worries about their relationship.

With that order of business out of the way, Bellamy sprawled back across the stairs. “So, they’ve got you doing ride-alongs now, huh?”

Lincoln nodded. “Today was kind of a special case. They wanted us to experience the craziness that comes along with the holiday season – but, yeah. I’ll be fully certified in less than 2 months, so there’s going to be a lot more field work coming up.”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow. “And how’s that going?”

Lincoln gave a small shrug, rolling his head around on his neck as if trying to release some of the tension. “It’s a lot different. I’m not just dealing with guys fighting for their lives or desperate civilians anymore. A lot of these people have just put themselves into stupid situations or don’t even want our help. It’s still what I want to do, but sometimes it’s hard not to snap at those people
that they don’t know just how lucky they are, you know?”
Bellamy nodded sagely. “But at the end of the day you’re still helping people.”

Lincoln sighed and leaned his head back against the post supporting the roof. “I’m still helping people,” he agreed. After a few moments of silence, he asked. “How’s the fire academy?”

Bellamy cracked his knuckles absentmindedly. “It’s been helpful to get my mind off of everything, keep things regimented, keep me moving. But I’m getting restless. I wish I could just skip past all of the training and get to work.”

Lincoln slanted his eyes toward his friend. “It’s only a few more months.”
Bellamy huffed out a breath. “Might as well be an eternity.”

A light tread crunching through the gravel in their direction caught their attention. Both men looked up to see Octavia moving toward them – alone.

Lincoln sprang to his feet instantly, while Bellamy sat frozen, the hair on the back of his neck rising.

Link made it to his fiancé’s side in a few long strides and immediately cupped her face, wiping the tears that Bellamy had just noticed away with his thumbs. “Hey, what’s wrong?” he asked O so quietly that Bellamy just barely heard.

Octavia shook her head dejectedly, eyes still glistening as she looked up at Lincoln through her eyelashes. “She said no.”

Lincoln started to whisper something soothing, but Bellamy didn’t stick around to listen, taking off down the path that his sister had just come from at a jog.

When he caught sight of Clarke just sitting on a fence, staring out across the pasture, he slowed down. He made sure to make plenty of noise as he approached so that he wouldn’t startle her, then vaulted over the white wood, settling down to sit just close enough that he wasn’t quite touching her.

He didn’t speak. He just wanted her to know that he was there, allowing her to take control of the conversation. She fidgeted for a moment, before slouching into herself with a sigh. “I can’t be what she needs me to be.” Her voice was emotionless, so Bellamy ducked his head so he could see her face, trying to read her expression – no luck.

“Your sister deserves a maid of honor who can help her plan the wedding, organize a kickass bachelorette party, and help her deal with all of her stress on her wedding day. Half the time I can barely convince myself to get out of bed in the morning.”

Bellamy reached out a hand and laid it gently over hers. “I really don’t think that O cares about any of that Clarke. She just wants her best friend standing beside her on her wedding day.”

After a moment, Clarke tentatively pulled her hand back and placed it in her lap. Bellamy bit the inside of his cheek trying to push down the hurt.

“What if I can’t even do that? What if I have another fucking panic attack and ruin her whole wedding?” She dropped her chin to her chest, hair falling forward to hide her face. “I told her to ask Harper.”

His chest ached. It made him sick to always hear her be so down on herself. But maybe it was
because that was all that she could see. And maybe there was something he could do to try to change that.

He hopped down from the fence and moved to stand in front of her. He reached toward her and picked the hand that rested on her thigh back up and threaded his fingers through hers squeezing tightly. With his other hand he gently ran his fingers through her hair, pulling it away from her eyes. He stopped when his palm rested against the back of her neck. “You’re enough Clarke.”

Her gaze flickered up to meet his, confusion heavy in her deep blue irises.

He went on. “You’re smart, and you’re beautiful, and you’re so caring. And on top of all of that, you’re one of the strongest people I’ve ever met – and that’s saying a lot.” He paused, stroking his thumb lightly across her warm skin, wondering how far he should take this.

In the end he couldn’t stop himself. “You’re so much more than what you can see in yourself. You’re enough for Octavia and you’re---” His throat seized for a moment. He swallowed heavily and tried again. “You’re enough for me. It didn’t mean ‘nothing’ to me when we were together. I care so much about you Clarke. I… I think I’m falling in love with you – have been for a while. I just didn’t want to say anything because I was afraid I’d make things awkward and I didn’t want to push you away.” He sighed wearily, searching her face. “I’m not saying this to put pressure on you or anything like that. I’m saying it because it’s what you deserve, and I think that you need to hear it. You deserve to be loved and you’re enough.”

“I-“ so many emotions flickered across her face until she finally settled on looking conflicted, her eyebrows tightly knitting together as her chin dipped. “I’m sorry. I don’t know if I can-“

He shook his head quickly, gently tilting her head back up to look at him. “It’s okay. You don’t need to say anything. That isn’t why I said it. I don’t want my words to have any bearing on your ability to feel comfortable around me. Nothing is going to change between us - this is my burden to bear.”

Clarke’s eyes glistened. “Bellamy –“

Bellamy briefly squeezed his eyes closed, his anxiety making him worry that he shouldn’t have said anything. He rushed to change the subject, hoping that she could just let it go. He shifted back so that he was no longer touching her, balling his hands into his pockets. “What if there was a compromise?”

Clarke looked bewildered for a moment, before her expression cleared and she tilted her head thoughtfully. “I’m listening.”

He explained his idea to her and she agreed easily with a tentative smile. He then helped her down off of the fence and they started walking back towards the house. His hand automatically went to the small of her back as if it had been attracted there by a strong magnet. She relaxed back into his touch, and he let out the breath that he hadn’t even realized he’d been holding.

After they rounded the bend, their friends came into view, curled up together on the porch swing. Octavia had her head in Lincoln’s lap, but as soon as she noticed them she was on her feet, wiping her hands on the front of her jeans nervously.

Bellamy took in her swollen and slightly bloodshot eyes without comment. This was a conversation for Clarke to have, not him.

Octavia came down the stairs and Clarke stuttered a step, her head shifting to look at him in
apprehension. He smiled reassuringly and gave her a gentle nudge forward.

Clarke sighed, her eyes trained somewhere on the ground in front of his sister’s feet. Octavia waited expectantly without saying a word. “O…” Clarke shuffled her feet for a moment uneasily. “I still think that you should make Harper your maid of honor.” Octavia’s eyes tightened as her hands clenched into fists. Clarke hurried on, “She can give you everything you deserve, and I want your day to be perfect. But… I was hoping that maybe you’d still want me to be a bridesmaid.”

Octavia’s eyebrows lifted as she stood there, like she was still trying to process what Clarke was asking. Suddenly her eyes brightened, once again filling with tears as she started nodding furiously. She rushed forward and launched herself at Clarke, locking her arms around her neck. “Of course,” she laughed, rocking back and forth with her best friend.

Bellamy couldn’t see very well from the angle he was standing at, but he was pretty sure that Clarke’s answering smile was the biggest he’d seen on her face in a while.

Lincoln caught his eye over the girls’ heads. “You do realize that this means that I’m going to have to find another groomsman right?” he mock whispered in an obviously joking tone.

Bellamy barked out a laugh and shrugged. He walked over to stand by his friend and gave him a hard pat on the back. “Not my fault that you have no other friends,” he teased without bothering to look at Link’s reaction. His eyes were too busy staying glued to Clarke’s radiant smile.

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap... Bellamy said the L word.

Next chapter will be the PTSD support group and we'll meet a new character... someone that Clarke met recently but has a past with Bellamy. Any guesses?

I'm going back to the two week update schedule. The beginning of the next chapter has been a huge struggle and I'll be on tour a lot in the next while so I won't have a lot of time to write. See you then :)

Comments and kudos give me life... please leave some!
"Again."

Bellamy huffed out a heavy sigh and wiped the sweat from his brow. They’d been running the same drill for the last 2 hours, working on ground searches with low visibility. Every single time something had gone wrong – they’d either missed a victim or taken too long – and they’d had to start over again. Needless to say, he was getting frustrated.

It didn’t help that he had already started the day irritable and sleep deprived. Clarke had been sleeping in her own room ever since they’d arrived back from Colorado, and part of him was glad that she hadn’t allowed herself to feel pressured. But he’d slept better knowing that she was safe beside him and it also played on his anxiety, making him worry that he shouldn’t have said anything in the first place.

Their training officer – Ryker – sounded the horn, and Bellamy replaced his fogged-over mask, rushing back towards the concrete steps. He forced his feet into a steady rhythm, ascending to the second floor quickly but carefully with his fellow trainees at his back. When he made it to the landing, he crouched down on all fours, one hand going to the nearest wall to help guide him. He felt his partner latch onto his ankle to stay close just before he set out on his way, heading toward the nearest room.

He swept his halligan back and forth in front of him until it clanked against the leg of a bed. Reaching underneath, his arm bumped against the hard plastic side of a dummy. “I’ve got one!” he called out, dragging the dead weight out from under the furniture. He turned his torso right as his partner reached forward to help and they collided, knocking off both Bellamy’s helmet and his mask.

He swore, putting his equipment back on hurriedly. He caught a brief glimpse of Ryker standing near the stairwell shaking his head over his clipboard. He punched the floor, feeling his knuckles instantly bruise, before resuming the task at hand.

They managed to get the dummy out and down the stairs without further incident, then waited at the meeting point for the rest of the trainees to join them. Ryker was the last one to come down the stairs, his swagger condescending as he crossed his arms across his broad chest. “Does anyone in this room think that the effort that they just showed me was good enough?”

Silence reigned as everyone’s eyes remained glued to the floor.

“When you get out into the real world peoples’ lives are on the line. The stupid mistakes that I just saw could have gotten someone killed.”

Still nobody moved.

Ryker sighed. “All of you get out of here. I don’t want to see your faces any longer. But you better figure your shit out before tomorrow because this-“ He jabbed his finger into his clipboard angrily, “Isn’t going to cut it.”

There was a mixture of groans and grumbles as everyone headed for the exit. Ryker bumped Bellamy’s shoulder aggressively as he passed. “Get your head out of your ass Blake.”
Bellamy bristled but managed to hold his tongue. He continued to head towards the showers with a stiff spine.

Once he’d gotten cleaned up and changed back into his normal clothes, he just sat on the bench beside his locker for a few minutes, elbows resting on his thighs with his head bowed. It had been an undeniably shitty day, and the prospects for the rest of it didn’t look any brighter.

The PTSD support group that he’d promised Clarke he’d attend was that night, but truth be told he really didn’t want to go. He just didn’t see the point.

Someone dropped their bag down heavily on the bench beside him, startling Bellamy back to the present. He looked up to see Sterling – another one of the recruits - looking back at him with a commiserating twist to his lips. “Rough day?” he asked wryly.

Bellamy huffed out a heavy breath, pushing off of his legs to stand up and grab his stuff. “You could say that.”

Sterling nodded, tossing a couple of things from his locker into his open duffle. “Want to go for a drink?”

Bellamy hesitated. He could really use one… but he also had somewhere to be. He glanced at the clock on his phone and noticed that he still had a couple of hours. He could definitely have a beer and still be back at the house in time to pick Clarke up. “Why not?”

The two men headed to the bar across the street, each grabbing a bottle from the bartender and then finding their way to a table at the back.

Sterling nursed his drink. “So Ryker is a hardass,” he eventually commented grumpily.

Bellamy smirked. The other man was young, likely no older than Octavia. He’d probably putzed around in college for a bit before deciding academics weren’t his style and he wanted to do something more labor intensive. “You have no idea,” he couldn’t keep the sarcastic edge out of his voice.

Sterling stopped picking at his label and raised his eyebrow, before understanding changed his features. Growing up in the area, it wasn’t too hard to figure out. “You’re military.”

Bellamy took a long pull before putting the bottle back down with a loud thud. “Navy.”

“For how long?” The younger man seemed really interested now.

Bellamy tried to hide his cringe. “Almost 10 years.”

Sterling couldn’t conceal his surprise. “But you decided to become a firefighter?”

Bellamy gave a half-hearted shrug. “Just seemed to fit.” He saw Sterling gearing up to ask another question, so he tipped back the rest of his drink and cut him off. “Look man, I really don’t want to talk about it.”

The disappointment on the younger man’s face only lasted a moment. “Want another?” he ended up asking instead.

Bellamy glanced at his phone and grimaced. He’d be pushing it. But if anything, their topic of conversation had made his mood worse. It was probably best for everyone involved if he had one more to take the edge off. He nodded.
When Sterling came back, they started talking over their firefighting drills instead, trying to come up with strategies so that they could improve upon their times. It turned out that the kid was actually pretty easy to get along with once they got past the awkwardness. They could probably help each other out down the road.

Finishing up the last sip of his beer, Bellamy checked the time. When the numbers flashed he cursed, reaching back to grab his jacket. He’d stayed longer than he anticipated. He quickly thanked Sterling then jogged to his car.

He made it back to the house in record time, but was still 15 minutes later than he probably should have been. As he pulled up, he could see Clarke pacing back and forth through the front windows.

He groaned, lightly knocking his head against the headrest a couple of times. He shouldn’t have been so selfish. He should have just gone home.

Clarke’s face melted with relief the moment he walked through the door. She pressed a palm to her forehead and let out a long sigh. “I was starting to think you weren’t – you know what? Never mind,” she cut herself off, grabbing her coat.

Her shoulders were still prickling with agitation, which just made him feel like an ass. Even if he’d decided not to go, he still would have had to drive her to the meeting. He shouldn’t have let her feel like she was being abandoned.

He pulled her into a one armed hug, trying to ease a little of her tension. ”I’m sorry I took so long,” he muttered into her hair. He wasn’t going to make any excuses, she deserved better than that.

He felt her relax a tiny fraction before pulling back. Her eyes looked worried, but if she smelled the alcohol on his breath she didn’t mention it. “We should go,” she muttered, leading the way out the door.

Clarke fidgeted continuously on the ride there, flipping through the radio stations and tapping her fingers against her door. Eventually she spoke. “I know that these sessions are open to the general public and aren’t specialized to deal with PTSD associated with military service – otherwise I wouldn’t be able to go.” She swallowed. “Just… give it a chance, okay?”

He glanced over at her. She looked so worried, her bottom lip trapped beneath her teeth. He gave her a reassuring nod, trying for a slight smile that he didn’t quite achieve.

The meeting was being held in the conference room of some fancy hotel near the harbor. Walking up he could just barely hear the sound of the waves crashing into the shore. He supposed it was meant to be soothing. Instead, the opulence of his surroundings just made him bristle even more.

He let Clarke lead him into a room on the main level that had chairs set up in neat rows looking upon a podium at the front of the room. There were maybe about 30 people milling around throughout the space, some of them chatting with each other quietly.

Clarke asked him if he wanted anything to drink, indicating a snack table set up in a corner. He shook his head, moving instead to take one of the few seats open in the back row. He just wanted to get this over with.

Clarke sat down beside him, worrying her lips nervously. He wanted to reach a hand out to her, but he felt paralyzed, tension thrumming throughout his frame. His arms subconsciously crossed across his chest, almost as if they were forming a protective barrier around him.

They hadn’t been sitting for very long when a young woman made her way to the lectern,
introducing herself as Delilah and asking everyone to take a seat so that they could convene. The room quieted and Delilah went on to stating some form of affirmation, then reminded them all that they had a right to be there and that everyone experiences trauma differently. Bellamy’s mind was already starting to drift. He had to shake his head to force himself to focus.

Different people began to make their way to the podium, relating their stories about horrific car accidents and abusive relationships. While Bellamy felt sympathy for them, he really couldn’t empathize. None of these people knew what it was like to have to make the difficult choice to take someone’s life, or had had to watch someone they loved be tortured by the worst of humanity.

Sinking lower into his chair, Bellamy truly zoned out, his eyes glazing over. The people’s voices became a steady drone completely indistinct from each other. He began to think instead about how he was going to explain to Clarke that though he appreciated the fact that she wanted to help, he couldn’t see himself doing this again. His eyes drifted to the ceiling, counting the tiles just to give him something else to distract himself with.

“I know that I’ve told my story before, but I was asked by a friend to share it again, so here I am,” Something about that particular voice cut through all of the others, causing his ears to prick with the familiarity.

“Like many people that live around here, I work with the military, and before I was injured, that included doing field work in the Middle East.” Bellamy sat up a little straighter, his eyes coming down to catch on a glossy mahogany ponytail.

“My missions were usually heavily classified, sending me out to remote locations to gather intel. The information I received was highly sought after and incredibly damaging to the enemy, and therefore my movements were heavily guarded. I was transported anonymously in and out of small villages where my presence wouldn’t be noticed. Until one time it was.”

Bellamy knew this story all too well. His arms tightened across his chest.

“It started out like any other extraction. I was given coordinates and would be meeting with a team that I’d dealt with several times in the past. I made it to the meeting point, but something was off. What should have been a quiet street was crowded with activity. The quaint little village I’d arrived in had turned into a bustling hive overnight. I knew something was wrong – information about my whereabouts had to have been leaked – but I didn’t have much of an option. There was no backup plan set in place. It was likely that it could take weeks for me to get back in touch with command to set up a new extraction and the intel that I had was time sensitive.

“I waited as long as I could, but the rendezvous time came and went without any sign of the extraction team. That was when I knew that there was really something wrong. I decided to make a run for it, hoping that they were still nearby. I thought maybe if they saw me and I was in a less populated area, they might still be able to get me out.”

Bellamy shifted in his chair uncomfortably, knowing what was coming. He felt Clarke’s hand reach tentatively for his knee and looked over to her. She was looking at him with a concerned but hopeful expression. She didn’t know.

“I hadn’t even made it to the end of the block when the truck exploded. I don’t remember much… just the ground rushing up at my face and the excruciating pain. It wasn’t very long before I lost consciousness.

“I woke up a week later at a military hospital in Germany. A piece of shrapnel from the explosion had been lodged in my spine. The doctors told me it was possible that I’d never walk again, and if
there’s one glimmer of light in this whole story, it’s that at least I proved them wrong. But there’s something that’s eaten at me more than nightmares of explosions and chronic pain and having a permanent limp ever could. And that’s that so many innocent civilians lost their lives that day just because I visited their village. They didn’t ask for a war. And now there are children that will grow up without parents, people that will be maimed for life, just because the military chose an arbitrary village as an extraction point.”

Bellamy could hear the screams echoing in his memory. He blinked hard, trying to force himself to focus back on the NSA agent’s voice.

She took a deep breath, shifting her weight where she stood at the pulpit with some difficulty. “I wish that I could say that the guilt gets better, but it doesn’t. It does get less fresh though. Over time I’ve finally begun to allow myself to start feeling positive emotions again without immediately cutting myself down. Therapy has helped. Finding ways to try to give back and maybe atone in some small way for my sins has been even better. And probably most importantly, I realized that refusing to live my life out of remorse wasn’t helping anyone – that maybe I could do a better job of honoring the dead’s memories by continuing to live myself. The nightmares haven’t gone away. I’m not sure if they ever will. But they’ve become less frequent, less all consuming. And doing things like speaking at places like this has helped.” She bowed her head and took a step away from the podium.

The room broke out into polite applause and Delilah stood up to close the meeting. Bellamy’s eyes stayed glued to the young woman who had just spoken as she returned to her seat.

Slowly the crowd divided into smaller conversations with each other before beginning to disperse.

Clarke squeezed his leg. “I hope that wasn’t as bad as you thought it would be,” she commented softly.

He didn’t respond. She followed the direction of his gaze and her face lit up slightly. “She’s a total badass isn’t she? I’ve talked to her a little bit after a few meetings and she’s really helped. I hope you don’t mind, but I asked her to share her story today. I thought that maybe you might be able to relate.”

Bellamy cringed. He continued to watch as the young woman gathered her coat, getting ready to leave. His heart lurched and he scrambled to get up to follow her.

Clarke made a little noise, obviously surprised by his behavior. He looked over at her apologetically and quickly grabbed her hand. “Can you just excuse me for a second?”

Clarke nodded, her brow creased in confusion.

Bellamy broke into a light jog, catching up to the swishing dark ponytail just after she’d exited the building. “Reyes!” he called out sharply, realizing too late that the sound might startle her.

The girl whirled, her shocked expression melting the second she laid eyes on him. “Blake?” she questioned apprehensively.

He nodded and she rushed toward him, her arms latching tightly around his shoulders. He remained stiff in her embrace, unable to take comfort from it. “I’m so sorry we didn’t stop it,” he whispered to her brokenly.

Raven shook her head, pulling back. “It wasn’t your fault. You were following orders,” she reminded him.
Bellamy looked at the ground between his feet. “We could have done something.”

Raven squeezed his shoulder lightly. “Hey. Didn’t you listen to anything I just said? The pity party doesn’t help. Neither does the blame game.” She paused for a moment in thought before she ducked her head to get a better look at him. “Is that why you’re here?” she questioned. “Guilt over what happened in Munirah?”

Bellamy winced. That was part of it. He couldn’t deny that that was when the nightmares had started, but there was so much more to it than that – things that Raven could never know. “Something like that,” he settled on telling her.

Raven nodded, looking understanding.

Bellamy shuffled his feet. “Does it really get better? I feel like I’m going to be stuck feeling like this forever.”

Raven’s expression sobered. “It hasn’t been easy, but yeah – I feel like I’m finally starting to live again, like I’m not completely consumed by it.”

Bellamy chewed on his tongue for a moment. He didn’t think that he could get behind sitting through meetings like this all the time. But maybe he could talk to a friend – one who had been through at least part of the same experience as him and could see the light at the other end. “Do you think maybe we could get a drink sometime? Talk some more?” He asked her awkwardly.

Raven raised an eyebrow. She pulled something from the back pocket of her jeans and began flipping it across the backs of her knuckles. “18 months sober,” she told him, pausing her movements to show him her chip.

Bellamy huffed out a breath, wanting to kick himself.

Raven hurried to reassure him. “But we could grab a coffee. And I was serious about seeing a therapist. The guy I go to is really great. I wanted to shoot him at first, but it turns out he actually gets it. I’ll give you his number.”

Bellamy hesitated for a moment before nodding. He pulled out his phone and handed it to her. She took it from him with a small smile.

A tentative voice made him jump just as she was handing it back. “You two know each other?”

He turned to find Clarke standing a few feet away, holding his coat in front of her like some kind of shield. She looked like she was ready to bolt at any second as her eyes darted between the two of them questioningly.

To his surprise, Reyes barked out a laugh. “Figures Blake was the guy you were talking about.” Clarke winced and Raven shook her head. “You sure know how to pick ‘em Clarke.” She walked over and bumped the smaller girl’s shoulder playfully.

Clarke’s complexion was pale as a sheet. “How do you know Bellamy?” she asked warily.

Raven rolled her eyes. “SEAL Team 10 was the extraction team sent to my location. Blake and I go way back.” She looked between Clarke and Bellamy for a moment before her eyes widened. “Shit. He’s a part of your trauma isn’t he?”

Clarke looked down at the ground, chin dipping in what could barely be perceived as a nod.
The silence was heavy, like a lead blanket falling over all three of them.

Raven sighed. “Look, I don’t know what happened to the two of you. But Bellamy, I was serious about Dr. Santiago. You should call him. And Clarke, I know you’ve never used it, but you have my number. Call me if you need to.”

The gentle purr of a motorcycle cut through the still night air. Raven looked over her shoulder towards the parking lot, and her lips curved up before her smile faded again. “That would be my ride.” She stepped in front of Clarke and gently pushed her hair back with her long fingers. “You’ve got this Griffin.” She looked back at Bellamy seriously. “Get some help Blake. I know you’re stubborn to a fault, but you can’t kick this on your own.”

They both watched as she walked toward the motorcycle and accepted the helmet that the rider was extending towards her. Before she flipped the face shield down, she addressed them one last time. “I’ll be seeing both of you,” she called, before straddling the back of the bike. They left with a roar of the engine, the taillight blinking as they disappeared around a corner.

Bellamy and Clarke stood there for several aching moments longer, neither looking at the other. Finally Clarke shifted. “Can we talk?” she asked him nervously.

Bellamy nodded, gesturing towards a path that led down towards the docks. They walked in silence, a strained distance between them. Bellamy kept his hands firmly shoved into his pockets, his shoulders tense, while Clarke still clutched his jacket.

They made it to the old wood border separating the boardwalk from the beach. Clarke stood there for a moment, looking out across the bay and listening to the water lap gently at the sand, before she turned back to him, teeth sawing into her lower lip.

Bellamy felt his muscles tighten even further. He had to try to explain himself. He couldn’t just let things fall apart. “You probably think that I’m some kind of monster…”

Clarke’s eyebrows lifted as her lips parted in surprise. “Why would you say that?” Her voice was so soft, it was almost swallowed by the waves.

Bellamy shook his head in disbelief. “You obviously know Raven’s story. We left her there Clarke. People died. How can you just be okay with that?”

Clarke hesitantly laid a hand on his shoulder. “Bellamy… I know you. You’re the same man who wouldn’t leave me behind no matter how much I begged. I know that there must have been unimaginable circumstances around what happened to Raven. I would never judge you for that.” She pulled her hand away, shrinking into herself. “I’m the one that has some explaining to do.” She backed away from him, leaning into the fence. “I swear I didn’t tell her about what happened to us. I would never betray you like that. I just… I have a lot of guilt - over Octavia and Wells… And you. I just thought that talking to someone that maybe understands might help. I’ve never told her any details, she just knows that I went through something awful.”

Bellamy shook his head once again. “I’m not mad Clarke. I’m never going to be mad at you for trying to help yourself.”

They drifted back into silence, Clarke turning back to look out over the water once more. The soft glow of the streetlamps settled into her skin and Bellamy found that he couldn’t look away.

Clarke began to fidget, picking at the mildewing wood where her hands rested on the seawall. Bellamy wondered idly why she suddenly appeared so agitated. It didn’t seem to be due to a panic
attack or anything like that. This was different – a side of her that she’d never let him see before. Her eyes darted down as her breath hitched.

“Bellamy, how well do you know Raven?” she asked him, her voice a little strained.

Bellamy’s forehead wrinkled in confusion as he took a small step back. “She worked as an NSA agent. Our team was tasked with working with her more than once. We ended up getting to know each other.”

Clarke’s shoulders drooped. “That’s all?” she prodded quietly, her tone suggesting that she didn’t believe him.

Bellamy let out an exasperated breath. Apparently he’d been letting off some kind of signal that he hadn’t intended to. “We, uh-. Things could get lonely out on tour. We… spent the night together a couple of times. But we were never more than friends.” He was now starting to feel just as disconcerted as she looked. He ran a hand roughly through his hair. “Clarke where is this coming from?”

She looked at him over her shoulder, and he was surprised to find tears glistening in her eyes. “I-“

He stepped closer to her, but stopped when she stiffened. She sniffled and shook her head. Turning her back to the ocean, she hopped up to sit on one of the wood posts, shoulders rising protectively around her ears.

She took a couple of deep calming breaths then tried again. “I think I might be falling for you too. But I don’t know if- I’m not sure if I can even-“

Bellamy moved forward quickly, stepping into the space between her knees. He ducked his head down and placed his palms on her cheeks, trying to get her to look at him. “Hey…” he wasn’t sure what to say. “Clarke-“

She shook her head, grabbing his wrists to pull his hands away from her face. “Seeing you with Raven… it made me realize how unfair I’m being. You deserve someone that’s able to return your feelings. You deserve someone capable of being happy.”

Bellamy twisted his wrists until she was forced to let go, then brought them back up, threading one hand through her hair while he used his other thumb to brush away the few tears that had managed to escape. “I don’t want anyone other than you.”

Clarke attempted to protest again, but Bellamy shushed her. “I understand that you’re struggling to figure out what you’re feeling right now, and I’m okay with that. I don’t have any expectations. All I know is that I love you, and if you’re willing to try that’s enough for me. We can take things slow, figure things out. But I want you.”

He leaned toward her slightly, feeling her sweet breath wash across his face. She stared into his eyes, looking unsure. He pushed forward another inch and her eyelids fluttered closed.

But this wasn’t like any kiss that they’d shared before. It wasn’t desperate or frantic in any way. It was soft… sweet, their lips connecting like they’d found their home. And yet when Bellamy pulled back to rest his forehead against hers, he was still panting as if he’d just run the 100-yard dash.

“Are you willing to try with me?” he asked her softly when he’d caught his breath. His stomach
knotted tightly in anticipation of her answer.

Clarke traced her thumb along his lower lip for a moment, then nodded. Bellamy couldn’t help the grin that tugged at the corners of his mouth. He leaned into her, stealing one last chaste kiss, before helping her back down to the ground.

She handed him his jacket with a small blush coloring her cheeks, and he took it gratefully. His hand found hers automatically, and he led her back toward the parking lot.

They both got into his car, and he put it into gear, taking them back towards the house.

Clarke was quiet for a while, but then she looked over at him. “So what does this mean?”

He glanced over at her quickly, before training his eyes back on the road. “Whatever we want it to,” he told her mildly. “I was serious when I said I don’t want to put any pressure on this. Let’s just let it evolve naturally.”

He saw Clarke nod out of the corner of his eye. She let out a heavy breath that she’d apparently been holding. “I think I can do that,” her voice was so quiet that he wasn’t sure whether she’d meant for him to hear the words. She leaned an elbow on the windowsill and let her head drop into her hand. “Can I just apologize in advance? I know that I’m not easy to deal with and that I won’t be emotionally available whenever you need me—“

He kept one hand on the steering wheel while he threaded the other into her hair, thumb rubbing small circles across her cheekbone. “You don’t need to try to sabotage this. I know what I’m getting into okay?”

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She paused and bit her lip for a moment, before leaning into his touch. “Okay.”

His lips twitched again, and she gave him a tentative smile in return.

Back at the house, he noticed that she looked dead on her feet. He helped her go through the motions of taking off her coat and shoes, then steered her by the shoulders toward her room. He placed a firm kiss on her forehead and whispered in her ear, reminding her that he loved her and that they could talk more in the morning.

She gifted him another small smile, just before closing her door most of the way.

Bellamy stood in the hallway for several minutes just grinning like an idiot. He kept trying to remind himself not to get invested so quickly, but it was difficult. He was now realizing that he’d fallen hard for Clarke a long time ago, and even the possibility that she could feel the same way made him feel like he might start floating at any minute.

Eventually he managed to convince himself that it was creepy to just stand staring at her door. He went to his own room, still on cloud 9, and got himself ready for bed.

He still felt like he was buzzing, so – knowing that he wouldn’t be falling asleep anytime soon – he grabbed the Iliad off of his nightstand, and flipped to the page where he’d left off. He’d barely gotten through a whole scene, when he was interrupted by a light knock on his door.

He lowered the book slightly, only to find Clarke standing in his doorway, wearing a short pair of boxers and an off the shoulder t-shirt that showed off way too much skin to not send his heart racing. A light flush darkened her cheeks as she studied him.

“I know we said we’d take it slow…” her tone was cautious. “But I was wondering if it might be
okay if I stay in here with you. I always sleep better when you’re beside me.”

Bellamy’s smile broadened even as he forced himself to calm down. “I was hoping you might ask,” he confessed, feeling his own face heat up. He patted the mattress by his side, and she quickly padded across the room, sliding under the covers.

“Is it alright if I still read for a little bit?” He asked her softly.

She mumbled some kind of affirmative response as she snuggled down, resting her head on his chest. He couldn’t help the low chuckle that rumbled through his body. She was asleep within minutes of lying down, her breathing relaxing into a gentle purr. He placed another kiss into her messy curls.

He went back to his book, allowing himself to get lost in the battle of Troy. He was so deep into the action that he jumped slightly when his phone buzzed on the nightstand. He grabbed it quickly, hoping that the noise and the movement wouldn’t wake Clarke. He needn’t have worried – she didn’t even stir.

Checking his texts, he found that he had a new message from Raven.

**Starting to realize that my exit was kind of abrupt earlier. Hope that didn’t cause any friction?**

Bellamy glanced back down toward the sleeping angel on his chest and couldn’t hold back the smile that kept reappearing on his face. He typed out a quick reply.

**We’re all good.**

She started typing a response almost immediately, so he waited.

**Glad to hear it. And happy to get to see you again as well. We really do need to catch up. Coffee sometime next week? My treat.**

He stared at the screen for a moment, wondering how his day had taken such a drastic turn. He’d started out frustrated, and ended up feeling like he was set up to be in a better place than he had been in a while. And reconnecting with Raven just seemed like the icing on the cake – he hadn’t even thought of her in years, guilt having pushed the concept of her into some far corner of his mind. But now, it almost seemed like divine providence that she’d reappeared – a sign that he was taking a step in the right direction in dealing with this.

**Sounds perfect. Sleep tight Reyes.**

Chapter End Notes

It only took... 23 chapters(??) for them to decide to try out being a couple. Yay for slowburn haha.

If there's any concern, nothing will happen between Raven and Bellamy. That's all in the past and was more of a vehicle for Clarke to realize she was jealous. Raven is happily with Zeke and I've put Clarke and Bellamy through enough without adding that kind of drama.
Next chapter will be Bellamy's first therapy session, as well as the fluffiest scene I've ever written. You're welcome I guess?

I sincerely appreciate every kudo and comment (even though I tend to only answer those that directly ask me questions... I'm just really awkward at responding to compliments). Please continue to leave them to feed my inspiration! See y'all in 2 weeks ☺️
Bellamy sat in his car and just stared at the small office building in front of him. He knew it was the right place. He knew that he needed to get his ass out of his seat if he was going to get to his appointment on time. His legs just wouldn’t move.

It had taken him a couple of weeks to dredge up the courage to make the appointment. Then, it had been a few weeks more before he could even get in. Now that he was finally there it all just seemed like too much.

His phone buzzed in his lap. He glanced down and found an encouraging text from Raven. He chewed his lip for a moment, anxiety at disappointing her, and even worse – disappointing Clarke, churning in his belly. He finally managed to convince his hand to crank the handle and stumbled out onto the sidewalk. He followed the signs for therapist’s office easily enough, and when he got through the door, he barely even had a chance to pace before the receptionist waved him through.

Bellamy wiped his sweaty palms on his jeans, then let out a nervous puff of breath before opening the final door into Dr. Santiago’s office.

An affable looking man of indeterminate age, dressed casually in an oversized cardigan stood up and offered his hand. Bellamy shook it firmly, trying to hide the agitated tremor in his arms. “Dr. Santiago?” He asked after clearing his throat.

The man gave him a small smile. “Please just call me Gabriel.”

Bellamy nodded, then pulled his hand back to ball it in his pocket. He looked around the room. It certainly wasn’t what he was expecting, looking more like a classic gentleman’s club with dim lighting, and winged armchairs arranged around a fireplace, than any therapist’s office he’d ever seen on TV. He could see why Raven had liked it so much, “No lounge chair?” he joked lamely, scratching the back of his neck.

The other man smirked. “Not really my style.” He gestured Bellamy forward with one hand. “Take a seat.”

Bellamy picked the armchair closer to the door, and perched himself right on its edge, not allowing himself to get comfortable.

The therapist didn’t seem to mind, sitting down across from him and pulling a notebook into his lap. He pulled a pair of glasses down from the top of his head to rest near the end of his nose, then looked at Bellamy over the frames. “So Petty Officer Blake, why are you here?”

“Bellamy,” he corrected quickly with a cringe. He watched as Gabriel wrote something down, and felt sweat begin to bead along his hairline. He fidgeted with his hands for a moment before realizing what he was doing and tightly clasping them together before squeezing them between his knees. “Uh- I have a friend – Raven Reyes. I was on the mission where she was injured. She said that you’ve helped her, and she said that I should come see you too.”

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. “Ms. Reyes has been through an immense trauma. But that doesn’t explain why you’re here.”
Bellamy’s forehead scrunched up. He looked around the room agitatedly. He’d never been good at
talking about himself. At least not with anyone other than Clarke. “I was in the Navy for almost 10
years – was a SEAL for the last 8. Mostly stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was recently
discharged and I’ve been told that therapy can help with the readjustment process.”

Gabriel put his pen down, and leaned back in his chair. He gave Bellamy a scrutinizing look.
“Understandable. And yet you still haven’t told me why you are here.” Bellamy just stared for a
moment and the therapist sighed. “I understand military types. I served as a field medic back in my
day. You didn’t just come here on a recommendation from a friend, or because you heard it was
helpful for vets. You came here for a more specific purpose. I need to know what that is if I’m
going to help you.”

“I-“ Bellamy’s throat clicked, having suddenly gone bone dry. He closed his mouth, swallowed,
dropped his head down to stare at the floor. “I uh- At the end of my last tour I went through
something terrible with my-“ he paused, thinking over what to say. Calling Clarke his girlfriend
seemed both woefully inadequate for how he felt, and like he was putting too much pressure on her
at the same time. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “Someone I really care about.” He finally
settled on.

“And?” Gabriel’s voice sounded nonchalant.
Bellamy’s eyes snapped up, ready to yell at the man that he was being a callous piece of shit.
Gabriel was looking at him intently, his pen poised to write. Bellamy forced out a heavy breath,
trying to remain calm. The guy was just doing his job, and he couldn’t do it without the details.

“What happened broke her. It broke both of us. She needs me to be there for her, but I think that we
both know that I can’t promise that I’ll be able to the way that I am now.”

Gabriel finally nodded in approval, then waited for him to go on. The silence in the room grew
heavier as each second ticked past. Bellamy’s gaze darted around the room again before landing on
an antique looking radio on the nearby desk. “Do you mind turning that on?” He asked nervously.

Gabriel wrote another note, but reached over to turn the dial obediently. There was a short crack of
static, before some form of light jazz music filled the room with a quiet hum. Bellamy let out a sigh
and sat slightly further back in his chair.

“I’m going to go ahead and assume that something happened that scared you enough to seek help?”
the therapist pushed, his gaze piercing.

Bellamy’s jaw clenched.

Gabriel steepled his fingers and leaned into the cushioned backrest behind him. “Am I wrong?” he
provoked his client with his eyebrows raised.

Bellamy subconsciously made a fist and started bouncing it against the outside of his thigh.
“Maybe a little over a month ago, I had some sort of – flashback. It felt so damn real. I tackled her
to the ground. I was trying to protect her, but instead I was the one that ended up hurting her. She
didn’t make a big deal out of it, but I can see the fear in her eyes sometimes. I’ve been having
nightmares for a while… even before everything happened actually. But if things are escalating I
can’t trust myself to be around her.”

Gabriel kept writing. “And what do you usually do when things start to get too overwhelming?” he
asked without looking up.
He felt his breath hitch. He didn’t want to show weakness - especially in front of a stranger. He felt like he’d already laid himself bare. His stomach knotted at the thought of admitting his vulnerabilities. His eyes glanced surreptitiously toward the door… Which was one of his coping mechanisms – leaving. He kicked himself internally. He needed to suck it up for Clarke.

“Usually I try to get myself out of the situation… maybe go for a drive. Sometimes I just need a drink to calm down,” he admitted quietly.

“And when was the last time you had a drink?” the therapist asked him, once again looking at his notes.

Bellamy bristled. “I’m not an alcoholic,” he responded flatly.

Gabriel inclined his head. “I never said you were.”

Bellamy swallowed, hunching forward to rest his elbows on his knees. “I had a couple of drinks before I went to my first PTSD group session to try to calm my nerves. That was a few weeks ago. Besides that I might have a beer with dinner every so often. It’s not like I really keep track.”

Gabriel nodded, putting his pen down and finally looking at his client. “You don’t need to get roaring drunk every night to have an unhealthy reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism. Something tells me you already know that – that you regret something you’ve done while under the influence.”

The floor dropped out from underneath him. One of his hands slid out to grip the armrest beside him as he took anxious sips of air through his nose. There was no fucking way he was opening up about that. Not to some guy he’d just met less than an hour ago. Yes, Clarke didn’t seem to hold anything against him for it, had even tried to convince him that it’d been what she’d wanted. But he was still disgusted with himself for taking advantage of her. He probably always would be. He just wanted to put that night behind him.

“And that’s something you’re obviously not comfortable talking about yet. And that’s okay,” Gabriel went on after a pause, flipping the page in his book. “So… there’s some sort of big incident that occurred at the end of your last tour that changed your life. You don’t have to go into specifics, but can you tell me what happened?” Gabriel changed the subject.

But Bellamy was now riled up, his walls having slammed back down. “I nearly went to prison for the rest of my life. I’ve been threatened with another court martial if I ever talk about what happened. So… no, I can’t tell you.” His words were clipped, tone flippant.

Gabriel raised his palms. “You could literally tell me that you once shot my nephew in a fit of rage and as long as you tell me you don’t intend to hurt anyone else I’m obligated by my profession to not say anything to the authorities. But I understand that you haven’t established the level of trust with me that you need in order to rely on my word yet. So why don’t we start on something a little less volatile.” He flipped his page back, scanning through his notes for a moment. “You mentioned earlier that the nightmares started before this big incident. Do you have any idea what might have caused those?”

Bellamy forced his breathing to calm. That was something he could do. The man had obviously heard the whole story from Raven before. He wasn’t sharing anything new or overly personal. He began listing the events of that fateful day almost mechanically, starting at when the team had arrived in Munirah and going through everything from his own perspective. “We knew almost as soon as we’d arrived that something was off. There were way more people milling around the streets than there should have been - innocent people looking for our help. It was incredibly
obvious that info about our op had been leaked. A few of us wanted to go in, try to clear the area. If civilians knew where we were, then the enemy did too and it wasn’t safe. But we were ordered to stand down, let things play out. They wouldn’t even let us extract Reyes.”

Bellamy exhaled through his teeth, running a hand shakily through his hair. “We watched the whole thing unfold through our scopes from a nearby hillside. They’d loaded a truck with explosives and packed the whole thing with shrapnel. They’d probably been waiting for us to show up, but when we didn’t they got impatient – detonated the bomb anyway. The street was crowded, and the damage was indiscriminate. There were women and children torn to shreds… and for what? We had time to go down there, warn them, try to make a difference. And really none of those people should have even been there in the first place. They’d travelled in from tiny villages because they knew that a medic would be in town. They died because of us.”

Bellamy paused, trying to put strength back into his voice. “That was the day that I became completely disillusioned with the military. The nightmares started pretty soon after that. And even now, that same sandblasted pickup truck comes back to me in my dreams, killing innocents and the people I care about alike. I’m never close enough to save them.”

Gabriel nodded sagely. “So you blame yourself for those civilians’ deaths, as well as for Ms. Reyes’ injury?”

Bellamy didn’t bother answering – he thought that was pretty damn obvious.

Gabriel pushed his glasses up slightly as he looked through the notes he’d just written down. “In your own words, you just told me that the terrorists had been waiting for the presence of your team to set off the explosion.”

Bellamy shook his head. He’d heard this argument before.

“The bomb would have been set off anyways. The only difference is that you and the rest of your team likely would have been severely injured as well. How would that have helped the situation?”

“It would have helped because we wouldn’t have just been standing by watching innocent people get hurt!” He bit off angrily.

“So it would have helped your conscience, but it wouldn’t have actually helped the situation.”

Gabriel leaned back in his chair. “Tell me Bellamy, do you have any family?” He seemed to change the subject.

“I have a younger sister. She means everything to me.”

Gabriel gave him a hard look. “And how do you think she would have felt if you’d died in that explosion?”

It was something that he hadn’t allowed himself to think about. It didn’t matter because it was his job. Octavia had always known that there was a chance that he wouldn’t come home. And besides, it hadn’t happened.

“You’re allowed to feel guilt - you’re human. And to be honest I would be more worried about your psychological state if you didn’t. But I’m going to challenge you to think about this when it feels like it’s consuming you: the choices you made that day led to you being here. You’re able to still be here for your sister because you’re alive. And no – that’s not a fair trade for the people that died, but that’s all the more reason that you need to take the opportunity you’ve been given and use it to its fullest.” Gabriel’s voice was gentle, but firm. Bellamy allowed his words to sink in for a
moment, able to focus on little else.

“Now as for the drinking,” the therapist shifted in his chair, crossing one leg over his knee. “It doesn’t seem to me that you have an addictive personality, so I’m not particularly worried in that regard - at least not yet. But the next time that you’re tempted to have a drink, I want you to stop for a moment and ask yourself why. If it’s a social gathering and you’re sitting down to have a beer with friends, then by all means have at it. But if you’re craving alcohol as a distraction, or to numb yourself, at least try to use a healthier means first. Go for a walk, pull out a book, call a friend – none of those things will put you at risk of making an inebriated decision that you’ll regret later on.”

Bellamy had to admit that that made sense. He drummed his fingers against his armrest for a moment before nodding.

Gabriel subtly glanced at the clock on the wall before sitting up a little straighter. “Therapy isn’t a quick fix. It’s something that you’re going to have to work at, and there are definitely going to be hard days. But if this is important to you, you will eventually make progress and things will get better.” He shifted his notepad back to his desk. “I think that that’s enough for today. You have a couple of things to work on, and we can talk about how it went when you come back in.” Gabriel looked at him over the frames of his glasses. “That is assuming that you’re willing to come back.”

Bellamy hesitated for a moment. As much as some of the questions had irked him, it really hadn’t been that terrible, and Gabriel had made some valid points. “I’ll make another appointment.” He allowed gruffly.

Gabriel’s smile was warm as he stood to give Bellamy’s hand a firm shake. “I’ll be seeing you then.”

He stopped at the reception desk on the way out and made a follow-up appointment for the next week.

After that, he hit the pavement, pulling his collar up to ward off the late winter chill. He was meeting Lincoln and Raven for coffee a few blocks away. He could have driven, but the crisp night air felt refreshing against his skin.

Lincoln was already there when he arrived – Bellamy could see his bald head situated in a booth near the corner. That was probably a good thing – he had some things that he wanted to clear the air about with his best friend while they still had privacy. But the thought of that also made him nervous. He went up to the till and placed his order. He was briefly tempted by the bottles of booze organized neatly behind the bar, but with Gabriel’s words fresh in mind, he settled on black coffee instead.

Lincoln briefly glanced up as he sat down. “Hey,” he greeted, his voice impassive.

Bellamy sunk into his chair. “Hey,” he returned uneasily. He played with the edge of the sleeve on his cup for a moment before taking a deep breath. “I didn’t want you to hear this from anyone else but – Clarke and I are together,” he let out in a rush.

Lincoln paused for a moment, studying him intently, before his eyes darted back to his drink. “I’m not going to lie… from a professional standpoint that makes me uncomfortable.” He rolled his shoulders as Bellamy felt some of the wind leave his sails. Lincoln didn’t pause for long before he spoke again, “But as your friend – I’m happy for you. She’s helped you in ways that I didn’t think anyone could. And I may not have known Clarke before, but the last few weeks have been the lightest I’ve ever seen her.”
Bellamy felt his eyebrows rise. He hadn’t expected that.

Lincoln quirked the side of his lips up in a small smile. “I’ve been suspecting that something was going on between the two of you for a while, but I do appreciate you being honest with me.” He sobered slightly. “All of that said though, I still think that both of you really need to be careful. You’re both in an emotionally fragile state and it wouldn’t take much to make things go south.”

Both men jumped as Raven dropped her messenger bag on the table and pulled out the chair beside them with a loud screech. “Glad you didn’t start the party without me,” she joked, flopping down into her seat gracelessly.

Lincoln’s face lit up as he took in the brunette sitting beside him. “Reyes, it’s been way too long,” He pulled her into a tight embrace that she returned eagerly. Lincoln pulled back slightly. “I’m so sorry we-“

Raven put her hand on his chest, cutting him off. “Save it. It wasn’t any of your fault – not even Roan’s. You were all following orders and things could have been so much worse. You can let the guilt go. Besides… you saved my life.”

Lincoln didn’t look particularly happy with that answer, but he let her move on anyway.

Raven swiveled in her seat. “So, you and Griffin then?” she asked Bellamy, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

Bellamy grimaced. “It’s all really new and we don’t want to put any pressure on things-“

“So butt out. Copy that,” Raven perceived the situation easily, but there wasn’t any venom behind her words. She took a long sip of her coffee, then placed it back on the table thoughtfully. “The three of us have a lot of catching up to do. Where should we start?”

She glanced at the other two men for a moment, before deciding for herself. “I figured Bellamy would be done once his contract was up, but I didn’t peg you for the same, Lincoln. What happened there?” Raven asked curiously.

Link smirked sheepishly. “I’m marrying his sister,” he nodded his head in Bellamy’s direction.

Raven’s face lit up like a kid’s at Christmas. “That sounds like a good story – spill.”

And so the three of them took turns relating what had changed in their lives over the couple of years that they hadn’t seen the NSA agent. Lincoln talked about how he was on his last few shadow shifts and that Kane already had a job lined up for him in a firehouse run by an old friend. Raven told them about her boyfriend – a man in the Air Force that was so much different than anyone she’d ever dated before, but he made her happy, and that was what mattered.

Bellamy was the most closed off out of the group, but when Raven asked him how many times he’d been tempted to punch Gabriel in the face during his first therapy session, he couldn’t help but laugh.

Time went by quickly, and before they knew it, they were saying their goodbyes and promising to get together again soon.

Bellamy left the café with an extra spring in his step. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d hung out with friends of his for no reason other than to catch up. Between that and the relative success of his first therapy session, it had given him quite the boost in his mood.
He pulled up in front of the house and was surprised to find that Clarke had waited up for him. She was sitting on the swing, the porch light illuminating her in a soft glow as she worked on a sketchbook nestled amongst the blankets in her lap.

When she heard the heavy tread of his boots on the front steps, she looked up at him and smiled.

That certainly helped his mood too.

He gently lifted her legs, then slid in underneath them so that she was sitting half in his lap. With a contented sigh, he leaned back, taking a moment to just enjoy being surrounded by her warmth.

“How was therapy?” she asked him gently.

He was always honest with her. “It certainly wasn’t my favorite hour of my life, but I think it went well. And I think it has the potential to help.”

“Good,” Clarke leaned her head against his arm where it rested along the top of the wooden seat.

“I’m also glad I got a chance to hang out with Reyes and Link. It was good to take some personal time to reconnect.”

Clarke’s smile broadened. “I had a bit of a productive day myself,” she told him shyly.

He raised an eyebrow as she fished between the cushions and handed him some kind of letter.

“What’s this?” he asked her, flipping it over in his hands.

“Do you remember Maya? Jasper’s girlfriend?”

Bellamy nodded, opening the page and beginning to scan it.

“She does a lot of the youth programming at the YMCA, and she’s agreed to have me come in and help with an art class in a couple of weeks.” When he looked up, she was biting her lip in anticipation of his reaction.

Unable to contain his smile, he threaded a hand into the back of her hair and pulled her in towards his lips.

The kiss started out slow, but quickly deepened as she opened her mouth to him with a soft moan. He nibbled at her lower lip, shifting his head until their noses lightly bumped together. She laughed into his mouth and Bellamy’s heart lifted at the sound.

He pulled back, gently guiding her head to lay on his shoulder. “Maybe I’m setting my hopes up a little too high, but things have been going well. This kind of feels like a new beginning.”

She looked thoughtful for a moment, then something glimmered in Clarke’s eye as she turned her head to look up at him. “Do you think that maybe you could borrow Lincoln’s truck tonight?”

Bellamy raised an eyebrow. It was already pretty late. “I’m not sure if he has a shift tomorrow, but I could always just trade him for my car. Why?... What do you have in mind?”

Clarke worried her teeth across her lower lip adorably for a minute before releasing it as she sat up. “It’s a surprise,” she grinned brightly. “Wear comfy clothes.”

He couldn’t do much more than shake his head at her as she disappeared into the house.

An hour later, they were at Lincoln and O’s apartment, swapping vehicles. Clarke transferred a box
she’d brought with her into the truck bed and deposited the duffel bag she’d had on her shoulder. Octavia walked up behind her carrying a smaller box of her own. “I’m still not sure why you want this ratty old thing when I’m sure you could find something much comfier at Griffin Manor, but good luck,” Bellamy heard Octavia mutter.

That didn’t seem to dampen Clarke’s mood. She pulled her friend into a tight embrace then backed off toward the passenger door. “You almost ready to go?” she shot over her shoulder in his general direction. Then her blonde head was disappearing into the cab of the truck.

At a low chuckle, Bellamy looked over to see Lincoln’s eyes twinkling in amusement. Bellamy shrugged. Apparently Link knew more about what was going on than he did.

Octavia bumped him with her shoulder as she passed. “Just… don’t get hypothermia.” She cringed almost as soon as the words left her mouth. “But save the stories about sharing body heat for someone who isn’t your baby sister.”

Lincoln let out a real laugh at that, then tucked his fiancé under his arm as they walked back up to their building.

Bellamy blinked. He still had absolutely no idea what was going on.

Clarke beeped the horn impatiently. With a sigh, he jogged over to the driver’s side and got them on their way. Clarke gave him directions, taking them towards the coast then south. She eventually had him turn onto a small dirt road, then continue until they’d crossed onto the sand of the beach. Bellamy felt a brief moment of panic that the truck would get stuck due to the soft surface, but it didn’t seem to be a problem.

“Can you turn the truck around so that the bed faces the ocean?” she asked him with a soft smile.

Bellamy looked down the beach both ways nervously. “I don’t really think that this is exactly legal.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Didn’t you ever take any girls out here when you were in high school?” she teased him lightly.

That would be a hard no. He’d been way too busy being a sullen teenager to worry about romantic getaways.

Surprisingly, Clarke’s expression seemed to brighten at the revelation. She quickly schooled her features in order to reassure him. “It’s really early in the season, it’s long past dark, and we’re far enough down from the houses and resorts that no one will notice. We’ll be fine.”

He parked the car like she’d asked, and they both hopped out. She immediately pulled out a flashlight and went to the back of the vehicle, unfolding the old air mattress that Octavia had given her. He felt his eyebrows shoot up past his hairline.

Clarke took the flashlight out from between her teeth and looked back at him, "Do you mind blowing this up? There should be a pump in the bottom of the box.”

He looked back at her uncertainly, but did what she asked. The mattress fit almost perfectly in the truck’s bed and Clarke let out a small sigh of relief. She then set about layering a couple of sleeping bags and resting some pillows up near the cab. When she was finished making a respectable enough bed, she extended an arm out to him, inviting him to join her.

He hesitated, his feet refusing to move. “Clarke, you know I don’t want to rush this-“
She cut him off with a roll of her eyes. “Not everything is about sex Bellamy,” she told him with a hint of a bitter laugh.

Still somewhat reluctant, he took her hand and stepped up into the truck, crawling back to sit beside her, both of them leaning against the rear window. They peeled off their shoes, and she covered both of their laps in the heavy thermal material, then pulled out a thermos that he hadn’t noticed she’d wedged into a corner. “Hot chocolate?”

He nodded and she poured him a small glass. He held it up to his face, feeling the steam warm his cheeks and the rich chocolaty aroma wash over him. He took a sip and couldn’t help his pleased groan. Clarke smiled over her own cup, tilting her head back to look at the sky.

He followed suit, then felt his heart lift a little bit as he took in the clear skies above. “You brought me out here to look at the stars?”

Clarke inclined her head. “Not exactly. That part was more of a happy accident.”

Bellamy settled a little further back, contemplating what he was seeing. The lack of light pollution made the glow of the millions of tiny points so much brighter and their patterns all the more clear. “Do you know your constellations?” He asked her quietly.

Clarke cringed. “Not really. I can’t say I ever paid much attention.”

Bellamy pulled her in a little closer, tucking her head in beneath his chin. “I never used to either. But over in Iraq it was one of the few things that could make me feel connected to home. We were close to the same latitude, so we could see the same things.”

Clarke scanned the sky thoughtfully as if she were trying to see the glittering blanket above them in a new way. She turned her head to look behind them and the corners of her lips twitched up. “That one’s Orion right?” she asked, pointing to a line of 3 intensely bright stars close to the horizon.

Bellamy nodded. That was one he knew all too well. “Do you want to hear the story behind the name?”

“If I say no are you going to tell me anyway?” she teased.

He pinched her side making her yelp. “You can be a real brat sometimes you know that?” he chuckled, the sound reverberating through his chest.

Clarke grinned up at him. She leaned up to press a quick kiss to the corner of his mouth, then snuggled down to rest her chin on his shoulder with a slight twinkle in her eye. “I’m listening.”

Bellamy thought about it for a minute. “There are a few different versions of the story, but one of them always stuck with me.” He scooted forward a little bit to get more comfortable and to have a better view of the sky. Clarke adjusted as well, nestling into his side. “Orion was a great hunter – one of the greatest to have ever lived. Because of that he caught the attention of Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. The two of them became hunting partners and even started to fall for each other. But that was a problem, because Artemis was also the goddess of chastity and had sworn to Zeus that she would always keep her virtue.

“Her brother Apollo saw that she was falling in love and was becoming tempted to forswear her vow… and he wouldn’t let that happen. One day while Orion was swimming in the ocean, Apollo dared his sister to show off her skills with a bow, betting that she couldn’t hit a small black dot far off at sea. Artemis had never been one to back down from a challenge and hit it on her first try. When Orion’s body washed up upon the shore, Artemis was overcome with anger and grief. She
begged Zeus to put his body up among the stars so that he would forever be remembered.”

Bellamy chewed his lip for a moment. “I’ve had to remind myself of that story a few times with Octavia. I want to protect her, but it can’t be at the expense of her happiness.” He let out a low chuckle. “I almost blew a gasket when she started dating Link, but I eventually came around. He’s good for her – makes her happy.”

Clarke squeezed his knee under the sleeping bag. “You’re a really great brother.”

Bellamy wasn’t so sure about that most of the time. “I try.”

She smiled softly, pushing herself even closer to him if possible. “You are.” She finished her hot chocolate and reached up to put the empty cup on the top of the cab. “Got any other stories?”

Bellamy frowned for a second, scanning the sky and running through the mythology in his head. When he found something he could talk about he kissed her temple. “See that kind of drawn out ‘w’ laying on its side?” He pointed. Clarke squinted for a moment, before nodding. He launched into the story of Cassiopeia, which eventually morphed into the story of Andromeda, and a retelling of Perseus’ exploits. Clarke had started out by making appreciative noises whenever his account warranted it, but had eventually become more and more quiet as the tale went on.

When he finished the story, he looked down to find that her eyes were closed, one hand fisted tightly into the front of his shirt, her breathing slow and even. He couldn’t help but smile at her beauty, musing to himself that he would slay a sea monster to win her love any day. Unfortunately, Clarke’s demons weren’t quite that corporeal.

He threaded a hand into the hair at the back of her head and massaged her scalp lightly, craning down slightly to place a kiss on her hairline. She mumbled something incoherent, her arms tightening slightly against his torso. He hummed soothingly to her until she appeared to be resettled, her breath coming out in a soft sigh.

He began to make slow but steady progress at gently scooting their bodies further down the mattress, until they were fully horizontal. Octavia had been right, the air mattress was old, and he was fairly sure that it was leaking, but despite all of that, it was still one of the most relaxed states he’d ever been in.

Clarke was warm against his side, her body radiating heat to the point that he couldn’t feel even the slightest chill from the cool night air. He listened to her breathe, electing to continue to watch the night sky, wanting the moment to last forever.

He felt like he had just barely allowed his eyes to flutter closed, when Clarke started shaking him awake.

He groaned something inarticulate, and struggled to pull the covers higher, hoping that she would take the hint and let him be for a little while longer.

But there was something about the excitement in Clarke’s voice as she told him to wake up that was able to pry his heavy eyelids open. His eyes immediately searched for her, as was now an automatic habit. He found her already sitting up, a little further down the mattress, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders with her knees tucked in to her chest, as she stared out across the water.

He crawled over to her side, and she handed him a corner of her sleeping bag without comment as he settled down onto his butt beside her. Then he looked up, curious about what she seemed to be
so enraptured by.

He gasped.

The sun was just beginning to peek up over the horizon, sending out a streak of fire in both directions. As he watched, dark violets, followed by pinks and golds started to leach their way upward, swirling together like someone was sweeping watercolors across the sky. The light reflected off of the water, sparkling brightly and adding even more depth to the image in front of him, until he felt like he might go into sensory overload.

Clarke wrapped an arm around his waist, leaning her head onto his shoulder. “*This* is why I wanted to come out here.”

For maybe the first time, Bellamy was left speechless, his brain too taken over by the beauty before him to bother with something like forming words.

“I just wanted a physical memory to associate with the feeling – something to help me remember if I need it. Since this is supposed to be a new beginning, a sunrise seemed appropriate.” Clarke sounded just the slightest bit nervous as she explained herself.

He pulled her away slightly so that he could meet her eyes – and his jaw dropped. Sure her hair was tousled and she looked like she could have done with more sleep – but she had never looked more stunning in all of the time he’d known her. Her skin positively glowed in the pale morning light, and her eyes twinkled as the sun reflected off of them as it continued its path into the sky.

He felt slightly choked up all of the sudden, but he forced his voice to work, knowing he had something he needed to say. “Have I told you that I loved you yet today?” he asked her softly.

He leaned forward, threading a hand into her hair and pulling her into a deep kiss, their breath mingling as their lips molded together in a slow, sensual dance. After a moment he reluctantly pulled away. “Because I love you.”

Her answering smile was brighter than the sun.

Chapter End Notes

Wow it feels like forever since my last post. December is crazy y'all.

It also feels insane to me that this story is nearing its end (yes I know there are still lots of chapters left, but I only have 5 or 6 left to start). That said, things feel a little rushed for me when I look at the story outline I've made. I feel like I still need to build their happiness a little bit more, before the big climax of the story hits around chapter 31-33. It feels like one more chapter would really help smooth things out but I literally have zero ideas. Fluff is about a million miles away from my comfort zone guys.

If you have any ideas (nice, happy things you want to see Clarke and Bellamy do together. No big life changing events), hit me up in the comments. I may not respond (if doing so would give you a spoiler), or even use them, but it would really help 😊

Next chapter is Clarke's POV of the art class she helps with, and her being relatively happy (super strange to write).
Thanks again for all of the support that I've received from all of you on each chapter. Let me know what you think of this one by leaving your comments and/or kudos!
When Clarke stepped into the community center, she had to pause to start her breathing exercises just to keep herself from bolting. Her skin was crawling, and her vision was darkened around the edges, but she forced herself to calm down, telling herself she was being ridiculous. All she’d done was walk into the local YMCA – something the old Clarke would have been able to do without batting an eyelash. It really wasn’t a big deal.

Bellamy had offered to give her a ride on his way to the fire academy. Even though it had warmed her heart, she’d refused, wanting to assure herself that she could get there on her own. And she had.

But now reality was setting in. She was about to walk into a totally new situation without any backup. Sure, Bellamy and Octavia were both only a phone call away, and she was able to take comfort in that – but she had something to prove.

She could do this.

A sign hanging from the ceiling pointed her towards Alpha Station – a section of the community center specially created for teens as a safe place to hang out. From what Clarke understood, they brought in different experts to run after school programming. There was an art therapy class every Wednesday.

Clarke paused in the doorway to the large room and just surveyed the scene. Teens of different ages were sprawled out throughout the space – some on couches, others gathered around tables. An older woman was standing at the front, setting up an easel and sorting through supplies. Nobody was paying much attention to what she was doing.

“Clarke!” she startled slightly at the sound of her name and turned to find Maya hurrying towards her. The young woman pulled up short just before reaching her and Clarke was grateful when she didn’t lean in for a hug. She was on edge enough as it was.

Maya’s smile was bright as she led her guest into the room. “I’m so glad that you could make it. Jasper has had nothing but great things to say about your art, and these kids could always use more positive influences in their lives.”

Clarke felt a blush heating her cheeks. She ducked the compliment as best as she could and followed Maya on a tour of the facility, politely asking questions whenever she needed.

Soon after they’d finished, the art session started without much fanfare, and Clarke was quick to help out where she could. She wasn’t sure what she’d been expecting – she wasn’t a certified art therapist, so she knew she wouldn’t be leading the class – but part of her had thought she’d be doing more than washing brushes and making sure nobody ran out of the color they needed.

The session was much different from the one’s she’d experienced at Mount Weather. It was obvious that some of the kids would much rather be somewhere else. Most of them paid little attention to what the instructor was saying. A few used the paints to doodle on their arms, while others didn’t even try, just sitting around and chatting with each other, the supplies in front of them completely untouched.
As Clarke stood over the sink, trying to tame the bristles of one particularly mangled brush, her eyes caught on one child in particular, sitting alone in a corner of the room, staring at her blank canvas sullenly.

She looked younger than the rest, and yet something about the deep sadness in her expression gave her the appearance of an old soul.

Maya sidled up beside Clarke, carrying yet another container of murky water. Clarke subtly moved over, creating space between them, before nodding her head in the girl’s direction. “What’s her story?” she asked, making sure to keep her voice low.

Maya’s smile turned sad when she saw who Clarke was indicating. ”That’s Madi.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed, a little surprised that that was the only answer she was given from the usually very talkative woman beside her. She decided to keep prodding. “She looks a little young to be here…”

Maya bit her lip. “She just turned 12 about a month ago, but she’s too mature for us to keep her with the younger kids. She spends most of her evenings here since her foster parents don’t know what to do with her.”

Clarke must have looked horrified, because Maya was quick to explain. “That didn’t come out right… her foster parents are good people, but they have a lot on their plate – too many kids to give Madi the attention she needs. Madi’s biological family died in a horrific car accident almost a year ago. She was the only survivor.”

Clarke felt her heart break a little bit for the poor girl. She probably could have used this session more than anyone else in the room, and yet she was just sitting there, head resting on her forearms where they folded on the table in front of her.

Clarke dried her hands on the apron she was wearing and glanced over at Maya. “Do you think you could handle supply duty on your own for a bit?”

The woman gave her an odd look, but nodded. Clarke immediately started off across the room before she could change her mind.

She made it to the empty chair beside the young girl and paused with her hand on the plastic back. “Do you mind if I sit here?” she asked gently. She didn’t receive any form of response, so she took it as a yes and sank down into the uncomfortable seat. “My name’s Clarke,” she added quietly. Still no acknowledgement.

Clarke reached for the plastic plate being used as a palette and slid it closer. “You know sometimes it helps me, when I’m feeling overwhelmed, to just pick a color – red if I’m angry, grey when I’m feeling lost, black when it feels like there’s… umm. Anyway, I just take it and start splashing it onto the canvas. It doesn’t need to form any sort of picture. It just makes me feel like I can get a bit of the emotion out of my head… purge it in a way.”

“I don’t see the point of having a visual representation of my grief. It’s just another reminder that I don’t need.” Madi’s voice was flat.

Clarke blinked for a moment. The kid was a lot more eloquent than she’d expected from a 12 year old. But she had a point.

She chewed it over for a minute, trying to come up with a different approach. She tried to think of what kind of strategy she used when she was just trying to forget, but she could only come up with
one answer – Bellamy.

She dug a little deeper, reminding herself that she was trying to create good memories with him so that she had something more concrete to hold onto. That gave her an idea.

“You don’t want a ‘visual representation of your grief’, but what about one of the good memories?” she reasoned.

Madi finally looked up, her blue eyes still cautious, but it was progress.

Clarke fiddled with a paintbrush. “What’s the happiest memory you have with your family?”

The girl just stared for a moment, but then began to sit up straighter. “The year before they died we went to Florida for Christmas.”

Clarke smiled slightly, picturing a younger, happier Madi dragging her parents around Disneyworld, trying to fool the ride attendants whenever they declared her to be too short. “What was your favorite part?”

“The beach.”

That wasn’t what she had been expecting. She raised an eyebrow. Assuming that Madi was from Virginia Beach originally, she should have had more than her fill of the ocean at home.

Madi inclined her head, allowing herself a small smirk at Clarke’s confused expression. “It was too cold for the locals to be out, and most of the tourists had better things to do. We had the whole shoreline to ourselves.”

Clarke nodded. She could work with that. She pulled the plate even closer and started swirling some white into the blue paint.

Madi frowned, folding her arms across her chest. “I don’t know why you’re bothering. As nice as the thought is, I’m garbage at all things art related.”

Clarke just shrugged, continuing to mix the paint. “So we’ll work together.”

Madi leaned over her shoulder, examining her work. “That isn’t right. It’s too blue. The water was more turquoise, with hints of aquamarine.”

Clarke bit back a smile and continued to lighten the color, adding a bit of green. “Better?” she questioned when she got closer to the color she’d seen on her own trips south.

Madi pursed her lips but nodded, indicating where on the canvas she wanted the ocean to start. Clarke set to work. She started with the waves, swirling varying depths of color together until they faded into white foam as they lapped at the sand. Madi started off by directing how she wanted the picture to look, commenting on nearly every brush stroke - but as time wore on, she became distracted, chattering on about other things.

Clarke learned a lot. She gleaned that Madi’s parents had been a really great couple, determined to give their children every opportunity in life, and encouraging them to be uninhibited by their fears. She found out that Madi had had a younger brother, and that though they’d teased each other mercilessly, she grieved for him as if he were her best friend. And above all, she learned just how lonely Madi felt, living in a foster home amongst strangers who she couldn’t bring herself to open up to.
As Madi spoke, Clarke pulled the canvas a little closer, not necessarily hiding what she was doing, but wanting her finished product to be a surprise nonetheless. Madi eventually started fidgeting in her chair, eyes darting around the room as she grew restless. Clarke completed her last few finishing touches, before sliding the painting in front of the younger girl and tapping her lightly on her shoulder to get her attention.

Biting her lip, Clarke waited nervously for her charge’s reaction. She needn’t have worried. After freezing almost comically for a moment, Madi snatched the artwork closer so she could examine it more closely, her eyes growing wide before brimming with tears.

Wanting to make something more personal than a generic tropical beach, Clarke had allowed her creativity to flow. Amongst the waves, Clarke had added three dark blue silhouettes, appearing to frolic just below the surface, two larger and one small – dolphins.

Clarke had always enjoyed the idea of the sleek sea mammal. Beyond their stunning intellect and their affectionate nature, there was something about the way that they soared through the water that just seemed so… free. She didn’t necessarily believe in reincarnation, but whenever her friends had jokingly brought it up, she’d always secretly hoped that if she came back, that would be the form she would take.

And in this context, she hoped that the souls of Madi’s loved ones had found the peace and freedom that she’d depicted.

Madi stared at the painting for a moment longer, before dropping it to the table with a light clatter and throwing her arms around Clarke’s neck.

The unexpected contact made her heart race for a moment, but she took a deep breath and slowly coaxed her arms to tentatively come up and pat the girl’s back.

When Madi pulled away, a few tears had escaped onto her round cheeks. “Can I keep it?” she asked cautiously, as if she thought the answer would be ‘no’.

Clarke was surprised by that. “Of course,” she replied with a grin.

The girl thanked her profusely, clutching the artwork protectively to her chest and speaking at 100 miles a minute. Clarke eventually had to excuse herself, feeling bad about neglecting the duties she’d actually signed up for.

She strolled back to the sink where Maya was scrubbing paintbrushes with a broad smile on her face as she watched Clarke with a benevolent twinkle in her eye.

Clarke grabbed a dirty paint water glass and a washcloth and started scouring away the caked on acrylics. She gave Maya a sideways glance, noting the other woman was still staring at her happily. “What?”

Maya managed to somewhat school her features as she tried to at least appear to concentrate back on her work. “Nothing. I’ve just never seen Madi connect with someone like that before.”

Clarke felt her cheeks heat up. She ducked her head forward, pretending to focus on a really stubborn stain as she allowed her hair to fall forward to hide her face. But inside, she felt warmth spreading beneath her rib cage.

The rest of the session went by in a blur. She talked to Maya in fits and starts and assured her that she’d be back again the next week. Then she left the YMCA like she was on a mission.
Her time with Madi had left her feeling inspired.

She stopped at an art supply store, stocking up on more acrylics, and a couple of bigger brushes, then caught the bus home.

She had the house to herself – she still wasn’t expecting Bellamy for a few more hours – so she used the quiet time to get to work.

She walked to the back of the house and entered ‘her’ room. In reality, she’d all but moved into Bellamy’s room, but he’d insisted that she kept a separate space so that she had somewhere to retreat to if she needed it. All of her stuff was still there – her easel and canvases rested near one wall, and her clothes still filled the closet.

She surveyed the small room. There was only one wall that was completely uninterrupted by windows or a doorframe – the same wall that her bed was pushed against. She set about moving it to the center of the room… not an easy task when it probably weighed more than she did, then examined the wall one more time, trying to map the dimensions in her mind.

She picked up her palette and started squirting various colors onto it before resting it easily on her forearm. Selecting a wide brush, she started with the outer edges of the wall, painting them a deep navy. From there she continued in a sort of ombre, moving through royal blue, and violet and just a hint of an intense burgundy as she made her way towards the center. With a solid background set in place, she moved on to adding highlights – cresting waves on the lower half of the wall, and billowing clouds up above.

Finally she moved on to the wall’s focal point - the glowing sun at its center. Her hand moved in precise brushstrokes as if compelled, sending streaks of fire darting across the horizon. She stuck to warm pinks, corals, and oranges, adding little flecks throughout the wall, wherever her mind’s eye told her the colors would reflect. The mural was almost there… it was just missing one more color.

She stared hard at her palette, trying her best to replicate the perfect shade of gold. The same gold that had flecked Bellamy’s eyes as he’d stared out across the landscape – awe softening his features. She couldn’t say why, but no matter what she did, the color wasn’t quite right. It just didn’t have the same life it’d had as it danced across his irises. With a sigh, she decided that the shade she’d made would have to do.

She added the color wherever the waves were kissed by sunlight, taking a step back every so often so that she wouldn’t miss a single beam. She was so zoned in on what she was doing that she didn’t notice the sound of the front door closing, or her name being called. She only snapped out of it after hearing the soft thud of Bellamy’s bag hitting the floor behind her.

After jumping slightly, she looked over her shoulder to find him staring wide-eyed at her work. He swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing, and Clarke suddenly felt apprehension claw into her good mood. She glanced back at the wall and then at him again, finally realizing that she probably should have asked him first, before just vandalizing his property - it was his house after all.

She dropped her paintbrush onto her palette and deposited it on the bed, before wiping her hands on the front of her jeans nervously. “Uh, I’m sorry… I just got inspired and I wasn’t thinking,” she stammered, eyes darting to the hardwood at her feet that she now noticed was speckled with tiny dots of paint.

Bellamy didn’t seem to hear her. He took a step closer, one hand reaching up as if to touch it, but stopping short. He was quiet for a moment, before he turned his head to look at her, his eyes glowing but his expression unreadable.
“Clarke this is stunning…” his voice was barely above a whisper. He flicked his eyes quickly back to her work, as if he couldn’t bear to look away from it for too long, wanting to absorb every detail.

Clarke’s chin lifted as she inclined her head. “You mean you’re not mad?” She allowed the tiniest spark of the happiness she’d been feeling bubble back up.

His lips twisted as he finally dropped his arm back to his side. “Why would I be mad? I told you, this is your space. You can do whatever you want with it.” He stepped towards her, sliding his hands tenderly across the small of her back. “And if that includes covering the walls in beautiful art, I’m more than okay with it.”

She felt herself melt, leaning back in his embrace. “As wonderful as that morning was, I just thought I could use a physical reminder… in case the memory starts to fade,” she explained to him, her hands skating up his chest to rest on his broad shoulders.

He leaned forward and kissed the side of her temple, before turning to look back at the sunrise once again. “Am I allowed to come in here and just stare at it too?”

She gave a light, tinkling laugh. “Of course.”

She rose up onto her toes, pressing her lips against his. Warmth spread from their point of contact, heating her cheeks and pulsing down her neck until her veins felt like they’d been set alight. She pressed closer to him, hoping to soothe the sensation, but it only made it worse, electricity searing just beneath her skin.

One of her hands slipped absently under the edge of his henly, thumb brushing along the sharp line of his hip. A soft moan escaped her mouth as she felt the press of his hardening length against her abdomen, and her other hand closed over it instinctively.

Bellamy shuddered, leaning his head just far enough back that she could no longer reach it, but not pulling away. “Clarke…” he exhaled, his voice strained. “We said we were taking it slow.”

She couldn’t help but roll her eyes. “And we have been.” She kissed his jaw instead. “We’ve been together for almost 2 months.” His arms tightened at the reminder, and she bumped her nose against his playfully. “This feels right.”

Apparently that was all it took to convince him.

He groaned, shrugging his jacket off, before tangling his hands in the hem of her shirt. It was gone after only a quick tug, leaving a rush of cool air its wake. Clarke felt goose bumps course over the skin of her chest. He pulled her in tight against him once more, the fabric of his own shirt soft against her bare skin. She grinned against his mouth. “Well that’s hardly fair,” she teased, grabbing the cotton edge and rucking it up as well. The second he was free, he was back onto her, raining kisses down the column of her throat and over her collarbone. He washed over her senses in an intense wave of sandalwood and citrus and Clarke was lost for a moment in the heady scent.

While she was still in a daze, he’d made quick work of her bra, and backed her up until her shoulders thudded lightly against the freshly painted wall. Clarke had a fleeting thought about how she was grateful that acrylics dried fast, before Bellamy started working over her skin with gentle nips and unrushed kisses. It was like he was worshipping her body as he slowly made his way down to his knees. Clarke didn’t understand it – couldn’t reconcile how he still apparently found her beautiful, even with all of the atrocities mapped out by her skin. But she refused to let herself get caught up in that thought, letting herself get lost in the feeling of his tongue lathing a line just above her waistband instead.
She tangled her hands into his luscious curls, tugging lightly when she felt him start to fumble with the button securing her jeans. Her fingers slipped free as he slowly began to peel the stiff fabric down her legs, placing a light kiss on every inch of skin he revealed. When he made it to her ankle, he gently lifted it, pulling her feet free one at a time.

From there, he switched to her other leg, teasingly kissing his way back up at a torturously slow pace. At the juncture between her hip and thigh, his hair tickled her sensitive skin, and Clarke giggled. She immediately clapped her hand over her mouth, shocked by the unexpected sound. Bellamy looked up then, his eyes glowing with warmth and amusement, and she felt something inside of her twist and flutter.

Bellamy massaged the muscles of her upper thighs contemplatively for a moment, before pressing his lips to the front of her underwear, then pulling back again. “Is this okay?” he asked her, almost shyly. Clarke could feel her blush heating all over her skin as if she’d swallowed the sun. She nodded hurriedly and he smiled.

Hooking his thumbs into the thin lace that was the only thing left covering her, he guided the fabric down, before loosely wrapping his fingers around her ankle again, raising her limb to untangle it from the fabric. This time he didn’t let go, lifting her leg higher until the crook of her knee rested comfortably on his shoulder. He began nibbling teasingly at her inner thigh, until Clarke thought she was going to explode. Finally, just when Clarke thought she might suddenly gain the ability to climb the wall, he put his mouth exactly where she needed.

A half strangled moan escaped her lips, as her head thumped back against the plaster. He moved his tongue in tantalizing ways, and her hands flew back to his hair, tugging lightly every time he hit a spot just right. He was still teasing her, repeatedly taking her to the edge, only to back off slightly. Her leg began to quake at the strain of holding her up. Just when she thought it might give out, he finally let her fall, holding her up within the cradle of his strong arms.

The orgasm was so strong, it took her a couple of minutes to come back to herself. She looked down to find that Bellamy was staring up at her through his fringe of curls with a small smirk on his face. Biting her lip cheekily, she slid her leg free and placed a hand on the back of his neck, guiding him back up to her level. Her hands flew to his belt of their own volition and a low chuckle rumbled through his chest.

As she worked to free his erection, he glided his hands over the gentle swell of her hips, to the small of her back and pulled her closer. He kissed his way across the line of her jaw until he reached her ear, nudging her hair out of the way with his nose. “Bedroom?” he asked her quietly.

She shook her head. “Too far.”

He laughed, but it turned into a choked groan when she gave him a firm stroke. She bit back a cheeky grin.

Bellamy looked around. The bed was too covered in paint supplies, and there wasn’t much other furniture in the room. He hoisted her into his arms easily, making her feel weightless, then carried her to the adjacent wall, kicking his jeans off as he went. He placed her so that she was perched on the ledge of the bay window, and searched her eyes as if trying to ask if his choice was acceptable. She locked her legs around his hips and pulled him closer, searching out his lips. He seemed to relax.

He entered her in one smooth stroke and Clarke moaned into his mouth, her left hand combing through the hair at the back of his neck. He began to rock against her, slowly at first, but then gradually speeding up. One hand crept up over her rib cage until he was palming her breast, teasing
his thumb over her nipple.

The tight space of the window frame didn’t give her very much room to move, but she didn’t mind. She wanted to feel close to him anyways. And she did, as he hit the perfect spot inside of her, over and over again. The rhythm of his thrusts began to falter and she felt the muscles in his back tense up, yearning for his release.

He took his free hand off of the windowsill, and tried to wedge it in between them, but she stopped him, weaving her fingers through his instead and squeezing them tightly. She didn’t care if she came again, she wanted this to be about *his* pleasure.

He pulled away from her mouth and nosed back to her ear. “God, you’re beautiful,” he whispered, before taking her earlobe between his teeth and giving it a gentle tug.

Her climax washed over her without warning. Instinctively, her heels flexed against his upper thighs, pulling him closer. After only two more thrusts, he jerked in her embrace as his release rocked through him as well.

Clarke leaned back against the window, enjoying the feel of the cool glass against her sweaty skin. Bellamy stayed still for a moment, panting softly while he rested his forehead against hers. Eventually, he pulled back, gently running a curl that had fallen into her face between his fingers before placing it behind her ear.

“I love you,” he told her quietly, rubbing his thumb in small circles over her cheek.

Her mouth opened, but no sound came out. Her heart clenched painfully. She wanted to say the words so badly but it was like there was something almost physically stopping her. Above all, she couldn’t lie to him – not about this - and even though she *knew* she felt something towards him, there was still a part of her that kept telling herself that she was incapable of feeling love.

She leaned forward, hoping to cover up her inability with a tender kiss. When she pulled back, Bellamy’s chocolate brown eyes were just as warm, as if he hadn’t expected anything more. She let out a tiny puff of breath.

He gently untangled her legs from around his waist, then bent down, scooping one arm beneath her knees. He picked her up bridal style, and without any further delay, carried her towards the master bedroom. She was grateful. She didn’t think that her legs were capable of holding her weight in their current state.

He laid her gently in his bed, covering her with the soft blankets, before crawling in beside her, his hand finding her hip as if he couldn’t stand the thought of not touching her in some way. “So… do you want to tell me what had you in such a good mood?” he asked her with an easy smile.

Clarke’s lips twitched as she reached a hand out and brushed her fingers through his hair, pulling it back from his forehead. A blotch of orange paint stained a section of skin near his hairline, and she chuckled, wondering how she’d failed to notice it before.

He pulled her in closer until their fronts were nearly flush against each other and Clarke let out a small gasp, briefly distracted. She had to blink in order to remember what he’d asked. She rolled onto her back trying to remain focused on what she wanted to say, and his warm hand came to a rest on her stomach.

“I went to the youth center today, and it was fine…” she paused for a moment. “But there was this girl, and she looked so sad. I just wanted to help her so I sat down and before I knew it, I was
painting and she was talking to me and it just felt right.”

Bellamy’s gaze was intent upon her, focusing on every word. He’d shifted to rest his head on his bicep so he could more comfortably look at her.

“She’d been through so much,” she felt Bellamy’s hand twitch, but she kept going. “And nobody ever connected with her… I’m not sure if anyone even really tried. Maya talked to me afterwards, and she suggested that I sign up for Big Brothers/Big Sisters so that I can spend more one on one time with her. And…”

Clarke pushed her head further into the pillows, eyes tracing patterns on the ceiling. “I was hesitant at first. I’m still scared that I’ll end up screwing this kid up even more. But she has no one. And the way that her face lit up when somebody actually paid attention to her… How could I not?”

Bellamy kissed her cheek lovingly and her gaze finally flickered down to meet his. “I’m so proud of you,” he told her seriously, his tone more emotional than what she was used to hearing from him.

Clarke let out a relieved breath. She was still a little bit weary about what she’d gotten herself into, but having Bellamy’s support eased at least a little bit of her anxiety.

She tried to smother a yawn that snuck up on her, but Bellamy saw it anyway. He shifted her over so that her head was resting on his arm as he laid back. “Sounds like you had a full day,” he murmured softly. Clarke nodded, her nose seeking the warmth of his chest where she nuzzled in.

“But it was a good one,” she muttered, trying to stifle another yawn.

Bellamy brought up his other arm and circled it around her waist, massaging her back soothingly. “I’m glad,” he told her softly, placing a firm kiss to the top of her head.

It didn’t take long for her eyes to flutter shut, feeling safe and content in the warmth of his embrace.