Summary

Diverges from canon at the end of S5. Clarke and Bellamy are struggling to forgive and forget. And then Abby learns something that might force them to do just that. Angst, family fluff, time travel (ish), and a good slice of preordained relationship. Rating will be earned in later chapters.

Notes

Hello and welcome to a slightly bizarre headcanon. We're going to see some of our favourite cheesy tropes, including muddled timelines and awkwardly preordained relationships, and get to see our favourite dysfunctional family find their way back to each other. It might get confusing, because Clarke is pretty damn confused herself, but bear with her. She'll get there.

This diverges from canon at the end of S5. We've got a lonely hurt Clarke, and a lonely hurt Bellamy, and then things start to get interesting...
Clarke doesn't understand why Bellamy has volunteered to babysit Madi, but she's grateful for it all the same. Well, perhaps babysit isn't quite the right word. Madi is, after all, a precocious twelve year old with the wisdom of centuries in her head, but she still needs rather more attention than Clarke can spare right now, as she helps Abby to wade through the mammoth task of collecting and collating the health information of every person in Sanctum.

"When's he getting here?" Madi asks, bouncing on the balls of her feet and making no attempt to conceal her eagerness.

"Soon." Clarke says through gritted teeth as she catches the tray of vials that Madi's excitement has sent wobbling.

"What do you think we'll do? Do you think he'll teach me how to shoot? Or maybe he'll tell me some stories about you and the hundred?"

"Maybe." She says noncommittally, typing out the results of a DNA test and musing that nothing is less likely than that Bellamy will find a sudden enthusiasm for reminiscing about their early days together. He doesn't seem to be enthusiastic about much that has to do with her, these days.

"What do you think -?"

She is mercifully prevented from having to summon up a response by a robust knock at the door.

"Bellamy!" Madi is throwing the door open before she has time to think, let alone time to brush the hair out of her eyes and fix a smile in place. She's not sure why she'd bother to do that, anyway, of course.

"Hey." He says, with a warm smile at Madi and sort of vague raising of his eyebrows at Clarke.

"Hey. So, thanks for volunteering to have Madi for the afternoon." She still can't work out why on Earth he's doing this, what could possibly bring him to spend these hours with the daughter of a woman who abandoned him and left him to die. And she can't entirely work out why she's allowing it, after that whole flame-based-betrayal, but she supposes that trusting this man is a hard habit to break.

"No problem at all. I figured she was probably getting bored of sitting here, and I thought maybe you could use a break."

"Thanks."

"How's it going, anyway?" He gestures at their work in progress. "Got everyone all logged and recorded, or whatever you're doing?"

She chuckles a little at that, at his failure to understand what exactly they are up to. "We've got all the information for Wonkru and Spacekru, we're just entering the last of that now. Then it's on to the Eligius prisoners."

"And then we'll have the most efficient healthcare system in the universe."

"Something like that."
"Well, good luck to you. Come on, kid, let's go shoot some things."

"Shooting some things? Really?"

"Yep. Hunting trip."

"Cool. See you, Clarke." Madi wraps her in a firm hug then runs for the door. Bellamy follows more slowly, an indulgent smile on his face.

"Look after her." She can't resist the temptation to add the request as he reaches the threshold.

"Of course I will." He says, as if he didn't once fail spectacularly to follow that particular instruction. "We'll be back before you know it."

As she closes the door, she just catches him beginning to ask Madi about her morning lessons.

She turns back to her work, and to her mother, expecting the older woman still to be fixated on the screen before her, but finds instead that she is gazing thoughtfully out of the window, to where Bellamy and Madi walk side by side, their faces glowing with similar broad grins, the wind swirling their matching dark hair.

"He could almost be her father." Her mother says wistfully and not a little unhelpfully, Clarke thinks, considering she knows full well how strained their relationship has been since their reunion.

"Yet he's not." She snaps, upset at the all-too-realistic vision her mother's words have conjured, and gets on with typing.

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They speak little after that, both absorbed in their tasks, and Clarke has to admit that she's also sulking just a smidge. She doesn't need her own mother, of all people, reminding her how poorly things stand with the man she used to think she was in danger of falling in love with, centuries ago. She prayed that this new planet might be a fresh start, read hope in the way he had stood by her side to listen to Monty's message, but the moment they awoke their friends he made no secret of his hurry to leave her to herself and return to his new family.

She just misses him. She misses him so much it hurts.

She misses the easy way she used to relax into his company, able to talk about oxymorons as the world ended. She misses the way his mouth would curl up into just a hint of a smile sometimes, that special half grin that has seen her through so much. And she misses above all the man who would stand by her side through anything, who held her hand when she stepped out into the City of Light, who anchored her to life through six years on a dead planet.

She only realises she is daydreaming yet again when Abby's voice calls her back to the present moment.

"That's not possible." Her mother mutters, gazing at the data in front of her.

"What isn't?" She asks, curiosity piqued by the shock in her tone.

"Madi's parents are here. Her biological parents. Both of them."

"What? How? They died in Praimfaiya." At least, she always presumed they had. She knows that the nomon Madi lived with as a young child was not her biological mother, has heard the stories of
her being found just outside the village where she grew up, but the odds that both her parents are amongst the surviving members of Wonkru seem too small to bother calculating.

"No. They didn't. They're right here. Let me look them up."

She rushes over, wondering what can possibly be going on, and peers eagerly over her mother's shoulder while reads out the five life-changing words they can both see on the screen.

"Clarke Griffin. And Bellamy Blake."

"No." She shakes her head, hoping to dislodge this insane notion from her brain. "No, that can't be right."

"It's true, Clarke. It's all right here."

"No, there's definitely something wrong. I mean, look at her age. That's not her age, that's some crazy list of numbers."

"Becca Franco herself invented that age test and it's been right every time."

"Well, it's not right now." She decides firmly, because the alternative is too terrifying to contemplate. "It's fine, mum. We'll just take another sample when she gets back. I'm sure it's all just a mistake."

"Clarke, I'm telling you, this is not a mistake. I don't know how it's possible -"

They both jump at the sound of Bellamy's voice in the door. She's not sure when he knocked, nor how much of the conversation he overheard, but he's standing right there, arm slung around Madi's shoulders in a way that Clarke finds she is suddenly rather uncomfortable with.

"Everything OK?" He asks mildly, his voice lacking that certain softness she can't help feeling he used to employ when asking that question.

"Yeah, all OK." Clarke lies cheerfully.

"Madi, dear, can we get another cheek swab?" Abby stands up and walks over to the girl, and Clarke makes haste to follow.

"Why? What was wrong with the last one?"

"Nothing, honey." Clarke rushes to reassure her. "The test just went wrong, so we need to do another one."

"How can the test go wrong?" Madi has chosen the worst possible time to become curious, Clarke thinks.

"We don't know, but we'll just do it again and it will all be fine."

"What is this?" Bellamy interrupts, voice carefully controlled, and Clarke realises with a cold flush of horror that while she has been distracted by Madi he has set about reading exactly the words she and her mother have just read.

"Nothing."

"It doesn't look like nothing. It looks like -"
"Well, obviously it's wrong. That's why we're checking."

"What? What is it?" Madi pipes up, reading the tension in the room.

"This report." Bellamy tells her slowly, eyes fixed on the page all the while. "It says that... Clarke's your mother."

"Well, obviously." Madi responds with all the naivety of her twelve years and twelve decades. "She is."

"No. It says she's your biological mother."

"But – how?"

"And... it says who your father is, too."

"It does? Who?"

"Me." He murmurs, so quietly Clarke has to strain to hear him, but based on the smile spreading across Madi's face she has no difficulty in understanding him. "It's me."

"I'm telling you, it's clearly a mistake." Clarke interrupts, pushing down the wobbly feeling she gets at the wonder in his voice. "We'll check it. Do it again."

They repeat the test seven times that night before Clarke is willing to admit that it is, in fact, correct.

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Clarke can't help feeling that everyone else seems to be taking the news better than the proud parents themselves. She can't help feeling, also, that probably everyone else does not need to know the news, but it's a small community and there's not much to do in the evenings, so she supposes it shouldn't surprise her.

She was less than shocked when Madi welcomed the undoubtedly true but utterly confusing news of her parentage with, quite literally, open arms. The girl has idolised Bellamy since she was six years old and first started listening to Clarke's stories of his daring mission in Mount Weather or bold rescue of her and a truck full of hydrazine, so it goes without saying that he is absolutely everything she has ever wanted in a father. If her daughter – her daughter, she thinks, with a new emphasis she is still coming to terms with – says one more time that she's so lucky to be Bellamy's child, Clarke swears she will scream.

Her mother, of course, is amongst the large number of people who find the news completely unsurprising. Clarke can't get her head around this, really, because it is literally impossible for the pair of them to have a child born before they met on a planet they did not live on, not to mention beyond laughable that anyone could read anything into the frosty civility that currently exists between them, but she's sick to death of people telling her with a nudge and a wink that they always knew there was something there and her and Bellamy are meant to be.

And that brings her, most perplexingly of all, to Echo, who has just taken a seat next to her. She's not particularly in the mood for a cozy catch up with Bellamy's girlfriend, but it seems she is destined to have one nonetheless.

"We broke up." Echo announces without preamble, without so much as a pretence of greeting. Well, then. It seems she is destined to have a cozy catch up with Bellamy's ex girlfriend.
"I'm sorry?" It ought to be a statement, but this conversation is off to a distinctly odd start and she can't quite keep the question out of her voice.

"Don't bother." She says briskly with a rather frightening chopping motion of her hand against the table. "I'm not the monster Nia wanted me to be. Bellamy taught me that. So when he shows up at the door having a meltdown because he's supposed to have impossibly fathered some child, who turns out to be the commander, with some woman, who turns out, of course, to be you, who he wept over losing for years – well, I can't stand in the way of that, can I?"

"I see." She says, not seeing at all, but not seeing either any better options in the way of suitable responses. Not seeing, either, how it is that Echo has suddenly become quite so loquacious.

She supposes that even ice-cold spies might not be immune to emotion.

"I mean, if I try to stop this, then the commander never exists, I guess. And then we all die in that valley. And I think that removing a commander from existence is probably about as bad as crimes get. There's also the fact that I suppose it'd probably break his heart all over again if he lost this, now, too." She has no idea what that last statement means, so she decides to file it away for later and focus on the whole commander-not-existing thing.

"So you think Madi might disappear as well, then?" She has been worried about this, but she is not well-versed in the nature of impossible parenthood.

"It stands to reason. He said something funny was showing up instead of her age, that it looked like something was wrong with time and maybe that's how she manages to have existed before you met. So I guess if you don't, you know, have a baby now, then Madi blinks out of existence or something. And then we all die back on Earth, so we all blink out of existence." Echo shrugs coldly as she confirms Clarke's worst fears. It is funny, she spares a moment to note, that she is having this particular conversation with a woman whom she used to think might, perhaps, have ruined her every chance at happiness.

"So you broke up with him." She repeats, needing to be extremely sure of this point before she pursues her next line of enquiry.

"Yes. He didn't take it very well." Echo says mildly, as if it's any of Clarke's business how messy the ending is between them. "But then, I suppose he's got a lot on his mind at the moment."

Yes. That does seem likely.

"So you're absolutely broken up. Because you don't want the commander not to exist."

"Yes. I don't want to stand in the way of you two doing... what you were meant to do, or something." Finally, she notes, at this point, Echo seems to be starting to have difficulty in swallowing.

"Right. Well. OK. You're very loyal to your commander, then."

"Yes. It's my religion. And I'm loyal to Bellamy. He's still my family, not matter what and – I didn't want to make this any more difficult for him than it needs to be."

"But not loyal to me." She notes mildly.

"Not at all." Echo confirms, equally neutrally. "But two people I care about would gladly murder me if I harmed a hair of your head." That's an odd statement, Clarke thinks, because last time she checked there was only one person on that loyalty list who felt anything stronger for her than stale
pity.

"Well, there's that, then."

"Yes. Good luck, conceiving the child that will save us all." She says, a little bitterness peeping through at last as she gets to her feet and strides away.

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Clarke knows that she needs to speak to Bellamy. Apart from anything else, she knows he will not be the one to start the conversation with her – he may have changed, but she doubts he has changed that much. And Madi is her daughter first and foremost, she still feels this even if she is somehow really theirs. It seems unlikely to say the least that Bellamy might be anywhere near as worried about Madi's potential nonexistence as she is.

Three days have passed since that impossible afternoon, three days in which Bellamy has made a point of spending time with Madi and accepting her overenthusiastic hugs. Three days, too, in which he has made at least as big a point of never, ever, being alone with Clarke, never so much as meeting her eyes if he can help it.

So it is that she decides a rather direct approach will be necessary.

"Bellamy." She walks up to him in the mess hall, her dinner tray held out before her like an unwieldy shield.

"Clarke." He nods a greeting and looks about him in some confusion, scanning the room for the unexpected daughter he expects to see by her side.

"She's not here." She explains as she takes a seat. "My mother's taken her for the evening so we can talk."

"Talk?" He sounds at least a little horrified at the idea, she thinks. This is not off to a promising start.

"Talk." She confirms. "I thought we should. It seems likely that it will be easier to have an impossible child together if we talk occasionally."

"We're not having a child." He says dismissively, eyes fixed on the sludge that passes for dinner round here.

"Well, apparently we are."

"No. No, we are not." Why, she wonders, does he sound quite so angry? All she wants to do is talk. She's not trying to force him to – to procreate, or anything.

"Bellamy. Will you please calm down and just listen to me."

"No, Clarke. I am done talking to you. This is insane. Madi's a great kid, and I want to be in her life, of course I do. I know what it's like not to have a father." He muses a little more softly, before seeming to remember that he is, in fact, furious. "But I'm not part of your life, Clarke. Not any more. You made sure of that."

Before she has time to ask him what that even means, to apologise for the hundredth time, for the hundredth sin, he has picked up his uneaten dinner and marched clean out of the room.
She should have known better, she reflects that night, as she lies awake in her bed and gazes at the ceiling and resolutely refuses to cry. She might not know this post-Praimfaiya Bellamy particularly well, but surely she should have realised that he is unchanged in essentials. That he's still prone to getting emotional and irrational about things that hit too close to home.

Last time he was this angry, she remembers, three hundred grounders died.

She can't let anything like that happen again. She's going to need to be less confrontational, next time she dares to bring up the question of Madi, rouse up less of that confused hurt that somehow turns into rage. She suspects, also, that he doesn't have a lot of people to talk it out with, these days, seeing as he won't talk to her and he's clearly not talking to his sister. So she's going to have to try to make this easier for him.

She just wishes that Bellamy, her Bellamy, was here to make it easier for her, too.
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke's not sure what to expect in the wake of her confrontation with Bellamy. On one point she is clear – she expects him to avoid her. But beyond that, she's not sure whether there will be the loud sort of anger, the ranting and raging and chafing his wrists raw to let his sister into the bunker type, or that quiet sort of fury that somehow cuts all the more deeply. She only hopes that he will not take her misguided attempt to talk out on Madi, will not ruin the happiness her daughter feels at her newfound sense of belonging.

She is also pretty damn unclear on what the hell is going on, how exactly it is possible that Madi should be her daughter when she's never given birth. She is sure of that much – it seems like the kind of thing she would remember. And she's certainly never... procreated with Bellamy. She imagines that would be pretty damn memorable too.

Not that she has ever imagined it, of course.

Just, hypothetically, it doesn't seem like the sort of interaction she'd find very easy to forget. She huffs a sigh and slams her palm against her desk in frustration.

"Something on your mind, dear?" Abby asks. Clarke finds herself at least a little concerned for her mother's sanity, because she doesn't appear to be asking sarcastically.

"I don't know." She look up into her worried gaze and decides she may as well get some of her thoughts off her chest. After all, she doesn't exact have a lot of people to confide in, these days. "I just – how on Earth have we ended up here? How am I supposed to have had a child with a man who currently won't even look at me, and before we ever even met each other. I mean – it's absolutely insane. It makes no sense. It's impossible."

"Bellamy thinks it's time travel." Madi pipes up, and Clarke feels her heart sink to her heels. In her frustration she forgot Madi was in the room. She hopes her daughter doesn't think she's annoyed with her.

"He's a sensible man, your father." Abby contributes, and Clarke feels a sudden urge to throw something heavy at her mother's face. "I think he's right."

"I don't think it's ridiculous." Madi disagrees, and Clarke finds herself wondering if the sudden existence of a father might make disagreements more of a feature between the two of them in future. "He told me this story about an Old Earth hero who lived in a blue box and travelled through time."

"Right, of course, and this hero in a box -" She is interrupted by that firm knock at the door that she is fast coming to recognise as Bellamy's. She is at least a little surprised at quite how smiley he seems, after their recent confrontation, but she supposes that it must be for the benefit of their daughter.

"Ready to go, kid?"
"Of course." Madi jumps to her feet. "What are we doing today?"

"We're going out to scout in sector seven. Jordan wants to know if there's anything out there that might be worth cultivating as a food crop."

Madi gasps in delight and begins to babble excitedly. "Please can we look for berries? There are these special pink berries. I don't know if they have them here. But we used to use them on Earth to dye our hair and I dyed Clarke's once and it looked so great. And I want to do it again. Please can I do that again?"

"I don't know, Madi. I think maybe we have more important things to do right now than dying my hair."

"But it looked so great. Please, Clarke? Please? Don't you think it would look great, Bellamy?" Clarke gasps in horror at that, at her naive daughter inviting Bellamy to have an opinion on anything about her at all, actually, but especially on the matter of her appearance.

"I think it looked better long." He says coldly, and immediately, as if this is something he doesn't even have to think about.

As if, her treacherous heart whispers, it is something he has already thought about.

"Oh." Even Madi is not completely oblivious to the sudden change in atmosphere. "Well, then. I guess we're going to look for some plants."

"Yes." Clarke agrees as Bellamy shakes his head, looking for all the world as if he's slightly concussed.

"I'll see you later, Clarke." Her daughter wraps her in a firm hug.

"Yes. Let's go. We'll be back later." He pastes his being-in-Madi's-life smile back onto his face and walks out of the door.

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The following afternoon is less unpleasant, but that's not saying much, she thinks. An afternoon where a man who used to be essential to her does not offer unsolicited criticisms of her appearance and an excessive quantity of cold-shouldering is surely not too much to ask for. And, if she's being honest, she has to admit that she's putting a bit more effort in. She's just fed up of everything being so wrong between them, and she figures she's got to start somewhere.

This time, when the knock sounds on the door she turns away from her notes and is ready to greet him with a smile. She hates herself just a little for how easy it is to smile, seeing him smiling in turn at their daughter the moment the door is opened. His smiles are not supposed to have this effect on her, not any more.

"Afternoon, Madi. Abby. Clarke."

"Hey." She stands up and walks towards him, a small bag in her hand. "What's the adventure today?"

"Sector five. Fishing." He offers, concisely but without any apparent anger, so that's something.

"Have fun. I – I brought you snacks for your outing." She's surprisingly nervous as she holds out the pack. OK, maybe she is putting quite a lot more effort in.
"You – you did?" He seems to be unable to fathom this very small act of kindness.

"Yeah. Nothing exciting, sorry. Just some fruit." She tells a spot on the wall somewhere over his left shoulder, not quite brave enough to meet his eyes.

"Thanks. Well." He ruffles Madi's hair in a way that even she seems to think is a bit unnatural. "We'll be going, then. See you later."

"Bye. Have a lovely afternoon."

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It gets better after that. If she had realised, she thinks, that a couple of apples might be all it would take to get him to look at her like she's actually human, she'd have tried it months ago. It's not that there's been a miracle, not by any stretch of the imagination, but that tiny gesture of thoughtfulness seems to have softened some of the sharp edges of his wrath. Maybe, at this rate, he will direct that particular grin at her again before her days are numbered. Maybe there might even be one of those blissfully comforting hugs in her distant future. Those hugs that feel like home.

"Clarke?" She must have missed his knock on the door, she thinks, jolting out of her daydream.

"Bellamy? You're early. Madi's still at school."

"Yeah. I know. I – I actually wanted to talk to you." She feels her heart start to shiver at that, unsure whether this is going to be the conversation she has dreamed of or whether his words are going to bring some new nightmare.

"OK. Sure. Talk away."

"Well, I don't actually have any time off this afternoon. I'm scheduled for target practice. And so I thought I should ask whether you'd be OK with – with Madi coming along with me. I checked with Kane, and it's fine as long as you agree to it. And, I mean, the kid knows how to handle a gun, better than half the guard. I just thought that, maybe, you might not want -"

"Bellamy. Stop. It's fine by me." She cuts him off, sensing that he'd offer several hours of nervous excuses if she allowed him to. It's almost as if he's particularly aware that she gets angry when Madi is put in a situation she doesn't approve, or something.

"It is?"

"Yeah. I'm the one who taught her how to handle a rifle, it'd be pretty hypocritical of me to say no to this."

"You did a good job. She's not half bad."

"You'd have done a better job." She says, thinking back to her own shooting lessons with him, a lifetime ago.

"I guess I'd better make up for lost time now then."

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The next day dawns dull and damp, a steady crescendo of rain which starts as a patter and is a downfall by lunchtime. It is fascinating, Clarke finds, that rain still excites her after a childhood in space, for all that it is damn inconvenient. Trying to balance their ongoing mission to catalogue the
health details of every resident of Sanctum with the number of idiots coming into Medical with
sprained ankles from slipping in the mud has her driven to distraction.

She hears the knock on the door and actually sighs with relief. Somehow, for all that they're still
worlds apart, it seems that she has already started sighing with relief at the thought of Bellamy
once again. Pathetic though it is, she knows that seeing him interact with their daughter will be the
highlight of her day.

"Bellamy. Hey." She greets him before he is even through the door, which is probably a good
thing. As soon as his soaked form appears in full view, his damp shirt clinging to his torso and his
bedraggled hair falling into his face, she rather forgets how to breathe. He might not look the same
as he used to but, well, there are less attractive men on this moon.

"Clarke." He grins broadly and she has to resist the urge to check whether Madi is standing behind
her. "I've missed rain."

"You've missed rain?"

"Yeah. I've not seen rain this heavy since – well – before."

She gasps at that, realises she should have realised it sooner. "Of course. This must be your first
proper storm since before Praimfaiya."

"Yep." He takes a seat at her mother's vacant desk, leaning back into the chair looking almost
relaxed, and she finds herself suddenly grateful for the foolish engineer who fell on his wrist funny
only moments ago. "And it's so bad out there that they've cancelled training for the afternoon."

"So what are you and Madi going to get up to?"

"I thought we'd hang out in my quarters and read. With the weather being what it is, I figure it's
probably the only choice." She gasps at that, and she's pretty sure he wouldn't understand why, sure
he doesn't remember those words. But all the same, she feels her lips shaping a response, and
before she can stop herself -

"That's an oxymoron. Only choice."

He stares at her, a shocked, almost grief-stricken edge to his eyes, for a moment. And then, quietly,
tentatively, as if asking for her permission to do so, he laughs.

"Yes." He agrees with her at last. "Yes it is." And suddenly, he is smiling the smile she has missed
so much, that particularly Bellamy half smile that just quirks up the corners of his lips, and she
wonders if, perhaps, one day, she might consider reaching out across the space in between them.

It is into the middle of this unexpected joy that Madi appears, Abby in tow.

"Bellamy! I thought I heard you."

"Yeah, sorry. Just laughing at your mother. It's been over a hundred and thirty years and she still
hasn't thought of any new jokes." Of course, Madi and Abby do not understand this. They do not
understand why she cannot stop beaming. But she understands what he means, and it's the first
time that's truly happened in far too long.

"How's the patient?" She asks, rather than venture any further down the dangerously tantalising
path of making Bellamy grin.
"Fine." Her mother says dismissively. "Madi was great. You trained her well."

"Is there anything you haven't taught our daughter how to do?" He asks, that gentle curve still playing at the corners of his mouth.

So, of course, she has to go and sour the mood.

"Yes. I've been trying to avoid passing on my skills as a mass-murderer."

To her utter shock, Bellamy does not flare up in anger at that. He looks only incredibly sad.

"You've done great, Clarke. Really. The pair of you have done great. Without me." She wonders, perhaps, if there might be something of guilt in his tone, and her heart goes out to him.

They need to stop living in the past like this.

"Go on, the pair of you." She summons a little brightness, but it feels somehow more forced than earlier. "Go read your boring history books and leave us to fix all these idiots who can't walk in mud."

"Boring history books?" He asks incredulously as he makes it back to the door. "Now that's an oxymoron."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
It warms her heart to see Madi come home from her outings with Bellamy glowing with joy. Of course it does.

But all the same, Clarke can't help but feel a little jealous that her daughter adores him so easily, when for years she was the only person in her life. And she can't help but feel a little jealous, too, that Bellamy is so warm with Madi when he's still so cold with her. And she knows that this is stupid, that their happiness shouldn't detract from hers, but she's pretty conflicted right now, struggling to keep her head above this torrent of mixed-up emotion that threatens to overwhelm her.

And she's so lonely that it hurts.

She might not be able to do much about Bellamy, beyond the painstakingly slow progress towards civility and occasional joking that she's been working on of late, but she can certainly lavish more attention on her relationship with her daughter. Just because she glows with joy when she's with her father, doesn't mean she can't be glad of her mother's company too, she reasons.

So she calls in a couple of favours, makes a few plans, and sets up a chessboard.

"Madi? Do you want to play chess?"

Her daughter looks up from where sits engrossed in a book she has borrowed from Bellamy.

"Sure. Can I finish this part first?"

Clarke stifles a sigh. "Of course. We can play whenever you're ready."

They sit in awkward silence for a moment, as she watches her little girl and wonders how it is that, already, Bellamy knows her interests better than she does.

"OK, done." Madi marks her place carefully and gets to her feet. "We haven't played chess in a while, Clarke."

"No. I just thought – I've been so busy in Medical recently and it's been a while since we did something nice together."

Madi makes a small humming noise as she takes a seat. Well then. So much for mother-daughter bonding time.

She resolves not to be discouraged, and presses on with her plans as they make their opening moves. "Are you looking forward to having no lessons tomorrow?"

"Not really." She shrugs. "I guess I'll sit in Medical and watch you type things. Bellamy said he's busy with training all day so he can't take me anywhere."

"Well, as it happens, I have a suggestion. I thought we might go on a picnic."

"A picnic?" Her daughter seems to find this somewhat unfathomable.

"Yes. Jackson and Niylah and grandma Abby are going to cover Medical so I can take you out for
the day. I thought we could take some food and you could show me some of the places you've been out scouting with Bellamy? Maybe we'll even find some berries and you can dye my hair after all."

"You – you mean it? We get a day to go on an adventure together?" Madi appears to think this is unheard of. She supposes that's probably because it is.

"Yes. I thought it might be nice." She moves a bishop carefully, and reminds herself that Madi is not so young any more. Perhaps a little honesty is in order. "It's just – you've been enjoying going on all these adventures with Bellamy so much and it made me think that it would be nice if I took you out sometimes, too."

"It's going to be great, Mum." She feels herself tear up at that, because her daughter usually calls her Clarke and she can't help but feel that she must mean something by choosing to use that word, now. "I love spending time with you. And I get that being a doctor is important but - it's been a long time since we did anything cool together. And we used to go on adventures all the time on Earth."

"Yeah. We did." She forces a smile. "But you have Bellamy for that now, while I'm working."

"Bellamy's great." She enthuses. "And he's the best father. But – I had you first, you know?"

"Yeah." She watches with pride as her daughter takes one of her pieces. Her little girl is growing up fast. "Let's go on more adventures, then, Madi. I'll remember to make time for them. Ai hod yu in."

"Ai hod yu in, nomon."

……

Clarke is surprised to see Murphy beckoning her over to a table when she wanders through what passes for the bar after supper one night. Sure, he is certainly the member of Spacekru who has forgiven her the most easily – she remembers him saying something about cockroaches sticking together as he slapped her on the back – but they're not exactly on socialising terms. All the same, she finds herself craving company and something that resembles friendship, and Bellamy is sitting next to him, and they've been on relatively good terms since that joke about the oxymorons and – well – surely it can't hurt.

She thinks better of it when she sees quite how many empty glasses are arrayed before them, and quite how much Bellamy is listing sideways, but John is still gesturing enthusiastically to her and surely it would be rude to turn around now.

"Clarke." Murphy greets her with a smirk.

"Murphy. Bellamy." She tries for a small smile.

"Oh, hello, Clarke." Bellamy grimaces at her by way of greeting and she feels her heart plummet to her heels. Clearly she has overestimated the importance of the oxymoron moment. "Come to ruin my night? You'll be good at that. You're good at destroying things. Mount Weather. Planet Earth. I suppose wrecking my relationship must have been easy compared to that."

"I'm not here to argue with you." She says, remembering her resolution to be less confrontational while she takes a seat next to Murphy and wonders if she should, perhaps, never have approached. "But I didn't mean to ruin things with Echo, you know that."

"You never mean any of it, Clarke. It just seems to happen." He accuses her even as Murphy tries
"I should go. You're drunk."

"Yes. A common side effect of being forced into a relationship with a woman who keeps trying to get me killed."

"I – I'm not forcing you into anything, Bellamy. I'm just – well, it does seem logical that we need to have a child. She is the commander. And you're the one who came up with that ridiculous time travel -"

"Clarke Griffin's favourite excuse – logic."

"Bellamy -" Murphy attempts to cut in, but she's fed up of Bellamy wallowing in feeling all wronged about this, and disappointed in him for drowning his sorrows in moonshine, and she feels her anger rising.

"Even your precious Echo agrees with me. We need to have a child to save our people."

"Don't try to pretend you're doing this for your people." He sneers, and even in recent months he has never looked more unlike that man she used to rely on. "You're doing this because you're scared the one person on this moon who still likes you is about to disappear in a puff of smoke."

"Bellamy, what are you doing?" An incredulous Murphy finally manages to interrupt. "Isn't this what you wanted all those years you thought she was dead? A second chance?"

"This isn't how I wanted it." Bellamy snaps straight back at him, alcohol having seemingly rendered him oblivious to her ongoing presence. "Not now, not like this, not doing it for our people with some woman who's no longer Clarke. A hundred and thirty years ago? Sure, she was everything I wanted. But things change."

"Well I'm sorry." She finds herself yelling at him, caught between anger and tears. "That's not how life works. We can't go back, can't just turn back the clock."

"Well, apparently we can, if we had a kid a hundred and forty years ago."

He stands up then, and kicks the table, hard. Bellamy Blake, the man who once crossed a battlefield to stroke her cheek, kicking a table in anger?

Before she has had time to process this uncomfortable development, he is gone.

……

She doesn't know why she thinks it is a good idea to approach him at breakfast the following morning. She has already established that an upset and angry Bellamy shoots people. But she can't just leave things on the note they left them on last night, and there's also the fact that if she does nothing her daughter might disappear.

A tiny voice in the back of her mind wonders if, maybe, there's more to it than that. Part of her thinks that, perhaps, now that she was everything I wanted has come to light, it might be time to share a frightening truth of her own. Maybe a little honesty is what they need to find their way through this.

She takes a bowl of porridge and a deep breath and sits opposite him, and is genuinely shocked when he does not immediately flee.
"I'm sorry." She says simply, and it's rather a widespread sort of a sorry that covers everything from her haircut to Polis and back again. "I'm sorry I've changed. I'm sorry I'm not the girl I used to be."

He grunts slightly, and she supposes that is all the answer she is likely to get.

She continues so quietly she's not sure he can even hear her. "For what it's worth – I wanted it then, too."

He gets her loud and clear, she can see it in the way his eyes light up ever so slightly and his shoulders relax just a little.

"I didn't know that."

"I thought you must have realised."

"How exactly was I supposed to realise that, in a world where losing Finn sent you unhinged and you carried Lexa around in a box for weeks after she died? How was I supposed to realise that there was still space in your heart for me?"

"You wouldn't have to ask that, if you'd seen me carry that radio around for six years. And if leaving you to die in Polis wasn't unhinged then I don't know what is." He doesn't answer that, but she thinks his eyes look more sad than angry now and that's certainly progress. "About Madi – we don't have to, you know, try a relationship or anything. The medical facilities here are pretty advanced, we could use IVF."

"Really?" He asks dismissively. "You think a hoard of superstitious grounders are going to be OK with their leader being made in a test tube? They'll probably lock us in our marital bedroom and hammer on the door until we do the deed."

"OK, then. Not IVF. But there are other ways we can try while we're locked in there, besides, you know, you actually screwing me."

"So having drunkenly admitted last night that I used to be a little in love with you I'm just supposed to – what – stand there and jerk off for you so we can make a baby?" He asks incredulously, voice climbing all the while, and she curses herself for rousing his anger once again even as she feels her own wrath rise to meet his. "Do you actually understand anything at all about human emotions, Clarke?"

"Do you understand that sometimes, we can't all sit around worrying about our feelings?" She asks, knowing as she does so that it is the criticism that will hit home the most after all those years he spent trying to use his head out of loyalty to her memory. "That sometimes, we need to get on with making difficult decisions and keeping our people alive?"

This time, for all that logic is apparently her weapon of choice, it is her turn to kick at the table and storm off.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke avoids Bellamy after that. She's not proud of it, but she does it all the same. She starts volunteering for every case that comes up in Medical at about the early-afternoon-time he would usually pick Madi up, and again at the time he would usually return with her. She eats her meals at odd times – gets to breakfast early, often has lunch at four in the afternoon. Murphy invites her to hang out in the bar on more than one occasion, and she's certainly keen to give that a miss. She has no more need of another encounter with drunk Bellamy than she has need of a hole in the head.

How on Earth is she supposed to face him now? After she has admitted that she used to be a little in love with him, too, and it somehow descended into a blazing row rather than bringing them closer to a happy family, how is she supposed to look him in the eye ever again?

And she's scared, too, and upset, because he made it clear that he meant before those six years apart and – well – she mentioned Polis. And she's pretty sure he's too intelligent to have missed that. But at least, she tells herself again and again and again, he can't humiliate her for that if he can't even speak to her.

She's been avoiding him for the better part of a week when it becomes apparent that he has been trying – and failing – to seek her out.

“Bellamy's been looking for you.” Raven informs her as she takes a seat, quite uninvited, at the breakfast table. Clarke curses her luck that this woman with whom she still has a rather challenging relationship is an habitually early riser.

“Hmm.”

“But, of course, you already know this, because Murphy told you as much yesterday.” Aha. It seems she is an habitually early riser with a mission.

She feigns ignorance and plays with her porridge.

“Snap out of it, Clarke.” Raven's patience has never been extensive, she recalls. “Bellamy has been looking for you. You know, Bellamy, tall guy, dark hair, would quite happily tear the world apart if it meant saving you? That Bellamy.”
“I think we know different Bellamys.” She mutters, annoyed at this disturbance of her peace, annoyed too at Raven's lies about what lies between them.

“You didn't see him in Space, Clarke. Losing you – it broke him. And Echo tried to put the pieces back together, really she did, and she was good for him but – but it wasn't the same.”

“No. Things aren't the same, any more. That has been made very clear to me.”

“Clarke. Perhaps I'm not making myself clear. He's already lost you once. Don't make him lose you again.” She feels herself thaw a little at that, because Raven still essentially hates her, so much is obvious, but the gentleness in her tone as she genuinely implores her to look out for him has her a little overwhelmed.

“You've made yourself clear.” She acknowledges quietly.

“I'm glad to hear it. So, in other news, I'm a genius so Abby asked me to take a look at Madi's file.”

“She did what?” Last thing she remembers, Abby and Raven were barely on speaking terms.

“She wanted someone to have a look at the technical side of things, figure out whether the test could be wrong. Spoiler alert – it can't. And yes, I think she also wanted an excuse to talk to me. Maybe you could learn a thing or two from that example.”

“Yes, point taken. What about Madi's file?”

“Well, you know that random string of numbers that appear instead of her age?”

“Yes.”

“It's not random. They describe a logarithmic spiral. The shape of the anomaly.”
The following morning dawns bright and just a little chilly as Clarke and Madi depart for their next day trip. After an enjoyable picnic the previous week they have resolved to make a habit of going on adventures together more often. Madi has asked more than once, too, whether they might invite Bellamy along as well sometimes, and Clarke realises it is only a matter of time before she has to provide an actual answer to that question.

Still, she pushes that thought aside and reminds herself to enjoy her time with her daughter.

“So where are we actually going?” Madi asks as they leave the village and turn to the south. Clarke smiles to herself, having successfully kept this secret all week in order to make the girl's day now.

“I had a fascinating conversation with Jordan the other day.” She explains with a deliberately casual air. “He told me something about a patch of unusual dark pink berries growing about an hour south of here.”

Her response has the desired effect. The commander of her people stops abruptly on the trail, gaping openly in a rather foolish fashion.

“Really? Are they the right berries?”

“I think so, from his description. We won't know for sure until we get there.”

“And... and I can dye your hair afterwards? You're serious?”

“If they're the right berries, you can have a go at dying my hair.” With that assurance, the girl begins to walk again.

“Even though – even though Bellamy, you know, the other week... Even though it was awkward?”

“Madi, today's about us. What Bellamy thinks of my hairstyle is neither here nor there.” If she insists on that firmly enough, she thinks, she may yet convince herself.
“What's wrong with you two?”

“I don't know what you mean.” She claims, knowing exactly what Madi means.

“Clarke, I'm a child, but I'm not stupid.” Her daughter fixes her with a firm glare that, she thinks, she might have inherited from her. “You're avoiding him, and you're avoiding my questions about whether we can hang out all together, and when you two actually talk – well, it doesn't seem much like the stories you used to tell. Or like the memory the flame shows me where he held your hand and looked after you when you had to go into the City of Light.”

She sighs at that, heart half caught up in the memory Madi has raked back to the surface, and wonders how to go about answering. She wants to be honest with the girl who is the most important part of her world, really she does, but she can't quite face telling her the whole truth.

“No. It's not like that any more. But these things happen, Madi. There was a time when he would do anything for me, but he has a new family now. And he used to be the only person I couldn't sacrifice to save the human race but... that's you now.” She pulls her daughter in for a fierce hug, rendered slightly awkward by their progress along the path, and tries not to dwell too long on the memory of pointing that gun at him in the bunker, all those years ago.

“Do you think things will go back to how they were again?”

“I don't think they can, Madi.” She admits sadly. She owes it to her daughter and herself to be realistic about this. “Because we've both changed a lot since then. I don't think we can just go back to how we were.”

“Oh.” The girl sounds distinctly unimpressed at that response.

“But I hope that, maybe, we might have a go at trying to start a new friendship.” She thinks she hopes that, anyway, however unrealistic it might be, however much she's been avoiding him. It seems like the sort of thing she's supposed to hope for.

“I'm sorry I made it awkward.”
“Oh, don't be. Really. There are worse things than a conversation about my hair.”

“No, I don't just mean that. I mean – being your child and everything. I'm sorry I made it even more complicated between you.” She gulps a little at that, because she thought she was doing quite well at hiding the true extent of the discomfort between them from their daughter.

“Don't you dare blame yourself, Madi. You're the best thing that ever happened to me, and I mean that.” She tells her fiercely. “Things between me and Bellamy have always been complicated, and all that time apart was only going to make them more complicated. We're both so happy to have you in our lives, and you'd better remember that.”

They walk in silence for a little while, and Clarke wonders if perhaps that conversation is over and whether, after a suitable pause, she might move on to something lighter, like the singing birds or the many flowers by the trail, when her daughter starts to speak again.

“I think you will be friends again, Clarke. Didn't you tell me all those stories about arguing at the dropship or you staying in Polis when he asked you to go home? And that turned out OK.”

“Thanks, Madi. I hope so.”

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Berries duly collected, they make their way home and Madi sets about crushing them into dye with more enthusiasm than finesse. Their bathroom is streaked pink, stray fragments of fruit dripping down the tiles, and Clarke is beginning to wonder if there will actually be any left to dye her hair when she hears a knock at the door.

“That must be grandma Abby.” She notes as she sets out down the corridor.

She receives no response from Madi, whose earlier excitement for her grandmother's visit has apparently been surpassed by her excitement at splashing juice all over the walls of the bathroom.

Sure enough, her mother is at the door and greets her with a hug.
“Hey, mum.”

“Hey. How was the berry-picking?”

“Successful. Madi's now redecorating the bathroom with the stuff.”

“Of course she is.” She stands just inside the door, apparently wondering quite what to do with her limbs, and Clarke reflects that she should not have left it so long before inviting her mother to have more of a role in Madi's life.

“Come on in.” She invites her, as much warmth in her voice as she can summon. “Thank you for coming.”

“Thanks for inviting me. I'd like to get to know my granddaughter better.” She looks a little nervous, Clarke thinks, as if unsure whether she is allowed to express that opinion.

“I think it will be good for her to get to know you better, too.”

With that, she decides, they have spent quite enough time procrastinating in the corridor. She leads the way to the bathroom, where Madi pronounces the dye ready.

“So how does this work?” Abby asks, having been in the bunker when they tried this before, on Earth.

“We're going to do streaks.” Madi declares proudly.

“Well. How impressive.” Abby is, it seems, not a natural at engaging with children.

“I just sort of sit here and Madi paints pink stripes in my hair.” Clarke takes pity on her and explains. “It looks better when it dries.”

“It looks great when it dries.” Madi chimes in.
“I’m sure it does.” Abby soothes, and leans back against the wall to watch the scene unfold.

Clarke settles herself on a stool, leaning back over the tub in a vain attempt to prevent further splashes of pink over the room, and Madi gets on with applying the dye, an expression of rapt concentration on her face for all that her approach seems, in so many ways, distinctly haphazard. It’s not an uncomfortable silence, Clarke thinks, at least in so far as she and Madi are used to sitting quietly together, but she rather wonders what Abby is making of it. In fact, she supposes, her mother might be feeling like a bit of a spare part, here, and that wasn’t the point of this evening of family time at all. Perhaps she ought to -

“Grandma Abby.” Madi interrupts her train of thought. “Do you want to try?”

“Try?” She’s not sure whether her mother sounds more alarmed or confused.

“Yeah. Do you want to try doing the other side?” She holds out the pot of crushed berries, and Clarke finds herself feeling distinctly moved by her attempt to include her rather odd recovering grandmother.

Truly, she thinks, this warm-hearted child is Bellamy's daughter.

“Sure.” She is surprised at how quickly Abby crosses the small space between them and gets stuck in. “Like this?” She asks, and Clarke feels her applying the paste to a section near her scalp.

“Yeah.” Madi confirms, smiling widely. “I told you this would be fun, Clarke. I think it might even be the most fun thing we've done since Earth.”

That statement is, Clarke thinks, evidence if any were needed that life has been pretty damn rubbish in the last hundred and twenty five years.

……

Clarke sits on the sofa with a sketchbook, legs curled by her side, and waits for Madi to get back from her evening lesson with Gaia. It seems there is a lot to learn about being the commander and controlling the flame and she isn't complaining if it means she gets a bit of peaceful time to herself
into the bargain. It's strange, she reflects, how she feels so lonely all the damn time but is also utterly fed up with human company. It's an odd state of affairs, born of spending all day in the busy Medical centre but having, as Bellamy so accurately pointed out whilst drunk last week, no one who actually likes her. No one with whom she can have a proper heart-to-heart about the rather confusing mess in which she currently finds herself. She supposes her mother might make the occasional attempt to look supportive, but she is so wrapped up in her own concerns that she tends to be unhelpful at best.

She hears the key turn in the lock and the door open and sets aside her sketchbook.

“Madi?” She calls, although, of course, it can be no one else.

“Clarke, hey.” Her daughter makes it into the room where she is sitting, and she stands up to hug her in greeting, and then she notices that there is another new arrival hovering behind her.

“Hey.” Bellamy offers, and at least he has the grace to look a little sheepish.

“You followed my daughter home from her lesson?” She asks, incredulous at his boldness in coming here and his complete failure to take a hint and stay the hell away from her.

“I believe I followed our daughter home from her lesson, actually.” He offers mildly.

She is about to lose her head and let her heart do the talking, turn back into that same not-quite-Clarke who kicked that table leg and ran away, but then she sees the look on Madi's face. Her daughter just looks so utterly hopeful that she cannot quite bear to ruin this for her. And then the girl speaks, and her heart melts even more.

“I thought we could spend the evening as a family. I thought that might be nice.” She says, naive optimism shining through in every word.

“We were going to play chess.” She points out unhelpfully but, at least, in a measured tone. “Chess is a two person game.”

“We can play teams.” Madi suggests, and Clarke thinks that, actually, if her daughter is sufficiently desperate for them to play happy families that she is suggesting they reinvent chess as a team game then, maybe, she ought to just give in.
“Sure.” She says with a forced smile. “Team chess. Why didn't I think of that?”

…...

They don't play chess for very long, as Madi's lesson with Gaia has already taken up a good portion of the evening. Clarke is relieved that she doesn't have to keep her forced smile in place forever. She is relieved, too – or at least, she knows she ought to be relieved – that her smile becomes substantially less forced and more natural as time passes. But she's not sure whether it's a good thing, that she's learning to relax in his company again, not with all the reasons why she should stay on her guard around him.

Bellamy discloses early on that he actually has no idea how to play chess, and Madi therefore decides that she shall be the one to team up with him and teach him, and Clarke faces them across the board and finds something of a warm glow stealing over her at the sight of the two of them laughing and so damn happy. It does her good to see Madi behave like a child. And it does her at least as much good to see Bellamy behave like the young man she used to know.

“You OK there, Clarke?” His voice drags her, mentally kicking and screaming, away from her reverie and back to the game.

“Yeah.” She braves meeting his eyes and is surprised by the warmth in them. “All good – for me anyway. Checkmate.”

“Checkmate? Again?” He asks, visibly aghast at losing for the third time in a row, and to someone who was blatantly daydreaming no less.

“Yeah. Sorry. When it's Madi on her own I let her win sometimes, but I'm not about to go easy on you.” She finds herself feeling brave enough to tease.

“She's quite good at chess.” Madi contributes conversationally, and Clarke supposes she had better at least try to look humble.

“Yeah. I noticed.” Bellamy gives a chuckle.
“Another game?” Madi asks hopefully, and Clarke hates to be the one to ruin what is evidently the best evening of her daughter's young life but it's getting late.

“I think it's time for you to go to bed, Madi. You've got school in the morning.”

“Can't I stay up for a little while? Just today? Because Bellamy's here?”

She hardens her resolve and says what needs to be said. “I'm sure Bellamy will be here again another time.”

“Will you?” Their daughter asks eagerly.

“Sure. If you'd like that. And if it's OK with your mother, of course.” She feels her stomach swoop at that, at the nervousness in his tone, and at this first foray into coparenting.

“Of course.” She says surprisingly easily. “It'd be good to do this more often.”

“You hear that, Madi? I'll come over another evening soon. You should probably go to bed now.”

“Yeah. OK. Night night, parents.” It's the first time she's said that, and it should come as no surprise, excited as she knows Madi has been about the revelation, but all the same it has her head spinning a little.

And then the girl is hugging her, and is hugging Bellamy, and practically bouncing with happiness, and then she is skipping to the doorway, and then she is gone.

And somehow, just as she might have predicted, the relaxed atmosphere departs with her.

Bellamy coughs a little and starts packing away the chess set, and she stares at his hands and wonders what happens next. Because she highly doubts he followed their daughter home just to learn how to play chess.

“Why are you really here?” She asks at length.
“I thought it might be a good idea to get to know my daughter.” He says carefully, concentrating a little too hard on collecting an errant bishop. “And to get to know my daughter's mother.”

She's pretty convinced that there's no good answer to that. The response she wants to give – throwing the chessboard at his head and telling him he that already knows her better than anyone, thank you very much – seems unlikely to move the situation on in a forwards direction, as such. She picks at the corner of the table and decides to change the subject.

“Have you spoken to Raven recently?” She wants to know what he thinks about this anomaly thing.

“Yes. About Madi's age and the anomaly? We had a long chat about it.”

“You did? She couldn't seem to run away from me quickly enough.”

To his credit, he resists the obvious temptation to point out that he has betrayed Raven less often of late than she has.

“That's actually why I wanted to speak to you today, Clarke. You can't avoid me forever. We need to work out what we're doing here.”

“What do you mean?”

“So Raven said that the thing in the age test was a reference to the anomaly. Now, obviously, you haven't already given birth to Madi. Much less long enough ago for her to be twelve years old. So Raven's theory is that you'll give birth to her in the future and the anomaly will – bend time somehow – so that she'll end up meeting you all those years ago on Earth.”

“Because that makes perfect sense.”

“I agree it's crazy. But Raven is normally right. So – basically – what you said the other day about how we need to have a child together or Madi will disappear. You were right.”
“Yeah.”

“So we need to have a child.”

“Yeah.”

“For goodness’ sake, Clarke, why are you making this so difficult? Did you not tell me last week that we need to, you know, get on with having a child?”

“Well, yes, but -”

“I’m pretty sure you understand how conception works.”

She feels her cheeks flame. “Yes.”

“So let's get on with it.”

“What – now?”

“Why not?”

“Because it's not the best time of the month for me to conceive.” She points out, rather taken aback at the idea that sex with Bellamy might be in her imminent future. “If we want the best odds, if we want not to have to do this loads of times, we should -”

“Clarke. Last time I checked, probability has never gone well for us. She's your daughter, and you love her, and she needs to exist to save the human race. Let's go.”

“Ok. Yeah, sure. Umm – bedroom?”

“Might be more private than staying here next to the living room window.” He suggests with a
quirked brow.

“Yes. Of course.”

With that, she stands and begins to lead the way to the bedroom. And the walk is over all too quickly, really, and she's barely had time to gather her thoughts. There is only one coherent idea that stands out in her mind and that is relief that he is up for this after all, and that she has this chance to conceive the daughter she loves so much and can't bear to lose, and that she must do absolutely nothing to jeapordise Bellamy's newfound willingness to go through with this.

“Thanks for – you know – changing your mind. Being up for this.”

He shrugs, and she thinks that's not the most promising attitude to bring someone to her bedroom with.

“We both want her to exist. What Raven said about the anomaly made sense.”

“So how are we doing this?” She asks, standing next to her own bed like a stranger, arms crossed over her chest.

“What do you mean?” He looks at her as if she has lost her mind, to be asking for instructions on how exactly sex works at this moment in time.

“I mean, are we, you know, going for the conventional approach, or are we trying that suggestion you thought was a bit stupid last week?”

“Well, obviously we're not going to do anything you're not comfortable with – but I thought maybe we could just get on with it?” She wishes above all things that he would stop talking about getting on with it, as if she is so different from that Clarke he used to be a little in love with that screwing her now will be some kind of chore.

With that thought, she kicks off her boots with unwarranted force, and then unbuttons the waistband of her trousers and pulls them down, taking her underwear along too in one brisk movement. And he sort of stands there, and stares at her as if he's never met her before, and she coughs a little and gestures at his still clothed state. After all, he's the one who wanted to get on with it.
He seems to get the hint, and he quickly dispenses with boots and belt, and has his hand on his waistband when he stops suddenly and asks her something.

“Could you – would you mind taking your top off?”

Now that, she thinks in some confusion, doesn't sound very necessary to his plan of getting on with it. But she does as he requests, because she can see no reason not to, and now he's naked from the waist down and she's only wearing a bra and he's walking towards her with a look in his eye that she can't quite fathom.

She backs up, away from that frightening gaze, until the backs of her legs hit the foot of her bed. And he keeps advancing, until he's barely a breath away, and suddenly he's undoing her bra and throwing it across the room and then his hands are on her shoulders and he's easing her back onto the bed.

She imagined this countless times, during those six years, and has imagined it, too, more often than she is prepared to admit since landing on this moon a couple of months ago, but in her imagination it was never quite like this. She never imagined that Bellamy Blake was capable of being careless, but there is no other word, she thinks, for the way that he grabs at her breasts and crushes them rather too firmly to be comfortable. And then he buries his face in her chest and starts groaning a groan that is distressingly like that which she might expect from a wounded animal, and he's slathering rough kisses over her nipples and, really, it's all pretty damn offputting.

But she loves her daughter, and she's scared of what might happen if she dares to suggest that, perhaps, he might stop handling her like a hunk of meat.

He really does seem to be obsessed with her breasts, she notes, and under normal circumstances she's quite into that but he doesn't seem to be paying the slightest attention to her response. He doesn't seem to be paying the slightest attention to anything other than taking his frustration out on her flesh. And she wonders if, perhaps, it is easier to pretend she is Echo while his face is in her cleavage and he is paying no attention to her.

Barely has she formulated this thought when all conscious thought is momentarily obliterated by the pain of him thrusting inside of her, unannounced and while she is distinctly unprepared, bringing instant tears to her eyes, and then he is pounding into her with rather more force than she thinks can possibly be necessary, and moaning like a man possessed, and suddenly, just when she thinks she cannot bear it any longer, this man who used to do everything in his power to protect her now hurting her in his anger, it is over.
To say it's the shortest screw of her life would be an understatement. But that's for the best, Clarke notes, as she grabs a robe and waddles briskly from the bedroom and towards the bathroom to clean up.

She doesn't stop to analyse the fact that Bellamy won't meet her eye. She's too busy feeling sore beyond belief, and then cleaning up hurts, and peeing stings like crazy, and really, for a man who's had more than his fair share of sex she can't help feeling that he's not done a great job of it on this occasion.

She spends longer in the bathroom than strictly necessary, hoping that he'll be gone by the time she emerges, hoping even more that the tears of pain and humiliation and disappointment that are coursing down her cheeks will somehow fizzle away into nothingness.

She still hasn't heard him leave by the time she's all cried out, and she realises there is no putting this off any longer. The walk down the corridor is at once the longest and shortest journey of her life, and then she's there, on the threshold of the space that should be hers but will now be forever tainted by him, and he's sitting on the edge of the bed, fully dressed, evidently waiting for her. He looks up when she enters, and that's when she realises it.

He's been crying too.

“I'm sorry.” He says simply, and not a little damply, and that's all it takes, really. Because she understands from those three short syllables that he's sorry for everything. For how they've ended up here, for what they've become. That he's sorry that it happened like this.

She doesn't hesitate, for all that he has hurt her so many times and in so many ways. She knows that he never meant to, and that he will carry the guilt with him for hurting her tonight alongside all the other stupid guilt he carries around with him. She doesn't think twice, but walks straight into his open arms.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Clarke expects it to be awkward. If ever there is a time when awkwardness seems likely, surely the aftermath of disastrous kind-of-obligatory sex between two people who used to love each other is it. Bellamy didn't stay long last night, just long enough to apologise and give her one of those long hugs that somehow still make her feel safe, even though she knows now that his embrace can be deeply unpleasant, too. But that was also long enough for her to see just how awful he feels about hurting her, and how humiliated they both feel at their resounding sexual incompatibility, so she's pretty sure that there are, in fact, plenty of reasons to feel awkward.

She should have known better than to underestimate Bellamy Blake.

No sooner have she and Madi sat down to breakfast – at a reasonable time, too, since she decided last night that they were probably past the point of avoiding one another – than he appears with a bowl of porridge and a tentative question.

“Do you mind if I join you?”

“Bellamy!” Their daughter makes the decision for them.

“How are you this morning, Madi?”

“I'm great. What are we doing this afternoon?”

“I'm supposed to be scouting out in sector four. Miller and Indra are coming too, hope that's OK.”

“Oh wow. Of course that's OK. This is going to be so cool.” Clarke chuckles affectionately at her daughter's excitement. Clearly she is looking forward to a whole afternoon spent with not just one but three of her heroes.

“How are you doing, Clarke?” Bellamy asks, his tone light but eyes searching hers carefully.
“I'm doing OK.” She tells him honestly. “It was good that you came round last night.” Because it was good, after all, if it means that Madi's future is assured.

“Thanks for inviting me back again.” He says, sounding almost, she thinks, meek. “I said I'd see Murphy tonight, but maybe tomorrow? Or the next day?”

“You're welcome any time. We don't often have plans.”

“What will we do, next time?” Madi asks, joy bubbling over. “Can we maybe read?”

“I'm pretty sure reading isn't a team activity either, honey.” Clarke teases, and is rewarded with two matching bursts of laughter.

He asks after the book he has lent Madi at that point, and she replies with enthusiasm, and Clarke takes a back seat in the rest of the breakfast conversation while she grapples with the question of how exactly she feels, this morning, towards the man sitting across the table from her. She can't quite work out how it is that she is finding it so easy to smile at him, but she supposes it probably has something to do with the genuine concern and remorse in his gaze.

He almost catches her by surprise when he stands up to leave, so caught up in her own thoughts has she been, but she jumps to attention at his parting comment.

“You know, I should have said yesterday. Madi was right. Your hair does look great.”

She knows that it shouldn't be that simple, that he shouldn't be able to worm his way back into her heart with shallow compliments the morning after the night before. And yet, it seems, it is basic human warmth like this that she has been missing.

And, anyway, she tells herself, she needs to think about this tactically. She has to stay on the right side of him, just in case she hasn't conceived. That's the reason, she resolves, for the broad smile on her face in response to that one pathetic compliment.

She almost has herself convinced.
It is strange, Clarke thinks, that the most awful night of her life should mark the beginning of quite the most pleasant week she's experienced in recent times. It's stupid, of course, that she's calling that the most awful night of her life, when she considers that she once had to kill Finn, or vomit alone in a lab in the face of five years missing her friends, or try to ignore the guilt of leaving Bellamy in Polis, but all the same, she's sticking to her judgement. Between the physical pain that leaves her sore for days, and the utter devastation of feeling used by the man who was once her greatest protector, and the sheer loneliness of realising that he is now worlds away from her, she's pretty sure she's never felt more wretched than she did in that lonely bathroom.

But that breakfast they had with Madi the morning after has set the tone for the week that follows, it seems.

Sure enough, Bellamy shows up at their front door the following evening, and announces himself with his normal firm knock, and Madi has flown down the corridor to answer even before Clarke has had time to formulate a sentence.

“Bellamy! Come in!” It appears that it is becoming usual for Madi to take the lead while she arranges her thoughts.

“Hey, Madi.” She makes it into the corridor in time to see father and daughter engaged in an enthusiastic hug.

“Hey.” Clarke offers quietly when the two of them part and Bellamy meets her eyes. She's about to offer up some trivial comment of welcome when she finds that he is engulfing her in a hug, too.

It would appear, then, that they are on hugging terms in general now, not just in the immediate aftermath of disastrous sex.

“It's good to see you.” He murmurs somewhere near her ear, and at that she's pretty sure she almost faints from shock. Since when has he decided that seeing her is not the bane of his existence?

“You, too.” She replies, and allows herself to pretend, for a heartbeat, that all is well, and to relish the warmth of his arms around her.
Madi, of course, is less than interested in allowing her parents to have a moment.

“Can we go sit down? And read?”

“You really want to read?” Clarke asks with a quirked brow as they make their way towards the sofa. “Your – your father is here for the evening and you want to spend it sitting quietly and reading?”

“But I like reading. I like learning new stories, after only hearing you tell the same ones for six years.” She flinches at that, and it seems that her daughter sees it and understands all too well what it means. “I... I didn't mean.... They were great stories, Clarke, and they're my favourite, I just...”

“I know, Madi.” She settles herself next to her on the sofa and pulls her into a hug, while Bellamy takes a place on their daughter's other side. “I get it. It's exciting to have more people in your life.”

“But if you had to be stuck with one person for six years, I'd say you got pretty lucky that it was Clarke.” Bellamy offers with a grin, and she finds herself confused to say the least. That statement doesn't seem at all consistent with Madi being the only person on this moon who still likes her, she thinks.

“Yeah.” Madi agrees easily. “I definitely did.”

“How about instead of reading I tell you some new stories?” He offers, and in spite of all the years that lie between them she's pretty sure she can still tell that he's a little nervous. “I could tell you about your grandmother Blake. Or... or about how I first met Clarke.”

“You could? You'd tell me about the dropship camp?” Madi asks, enthusiasm for the idea rolling off her in waves, even while Clarke tries to scoop her jaw up off the floor. He can't be volunteering to reminisce about their past. He can't. It's not something they do anymore.

“Of course. I've got to say, though, I'm a little surprised your mother hasn't already told you all about it.”

“Oh, she has.” Madi confirms eagerly. “She's told me all about how brave you were, and how much you cared about your sister, and about all the kids too.”
Clarke feels her face flame with something that feels strangely like shame at the idea that her rosy-tinted memories of him are being laid bare.

“In that case I’d better tell you about how incredible she was, and how she never gave in, even when I was a bit of an idiot and tried to disagree with her.” He looks up and meets her eyes, lips quirked as if he expects her to smile back at him in response to that odd praise. As if he presumes she will be overjoyed at his kindness in admitting to their daughter that he didn't used to hate her.

As if he thinks it even counts as kindness, to point out the gulf between the Clarke he used to love and the Clarke she is now.

She doesn't smile back. She can't. She makes some feeble excuse, some urgent need to check on how Jackson is managing in Medical, and walks straight out of her own front door.

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She returns a couple of hours later, not quite sure where the time has gone, sure only that she has now wandered every road and trail and path in the vicinity of Sanctum, and is greeted by the sight of Bellamy sitting bolt upright on her sofa, anxiety plain to see in every breath he takes. He looks up on her entrance and she can hear his sigh of relief from across the room.

“Thank God.” He jumps to his feet and crosses the floor to her. “I'm so sorry. Again. I just – I keep screwing this up.”

“Yes.” She agrees dispassionately. “Where's Madi?”

“In bed.”

She nods in acknowledgement of that and wonders what happens now. She seems to be wondering things quite a lot in general, recently, she notes. She is fed up of being so damn confused all the time.

“I'm sorry. I know I must have said something wrong. But – you have to know I didn't mean to upset you. I'm trying to do better, really I am. To show you I didn't mean to – you know – the other
“I'm sure there's a reason you felt the need to tell our daughter how wonderful you used to think I was.”

“It was supposed to be a peace gesture.” He grinds out, evidently growing annoyed. “I was trying to show both of you that just because we've both screwed up recently doesn't mean we can't acknowledge the good things.”

“Do you have any idea how insulting it is to listen to you go on about how great things used to be? How upsetting it is to have you remind me all the time that it isn't like that any more?”

He visibly gulps at that, apparently struggling to process this new viewpoint.

“I'm so sorry.” He says, and she thinks that probably, he actually is. “I never meant it like that. But I'll stop, of course I will. No more going on about the past.”

“Thank you.” She sags onto the sofa, and he resumes his seat, and a Madi-sized gap looms between them. “Did you have a nice evening with her?”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“I hope you'll come back again.” She says nervously, gaze fixed on her hands, fearing that, perhaps, her anger this evening might put him off coming back to spend the evening with Madi in future. In fact, now that she has his apology echoing in her ears, and she can almost feel the weight of his concerned gaze on her, she's not quite sure what she was so upset about in the first place.

Whatever happened to using her head, not her heart?

“If that's OK.”

“Of course it is. You're always welcome. I'm sorry I might have overreacted.”
“Clarke, if ever there was a time for overreacting, I think this is it. It’s not every day you end up having an impossible time-travel child with someone you used to love.” He reminds her sadly, and she looks up and meets his eyes on hearing the genuine tenderness in his tone. “I think you’re still taking this better than I did with that drunken outburst the other day. Sorry about that, too, by the way.”

“You’re forgiven.” She says easily, and finds her lips curling up into the smallest of smiles. “Isn’t forgiveness what we do?”

“Yeah. I think it’s what we do best.”

“Yeah.” She chances a glance at the space in between them and wonders if, perhaps, there might be a way to go about closing it just a little.

“I suppose I should be going.” He offers, and suddenly she knows what she has to do.

“Don’t.” She reaches out a hand across that centuries-old divide, but stops part way. She still can’t touch him. Not quite. “Stay for a bit. Do you want to play chess?”

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They keep it lighter after that, more superficial. They exchange upbeat remarks about the weather, rather than deep conversations about forgiveness, and they avoid the subject of the past with painstaking care. It makes for a joyful week in many ways.

There are other ways, of course, in which it is wretched. Because the more he pops up at her front door with good evening and I do enjoy chess, the more she remembers that this is not what her and Bellamy are about. It never has been, and it never will be. They are all about the difficult conversations, about supporting one another through tough times. And, of course, forgiveness is what they do best.

But it seems the do pretending to be happy pretty damn well, too. In fact, the more she forces those tough times to the back of her mind, the easier it becomes to believe that she might not be entirely pretending. And at least, she reminds herself firmly, there is now more than one person on this moon who tolerates her, and that’s definitely progress. It is quite lovely, to be very slightly less lonely.
She is walking down the corridor of the Medical Centre, returning to her desk from setting a broken wrist, when she hears his voice.

“Bellamy? Mum?” She walks into the office to the unaccustomed sight of the pair of them engaged in conversation.

“Hey, Clarke.” He greets her cheerfully.

“How's the patient?” Abby asks.

“Fine. All done. What's going on here?”

“Bellamy was just telling me about this plan he has for a family day out tomorrow.” She feels her heart give something of a hiccup at that.

“A family day out?”

“Yeah. I thought Madi might enjoy it if we all went somewhere together, the four of us.” She is sorely tempted to ask why only four, why his sister is not a part of this game of happy families they are to play, but she reminds herself that they are not supposed to ask difficult questions, of late.

“Bellamy was suggesting we take a picnic out to the lake, do a little swimming.”

“I'm sure Madi would enjoy that.” She agrees past the inexplicable lump in her throat. “Thanks for thinking of it, Bellamy.”

“You're welcome. I'll get the picnic, if you two can arrange people to cover for you here?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Great. Well, I'll see you both tomorrow then.” He stands there for a second, looking a little unsure of what, exactly, he ought to do with his limbs.
She finds it only too easy to reach out and pull him into a parting hug.

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When she hears his knock at the door the following morning, she comes to a decision. It is time he had a key, and she tells him as much the moment he gets across the threshold.

“But – it's your house. I wouldn't want to invade your privacy by walking in uninvited.”

“It's also your daughter's house. I think it's only right you have a key.” What's the worst that can happen by him invading her privacy? It's not as if she has a string of lovers to bring home.

“If you're sure.”

“I am. I'll get Emori to sort it, it seems like something she'd know how to do.”

“If there's one thing I learnt in space, it's that Emori can work out how to do anything.”

“Even tolerate Murphy.” She adds with a laugh.

“Yeah, even that. You know, you should come have a drink with us some time. While Madi's with Gaia one evening. You'd be very welcome.”

“Would I?”

“Yes.” He says with a tone of finality that forces her, somehow, to take this crazy idea seriously.

“OK. Yeah. I'll give it a go.”
Madi chooses that moment to come bundling down the corridor, her backpack for the day already in place across her shoulders, a broad grin across her face.

“Let's go!”

“Sure thing, kid.” Bellamy agrees with a grin, and they set off on their adventure.

They meet the fourth member of their party at the edge of the village and begin to make their way down the trail to the lake, Madi running ahead, Abby dawdling whenever she sees an interesting plant. This being a relatively new home to her, that happens often, so the ostensibly-happy parents are, for the most part, left to each other's company.

It is, Clarke realises early on, disarmingly easy to talk to Bellamy while the sun is shining and they are walking side-by-side on this well-worn trail, with neither audience nor eye contact to make the situation awkward.

“She's incredible.” He says thoughtfully, as the pair of them watch their daughter crouch to gaze in fascination at something they cannot see. “And you did a great job raising her all those years.”

“You helped.” She admits, keeping her tone light even as she veers dangerously close to the kind of topic they have been avoiding recently. “I know you weren't actually there, but – the stories of you helped. And calling you on the radio, that kept me going. Kept both of us going.”

“I'm sorry I couldn't answer.”

“Don't be. It's not your fault.” She squares her shoulders and reminds herself not to talk about the past. “Thanks for planning this.”

“No problem.” She risks a peek at his face and sees that his brows are furrowed. “How – how are you, Clarke? After the other night?”

“Fine.” She shrugs, because admitting that it was the worst night of her life and she's still both a little sore and deeply embarrassed seems unlikely to help the situation.
“Thank goodness.” Clearly he does not see through her deception. Perhaps it is not only her who cannot read him, these days. Perhaps it cuts both ways.

“I’m due to start my period any day.” She states dispassionately, determined not to allow herself to dwell on the fact that she is discussing this with him. “So I suppose we’ll know before long whether it worked.”

“Yes. Well.” He coughs slightly. “Let me know if there's any news.”

“Of course I will.”

They arrive at the lake not long after that, and set about eating the picnic that Bellamy has packed while they sit around on the shore. It’s not clear who starts it, but at some point an apple is being tossed around in an impromptu game that has them all laughing hysterically when Clarke goes for a difficult catch, misses, and ends up rolling in the sand. She huffs in mock annoyance and insists that they are to swim now, and the day continues in the same buoyant way.

The suns burn her a little around the shoulders, and she laughs when Madi points out that her skin is fine and she has clearly inherited Bellamy’s genetic material on that front. And her cheeks burn rather brightly when she sees him unashamedly watching her as she walks from the lake in her wet underwear and makes her way up the beach towards the spot where she has left her clothes.

But over and above this, one thing burns brightest of all. Hope. Hope that she might have conceived, that Madi’s future might be assured. Hope that there will be some happiness born from the worst night of her life after all.

Hope that the worst night of her life will not need to be repeated.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
The hope that has burned so brightly throughout their time at the lake is cruelly dashed that very evening. If there is a God, Clarke thinks, he or she must have a very poor sense of humour. To choose this, quite the happiest day she has had in literally centuries, as the day to make it clear that she is resoundingly not pregnant, seems cruel beyond belief.

She sits on the toilet, and stares at the dispiriting stain on her underwear, and feels hot tears roll down her cheeks. It seems that crying in the bathroom is what she does, now. And sure, being Wanheda wasn't exactly a barrel of laughs but she misses her youthful and slightly more put-together old self almost as much as Bellamy does. She dislikes the woman she has become. She dislikes her heartily.

At length, she dries her tears and goes to check on Madi. She knows there's no reason her sleeping daughter should vanish into thin air just because she's not pregnant now, but all the same, she prefers to be sure that she's still there. She thinks that this overwhelming fear will probably be a permanent feature of her life until she knows for certain that she is expecting.

Sure enough, her daughter's dark hair is still splayed over the pillow as her chest rises and falls with the soft breathing of sleep. Clarke sighs in relief and retreats to her own room, to the bed that, it seems, Bellamy will have to occupy once again.

It seems that the worst night of her life may yet be repeated.

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He is everywhere the next day, and she can't quite fathom it. She reckons that probability really does have it in for her. He sits opposite them at breakfast, an improbably cheerful grin on his face as he asks whether they enjoyed their day out, and she feels at least a little smothered by his ill-timed levity. And, of course, she expects him to show up at Medical to pick up Madi for the afternoon, but when he stops by in the middle of the morning ostensibly chaperoning a cadet with a sprained ankle – well, that just seems a bit unnecessary. But as it is, she attempts to paste a smile over the expression of deep sadness and utter terror that has graced her face since last night and gets on with seeing to her task.

Shesuspects she doesn't fool him. She's very aware that her smile doesn't reach her eyes. If she's
being honest, she's not sure it even reaches her mouth.

Of course, her luck being what it is, he invites himself over for the evening and Madi has joyfully accepted before Clarke can think of a reason to refuse. And she's not sure she would refuse, actually, now that she comes to think of it. For all that she wants to spend the time tearing up alone with a sketchbook, she does need to tell him eventually, and it might as well be tonight.

The three of them pass the evening in watching some old Earth movie on a beaten-up tablet, the screen too small for either parent to have much idea what is happening as Madi holds it in her lap, enraptured both by the entertainment and by the idea of a family movie night. Clarke tries to distract herself by taking in her daughter's joy, really she does, but the difficulty of engaging with the film and Madi's silent awe leave her mind far too free to wander.

She's not sure how to go about telling Bellamy. He just looks so at peace, relaxing against the back of the sofa, and as their little girl becomes increasingly excited about the movie she thinks that, probably, it is the happiest she has seen him in years. The smile playing about his lips is deeper, somehow, than it has been of late, a smile of genuine contentment rather than only passing amusement.

Just for a moment, she allows herself to feel a burst of joy that it is their daughter who has brought that happiness into his life. And hot on its heels, of course, follows the stab of sorrow that he will never again look quite that glad about her existence.

She forces herself to make a start on planning out this impossible conversation in her head. She ought to start with an apology, she thinks, for putting both of them through that ordeal to no good effect. And she needs him to be willing to try again, of course, but she doesn't want him to think she's desperate. Her pride couldn't quite bear that, after all the years that lie between them. And through it all, she resolves, she will need to keep better control of her emotions. It will do neither of them any good if she makes another scene. She's supposed to be the one who holds it together, isn't she?

At last, the film is over and Madi skips joyfully off to bed, leaving her empty place yawning between them. It will always be there, Clarke notes, that empty gaping hole, if she cannot get pregnant. And she will always -

“Clarke?” Bellamy interrupts, and she berates herself for her distraction.

“Yeah?”
“So – I take it you're not pregnant?” He asks gently, and she hears a loud gasp.

She realises a little too late that the gasp must have come from her. How is it possible that he has already worked it out? How is she to go about rectifying this, steering the conversation back to those words she has planned?

“Clarke?” His soft voice sounds even further away than the child-sized space between them. “It's going to be OK, Clarke. Really. I can only imagine how frightened you must be, and how upset but – Madi's still here. And she always will be.”

She nods, damply, and wonders how this situation has got away from her so quickly.

“And – I promise I'll take better care of you, next time.” She starts crying in earnest at that, and suddenly, before she can quite see it coming, he has moved across the space in between them and gathered her into his arms.

“I'm sorry.” She mutters into his chest. That was an important part of her script, she seems to remember, and she will stick to it. She will cling to it with a certain measure of desperation.

“What for?” He murmurs. “I can't see anything to be sorry for. I think we've already agreed that being emotional right now is understandable. And you can't apologise for not being pregnant. That's not how biology works.”

She giggles through her tears at that, and relaxes more deeply into his arms.

“Thank you.” She says at last, when the tears have dried. It is better, she notes, to cry with Bellamy than to cry in that damn bathroom alone. “Could we – I mean – could we leave it a couple of weeks before we try again?”

“Of course, Clarke. Of course we can. Whenever you're ready.” She pulls away, back to her side of the sofa, and she thinks that she recognises the expression on his face, thinks that it means he has something further to say. She seems to remember that it used to mean that, anyway.

“What is it?”
“Nothing.” He shakes his head with a slightly laboured smile. “Nothing at all.”

Well then. Clearly that is not what it means, not any more.

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The day that follows is quieter, thank goodness, but it seems that even then it is not destined to be entirely peaceful. Barely has Clarke said goodbye to Madi and Gaia and settled herself on the sofa when she hears the key turn in the lock. And then, bizarrely, a certain familiar knock on the door. Does this ridiculous man not understand why she gave him a key?

“Bellamy?” She calls, although she's not sure why. There's no one else it could be. Without bothering to stand she welcomes him into the house. “Come on in.”

Within moments he is hovering in the doorway, looking rather sheepish.

“Hey, Clarke.”

“Hey. Is there a reason you felt the need to knock after unlocking the door?”

“I didn't want you to feel uncomfortable.”

“Thanks, I guess.” She tries to convince herself to stop frowning at him as she gets on with working out what's going on. “Why are you here? Madi's with Gaia for the evening.”

“Yeah, I know. I'm actually here to see you.”

“You are?” That sounds implausible at best.

“Yeah. You said you'd come to the bar, spend some time with us.”
“Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I did.” She didn't think he meant it, she muses. She was convinced it was not a genuine invitation.

“And I thought as Madi's out, and I'm going to meet Murphy now, and the others will probably be there, I - I thought I'd stop by and see if you'd like to come.”

It should take her longer to make up her mind, she thinks. It should merit careful consideration, the question of whether she wishes to give up a peaceful evening to spend time drinking dodgy moonshine with people who detest her with varying degrees of intensity. Last time she was in the bar with Murphy and Bellamy, she remembers only too well, it went really rather poorly. But, of course, she hasn't the strength to say no to an invitation that involves actual human company and laughter and this man she once loved.

“That sounds great.” She hops to her feet, sketchbook abruptly forgotten. “Let's go.”

“Great.” The grin that breaks out over his face looks surprisingly joyful, she thinks, given the circumstances.

They walk briskly to the collection of battered furniture that passes for the bar, exchanging harmless chatter about Madi's lessons and Madi's interests and Madi's happiness. It is almost, Clarke thinks, starting to feel like they are a team again, even if they are only a team in this one very small regard. And if she tries hard enough, she can almost forget that she is not pregnant, and is frightened, and is resoundingly unloved.

She remembers all of those things very suddenly when she sees Echo sitting at the table between Emori and Raven.

“Hey, guys.” Bellamy greets his friends with an ease she can only envy.

“Clarke?” Raven sounds surprised to say the least.

“Hey, everyone.” She tries for a smile but isn't sure she succeeds.

“Have a seat.” Bellamy gestures at an empty chair. “I'll go get us something to drink.”
And with that, he walks off, and leaves her facing a handful of his friends. Alone.

“What are you doing here?” Raven asks incredulously, even as Emori tries to hush her.

“You asked me to stop avoiding him.” She says with a laboured shrug. “So here I am.”

She's never seen Raven Reyes lost for words before, but it seems she has achieved it now. And Echo's looking at her funny, with a slant to her brow she can't quite make out, but which doesn't look at all like the open hostility she was expecting.

“Good.” Echo says briskly, and she's not quite clear on what that's supposed to mean. “That's good.”

“Yeah.” Raven seems to have found her voice again. “Yeah, it's good that you came.”

“Good.” Murphy mimics, as only Murphy can. “Now we've got that sorted, can we get back to the subject?”

At that, Emori launches into a monologue she cannot entirely follow that seems, she notes with some puzzlement, to be about screwdrivers.

“What's going on?” Clarke hisses to Raven under her breath. She doesn't necessarily believe that her former friend will bother answering, but she figures she might as well try.

“Murphy wants to prank Kane, make it so his chair falls apart underneath him.” She whispers back, for all the world as though they are on speaking terms.

“Of course he does.” She giggles, as Bellamy returns, drinks in hand, and takes a seat by her side.

“What's so funny?”
“Murphy's being Murphy.”

“I think you'll find that I'm honouring Monty's memory.” Murphy corrects her with a surprising degree of dignity, and she finds herself wondering if she has put her foot in it yet again. That seems to be another thing she does around these people, these days.

“Monty would have come up with something more original.” Raven argues with spirit.

“More original than what?” Bellamy is still apparently at a loss.

“Making Kane's chair collapse beneath him.” Emori catches him up.

“The fire extinguisher was better.” Clarke offers, and for a heartbeat, there is complete silence, and, horrified at what she has done, she gazes on the blank faces of these people who should have been like family to her were it not for that stupid satellite dish.

And then Raven laughs, loud and long, and suddenly Bellamy is joining in, and Murphy is explaining the joke to Emori between his own chuckles, and even Echo is giggling quietly. And that is all it takes, really, for her to decide that coming out for a drink was not such a bad idea after all.

It isn't without its drawbacks, of course. She doesn't exactly enjoy watching Bellamy and Echo chat about nothing in particular with an ease she can only envy. There is something in the utterly relaxed way that they exchange news that leaves her in absolutely no doubt that they spend the evening together rather often. And that shouldn't hurt, of course. She has no right to be hurt by Bellamy choosing to pass the time with a woman he has loved rather more recently than he has loved her. But for reasons she's not entirely willing to investigate further, it does hurt. It hurts rather a lot.

It's only because he's become the closest thing to a friend she has just now, she tells herself.

“So you're making it work, then?” Raven's voice interrupts her thoughts and leaves her rather unclear as to what, exactly, it might be.

“We are?” She asks, somewhat alarmed by this line of questioning.
“Yeah, you know, having a kid together. Speaking to each other.”

“We're speaking to each other.” She confirms, although, right now, they are not. Right now she is facing an inquisition while he laughs out loud at something his ex-girlfriend has said.

“That's great.” Raven says, and looks so genuinely happy about the idea that, all at once, before she can stop it, something within her snaps.

And maybe the alcohol has something to do with it, too, and maybe it's also something to do with the fact that the closest thing she has to a friend just now is currently making it blatantly clear that he has plenty of other people in his life whereas she, of course, was so recently told that he was not part of her life any more. But suddenly, it seems like a good idea to start telling Raven what's going on.

“The having a kid isn't going so well.” She tells her empty glass quietly. “I'm not pregnant.”

“I should hope not, with the amount of moonshine you've just had.” Raven says with a laugh, but something of her sorrow must show in her face as she stops, abruptly, and frowns at her instead. “Are you telling me that – that you could have been pregnant? That you've been trying?”

“Yeah. Well, technically we've only tried once.”

“You – you have?” Raven is suddenly looking between the two of them with a slightly awestruck expression on her face and, sure, it would have been nice if she could have been a little more subtle but it is such a relief to get this off her chest that Clarke cannot really find it within herself to care.

“Yeah. And I think we're going to try again now it hasn't worked.” She mumbles, feeling really rather small.

“You'll get there.” Raven rushes to reassure her. “You must do, somehow, as Madi exists.”

“Yeah.” She offers, less than helpfully, and takes a self-conscious sip of her drink.
Silence falls for a moment, and Clarke rather thinks that means the topic is closed. She has shared a little slice of her sorrow with someone, and it feels good, but now she must fish around for something else to talk about.

“I'm so pleased you worked it out.” Raven's voice surprises her.

“I'm not sure we have, really.” Her own confession surprises her even more.

The biggest surprise of all is the thoroughly understanding look on her old friend's face as she turns to look at her.

Her old friend? Her former friend. That's what she meant, of course.

“I can't imagine how you're feeling.” Raven tells her with a shake of her head. “This must be so hard. And I know it's not how either of you would ever have imagined it but – you'll figure it out. You always do.”

“Thank you.” She hopes she can hear just how much she means it.

“Any time.” She waves a careless hand and pushes another cup of moonshine towards her.

Perhaps old friend wasn't so far off the mark after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter seven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Of course, there is one notable absentee from this game of happy families they are playing at the moment. Bellamy still seems to be going out of his way to avoid speaking to his sister, mentioning his sister, or even so much as looking at his sister, and Clarke thinks that's a bit much, really. If the two of them can pretend to be on good terms convincingly enough to parent Madi together, then surely he can patch things up with Octavia. But, of course, she doesn't dare mention this to him, because talking about things that actually matter is not part of their script, these days.

She occasionally salves her conscience on this front by speaking to Octavia herself. They're far from close, of course – how could it be any different, with so much history between them? But they have at least learnt to exchange an awkward good morning when they bump into each other at breakfast. Occasionally, Clarke torments herself with wondering who, exactly, Octavia is still speaking to. She supposes that Indra is probably on that list, and she's certainly seen Miller engaged in an apparently polite conversation with his former leader. Niylah, too, is on good terms with her, and there's a couple of other Wonkru councilors...

Great. Bloodreina herself currently has more friends than she does.

All the same, she's far from popular, and Clarke can't help but feel like it's a nice gesture to be polite to the aunt of her child. So it is that, when she sees Octavia sitting alone at supper one evening, and Madi suggests they go sit with her, she finds herself agreeing with the scheme all too easily.

Apart from anything else, this is surely a good way of avoiding awkward forced cheeriness with Bellamy for the duration of her meal. There is no way he will approach while they are sitting with his sister.

"Hey." She offers with what she hopes is a cheerful smile. "Do you mind if we join you?"

"Go ahead." Octavia welcomes them with a joyful expression that looks like it doesn't quite belong on her face. "How are you, Madi?"

"I'm great." The child answers easily. "It's beans for supper."

"Yes. Yes it is." Her aunt seems less than convinced that beans should be a source of any particular joy, and Clarke has to agree with her.

"And Bellamy lent me a new book." She holds her breath as her daughter mentions that potentially dangerous name. "It's all about Greek heroes."

"Who's your favourite?" Octavia shows no sign of distress at the mention of her brother, face carefully impassive. "I've always liked Achilles."

"Yeah, he's pretty cool." Madi agrees. "But not as – Bellamy!"

Clarke feels her heart sink into her soles as her daughter starts waving to attract the attention of the man who has just entered the room. There is no good outcome, here. Either he will ignore Madi, and she will be heartbroken, or they will all have to endure an unpleasant explanation of why it is that, in fact, he is going to cross the room to sit with Murphy instead. It appears, as he collects his
food and starts making his way towards them, that they are destined to face the second of those options.

"Bellamy! How was your day?" Madi dives into a conversation before he has the chance to make a start on the difficult excuse Clarke presumes is to come.

"I had a good time out on patrol with Miller. Sorry you couldn't come with us, though." He sets his plate down on the table and Clarke finds herself frowning as he pulls up a chair.

This isn't what is supposed to happen. She is sure of it. He is not supposed to be so keen to spend time with Madi that he is prepared to overlook even his feud with his sister.

"That's OK." Her daughter prattles on, apparently oblivious to the suffocating tension. "I was reading that book you lent me, and before you got here I was just about to tell Octavia why Odysseus is better than Achilles."

He chuckles, doing a surprisingly good impression of someone entirely relaxed. "Good luck convincing Octavia of that. Achilles has always been her favourite."

He begins to shovel nondescript beans into his mouth while his sister and the mother of his child stare at him with matching expressions of shock.

"But Odysseus is so much better. Being loyal and coming up with all those clever plans and coming home to his family are so much more important than being good at fighting."

There is a beat of horrified silence, then -

"You know, I think you might be right." Octavia murmurs. "Perhaps I need to think again."

This time, it is Bellamy's turn to gape in shock, Clarke notes.

"Odysseus is the best." Madi states. "And I like the whole story, the way he gets home to his wife and child and they live happily ever after."

"I'm not sure it's quite like that." Bellamy bites out, and she can read in his eyes that this has the potential to get ugly. "Quite a lot of people die along the way, I seem to remember. And they've been apart such a long time I don't see how it can be the same. I'm not sure it even counts as happily ever after."

She is about to speak, to try to soothe his anger and bring the conversation back to safer ground when Octavia beats her to it.

"I think happily ever after is what you make of it." She offers quietly, and Clarke gathers that they are, in fact, still not talking about the Odyssey. "Sure, things might not be the same, but coming back together after all that time apart has got to be happier than never seeing each other again."

"I agree." Clarke adds, eyes fixed on her beans, knowing full well that Bellamy will not care whether she agrees or not but feeling the need to speak her truth all the same.

"You do?" He asks, and she dares to peep up and meet his gaze.

"Yeah. I think happily ever after is what we make of it."

"Well then. Maybe it's time for me to think again."

She smiles, and is about to continue tiptoeing down this path of peace, but at that point Madi,
visibly bored of listening to the adults talk in riddles, pipes up with a question about his afternoon patrol. He responds with animation and continues chatting to his daughter, with even the occasional invitation to his sister to join the conversation. It has been, all things considered, a rather weird suppertime, Clarke feels.

And then it gets even weirder, as she smiles at Raven across the dining hall, and Raven smiles right back.

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They are developing a kind of a rhythm, Clarke notes, a familiar pattern of evenings with Madi, and breakfast together, and light chat in the Medical centre of an afternoon. She has even made another appearance at the bar, while Madi had a lesson with Gaia, and stayed long enough to have a drink with Emori and Raven before retreating back to the comfort of her sketchbook.

Chess as a team game is unlikely to catch on more widely, she thinks now, as she smiles slightly at the sight of Bellamy and Madi discussing strategy. They're going to lose, she can read it in the pattern of the pieces on the board before her, and they're going to lose soon. But all the same, they seem happy enough with the evening's entertainment.

"Shall we move this knight?" Bellamy is asking, not bothering to keep his voice down and hide their plans.

"I wouldn't." Clarke advises with a grin. "It won't save you, at this point."

"We've lost." Madi agrees thoughtfully. "She's got us trapped."

"Hey, we've not lost yet." He is apparently trying to remain upbeat.

"We sort of have. We can't possibly win from here."

"She's very wise, our daughter." Clarke feels her heart skip a beat as he looks up and meets her eyes with a grin that makes him look almost like the handsome young man she once fell in love with.

"We surrender." Madi topples their king with enthusiasm, sending pieces rolling over the board.

"You can clear up, then." Clarke tells her with a pointed look.

"Yes, mum." The girl rolls her eyes affectionately, and starts collecting the pieces.

"Thanks, honey." She pushes her chair back from the table and takes in the scene before her, as the pair of them make quick work of tidying up.

"I guess I'm supposed to go to bed now?" Madi asks, tone brimming with false innocence that makes both of her parents laugh.

"I think so, kid." Bellamy agrees. "See you tomorrow for a fishing expedition?"

"Great." Madi hops happily to her feet and wraps him in a hug. "See you tomorrow."

"Sleep well." Clarke reaches out to embrace her daughter. "Sweet dreams."

She watches, endlessly fascinated by this pre-teen who will always be her little girl, as she dances from the room. Madi has been gone for some seconds when she gives a start and recalls Bellamy's presence. He is shifting in his seat, as if fretting about something, she thinks.
"Do you want to stay for a while?"

"No, I'll be going." She resolutely ignores the twinge of disappointment she feels as he stands, and instead rises to her feet as well.

"If you're sure."

"Yeah. But – before I go – I need to thank you. For sitting with Octavia at supper the other day. It was really good for me to be… obliged to speak to her. And I actually went to see her today, just for a little while."

"That's good."

"It is. She's learning how to be human again, I think."

"Maybe she could give me some tips when she's figured it out."

He laughs at that, a hollow sound, because they both know she wasn't entirely joking. "You're doing OK, Clarke."

"Thanks."

"You were right, you know. Both of you. It may not be the happily ever after we used to wish for, but this is better than nothing." This is dangerously close to being a conversation about something important, she notes, as he engulfs her in the most Bellamy hug she has experienced in over a century.

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She is doing OK, she tells herself often in the coming days. And they are doing OK, the pair of them, if she doesn't look beyond the upbeat conversations about parenting and patrols. She ignores with no small amount of effort the part of herself that wants more than that from him, that wants more than that for them. She understands, really she does, that he might not be able to love her any more, not the way he used to, but it would be a vast improvement if they could at least be real friends and talk about things that actually matter. She seems to remember that was something they used to do, too. And that tiny titbit about being human and beginning to reconcile with his sister has only sharpened her appetite for more.

Whatever. She's ignoring that can of worms, she reminds herself.

Even harder to ignore is the growing anxiety she feels as the days pass and she realises that it is only a matter of time before they make their next attempt at conceiving a child. And she knows that he'll be kinder, this time round, he made that quite clear with those tears of guilt on the worst night of her life. But all the same, she can't help but feel apprehensive.

"You OK?" Abby asks her one afternoon, as she gazes into nothingness instead of cataloguing the health details of the latest group of Eligius prisoners.

"Yeah." She lies cheerfully, and tries to still the trembling of her hands.

"You're worried about something." Her mother observes, and she curses the fact that, recovering drug addict or not, this woman can still read her like a book.

"Yeah." She admits. "Just worried about Madi."
"It'll work out." Abby says, leaving her desk to come over and wrap her in a motherly embrace. "I know this is hard but – if any two people can work this out, it's you and Bellamy."

"People keep saying things like that to me. I'm not convinced."

"I am convinced." Abby insists firmly. "The two of you have always been a team, even before you became close. I still remember that time when you defended him to Thelonious when you first got to the ground. You've always trusted each other. You just need to trust him now."

Maybe she takes her mother's advice too easily. Maybe she ought to pause and reflect on all the times that trusting each other has done neither of them any good. But when he chooses that very moment to knock on the door of the Medical centre, she takes it as something of a sign.

She invites him in, and while her mother volunteers to run and fetch Madi from helping Jackson next door, she takes her chance. In a voice so quiet it scarcely sounds like her own, she murmurs her suggestion.

"I think it's time to try again."

She doesn't have to say anything else. She can read in his eyes that he understands her only too well.

"OK." He agrees, voice neutral. "I'll come over tonight."

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By the time the evening rolls around, she is beginning to regret her spontaneity. Didn't she used to think things through rather more thoroughly than this? Impulsiveness doesn't suit her, she decides. She is made for the careful curating of plans, not this haphazard whimsy that seems to have overtaken her since other actual humans arrived in their idyllic valley all those years ago.

Madi is, thank goodness, asleep by the time Bellamy opens the front door. Clarke struggles through a sentence of welcome, and just about manages to invite him to her bedroom without bursting into anxious tears.

"You go on." He says, sounding a little choked. "I'll meet you there. I just need to – bathroom."

She makes it to her room, and removes her top. That seemed to be something he was into last time round, she remembers, and she figures she may as well save him the awkwardness of having to ask. And then she runs a brush through her hair – although she's not quite sure why she bothers - and then she thinks better of the whole topless thing, panics that maybe it looks a bit too forward somehow, and reaches out for the discarded shirt, wondering all the while what can possibly be taking him quite so long in the bathroom. What can he possibly be up to in there? Does he have to hide away from her to get himself turned on?

Is he imagining Echo?

The shirt is lying balled in her fist by the time she hears his footsteps in the corridor. She throws it decisively into a corner and sits, stiffly and somewhat awkwardly, on the end of the bed she is trying very hard to remind herself is, in fact, her own.

"Everything OK?" She asks when he opens the door.

"Yeah. You?"
"Fine." She lies with a forced smile.

He sits next to her on the bed, and she supposes she should have been prepared for this moment. She knows exactly why they're here, after all. But somehow she is still not ready for the way her body freezes in terror as soon as he is here and about to begin. She takes careful, measured breaths and wonders idly if, perhaps, it is a little odd that she is still wearing boots but no shirt.

"Clarke?" He asks softly. "You doing OK?"

"Just a bit nervous." She tries to joke about it but is less than successful.

"I'd say that's a bit of an understatement." He suggests, and she dares to peep a look at him from under her eyelashes and finds that he is looking at her with what can only be concern.

"Maybe." She acknowledges.

"I hate this." He tells her suddenly. "It's awful, what I've done to us. You're the strongest person I know and you're scared of me. I'm so sorry, Clarke, for – for last time."

"It's OK." She tells him, even though it's not, because, in fact, it will have to be.

"We don't have to do this. If you're feeling nervous, or if you hate me for last time – I get it."

"We do have to do this, Bellamy. Otherwise we lose our daughter."

"OK. But we don't have to do it now, or – or like this. We don't have to do anything that makes you uncomfortable. How about we just start by getting to know each other?"

She gives an empty laugh at that suggestion. She can't understand why he keeps coming back to this phrase. There is, after all, no one she knows as well as this man – or rather, as the man he used to be. "Getting to know each other? Didn't we do that about a hundred and thirty years ago?"

He lets out a surprised laugh at that, too. "I meant – you know – getting to know this side of each other. Kissing, touching, all that."

"You didn't seem to be into kissing and touching last time round. I thought that, maybe, it would have made it worse for you, made it more real that I'm not her." She can't even bring herself to say Echo's name.

"I – no – that's not it at all." His jaw is set firm as he stares at the floor. He takes a deep breath, and she is pleasantly surprised to note that she can still read him well enough to know when he's finding something difficult to say. "It would have made it more real that you're you. And I was already struggling quite a bit to process... the emotions that came with it being you. Struggling a bit with self-control, you might have noticed."

She's not sure she can quite make sense of that, because she presumed that his feelings on the matter were a fairly straightforward combination of anger and frustration.

"I don't understand what you mean." She's ashamed to admit it. She used to understand even what he wasn't saying, but she tries not to dwell on that too much.

He gives a humourless laugh and starts picking at a loose thread in the bedclothes.

"You were there the other week when I drunkenly told you that – you know – before Praimfaiya? You do remember me admitting that I used to want you?" She feels something low in her belly at
that, and she's not sure whether it's arousal at the thought of him wanting her or disappointment at
his use of the past tense, but either way, it's a step forward from the cold nerves of earlier. "Things
might have changed between us but – well – physically, you're not so different."

And with that, suddenly, this whole stupid mess begins to make so much more sense. He wasn't
angry with her, wasn't trying to be careless. Hasn't reverted to the frustrated, violent man she first
knew on the ground. He was just struggling to cope, on finding himself in a situation that his
younger self had imagined and his older self deplored.

She realises, then and there, that if this is difficult for her – well, it must be at least as challenging
for him.

"OK." She reaches out and covers his hand with her own, stilling it where he has tied that loose
thread in an improbable number of impossibly tight knots. "It's a good idea. Let's get to know each
other."

"OK."

"Where shall we start?" She's not sure why she's bothering to ask, really. She's expecting him to
choose those breasts that are the only aspect of her he still seems even vaguely interested in. They
are, she supposes, certainly one regard in which she has not changed.

He surprises her instead by kneeling at her feet and making a start on removing her boots.

"Is this OK?" He asks.

"I guess." She's not uncomfortable with it, she's just a bit confused. "What are you doing?"

"I want to see the scar. From the bear trap, the day you met Madi. And then I'd like to kiss it, if
you'll let me." He inhales deeply, and looks up to meet her gaze, and she doesn't think that she's
imagining the unshed tears in his eyes. "I'd like to get to know the Clarke you are now."

"I'd like that." She tells him honestly, even though what either of them would like ought to have
nothing to do with this. They both know why they're here.

But she has to admit, as he sprinkles kisses along the puckered skin of her naked calf, that this is
off to a much better start than their previous attempt. He takes his time, giving the task his full
attention, until he is done and he looks up at her, a question in his eyes, still kneeling before her.

She knows it's her turn now. And really, there is only one thing about this new Bellamy that
puzzles her on a physical level. She reaches out a hand towards the wiry dark hair that now lines
his jaw, runs her fingers over the beard she never imagined him growing. The beard that turned
him into a man she barely recognises. He sighs deeply, and nuzzles into her hand a little, and she
can't help but wonder what he's thinking.

Maybe, if she's feeling really brave, she might ask him later.

In the meantime, though, she leans down, licks her lips. Turns his head gently to the side. Presses a
kiss, just one, to that spot on his jaw where she kissed him farewell all those years ago on the way
home from Mount Weather. Wonders at how different it feels now, rough bristle instead of soft
skin.

All at once he turns his head, and meets her lips with his own, and for the first time in her rather
long life she's actually kissing the man she loved for such a significant part of it. And he's kissing
her eagerly, yes, even verging on desperately, but it has none of the pent-up frustration she felt
between them last time. It is, she notices in an abstract sort of a way, rather a nice kiss, but she's still a little too overwhelmed to simply relax and enjoy it.

He relieves her of the last of her clothes, kissing her all the while, and although she knows her priorities should be elsewhere she can't resist the urge to help him out of his shirt. She thinks she deserves to see that body that drove her so crazy all those years, feel his bare skin against hers at least once in her life. If this goes to plan, she might never have another chance. So she makes the most of it now, exploring every part of him she can reach, breaking away from his lips to press kisses to his collarbone and tracing the defined lines of his stomach with her fingertips. And it's funny, but she finds herself coming back to what he said earlier about getting to know each other. Because she never knew before that he would produce a particular type of gasp when she digs her fingernails into his shoulders, nor quite how he would moan when she rubs her hips against his groin. And he starts groaning again, much like he did last time, when he at last allows himself to reach out for her breasts, but this time he handles them so much more gently that she can scarcely believe he is the same man.

She has to admit, she'd be enjoying this if she wasn't so damn scared.

At least this time round she's vaguely ready for him by the time he eases her down onto the bed and pushes inside of her. It's still at least a little uncomfortable – there's quite a lot of him and they haven't got the angle quite right – so she rocks her hips a little, seeking a better fit. At her action he lets out a noise that she can only describe as a growl, and starts driving into her, again and again and again, building up a rhythm that she has to admit has the potential to go places. And he keeps on kissing her, or rather his lips are still against hers, but she thinks it might have stopped being strictly kissing now as really he's just panting into her mouth, faster and ever faster and she realises abruptly that, in fact, she will be disappointed when this is over before she's had a chance to enjoy it as thoroughly as she might wish to.

And then he moans something that sounds suspiciously like her name – although it can't be, surely it can't be, she must have misheard him – and ruts against her one last time, and then he has collapsed on top of her, his hands tangling in her hair and his face buried in the crook of her neck.

Not much happens for a couple of moments. She wiggles a little, his cock still inside of her, and wonders what it would have been like, to have slept with him properly, all those years ago, rather than here, now, like this, to conceive the child that has saved their people. She wonders if it might have been less – well – disappointing. But at least this time wasn't actively unpleasant, and he's now breathing against her ear and stroking her hair and really, she shouldn't complain.

She's not here for her own entertainment, after all.

"You OK?" He asks eventually.

"Yeah. I'm fine. I should go clean up."

"Sure." He pulls out and away, letting her get up and grab her robe.

"Will you – are you still going to be here when I get back?" She's not sure what the correct answer would be, but she asks the question all the same.

"Yeah." He says with a small smile, and she realises that is what she was hoping for.

She's undoubtedly frustrated by what's just happened, can feel herself throbbing with want at the way he kissed her so enthusiastically and then got her going and then... stopped. She wonders briefly about finishing the job herself, but somehow she's not quite comfortable with the idea. Not
comfortable with taking pleasure in sex that was supposed to be a chore, not comfortable with the thought that he would be waiting for her all the while.

She therefore makes quick work of her bathroom visit, and returns to her bedroom wondering what she will find. He's sitting up on one side of the bed, dressed only in his underwear, and she feels a shiver go down her spine. Carefully casual, as if it is the most normal thing in her world, she takes a seat on the other side of the bed and leans back against the wall.

"All OK? Going to be less nervous next time?" He asks, and she senses that he is in need of reassurance.

Frustrated as she is, she feels no need to give it to him. "Hopefully there won't need to be a next time."

He frowns a little at her words, but she can't see any grounds for that. They both know why they're here. All the same, she decides she doesn't really want this surprisingly successful evening to turn sour.

"I was thinking about what you said earlier." She begins. "And I'd like to get to know the Bellamy you are now, as a person. I feel like – I missed so much."

He is silent for a long time, fist tense on the bedsheets beside her, and she wonders if she has pushed him too far, if this is something she is not allowed to know any more, if this is too much intimacy even compared to the intimacy they have just shared.

"I left you." He says at last, angrily, coldly, fist tighter than ever. "That's the headline news of the last thirteen decades of my life. I left you behind, left you for dead, and moved on with my life, and now I have to live with that, always. It's part of who I am now. I am who I am now. And I can never undo it. I swear to you, Clarke, if we find out how this anomaly works – I am going back and putting that right."

"No, Bellamy. You can't." She takes a risk and reaches out to uncurl his fist with gentle fingers. "Because then something else would go wrong, you would die or you would get me on that rocket but I wouldn't meet Madi. But also – that's part of who I am, now. And put together, I think that's part of what we are now."

"I liked what we were before, better." He says sadly. "I liked who we were before."

"Yeah." She agrees softly.

"What about you?" He asks, and it takes her a moment to catch up. "Tell me more about the Clarke you are now?"

"I think I'm turning into you." She says with a humourless chuckle. "Or the you I remember. Since you left and – like I said – it sent me a little unhinged, and then I met Madi and became this madly protective mama bear, I seem to be thinking with my heart a lot more than my head."

"Funny." He says, and she notes that somehow, somewhere along the line, his fingers have ended up entwined with hers. "I spent quite a lot of that time trying to practice using my head. I thought I was honouring your memory or something. I'm not sure it suited me, though. And even unhinged you're still a damn sight more sensible than me."

She laughs at that and squeezes his hand gently. She may not have had an orgasm that night, but she does have her best friend back, at least in part. And she knows which of those things matter to her more.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Clarke awakes the following morning to a distressing realisation. At this rate, having sex once a month and then waiting around to see whether she's conceived, it could be years before Madi's future is assured. Not to mention that they keep being illogical in their timing, and missing the most fertile time of the month. By keep being, of course, she means it's happened all of twice, but it still seems like a less than useful pattern. And the most distressing realisation of all, of course, is that her head is currently so full of confused fluff that she's only just noticed all this.

If they want this to work out, they should have sex more often. There's nothing else for it.

It's not the sex itself that has her so distressed, not any more. Last night has well and truly cured her worries on that front. In fact, she thinks, with a bit more practice the day may come when she actually enjoys it. Not that she's supposed to enjoy it, of course. It's nothing but a necessary act to endure for the good of their people, and all that.

No, she's distressed at the thought of raising this idea with Bellamy, because it seems likely that it will be uncomfortable to beg a man she used to love to screw her again. But, she reminds herself, he really was very lovely last night, and they had a good long chat about those missing years, so maybe asking him to lend her his penis more often isn't such an impossible mission. All the same, though, she finds herself fretting nervously as she potters around Medical and ignores her mother's stares the following afternoon.

Well, perhaps pottering isn't quite right. Were it not for the furniture impeding her progress, and the trivial errands that serve as her cover, she thinks she'd actually be pacing.

His familiar knock sounds at the door, and Clarke jumps to attention even as Madi leaps joyfully to her feet.

“Bellamy!”

Their daughter dives into his arms, and he hugs her back, but even as he does so, Clarke notes, his eyes are seeking out hers. And it makes her heart do a funny little hiccup into her throat, somehow, and she can't help the smile that breaks out over her face in response.
He doesn't smile. No, he simply beams. There is no other word for it. And it makes her feel eighteen years old all over again.

Maybe she can ask him to screw her again, after all.

She shakes away that thought, because this is really neither the time nor the place, and crosses the room to claim a hug of her own the moment he has extracted himself from Madi.

“You OK?” He whispers into her hair.

“Yeah.” She murmurs easily in reply, before drawing reluctantly away from his arms.

“Can we go now?” Madi is as eager as ever to get on with the next adventure.

“Hang on a moment.” Bellamy laughs at her eagerness. “Am I not allowed to speak to your mother first?”

Madi huffs in mock annoyance and folds her arms. “Why would you want to do that?”

He crouches and adopts a conspiratorial mock whisper. “I don't know if you've ever noticed, Madi, but we're quite good friends.”

Everyone laughs at that, even Abby joining in.

“So what did you need to speak to me about so urgently?” After the revelation that they are, in fact, quite good friends, Clarke finds it surprisingly easy to forget her earlier distress and relax into the conversation.

“It's not exactly a matter of life-or-death.” He concedes with a shrug. “I just wanted to tell you there's a bit of a gathering in the bar planned for tomorrow.”

“What's the occasion?”
“No occasion. Just people hanging out and I thought you might want to join us.”

“That's kind of you, but I'll stay in with Madi.” After all, she cannot be abandoning her daughter just because an annoyingly attractive man has decided they are friends again.

“Madi can come over to us for the night.” Abby volunteers, as if this is a thing that happens all the time.

As if this is a thing that has ever happened before.

“Really? Oh please can I? Please, Clarke?” Madi is evidently rather excited at the prospect.

“Well, it seems like that one's settled.” Bellamy decides with a grin. “I'll see you there.”

……

He doesn't see her there, in the end. No, he appears at her front door, a clear ten minutes before the appointed time, and does that ridiculous thing where he unlocks the door and knocks as if worried she might still be afraid of him. She tells herself she's only frazzled by this because she wasn't expecting him, and because it's frankly very weird behaviour, but she knows there's more to it than that. She has decided that tonight is the night to approach him about having sex more often, that it is sensible to take advantage of this obvious opportunity to talk without Madi around to complicate matters, but she's more than a little nervous at the prospect.

She forces down the rising tide of panic, and calls out in welcome.

“What are you doing here?” She asks when he has made it inside. “I thought I was meeting you there.”

“I didn't want you to change your mind.” He tells her, and she thanks the heavens that they are being rather more honest with each other, now, than they were only days ago. “I thought that you might not be completely sold on the idea and you might find it easier to go through with it if you had company.”
“Thanks. Company's always welcome, but I was actually about to leave anyway.”

“Great. Let's go.”

It is easy, to walk across the village by his side in the darkness. There is none of the discomfort she has grown all too used to feeling in human company, of late. And she knows that this would be a very sensible time to raise that big issue but she can't quite bear to break the comfortable silence.

“What are you thinking?” He asks at length. “You know you can tell me, right?”

“I know.” She lies gently, because she can't, not quite yet. Forty-eight hours of careful friendship do not outweigh over a century of discord. “It's nothing. I'm looking forward to seeing the others.”

“Yeah. They're pleased you're coming, too.”

“They are?” This sounds implausible at best.

“Well, Murphy might not be. He is Murphy, after all. But Raven said she was looking forward to it.”

“She did?” Clarke seems to remember that she is usually quicker on the uptake than this. It's not her fault, she decides. Bellamy is just throwing a lot of unexpected statements at her this evening.

“Yeah.” They are entering the bar at this point, and he indicates a table in the corner. “Look, there they are.”

Sure enough, an assortment of Spacekru are waving at them. Well, waving at Bellamy, presumably, but she's not going to complain.

“Do you want a drink?” She offers, trying really quite hard to do a decent job of this whole friendship thing.
“Go sit down.” He recommends instead. “I'll get drinks. Non-alcoholic, for you, just in case.”

She can't help but perk up at the optimism in his tone. “OK then.”

“Go enjoy Raven pretending she's not happy to see you.”

She laughs at that, and sets about making her way to the table. She is taken rather by surprise at the veritable chorus of people who call her name in greeting. Sure, there are only four of them, but that's more people than have seemed pleased to see her in centuries.

“Hey.” She pulls up a chair. “How is everyone?”

“Pretty good.” Raven's smile is small, but it's there. “Kane keeps giving me impossible transportation problems to solve.”

“That sounds perfect for you.”

“Well, you know. Solving impossible problems is what I do.”

“She does modesty, as well.” Murphy comments with a raised eyebrow.

“You're both as bad as each other.” Emori chastises them.

“And yet you love us both.” Raven reminds her easily.

“What did I miss?” Bellamy arrives at the table and hands Clarke a drink.

“Emori being a saint.” She comments, and somehow surprises a laugh out of Echo by doing so.

“Nothing new there.” He shrugs. “Murphy, recovered from training yesterday yet?”
“Absolutely not. You know, I think I'll be sore all week. My backside -”

“That's quite enough of that, thank you.” Raven admonishes him. “No one here is interested in your backside, Murphy.”

“I think Emori might be.” He suggests with a smirk.

“Don't flatter yourself.” His girlfriend slaps him affectionately on the arm.

“Of course, you're with me for my shining personality.”

“I'm with you because you're about to get me another drink.”

“Your wish is my command.” Murphy gets to his feet and sweeps Emori a mocking bow, before heading off to the bar.

“They're brilliant.” Clarke comments to Raven, shaking her head in amusement.

“Yes, they are.” She agrees with a grin. “But they weren't always, you know. They were such a mess, those last six months in space, and even before they actually broke up, to be honest. Things change.”

“Yeah.” She agrees, taking in the sight of Bellamy striking up conversation with Echo out of the corner of her eye. “Yeah, they do.”

“You two seem to be doing better.” Raven whispers with a vague nod in Bellamy's direction.

“What makes you say that?”

“He's smiling more easily. At everyone, actually, but especially at you.”
“An expert on him, are you?”

“I spent six years living in a metal tube in the sky with him. Yeah, I became a bit of an expert.”

“I wish I had some idea what's going on in his head.” She laments, sneaking another glance at him and Echo. She's not sure why she's still whispering, really, because the pair of them seem far too involved in their conversation to notice anything she might say.

“No, you don't. It's a mess, trust me. And will you please stop shooting those death glares at Echo.”

“I don't know what you mean.” She lies on reflex. She doesn't want Raven to be angry with her, not when they're only just starting to patch things up, not over the bitterness she feels towards this woman Bellamy replaced her with.

“Yes, you do. And it's a waste of your time, trust me. She could never replace you, Clarke.”

“What – what did you just say?” Has her old friend branched out into mind reading?

“She could never replace you. She wasn't even trying to, I don't think. She was in love with the person he was without you, and – well – he's not that person any more.”

“I'm not so sure about that. I don't think he's the person he was with me, either.”

“Of course he's not. Things change. But he's barely taken his eyes off you the whole time he's been talking to her, so I think you're probably good.”

She shouldn't necessarily put her faith in that statement, she thinks. There could be a thousand reasons Raven said that. She could be lying, trying to make her feel better, or she could be misinterpreting his gaze altogether. Maybe he's just checking she hasn't disappeared, hasn't run off to betray him and his family again.
But all the same, as Emori distracts Raven with a question about pressure regulators, she finds herself turning and inserting herself into Bellamy and Echo's conversation all too easily. It's a conversation about nothing, she is strangely relieved to learn, a trite recitation of the events of recent days, and of gossip about mutual acquaintances, and of commentary on the weather.

And yes, she thinks, he really does seem to be smiling more than usual.

That makes it easier, somehow, to summon the courage needed to ask him to screw her more often. As the social part of the evening draws to a close, and Emori yawns widely and everyone gets to their feet, Clarke knows what her next move is.

“Can I convince you to walk me home?” She asks him. “There was something I wanted to speak to you about.”

“Sure.” He agrees easily, and falls in at her side.

“She was fun.” She comments lightly as they leave the bar. “Thanks for inviting me.”

“Well, you know. Still working on my decades-old mission to teach you how to have fun. Remember that Unity Day on the ground?”

“Of course I remember that.” She resists the temptation to add that it was the first day she noticed he was slightly wonderful as well as utterly infuriating.

“At this rate, you'll learn how to enjoy a party properly before the millennium is through.”

She laughs at that, and they walk in silence for a couple more minutes.

“What was it you wanted to speak about?” He breaks the stillness carefully.

“Can we wait till we get to the house? It's – I'm a bit nervous to talk about it and I'd rather not have everyone in town hear us.”
“Sure we can.”

Silence falls once more, and she practises taking deep breaths. She can do this. She has to, for Madi. And she thinks that, perhaps, she has to do this for her, too. For them. If she can learn to be honest with him, and ask the difficult questions, maybe this newly rekindled friendship might endure beyond two days.

They reach the house. Slowly, methodically, she removes her key from her pocket, turns it in the lock. Switches on the lights and leads the way down the corridor. Takes a seat on the sofa, hands neatly arranged on her knees, eyes fixed ahead of her. She can do this, she knows she can, but she sees no sense in making it more difficult by looking at him.

“Are you OK?” He asks gently, and she feels his weight settle onto the sofa beside her. “Want to have a go at telling me what this is all about?”

“I'm sorry to have to ask this of you, because I know it must be a pretty unpleasant chore for you.” After all, that is only the truth. She still remembers all of his talk of getting on with it the first time round. “And I know I said hopefully there wouldn't need to be a next time, but – well – I think the most rational approach to trying to conceive Madi is for us to have sex more often. Because at this rate, we'll only be trying once a month, and then waiting to find out if it's worked, and like that, I might never get pregnant and – and our daughter -” She trails off in an unpleasant mixture of anxiety and embarrassment.

“I agree.” He tells her in a measured voice. “I was thinking that myself, but after hurting you that first time I didn't want you to feel pressured into doing anything you were unhappy with. There's something I don't agree with, though. I wouldn't describe it as an unpleasant chore, and I don't think you need to be apologising.”

She can't quite make sense of that one. She has a feeling that, perhaps, there might have been the slightest hint of a compliment in there somewhere, but she thinks their friendship is currently a little too fragile to go looking for it.

“OK.” She sighs in relief. She has won this round. She will secure her daughter, one day. “Thanks for that. So I guess – just – whenever it's convenient?”

“Yeah. That sounds sensible.”
They sit there, side by side, for fully twenty seconds, in a silence so heavy she thinks she could probably use it to bludgeon this infuriating man to death, if she so chose. She's familiar with the expression elephant in the room, of course, but this seems more like a full-sized blue whale. She remembers those from the old Earth documentaries she watched with her father. Surely, she thinks, there is no time more convenient likely to present itself than this very moment, when their daughter is staying with her grandmother for the night and they have the whole house to themselves and nothing, but nothing, to interrupt them. And Bellamy's no idiot, so if he's chosen not to point out how convenient this is, well then, clearly he must not be interested in -

“Clarke?” He breaks the silence at last, sounding somehow rather smaller than usual.

“Mhmm.”

“Is – is now convenient?”

“Yep.”

Barely has the word left her lips before his lips are on hers, and she wants to kiss him back, really she does, but in this moment she cannot help but laugh into his mouth. And then he's laughing, too, but somehow still kissing her, and he tastes like moonshine and memories.

Something hits her on the leg, and she realises that he is trying to kick off his boots without much success.

“Come on.” She jumps to her feet and tugs at his hand. “You're the one who wanted the privacy of the bedroom, last time.”

“Whatever's convenient.” He teases her cheerfully.

The walk to the bedroom seems to put the brakes on things at least a little, thank goodness. She was worried, for a moment, when he started kissing her so passionately, that perhaps they were in for another one of those unpleasant poor-self-control frustrated messes. But instead, he sits her on the bed, and gently removes her shoes and socks, and then discards his own, too.

“You OK?” He asks, and she thinks that, probably, he will always ask that more often than necessary, now. That he will always be trying to make up for that time he did not ask.
“Yeah.” She confirms, and reaches for his belt. She figures there's nothing wrong with her taking a little bit more initiative in the bedroom, now she knows there's nothing to be afraid of. So she makes short work of stripping him, releasing his somehow-already-erect cock, tugging his shirt over his head, and smoothing her palms over the planes of his chest in a way that, she fears, might look a little too obviously appreciative.

“My turn.” He murmurs, and slides her trousers gently down over her hips, kneels at her feet to ease them over her ankles. Pulls her underwear down, too, still kneeling, and for some reason drops a soft kiss on a seemingly random spot on her thigh.

She represses the urge to sigh at that.

He gets to his feet and helps her out of her shirt, and somehow her bra gets thrown across the room with enthusiasm, and then they are both naked and really, it's not her fault that she cannot help but press a kiss against the crook of his neck.

He groans slightly, and tucks a finger under her chin, and turns her face back up to meet his lips. And she's beginning to remember, now, that kissing this man is actually rather beautiful, and he's taking it slow but she can sense his arousal. After all, the erection pressing against her stomach is hardly subtle. But she's glad that he's still kissing her softly, running his hands over her bare skin, because she sort of wants this to last forever. Well, not forever, of course, but she wants this bit to last as long as possible because – well – if it lasts a bit longer she might end up less disappointed than last time.

It seems she is not to get her wish. And that's fine, really, because she knows why they're here. She knows she's not here to enjoy herself. But it's just that, actually, if she'd enjoyed herself by accident along the way, that would have been fine too.

Whatever. It's fine. She's almost perfectly relaxed as he urges her back onto the bed and hovers over her, dusting kisses on the soft skin next to her ear.

“Clarke?” He asks, and she knows what he's asking. What he seems to be asking all of the damn time, now.

“I'm fine.” She responds, as if fine is what one should be aiming for in the middle of sex. She briefly wonders about screaming in frustration, but then his lips are back on hers and he is pushing inside of her, building up a rhythm her hips cannot help to respond to, and she is rising off the bed
against him, further and further with every stroke, and yes, she could definitely enjoy this, yes, it's -

And then he's done, of course, groaning her name – and this time she's certain that it's her name – and sagging against her, and she can feel herself literally pulsing with want as he leaves her teetering on the very edge of completion.

But she's nothing if not pragmatic, so instead of focusing on the pleasure she has been denied, she decides she may as well concentrate on taking joy in the feel of his soft hair beneath her fingers as she strokes a hand against the back of his neck.

Eventually he rolls off her, with every appearance of reluctance, and one hand left slung across her chest.

“I'll be back soon.” She wriggles out from under his arm and grabs her robe, and runs to the bathroom as fast as she can.

It's so tempting to finish the job, really it is, because it would be the work of a moment and it's been so damn long since another actual human being has got her even half-off. But then she thinks of the man who is somehow, still, her closest friend, sitting on her bed and waiting for her so they can talk about everything and nothing and parent their beautiful daughter together. And she realises, quite abruptly, that getting back there to enjoy his company is far more important to her than enjoying her own left hand.

So she takes two whole deep breaths, and cleans up, and bounces disproportionately cheerfully back down the corridor to him. Sure enough, he is sitting up against the pillows in his underwear, but in place of the easy smile she was expecting is a somewhat troubled expression.

“What's wrong?” She asks, confused. As far as she can see, he just had pretty fulfilling sex. Why does he look so damn bothered?

“I want it to be OK for you, too.” He mutters, staring resolutely at the bedclothes.

“It was fine.” She shrugs, because fine seems to be her word of the day, and because it seems like a safer response that pointing out that it was pretty damn great until he went and left her hanging.

He looks even more bothered at that, but she doesn't think there's much to be done about it. Instead
of pursuing the topic further she takes a seat by his side and reaches instinctively for his hand.

“Tell me more about the time I missed?” She asks, partly to change the subject, but mostly because she wants to know. “We still need to work on getting to know each other, I seem to remember.”

“When I asked O to set aside some land for us, in the valley, if we won – I – I didn't include you. I didn't think you were part of my future.” He sounds incredibly sad at the idea, she thinks, and the apology comes through in his tone.

“I don't blame you. I'd just betrayed you and everyone you cared about, and damaged your chances of winning.”

“Why did you do it, Clarke? Why did you betray us? I know it was about Madi, of course, and the flame, but – you'd always forgiven me for my mistakes before. And you've forgiven me for plenty of mistakes since, too.” She squeezes his hand at that, because forgiveness is what they do best. “I still don't understand why that turned you so... unhinged.”

“She's my daughter. And she was the only person I'd had for six years. She was everything to me.” It seems, though, that she isn't absolutely everything any more. That there are other people in her world again now, too, and that one of them is currently sitting beside her and rubbing his thumb softly over the back of her hand. “And it was the flame, as well, which gets people killed.”

“But it's not like that anymore, you know that, right? She's safe, now.”

“Yeah. I know.” It is his saying those comforting words about Madi, somehow, which gives her the strength to tell him the whole truth she has been denying, even to herself. “But it was partly... partly you, too. I was so angry with you, Bellamy. The memory of you kept me going for six years, but then when you came back everything was all wrong. You were with Echo and then you betrayed my trust by putting the flame in Madi. You weren't the person I remembered, weren't like the hero of Madi's bedtime stories. And I was so angry with you, and so disappointed, and – and I was mourning you, too, the old you, somehow.”

“And it all sent you a little crazy.”

“Yeah. I'm so sorry. You know that, right? I was so completely wrong to do it.”
“Hey, you're forgiven. Forgiveness is what we do best, after all.”

She melts at that, and finds herself sorely tempted to lean on his shoulder. She shouldn't do that, though, she knows. That way lies danger, she's pretty sure of it.

“I should get some sleep.” She tells him, although she finds that she is alarmingly reluctant to do so. “I need to take care of this potential baby that might be on board.”

“That you do.” He agrees softly. “I'll leave you to it. I can let myself out.” He gets to his feet, and starts pulling his clothes on, and she tries very hard not to make it too apparent that she is staring.

“See you tomorrow?” She asks.

“Yeah. I'll swing by to get Madi as usual in the afternoon. I'm going to see O in the evening, too.”

“That's good.”

“Yeah. But I can come over the following evening, if that's convenient?” He suggests, brow quirked.

“Yes, it is.” She confirms with a giggle.

“Great.”

Fully dressed, he hovers half way between the bed and the door for a moment before apparently coming to a decision. In three paces, he covers the space between them, tucks a stray strand of hair behind her ear, and presses the lightest of kisses to her cheek.

“Goodnight, Clarke.”

“Night, Bellamy.”
The sun looks brighter, somehow, the following morning, as she makes her way to Medical where she is to meet up with her mother and daughter. She has a friend, a rather good friend, and his forgiveness, and they are both utterly committed to conceiving their wonderful little girl. And now she's had chance to sleep on it, and recover from her frustration, she's decided that, really, the sex isn't bad either. No, it might not exactly match the fantasies that blossomed in her imagination through six years without him, but it's definitely not bad.

She tries to adopt a more serious facial expression on entering the Medical Centre, really she does, if only because telling either of her relatives what's currently on her mind is absolutely out of the question. So it is that she pastes a careful frown onto her brows, as if thinking deeply about the day ahead and not the night before.

“Clarke!” Madi throws herself into her arms the moment she enters the room. It's hardly surprising, she supposes, given they have never spent so long apart before.

“Hello, honey.” She holds her tight for a moment, inhales the familiar scent of her hair. “How was grandma Abby's?”

“It was great!” She enthuses as she withdraws from her embrace and starts bouncing excitedly around the room. “She taught me all about dislocations, that was cool.”

“Dislocations?” Clarke is struggling to follow this unexpected conversational detour.

“Yes. Sorry.” Abby shrugs. “She wanted to learn about being a doctor. It seemed a relatively straightforward place to start.”

“Of course. Dislocations.”

“And then Marcus taught me all about Skaikru religion.” Madi is already jumping to the next topic. “He was telling me that there was this tree?”

“There was a tree.” Clarke confirms with a smile. “I'll have to remember in future that Marcus is a safer babysitter than you are, mum.”
“Yes. He really enjoyed having her over, actually. We both did.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“How were Bellamy and Raven and the others?” Madi is asking now.

“They were great. It was really good to see them.” She suspects that her mission to keep a straight face has failed at this point.

No, she doesn't suspect it. She knows it. The way her mother is narrowing her eyes has her convinced that she has let her happiness peep through. All the same, as they continue to catch up on the vast amount of news produced by sixteen hours apart, Clarke forces herself to take a seat at her desk and fall in with her usual routine. She makes it all the way to lunch without actually dancing on the ceiling, which feels like something of an achievement. And then the three of them are eating together, and that is surely a perfectly good reason to be grinning from ear to ear, and then they are back in Medical, and if she's having to work quite hard to repress the desire to sing under her breath – well, that's only natural. It's a lovely sunny day outside, after all.

As the prospect of Bellamy appearing at the door looms closer, she abandons any attempt at solemnity and instead finds herself giggling at everything. Also at nothing, actually, now she comes to think about it.

And then he is knocking on the door, and she jumps to her feet, and sure, it's not exactly part of their normal routine for her to hug him first, before their daughter has had the chance to do so, but she maintains that, on this occasion, it's only because she is standing so much nearer to the door. And as for the way he nuzzles into her hair a little as he holds her tight, that doesn't seem worthy of comment at all. It's a perfectly normal way to greet one's good friends, she maintains.

She can't allow herself to think any more of it than this. That way lies only heartbreak and crushing disappointment.

She allows the hug to last rather longer than is strictly appropriate before pulling away and letting Madi have her turn. He starts to speak, his deep voice weaving some explanation of what their plans are for the afternoon, but she can't quite hear him, somehow. She's a little preoccupied with staring at his lips.
Her mother elbows her softly in the side and she forces herself to snap out of it. She shouldn't be quite this with joy only because he no longer actively detests her. She's clearly just overwrought, she decides, at suddenly being so much less lonely, and at suddenly feeling so much more confident in Madi's future. If she's being honest, she's beginning to think there might be a future for them, too. A future in which, at the very least, they can share a drink together, even if sharing a life is still not on the cards.

“So we'll be back a little earlier than usual.” He's telling her now, and she nods and tries to look coherent. “Because I need to get over to Octavia's.”

“Sure. Of course.”

“And I've got training all day tomorrow, but I'm still good for tomorrow evening, if that's still convenient?”

She blushes deeply and hopes that neither her mother nor daughter notice.

“Still convenient.” She confirms with a grin.

“Great. See you later.” He holds eye contact with her for just a fraction too long before turning and shepherding their daughter out of the room, leaving a stunned silence in his wake.

“Well then.” Her mother breaks the quietness. “I take it things are going better?”

That might just be the understatement of the century, Clarke thinks.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter nine

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke knows that this is not the first time Bellamy has let her down. She knows, too, that it is far from the worst way he has ever let her down. But all the same, as the appointed hour for him to show up and spend the evening with her and Madi passes by, she is absolutely furious with him. It's one thing to be late, she thinks, but half an hour late is really quite a lot of late. She tells her devastated daughter that she's sure he just got held up, but she's not sure of that at all, actually. She knew that the joyfulness of yesterday was far too good to be true, that he was bound to back off again sooner or later. She tries to conceal her anger as she suggests to Madi that they should just get on with watching the movie they have chosen. When her father gets here, she points out, they can simply catch him up on what he has missed.

If her father gets here, missing the beginning of the film is going to be the least of his worries. He will be too busy dealing with her wrath, she promises herself, her fury at disappointing his daughter like this. Madi has lost too many people in her life to have the father she idolises walk back out on her now. She won't let it happen.

She briefly considers the possibility that there is some rational explanation for this, that there has been an emergency involving his sister, perhaps. With a rush of cold horror, she allows herself to wonder if there has been an emergency involving him. No, that's an unlikely explanation. It's far more plausible that he has simply decided not to show up, has remembered that she's not part of his life after all. And she doesn't mind for herself, of course, because as she's made quite clear the sex she was expecting tonight would have been nothing better than fine. No, she's just angry on her daughter's behalf. That's all that's going on here.

The film passes by, punctuated only by Madi occasionally wondering aloud where her father has got to. Even those interruptions become increasingly infrequent, until the credits roll and she takes herself off to bed without further questions but with a distinctly sad glint in her eyes.

Clarke is ashamed to admit that she waits up for him. She's angry with him, yes, but she can't quite repress the glimmer of hope that tells her he'll get here as soon as he can, that he'll barrel through the door full of apologies and kiss her softly on the cheek.

He never does.

Midnight comes, and goes, and eventually, she admits defeat. She stumbles, exhausted, into her bed, unable to summon even the energy to cry and mourn the passing of this failed attempt at reconciliation.

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She pastes a smile onto her face as she shepherds Madi to breakfast the next day. She can't let anyone know that she was actually starting to believe in him, again. She can't let anyone see that she's been caught in a moment of weakness. And she supposes she ought to remain upbeat for her daughter's benefit, ought to remember that the girl is even more devastated by Bellamy's desertion than she is.

There are very few people at breakfast, but she doesn't let herself dwell on that as she gulps down her porridge. It scalds her throat, she notes idly, but that doesn't seem to matter right now, in the
grand scheme of things. The moment the two of them have finished eating, she drops Madi at school, and drags her weary feet towards the Medical centre. Her mother isn't there, which is rather odd. Normally she's the first one in each morning. And there's no sign of Jackson, either, and Niylah is taking a day off, so it's a little too lonely as she starts setting up for the day.

There seem to be some supplies missing, she notices, a few dressings unaccounted for. And then she checks the medicines, and they're a couple of vials short on antibiotics, and there's a discrepancy between the amount of anaesthetic in the inventory and the amount they actually have.

Something is wrong here. Something is very, very wrong.

All of a sudden, her mind flies to Bellamy, and that question of whether there might be a good reason he didn't show up last night. Has something happened to him? No, surely not. Someone would have told her, even if she's no longer the de facto leader of her people, even if she's no longer told everything.

But something has evidently happened to someone.

There is a knock at the door, and she jumps a mile. Barely has she had time to process that it his knock, that it can't be him that all of these supplies have been used on, that relief threatens to overwhelm her, before he has opened the door and is standing before her.

And, really, this is no moment for self control. She throws herself into his arms with little regard for her dignity.

"Clarke." He breathes into her hair. "I'm so sorry about last night, Clarke, but I hope you understand, after what happened -"

"What did happen?" She asks, cheek still pressed tight against his neck.

"You don't know? I thought someone must have told you?"

"No. Not a thing. And I just got in and no one's here and there's loads of supplies missing -"

"It's OK." He interrupts her nervous babbling and pulls back to look her in the eye. "A patrol was attacked yesterday. Out to the north, near the anomaly, by something with claws. Only a couple of them made it back here, your mum and Jackson spent half the night piecing them back together. I can't believe no one told you."

"Oh my God." She forces herself to take deep breaths. "How many casualties?"

"Six people didn't come home. Four Eligius, two Wonkru."

"Oh my God." She repeats, horrified. She can't believe that while her people were dying she was so selfishly wasting her time being angry over something as petty as Bellamy standing her up. It's no wonder no one asks her opinion on anything important, these days.

"Kane wanted me at the emergency security meeting. That's why I couldn't come over. And I was going to stop by after, really I was, but we didn't finish until the early hours and that seemed too late."

"No, I understand. It's fine, really."

"That's not all, Clarke. He's – he's sending out a team. To do a detailed patrol of the area, and spend about a week exploring further north to find out where these things have come from." She knows
what's coming next, somehow, before the words even leave his lips. "I'm on the team."

"Of course you are." She says, trying to sound confident for his benefit. "I can't imagine anyone more suitable. I surprised he's not put you in command of it, actually."

"Joint command, technically. Me and Indra. And he's sending Miller, too, and Echo, and the rest of the spots are supposed to be some frighteningly good Wonkru fighters. We should be fine, we're the perfect team." She is, in fact, too frightened to dwell on the thought of Bellamy and Echo being the perfect team.

"Of course. You'll be fine. He wouldn't be sending all his best troops out unless he was confident you'd come home."

"Absolutely. Yeah."

"When do you leave? It's just – Madi will want to see you before you go." She doesn't add that she'd rather like to say a proper goodbye, too, just in case.

"Tomorrow morning. I thought – I thought I might come over tonight, if that's convenient?" He stresses that last word just a touch.

"Yeah. That sounds great."

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Madi seems to find it heartbreakingly easy to accept that her father is about to set out on a dangerous mission, and that he is not entirely confident that he will come back. This shouldn't be a surprise, Clarke thinks sadly, because he was absent for the first twelve years of her life, and she spent six of those relying on stories of him. Clearly her daughter is just used to him being gone.

"I'll see you when you get back." She says brightly, when he tells her the news.

"Of course." Bellamy swallows slowly. "I think we should go on a day out together when I get home. We could go to the lake again? But I suppose it might be getting a bit cold for swimming in lakes now that autumn's coming."

"I'd like it anyway." Madi decides cheerfully. "Can we invite aunt Octavia, this time, too? And maybe grandpa Marcus?"

"Sure. Let's make a big family day of it. I'll – I'll look forward to it while I'm gone."

"Great. And can we go fishing, too? You really need to work on your fishing."

"Let's do that, too, then." Clarke can see him battling to keep his fragile smile in place.

"Cool. I guess I should go to bed?" Madi looks to her mother for confirmation.

"Yeah, I think so. You'll see Bellamy again when he's home."

"Of course I will." She says brightly, but something about the gravity of the situation must have rubbed off on her, Clarke thinks, as she pulls both her parents at once into an unusual and impractical but really rather moving family hug.

And then she is gone, dancing down the corridor with almost her normal dose of levity.

"That went better than expected." Clarke comments into the silence she leaves behind her.
"Yeah. Yeah, it did."

"You'll see her again." She tells him. She might not know him so perfectly, these days, but she at least knows that this is what he needs to hear. "You'll be back, and this time it's only a week, not six years. And you'll have the lazer-comm in case you really need to get through to us."

"Yeah. It's not myself I'm worried about, it's leaving you two again."

"I know." She soothes quietly, and reaches out to rub gentle circles on his thigh with her fingertips.

"Here." He reaches abruptly into his back pocket and hands over a small envelope. "I figured it was about time you had a key to my place, too."

"But I never go to your place." She tells herself that this is because she knows his quarters are too small to host an evening of family entertainment, not because she's still slightly scared of walking into his life.

"Well, now you can, if ever you need to." He explains, as he places his hand atop hers.

"Thanks, I guess."

She gazes at the bare wall opposite, and tries not to focus too hard on the warmth of his hand over hers. She knows that this is the point where they are supposed to get on with conceiving a child, but she's not quite sure how to go about initiating that. As if he has read her mind, she notices him beginning to entangle his fingers with hers. And then he shuffles sideways a little, narrowing but not closing the gap between them, and she is sorely tempted to laugh at their ineptitude.

"Shall we get on with this?" She asks, and she means it in good spirit, but she can't help but notice that his face falls slightly at her words.

"Sure." He says smoothly, instead of explaining his sudden disappointment. "Let's go."

She's not expecting to achieve much in the way of pleasure, tonight. She has got the hang of this, now, has learnt that reaching her climax is not a feature of their obligatory sex life. No, she's expecting some really lovely kissing, and a bit of unobjectionable gentle fondling of her breasts, and a powerful rhythm that breaks off all too soon.

And sure enough, that is what she gets. Within minutes of starting to screw her in earnest, and just as her soul is on the very verge of singing with joy, he groans in satisfaction and then rolls off of her.

She resists, with great effort, the urge to sigh in exasperation.

But then something most unexpected starts to happen. His hand is somehow hovering at her crotch, his fingertips barely brushing her clit as he asks her permission.

"Is this OK?" He whispers, and she tries very hard not to faint from shock.

"Yeah." She confirms, and the moment the word has left her lips, his fingers are inside of her, replicating that rhythm she was enjoying so much, and somehow his mouth is still on hers, swallowing her gasps, driving her to distraction, and then all at once she's there, clenching around his fingers and moaning an embarrassingly loud moan.

They continue kissing, deeply, thoroughly, as they descend slowly back to the ground. He pulls away eventually, just far enough to nuzzle into her neck instead, and scoops her towards him such
that she's lying sprawled half over his chest.

"You have no idea how often I have imagined doing that." He whispers against her skin, and she feels the moon beneath her accelerate even as her heart rate continues to stutter back down to normal. Because it seems to her that I have imagined is rather different from I used to imagine, or even from I imagined. It seems to imply, to her at least, that he's not talking about a time long distant, or about the youthful wet dreams of the man he no longer is. That there's at least a little hope that he's talking about some time a lot more recent than that.

"It was pretty great." She murmurs in reply, and she tells herself that it's a simple matter of positive reinforcement, of ensuring he's more likely to be considerate next time. It is absolutely not because, as he cuddles her tightly against him, it is all too easy to pretend that this is real.

"Good. I know that – that you always seem to want to get on with it, but I wanted to have a go at making it good for you too. I just wasn't sure if it might make this whole situation even more difficult for you?"

"No, not at all." She rushes to assure him, wondering how it is that they've both become so convinced that the other only ever wishes to get on with it when there is quite so much evidence to the contrary. "I know we haven't exactly chosen to be here, but that doesn't mean we can't enjoy it if the opportunity presents itself."

She bites her lip, waiting for his reaction, wondering if she has made a gross miscalculation. She can't be so far wrong, surely, because his physical response in the bedroom has seemed to indicate a certain amount of enjoyment and surely it's only sensible that they might seek to make the best of a bad situation. But the silence is growing, now, as he searches for something to say, and she's beginning to wish she could just take the words back and -

"I couldn't agree more." He tells her, and presses his lips gently to the lobe of her ear.

It is hard to let him go on the mission, after that. She's not completely delusional, of course, and hasn't taken leave of her senses. She knows that one orgasm and an agreement to enjoy their obligatory sex life do not constitute a declaration of love. And that's just as well, really, because she's far from ready for a declaration of love. He's still not the man she remembers, and she still tears up every time she thinks about his long-awaited and thoroughly disappointing return to Earth.

But all the same, she likes to think that the events of that night have brought them a fair amount closer. Not only does she have a good friend in her life again now, she also has a halfway decent lover. Even if he's not chosen to be there, and all that.

The first day he is gone is the worst, much like it was when she sent him into Mount Weather all those years ago. Every time she hears a knock on the door of the Medical Centre she looks up in anticipation, even though no one knocks on the door quite as he does. And every time she is disappointed, and uncharacteristically short with whichever poor Sanctum resident appears, clutching their painful wrist or coughing emphatically. It's just so difficult, after that snapshot of happiness, to crash straight back down to being so damn lonely.

"He'll be OK." Abby tells her, unprompted, in the middle of the afternoon.

"I know." She says, although it is something she is far from sure of. "I just miss him."

"Of course you do, sweetheart. That's hardly surprising, you just got him back."
She tears up at that, because she hadn't really expected her mother to be quite so up to speed on her emotional state. The next thing she knows, Abby has enfolded her in a hug and is murmuring miscellaneous platitudes into the space near her ear.

"Thanks." She says at last, somewhat damply, as she draws away and rubs a hand over her eyes.

"No problem. I think maybe we should go out somewhere with Madi, tomorrow. Just the three of us? Or we could invite Octavia too? Maybe Marcus could take a day off and come with us?"

"That sounds like a great idea."

"And you know you only ever have to ask if you want me to babysit for a while so you can meet up with Raven and the others."

"Yeah. Thanks, mum."

"Any time. He'll be home before you know it."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
They eat their breakfast early the following morning, keen to set out on their adventure, Madi sitting between Kane and Abby on one side of the table, Clarke and Octavia on the other. The conversation is a little stilted at first, of course, as it's the first time they have ever tried to play happy families on quite such a large scale. And there is a certain sorrow that hangs heavy in the air, courtesy of Bellamy's absence, that Clarke finds she is struggling to overlook.

But then, of course, her wonderful daughter pipes up with some comment about how much she is looking forward to teaching her grandparents how to fish, and how amusing she expects it to be, and Clarke is so caught up in her imagined impression of Abby going for an unscheduled swim that she is taken by surprise when Raven appears in the spare seat by her side.

"Well, hello, entire Griffin-Blake clan." She stirs her porridge with a distinctly skeptical expression. "What brings you all here this morning?"

"We're going on an adventure." Madi announces joyfully. "We're going fishing."

"Fishing. Of course. What else did I expect a family of former leaders-of-humanity to get up to in their spare time?"

Clarke laughs rather loudly at that, and she thinks it might be the first time she's laughed since Bellamy left. She has missed Raven's biting humour, but she's not sure they're on quite good enough terms for her to admit that, yet, so instead she goes for a rather different kind of peace offering.

"You'd be welcome to come with us, if you want. Then you can laugh at us all falling in."

"You won't fall in." Madi points out. "And neither will I. But the others probably will."

Clarke resists the urge to shush her. She's rather desperate to know what Raven makes of her spontaneous olive branch.

"Thanks for the offer." Her heart sinks as soon as Raven starts speaking and she hears the rejection in her tone. "But I've got to get into the workshop. Someone needs to be there in case Bellamy and Indra call, and my shift starts in ten."

Clarke tries to nod cheerfully. She should have realised that people were keeping an ear on the lazer-comm. She wonders idly who's in charge of security while Kane takes the day off, and hopes that it's someone competent enough to charge out there and rescue her daughter's father if the need should arise.

"Have you – have we heard from them, yet?" She cannot help but ask, even though she suspects it's none of her business.

"You mean have we heard from him yet?" Raven asks with careful emphasis.

She chooses not to dignify that with a response, but instead narrows her eyes. Things may have changed in the last hundred and thirty one years, but she can still tell when Raven's taking the piss.
"As it happens, he checked in last night, just before I clocked off. They're all fine. Which, you know, Kane would have told you if you'd bothered asking." Raven nods in his general direction.

"Yeah." Clarke makes a great study of scraping the last remnants of porridge from her bowl. "I just-

"But, of course, Kane only knows that they checked in and they're all safe, so it's probably as well you didn't just ask him, because I, on the other hand, know that he gave me a message for you."

"He did?" Madi is suddenly alert and interested in the conversation at this news.

"Yes. He said, and I quote, give my love to Madi and tell Clarke to stop worrying about me."

"How did he know I'd be worrying about him? I'm not worrying about him."

"Clarke, please. He's known you a while. You are worrying, and of course he knew you would be." Maybe Raven's right, she thinks. Maybe all of this getting to know each other is getting them somewhere after all.

"Well, next time he checks in, tell him we say hello." She requests with a vain attempt at nonchalance.

"No. Don't tell him that." Madi demands. "Tell him we send hugs, and that we're going fishing."

"Hugs and fishing it is." Raven decides.

Apparently satisfied, Madi returns to pestering her grandmother for further pearls of medical wisdom, and Clarke finds herself scraping at her now utterly empty bowl and wondering what he'll make of being sent hugs. Are hugs an appropriate thing to send a man with whom one is good friends and with whom one has an enjoyable but obligatory sexual relationship?

"You know, you are allowed in the workshop." Raven mutters to her as she finishes bolting down her breakfast and prepares to leave. "You could just tell him yourself."

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The seed of the idea that Raven has planted in her head, that she could actually just walk into the workshop and call Bellamy, stubbornly refuses to stop growing. And it's stupid, really, because he's on a dangerous mission, surrounded by these terrifying killer wild animals, and he needs to be completely without distractions if he is to stay safe. And the lazer-comm needs to be kept clear for real emergencies, that's an important counter point, too. And, of course, if everyone who had someone they care about on patrol showed up in the workshop demanding to speak to them – well, that would be chaos. It would be ridiculous. And then there's the fact that they don't even have the kind of relationship that merits clingy calls while he's on the job, obviously. A bit of necessary screwing is no reason to need to speak to him every five seconds. And she learnt centuries ago that calling an absent Bellamy all the time doesn't necessarily improve the situation when he's present again.

And yet, somehow, she finds that she cannot get the suggestion out of her head.

The fishing excursion is great. It's a great distraction from her preoccupation, and it's a great occasion to have the vast majority of the family gathered together. Marcus proves to be rather adept at the task, and Abby thoroughly inept. Octavia, surprisingly, doesn't really partake at all, sitting on a rock a little distance away and watching events unfold. So it is that Clarke finds herself leaving Madi in Kane's capable care and making her way over to the adjacent boulder.
"You doing OK?" She asks, wondering how, exactly, one is supposed to start a conversation with a former tyrant about what the hell is wrong.

"Yeah. I'm doing better. I just don't really like killing things, any more." Suddenly her withdrawal from the morning's activity makes a lot more sense.

"Then why come fishing? Surely you realised we were going to be killing the fish."

"Because I didn't want to say no. I didn't want to miss out on a day of having a family, and getting to know Madi." Perhaps she has been wrong, Clarke wonders. Perhaps Bloodreina is every bit as lonely as she is.

"We'll do something else, next time." She promises, because that strikes her as less risky than attempting to give her a hug. They used to be on hugging terms, she seems to remember, but she doesn't think that they are those people any more.

"No, really, it's fine. It's an honour just to be here." Clarke is a little taken aback at that.

"You're welcome."

"Thanks. Thank you so much for everything, Clarke. I know it's thanks to you that I get to see Madi, and that it was basically you who made my brother start speaking to me again."

"I don't think that's true. I don't think I can make Bellamy do anything."

"OK, encouraged him to start speaking me, then."

"That sounds more like it." She agrees with a chuckle.

They sit in silence for a moment, both of them staring out over their little family. She suspects they are both thinking rather similar things, about a sense of belonging and the power of forgiveness, but she doesn't quite dare to ask. And apart from anything else, she is rather keen to get back to that little family and enjoy her daughter's laughter.

"Come on." She tugs gently at Octavia's sleeve. "You don't have to kill anything to go swimming."

"Swimming? You don't think it's a bit cold for swimming?"

"Of course it's a bit cold for swimming. But we've survived worse."

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She's not going to go to the workshop, she reminds herself as she walks to supper the following night. It's a ridiculous idea. And has she mentioned how completely inappropriate it would be for her to waste his precious time in the middle of a mission? No, it's settled.

She calmly takes a seat at the supper table, and makes conversation with Madi about the lesson she is about to attend with Gaia. And it's fascinating, really it is, learning all about the intricacies of controlling the flame and asking the commanders for the precise advice she has need of, but all the same, at least a little of her mind is wandering to the question of what might be happening out there, in a tent in unknown territory.

She wonders if he's sharing a tent with Echo. And, naturally, there would be no reason for him not to. It's not like his daughter is there to have her naive hope of a perfect family and parents who love each other shattered by his indiscretion. And he must be missing Echo, she thinks, because it's been
a good six weeks now since they broke up, and she wouldn't judge him at all if he was sharing a tent with her. Or if anything was happening inside that tent, of course, or if he wanted to make the most of being able to choose who he slept with, just for one week. And, obviously, it's none of her business what -

"Bellamy says hello." Emori sinks heavily into a chair by her side.

"He – he does?" Did her train of thought summon this messenger, or something? Stranger things have happened in her life, of late.

"Well, technically he sends hugs and says he hopes fishing was fun. And he said to tell you that he's OK and the mission is going well. And a lot of other dull stuff about not to worry, and how he's looking forward to playing chess, etcetera, etcetera."

"You're not a very good messenger." Madi tells her robustly.

"It wasn't a very good message." Emori counters. "It was long, and it wasn't really about anything. It was more like a very one-sided conversation."

There is something in the quirk of Emori's brow that makes Clarke think that she and Raven have been comparing notes.

"Well, thanks for passing it on." She says airily. "Next time you speak to him, tell him fishing was great. We went swimming too. And yes, we'll play chess as soon as he gets home. And tell him -"

"Of course. I'll tell him all that. After all, there's no way you could possibly tell him yourself."

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Raven and Emori have definitely been comparing notes, Clarke decides, when the former walks into the Medical centre the following morning. Madi is at school, and Abby is with a patient, and there is no one here to act as a buffer to Raven's well-intentioned wrath.

"This is ridiculous." Her friend informs her briskly. At least, she thinks they count as friends, now.

"What is?"

"This absurd message situation. I am fed up of telling you that Bellamy had a healthy bowel movement, or ate porridge for breakfast, or misses you, or whatever other crap it's supposed to be this morning."

"To be fair, that's the first time you've passed on that particular message."

"Snap out of it, Clarke. The man misses you, and there's a perfectly good way of speaking to him within fifty metres of where you're sitting right now."

"I don't think he misses us." She says carefully, because it must be both her and Madi that Raven is referring to. "I think he just doesn't want us to worry."

"He doesn't want Kane to worry, either, or Murphy, but he's not sending them damn essays every time he calls. Stop pretending that he doesn't care about you enough to want to hear from you, and stop pretending that you're not worth wasting comms time on, and go speak to him."

She notices with a mix of frustration and admiration that Raven seems to have undermined most of her carefully recited logical arguments.
"I don't want to distract him." She finds herself muttering in a very small voice. "He's on a
dangerous mission, and he needs to be on top of his game. He can't afford for me and Madi to
distract him."

"Clarke." Her friend's voice is rather softer than she is accustomed to hearing. "His daughter and
his daughter's mother aren't a distraction. I can't think of any better way of keeping him motivated
while he needs to be on top of his game."

She gives up far too easily, in the end. She should be at least a little disappointed in herself, she
thinks.

"OK. Sure. I'll bring Madi over later today, when she's out of lessons. In the evening, so we don't
interrupt whatever their objective is for the day."

"Great." She watches Raven take a deep breath, set her jaw as if preparing for something difficult.

"What is it?"

"To be clear, I'm only telling you this so you don't hear it from someone else and panic. And he's
fine, he really is, otherwise I'd have started with this. But – but Bellamy had an... up close
encounter with one of those creatures this morning."

"What?" She cannot entirely make sense of Raven's words.

"One of the bear things. He came across one at close range. It – it took a bit of a swipe at him but
he's fine."

"Oh my God." She feels the room start to spin around her. "Oh my God. How bad is it? Is he going
to make it home?"

"I literally just told you he's fine. Nothing but a scratch, apparently, down his left arm, and they
treated it with their field med kit and he's all good."

"How – how did he get away with that?" Raven's words seem too good to be true. "The patrol that
met them last week were ripped to pieces."

"Echo shot the thing. Straight through the eye. She saved his life."

"Of course she did." Clarke knows she should be grateful, but somehow she finds herself feeling at
least a little bitter.

How is it that Echo is always there to save him, whenever she is not?

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By the time the evening rolls around, Clarke's patience is wearing thin. Something about the
combination of anticipation at the idea of speaking to Bellamy and nervousness at the thought of
his injury, coupled with the strain of keeping his misadventure secret from Madi, has her distinctly
on edge. She keeps an eye on the windows, rather than focusing wholeheartedly on the notes she is
supposed to be writing up, waiting for the moment when darkness will fall. She may have given
way to Raven's persuasion that them speaking to Bellamy isn't a distraction, but she feels she ought
to at least wait until his team are forced by lack of daylight to declare themselves done for the day.

The sky is stained with orange by the time she eventually cracks and allows herself to broach the
subject with Madi.
"I hope you don't mind if we stop by the workshop for a while on the way to supper." She says airily. "I thought it might be nice to speak to you father."

"Really?" Madi's eyes are alight with excitement. "We can call him? And I can tell him all about my lessons today and about grandma Abby being terrible at fishing?"

"Hopefully. Of course, if he's busy, we might have to try again another time."

"He's never too busy to speak to us." Madi declares with a certainty that Clarke finds herself rather envious of. It would be lovely, she thinks, to have such unshakeable faith in him.

She seems to remember that, once upon a time, her faith in him was that firm, too.

"We'll see." She says, trying very hard not to puncture her daughter's optimism. "Are you done with your book? Shall we go now?"

She watches her daughter glance, once, at the dense page of text which looks distinctly unlike a convenient point to put her book aside, before closing it decisively, not even marking her place.

"I'm done. Let's go."

She laughs at that, one joyful chuckle, and then leads the way to the workshop. Raven greets them with a cheery wave and beckons them towards what looks, to her uneducated eye, like a large metal box. She can only hope it is a large metal box with hidden talents.

"Well, then." Raven pushes a seat between mother and daughter without invitation and deposits herself on it. "Look who finally showed up."

"Finally?" Madi squeaks in puzzlement.

Raven ignores her in favour of picking up what appears to be a handset and beginning to speak. "This is Sanctum, calling the northern patrol. Does anyone read me?"

Clarke tries not to fret during the heavy silence that follows.

"Raven?" A familiar voice crackles over the line. "This is Indra. Is there a problem?"

"Indra. Hey. No problem at all. Is Bellamy there? There's a couple of people here who'd like to speak to him."

She hears Indra give a snort that she suspects, in a more noticeably humour-prone woman, would be a fully fledged laugh. "I'll fetch him. Just a moment."

Another heavy silence follows, and only a smidge more fretting.

"Hello?" Bellamy's warm voice sounds out of that large metal box, and Clarke breathes a less than discreet sigh of relief.

"Bellamy!" Madi is practically jumping out of her chair. "How are you? How's the mission?"

"It's fine, kid." Bellamy lies smoothly. "It's not very exciting, though. I'd rather hear about your day."

"We had a test in survival class." Madi begins with spirit, and without the slightest apparent suspicion. "It was all about edible plants, so I aced it, of course, but I wanted bonus marks for drawing that root that we found when we went out the other week? And the teacher wouldn't give
me bonus marks, she said that no one had proved it was edible. And then I said that was funny, because I've seen it served at supper at least twice."

"You definitely take after your mother." Bellamy says, voice full of laughter. "She has a problem with authority figures as well."

"That's rich, coming from you." Clarke cannot help but counter.

"Shh, Clarke. Madi was telling me a story."

Madi duly continues her monologue on the injustice of the classroom, but Clarke isn't really listening. Did Bellamy just engage in such a thing as teasing with her? It's a long time, she seems to remember, since teasing was a feature of their relationship. Maybe she wasn't entirely wrong to put a bit of faith in that shift she felt between them on that last night before he left on this ridiculous excursion.

She has to ask him about his arm. She can feel her burning need to know how he's doing cooking her insides to mush. But she can't ask him now, not with their beautiful, innocent daughter listening in. OK, maybe innocent isn't quite right. Sure, she's actually the commander, and has led Wonkru into battle before now, but she's still her little girl and she's not about to cause her unnecessary distress. And she's managed her father's absence with such cheerfulness that she doesn't want her to see the grim truth.

It seems that, while she has been woolgathering, Madi has moved on from her school day to a description of their fishing trip.

"And then Clarke convinced aunt Octavia to swim and they were obviously freezing but they were trying so hard to look tough that they wouldn't get out. And they tried to get us to join them, but grandpa Marcus is too sensible to swim, he says."

"We'll get him swimming, when I'm home."

"Really?"

"Really. I promise. Lots of swimming adventures, and even Marcus joining in."

"Cool. That sounds great. I can't wait."

"You're going to have to wait a couple more days, kid. But I'll be home soon." Clarke has her suspicions that, in fact, Bellamy might be tearing up, but Raven's face shows no hint of concern. She must be wrong, then. Raven's the expert, these days.

"Of course you will." Madi says blithely.

There is a heartbeat of quiet, and Clarke wonders if, perhaps, it might constitute an awkward silence.

"Come on, kid. Let's go look at the rover I'm building." Raven suggests. "Say goodbye to your dad and let him catch up with your mum for a bit."

Madi seems only too keen to agree to this scheme. "A rover? That sounds cool. Bye, Bellamy. Speak to you again soon?"

"That sounds like a plan, Madi. Speak soon."
Clarke waits, carefully, for her companions to stand. Raven puts her chair back, and leads the way to the door. They step through it, unhurried, and slowly, oh so slowly, it closes behind them.

"Are you OK? What the hell happened? Raven said you got attacked and Echo had to shoot the thing to save your life?" Her questions tumble out of her in an urgent rush.

"Hello to you too." He sounds infuriatingly calm about the situation. "I'm OK, Clarke, I promise. It's just a scratch. And Echo did shoot the thing, so no harm done."

"Thank God she was there." She doesn't even try to hide the emotion in her voice.

"Yeah. She's pretty handy in a crisis."

"Yeah... She..." She takes a deep breath and tries again. "I'm pleased she was there. It's good that she's always there to save you."

"Yeah, I'm a lucky man." His tone suggests that he has heard nothing amiss in her words. "How's Madi doing, with me being gone?"

"Fine. She's missing you, of course, but she seems to think this is completely normal. I guess I must have told her too many stories about you going off on heroic quests, and now she thinks that's just what you do."

"I don't think I want it to be what I do, any more." He says, voice raw with honesty. "I'm going to ask Kane not to send me out for so long in future, I think. It doesn't seem right, now I've got a family to think of."

"OK." She swallows thickly. "If that's what you think."

"How – how are you doing, Clarke?"

She hesitates for a long moment, frowns at the metal box before her. A month ago, she thinks, she'd have lied without question, told him some comfortable untruth, but doesn't she want things to be better between them? Doesn't she want them to practise honesty? Doesn't she want to show him that she felt that shift in their relationship, the night before he left?

"I'm not doing so well." She admits cautiously. "I'd only just got used to – to having you back in my life again, to having your friendship. And now you're gone again."

There's a beat of stunned silence. Or at least, it's stunned on her part. She can't believe she managed to get those words out.

"That's how I feel, too." He tells her, so quietly she has to strain to hear him, before continuing in a slightly stronger voice. "There's no one here who appreciates me taking the piss when things get desperate. Miller was so annoyed with me when he was trying to see to my arm, he reckoned I wasn't taking it seriously."

That sounds like the Bellamy she used to know, she notes, with a bittersweet smile. That sounds like the gallows humour of the man who once told her that breathing was grounds enough for hope.

"I suspect he was right. What happened? How did you end up facing off against one of them like that?"

"I came across it, in the middle of the forest, on its own. And it just went for me, which is weird,
because we'd bumped into a whole group of them the day before with no trouble."

"A whole group of them?"

"Yeah. I don't know, a herd? Lots of them. But they walked straight by us."

"So why did that one go for you?"

"No idea. And I'm not going to hang around to find out. We're nearly done here, Kane reckons we can come home soon."

"That's good."

"Yeah." He pauses for a moment, and she thinks she can hear a rather careful inhale. "I wanted to say -"

"Hello?" Kane's voice sounds in the workshop behind her, and Clarke jumps a mile.

"Marcus?" She could throttle him right now, she thinks, however much her mother might love him. It sounded like Bellamy was about to tell her something important.

"Are you guys done?" He asks. Tact has never been his best thing, she recalls. "I need to speak to Indra."

"Umm, yes. We can be." It looks like she is not to know what he was about to say. She will add that to her collection of sentences fate wants left unfinished between the two of them, she thinks bitterly.

"Nearly." Bellamy says firmly. "I just needed to tell Clarke that I'm hoping it'll be convenient if I come over when we get back."

She's not sure how to handle that. She can't quite work out whether to blush, or giggle, or stammer incoherently, so she settles for doing all three.

"Yeah – sure – of course." She huffs a little, frustrated at herself, and tries again. "I'm looking forward to it. Stay safe until then."

"Will do. See you soon."

Kane looks somewhat perplexed, she thinks, but he takes over at the lazer-comm without further comment. The conversation he has with Indra is not long, and seems to be a fairly dull summary of what they have accomplished and what little there is left to achieve before they can set out for home. And she doesn't mean to hang around, really she doesn't. She's not deliberately listening in, and it's not that she misses being in the thick of things. It's just that there are a couple of puzzle pieces she thinks someone ought to be trying to fit together, here, and in the absence of anyone else trying to do so – well, it looks like the task will fall to her.

"What are you thinking?" Kane asks her, brow marred by a frown, when he ends the call to Indra. "Bellamy will be fine, you know that. He's strong."

"Yeah. Yeah, you're right. It wasn't that at all. I was thinking about the behaviour of these creatures. Why do they sometimes attack patrols, and sometimes ignore them?"

"We don't know. You have a theory?"

"Yes. So far all the attacks have been lone individuals, and the large groups have been peaceful."
"That's true."

"It's not a very big sample, of course, but it's a start. I think there must be something we're missing about their behaviour patterns. The lone individuals might be mothers protecting young nearby, or aggressive males." Of course, she is basing this theory entirely on sound logic, and biology, and old Earth documentaries about animal behaviour. It has absolutely nothing to do with her emotions, or with her instincts. And certainly, it has in no sense been inspired by her history with Bellamy.

"You know, you might be onto something. I'll have the team look at the body more closely before they come home, see if there are any more clues."

"Sure." Clarke shakes herself a little. She's not supposed to be here. Motherhood and medicine, those are her duties now. "I'll leave you to it."

"Have a good evening, Clarke. And – thanks for your thoughts."

"Any time." She says, meaning it a little too genuinely, as she goes in search of Madi and Raven.

……

Clarke has long suspected that she is pathetic. She began to wonder that quite some time ago, when she found herself making daily calls to a man who couldn't even hear her simply to keep herself sane. And she became ever more convinced, she remembers, when he arrived back from the sky with another woman by his side and she still couldn't take her eyes off him.

But her suspicions are confirmed, now. It is without doubt utterly pathetic that she is lying here, in her lonely bed, and reliving the sound of his voice telling her that's how I feel, too. And it is beyond pathetic, she is acutely aware, that she cannot forget him whispering into her neck that he has often imagined her falling apart around his fingers. It's just that – well – she's often imagined that, too. And if they have both imagined it, maybe there's some hope yet of fixing the broken centuries that lie between them.

If she's completely honest with herself, she's imagining it now. Because she knows what it feels like, now, and what it sounds like, and talking to him this evening has only served to remind her of the tenderness in his voice when he speaks to someone he doesn't actually detest.

OK, if she's being absolutely honest, she's doing a bit more than imagining it, at the moment, as her hand drifts below the waistband of her underwear and traces the path he traced only days ago. After all, she's allowed to enjoy it, if the opportunity presents itself. And, sure, it's not quite the same, because he's not actually here, and yeah, to be clear, she understands that it's entirely and conclusively pathetic.

But for all that he's physically two day's trek away, somehow, he feels a lot more here than he has done in decades.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter eleven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke is fed up with sitting in Medical, day in, day out, typing up notes and dealing with trivial sprains and the occasional birth control question. She is somehow missing those times when she used to bear the weight of the world on her shoulders, and not only because, in those days, Bellamy was always by her side to share the load. But, she reminds herself, it's a good thing that she's not in charge any more. Because people die when she's in charge. All the same -

Her less-than-productive train of thought is interrupted by a knock at the door. A rather particular knock at the door.

"Bellamy." She is out of her seat and half way across the space between them by the time his much-missed face appears, hair a tousled mess, beard more scraggily than ever. There is something, too, of exhaustion around his eyes, and a firm set to his jaw that she doesn't much like the look of.

"Hey." She is relieved to see that his grin, at least, is still fully functional.

"I wasn't expecting to see you so soon."

"No, we made good time. I was keen to get home. And then Kane reckoned I needed to come get my arm checked out."

"I thought it was just a scratch." She recalls, eyes narrowed, beginning to make sense of the line of his jaw that, she can now see, is half way to a grimace.

"It's – it's a decent sized scratch." He admits, watching her face carefully.

She sort of wants to pull him into an exasperated but rather fond hug, or even risk a relieved kiss, but based on the stiff way he's holding himself she suspects that would be a poor idea.

"Come on." She reaches out for his good hand instead. "Let's get you to a treatment room."

The walk down the corridor is mercifully brief. Clarke isn't sure what one is supposed to say to the father of one's child when they show up at the door with a substantial injury, and she's even less sure why she felt the need to take his hand, and what she's supposed to do with it now, as his fingers lie limply in hers. It makes, all in all, for a rather awkward ten yards.

"Have a seat." She gestures to a chair and sets about collecting up the supplies she expects to need, trying very hard not to notice how heavily he sits down.

To be honest, falls down would probably be a more accurate description.

He makes a start on removing his jacket, more than a little hampered by having only one fully functioning arm, and she becomes increasingly convinced that there is nothing decent about the size of this scratch. She wonders about helping him, but she seems to remember that he doesn't much like being patronised, and she's still recovering from her mistake in taking his hand earlier, when it was, she has been forced to conclude, the wrong thing to do.

Eventually, painstakingly, he eases the sleeve off his injured arm, and she expends a great deal of effort on repressing a gasp. She's seen worse injuries before, of course she has, but she's not seen
worse injuries on Bellamy. The gash is evidently deep, and there's really quite a lot of dried blood, and the stitches are chaotic at best. And the wound reaches to the edge of his T shirt sleeve and, she suspects, quite a long way beyond.

"Let me help you." Her instincts kick in when she sees him grab the hem of his T shirt and make a start on trying to remove it. Based on how much he struggled with the jacket this is, she thinks, a bridge too far.

"Thanks." He mutters, eyes averted, as she eases the somewhat filthy fabric over one arm, over his head, over the injury.

Sure enough, the wound reaches all the way to his shoulder. This time she does not bother repressing her gasp. She does, however, manage to refrain from pointing out to him that this is no scratch. She can see from the tension in his face that he is very much aware of that fact.

He doesn't seem inclined to talk, and she's not sure what she'd say, so she gets on with the task at hand in a less-than-relaxed silence. There is no sign of infection, thank goodness, and although the stitches appear haphazard they are holding securely. All in all, she thinks, once she has cleaned it up a little, things are not looking too bad.

Well, the gash isn't looking too bad. Bellamy's face looks like thunder.

She ignores his stony silence as best as she can, and pours all the sympathy she is feeling into her actions. She coats the wound in a paste that is, in her opinion, quite the best thing about Sanctum, between its antibiotic properties and the way it encourages tissue to repair itself. Then there is a clean, soft dressing to secure gently in place, and then they are done.

"You'll have quite a scar." She comments, because she feels like she's probably supposed to say something before they both leave this place.

"That doesn't surprise me." He says, the slightest glint of humour creeping into his eyes. "Miller insisted that living with Jackson all this time made him basically a doctor, but I wasn't convinced by his stitches."

"He did a decent job, actually. They're not pretty, but they work."

There is a beat more silence, and she swears she can feel it again, just like she has so many times before, that blue whale in the room as they stand here and resolutely ignore the conversation that needs to be had. Are they to say nothing about that's how I feel too? Is there to be no mention of I hope it'll be convenient? Is she not supposed to admit that she missed this wonderful, broken man, or acknowledge that his words on the radio implied he missed her too?

It is as if, she thinks, that night before he left never happened. Not just that night – no – it is as if they have turned back time to a good couple of weeks before even that. To a time when even touching one another was either a necessary act or a mistake to be avoided. And she is so frustrated at the pair of them that she could scream.

"Pass me my jacket?" He asks eventually, brow knotted – whether against the pain or against the tension in the air she's not quite sure. "I don't think I can face putting that shirt back on."

She closes the gap between them, jacket in hand, but doesn't pass it over. She gets to work, instead, on slaying that exasperating metaphorical whale.

"Welcome home." She whispers.
And, of course, that is all it takes. And somehow, she realises in a flash, she knew that was all it would take. She is getting to know him again, after all, she rejoices as he suddenly pulls her into a hug, with a speed she thinks is not entirely responsible given his injury. And, sure, it's a bit awkward given he's only got one good arm and he's still sitting down and she's standing up, but somehow, it feels like she's the one who's just come home.

"Careful." She cautions, even while allowing herself to discard the jacket and wrap her arms around him in turn. "We don't want you to get hurt."

"Good luck conceiving a child with that attitude."

She chuckles at that, and bends down to press one, solitary, brave kiss to the crown of his head. "We might have to wait. You're going to have to take it easy for a couple of weeks at least."

"Or we could not wait." He counters, head still resting against her stomach. "We could find a way for me to take it easy and you to do the work for a change."

It's a bold move, she knows, for him to make light of it like that after that disastrous first attempt, and the less than ideal attempts that followed, but she takes his words in the spirit in which they were intended. The spirit of progress, and of reconciliation, and of getting to know each other.

"We could try that." She agrees with studied nonchalance, as she pulls reluctantly away from the hug.

"That's that settled, then." He somehow manages to summon a smile despite the discomfort she can still read on his face. "I'm going to go change into something clean before I see Madi."

"Yes. She doesn't know you got hurt."

"I guessed. Have we got plans for the evening?" Her heart skips a beat at that, and she knows that the we is only a product of fate forcing him to consider her family, but it's at least a little moving all the same.

"Not really." She replies, trying not to sound as if his question has made her year. In fact, she realises abruptly, it would be more accurate to say it has made her century. "Supper, then chess or movie."

"Sounds perfect." He tells her with a warm smile. "When will you be done here?"

"I'm not really doing much." She admits with a shrug. "Or at least not much interesting. I'm ready whenever you are, and Madi's just in the other room with my mum."

"In that case, the sooner you can help me get that jacket back on, the sooner I can go home and change."

She carefully eases it back over his bad arm, and he finishes the task as if somewhat more motivated than he was earlier. He stands a little more slowly than she is used to, but he seems determined to get on his way.

"Do you want me to come with you? Are you going to need help?"

"I'll manage. Go get Madi." He says shortly, and she curses herself, presuming she must have said or done the wrong thing again. "Thanks, though. For trying to look after me. I guess I'm not the easiest patient."
Her heart lifts again at that, and suddenly she knows what she has to do. Sure, he's at least a little insufferable at times, but that doesn't mean he has to suffer.

"Here." She grabs a packet from the cabinet and offers it out to him.

"What's this?" He asks, frowning.

"Painkillers." She explains gently. "You're probably the bravest person I know, but that's no reason to pretend your arm isn't hurting."

He gives one short burst of surprised laughter. "Thanks, Clarke. You know me too well."

That's not true, she muses, as he shuffles slowly out of the room, painkillers in hand. She still doesn't know him well enough.

......

They are a merry party as they make their way to supper. Abby joins them, too, and Clarke thinks it is probably the first spot of spontaneous socialising her mother has done this side of her addiction. And then they walk into the dining hall, and take their food, and there is Octavia sitting alone in a corner, and the day just gets even brighter, she decides, when Bellamy leads them right over there.

"Big brother!" Octavia looks almost seventeen again as her face lights up with joy and relief.

"Hey." He sits opposite his sister, and the rest of their odd little family arrange themselves around them. "I hear you went swimming?"

"Yeah. It was great, apart from one thing." She has a teasing smile. "Your daughter wouldn't stop laughing at me."

"I wasn't laughing at you." Madi defends herself with spirit. "I was laughing at Clarke."

"That does sound more likely." Bellamy agrees with a grin.

"We should go on another trip." Abby suggests with quiet enthusiasm. "Now that Bellamy's home."

"Definitely." He agrees with every appearance of ease, but Clarke can almost see him trying to work out how he is to go on a swimming trip without his daughter noticing that his arm has recently been torn open.

"Maybe not swimming, though." She suggests, hoping to transfer a little of the attention away from him. "It's a bit cold for swimming, now. Maybe we could go and explore some of the footpaths to the south?"

"Walking? Walking isn't a trip." Madi is definitely pouting.

"It could be a trip if we take a picnic." Octavia suggests with a conspiratorial air.

"A picnic can make anything into a trip." Abby concurs.

That is, it seems, a statement with which no one can disagree.

......
It turns out that some painkillers and a long-sleeved shirt are enough to keep Madi from growing suspicious during the course of their evening together. Family chess night disintegrates rather early on, as it becomes apparent that Clarke is destined to face absolutely no opposition. She has half an eye on the board, and that's enough for her to play passably well, but Madi is too busy asking Bellamy for every detail of his time away, and he is too busy telling a very edited version of his story, for either of them to concentrate on the game. So it is that the three of them soon abandon their pieces and instead pass the evening with a series of anecdotes about Indra's poor attempts to make a decent meal out of berries and large rodents, and Echo's resounding victory in the shooting contest they had whilst bored one afternoon, and Miller's less-than-convincing ghost stories. It sounds, Clarke thinks, like they had a good time apart from the constant threat to life and limb. And, sure, something still stings in her chest when she hears Bellamy talk cheerfully about how amazing Echo is at such an impressive range of enviable skills, but her relief at having him home far outweighs any such petty concerns, for now.

She lets the evening roll on for longer than she normally would, aware as she is that Madi is excited to have her father home, but when she catches Bellamy yawning for, she thinks, the fourteenth time, she decides it's time to call it a day.

"I think you should go to bed, honey. You can hear more about your dad's mission tomorrow."

She frowns stubbornly in response.

"Kane's actually given me a couple of weeks off." Bellamy tells her, as if this is some perk rather than a doctor's prescription. "So we've got plenty of time to catch up. Shall I pick you up from school tomorrow?"

She brightens at that suggestion. "That sounds great. Can we go out hunting?"

Clarke bites her lip, wondering how Bellamy will deal with this ill-timed request.

"I thought we might read, actually. I'm a bit tired after this last week." He admits cautiously.

"Oh." Madi apparently struggles to comprehend the idea that her father is vulnerable to such human weakness as being tired. "Sure. Let's read."

"Great. I'll see you then."

"Yeah." She makes a show of reluctance as she gets to her feet. "Night, parents."

With much hugging, and laughter, and a great deal of see you tomorrow, she is gone.

And her parents are left facing each other across a chess board littered with discarded pieces. Clarke waits for that blue whale to return, but it doesn't seem inclined to make an appearance on this occasion, she notes with relief, as Bellamy meets her eyes with an unabashed suggestion in his gaze.

"Do you think we should wait until she's actually in bed?" Clarke asks pragmatically. "I'm sure she knows what we're up to anyway, but I'd rather she wasn't awake at the time."

"Yes. I'm with you on that."

"Chess?" Clarke suggests with a gesture at the board before them.

"Chess as foreplay?" He asks, brow quirked. "No thanks. I'm bad enough at it when I'm not exhausted and in pain."
"OK." She casts around for something else to say, another suggestion to put forward.

"I'm going to move to a comfier chair." He declares, instead of waiting for her to fill the silence. "Because sitting upright is a bit difficult just now. And then I thought maybe we could talk for a bit?"

Talking? Is talking a thing they do now? Well, of course, they do speak to each other, but the tone of it suggests that he means something a little more significant than that. With a rising sense of panic, she wonders if he feels there is anything particular they need to discuss. Is this about Madi, perhaps? Is this about what they have to do to secure Madi's future? She reminds herself to breathe and follows him to the sofa, taking a seat by his side, then arranging her hands precisely in her lap.

"What did you want to talk about?" She asks, voice carefully controlled, gaze fixed dead ahead.

She hears him sigh heavily, and is on the point of asking after his arm, or concluding that there must be something rather grave to discuss, or even both, when he starts to speak.

"I didn't want to talk about anything, Clarke. I wanted to talk. You know, chatting. The kind of thing people sometimes try when they've been apart for a week when – when they've just got each other back."

"Oh." She casts around for something more coherent to say, and the only thing that comes to mind is I missed you, too, but that seems like a leap too far. He didn't actually say that, after all, he only implied it, and there's a difference there that she thinks is rather crucial just now.

"We don't have to." He rushes to assure her, and now it is his turn to gaze at his shoes even as she stares at him with no small amount of awe. "We can just – we can go and get on with it, if you want."

"No." That is an easy suggestion to counter. "I'd like to chat. You can tell me all about your mission, without editing out the dangerous parts."

"Great." He gives a relieved smile, and she takes that as her cue to relax and lean back into the sofa. Only somehow, by the time she gets there, his good arm has ended up wrapped around her shoulder. She wonders briefly if it is an accident, but that seems unlikely at best. Maybe he really has missed her, after all.

She shakes that thought away and asks after his misadventures of the previous week instead. It's a pretty grim tale, the unedited version, featuring a good deal of peril, and a fair amount of cold, and very little sleep. But all the same, listening to him talk about companionship and the satisfaction of a job well done has her heart aching for that first autumn on the ground, despite the associated risks. His yawns are growing ever more frequent as he moves on to a rather dry recount of the report he made to Kane, and she takes pity and places a gentle hand on his thigh.

"Madi must be asleep by now." She suggests with a quirked brow. "I think you can stop there."

She's not sure which of them starts it, this time, but before she has had time to blink their mouths meet, and his tongue is outlining her lower lip and she's welcoming him home with a moan. And that is encouragement enough, it seems, for that arm that has been around her shoulder to find its way to her waist, and then his hand is on the move again, sliding over her hip, then roaming up to her breasts, as if he is trying to touch all of her, all at once.

"Someone's a bit eager." She comments, grinning, as she pulls away and stands, ready to make her way to the bedroom.
"Well, you know, it's been a long week." He smirks, and sets out down the corridor. For fully five seconds she stands there, fixed in place, staring at his retreating back. Because that seems to imply, to her at least, that it's been a celibate week, and that he didn't enjoy Echo's presence on the mission quite as she suspected.

Well then. It looks like she ought to go get on with enjoying it, seeing as the opportunity has presented itself.

She makes haste to catch up to him, and by the time she arrives in the bedroom, he is sitting on the edge of the bed, removing his clothes and shoes as quickly as might be expected of a man with one working arm. And she is only too happy to follow his lead, discarding her shirt as she strides into the room, kicking her boots under the bed, throwing her bra in the direction of nowhere in particular.

It is only when she looks up that she realises he is staring at her.

"All OK?" She asks, unceremoniously dismissing her trousers.

"Very much." He confirms, as his own follow close behind. "How are we doing this?"

She supposes she ought to answer, but she's really far too preoccupied with pulling him in for another kiss, and then she finds that she urgently needs to weave one hand through his hair and take the other lower to tease his erection, and then, of course, she has to shiver in delight as he moans into her mouth. She's allowed to enjoy herself, this time, and it's easier to remember that than she might have feared. She feels strangely uninhibited, actually, with none of the crippling embarrassment she might have expected to feel at enjoying it quite so obviously. And the way that he is so obviously enjoying her enjoying it – that's a bit of a turn on, too.

In the end, she does answer him, but not in words. This time, it is her turn to ease him back down onto the bed, and he is lying there looking up at her with a question in his eyes as she hovers over him. And then the question disappears from his eyes quite abruptly, as she takes his cock in her hand and guides herself down onto him, and his gaze is filled with something else entirely.

She expects him to get on with the whole screwing thing at this point. That seems to be how it goes, even when they are practising the art of enjoying it. She expects him to be urging her hips to find their rhythm, to be rising off the bed in turn to meet her.

But that is not what happens. Rather, he stills, and reaches out with his good hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. And then slowly, oh so slowly, as if it is a perfectly normal thing to do in the midst of obligatory sex – even enjoyable obligatory sex – he runs a gentle finger down the curve of her cheek.

"I used to dream about this." He whispers, so softly she has to strain to hear him. "On the Ring. And then every time I woke up, and you weren't there."

She's not sure about pursuing this conversational path, because used to isn't really something they talk about any more. Or, at least, she thinks that's right. But he's staring at her so intently, the sheen on his eyes testament to the tears he is too stubborn to let fall, and she's so overwhelmed at the idea that she ever featured in his dreams like this, that she feels like she ought to say something.

"I'm here now." She murmurs, lifting her hand to catch his own, weaving their fingers together. "I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere."

"I'm so pleased you're alive." He tells her, voice rough with a mix of tears and arousal that seems,
she thinks, to be a perfect summary of their ridiculous relationship as it stands now.

"Yeah, I can tell you're pleased." She wiggles her hips, brows raised in challenge, enjoying the feel of his cock twitching in response.

"Tease." He accuses her affectionately.

"You're enjoying it." She shoots back.

"Yeah." He agrees easily, abandoning her hand in favour of a secure grasp on her hip. "Yeah, I am."

With that, she takes his hint and gets to work, building a rhythm, riding him hard, and sure enough he is only too happy to respond, arching off the bed towards her, guiding her with a hand. It make a nice change, she notes, to try something a little different in the bedroom, even if it's not exactly ground-breaking. And it's quite fun to take the lead for once, and she's looking forward to doing that a little more often in the future. She misses his lips, and she thinks that next time they might have to work that out, but all the same it is over half way to mind-blowing and it isn't long before she can feel her pleasure building, feel him losing himself too, and then all at once she is there, and his grip grows tight on her hip, and then he is falling apart beneath her, groaning in completion.

It is strangely intimate, she notes, to be able to see his face in this moment. She feels like she ought to be embarrassed as she watches him find satisfaction, but she's rather too dazed to manage it. So she just sort of sits there for a while, wondering what happens next, wondering too whether they are supposed to talk about the fact that what just happened was at least a little bit special. And he just sort of lies there, smiling that half-smile, fingers tracing gentle lines over her flesh.

"Are you going to sit there all night?" He asks at last, something of a smirk about his lips.

"Would you like me to?" She teases, but all the same she lifts herself off of him, and takes him up on the implied invitation of his arm outstretched by his side.

There is something rather lovely, she decides easily, about lying next to him in the relaxed afterglow of satisfactory sex. There is warmth, and there is companionship, and there is the feeling that, perhaps, they are not such strangers any more. And whilst this moment isn't strictly procreation, they're still in the bedroom, so she doesn't see anything wrong with nuzzling into his chest and pressing the occasional kiss against his skin. Just because they haven't chosen to be here, doesn't mean she can't make the most of having a compliant bedmate. He's certainly not objecting to her slightly more affectionate behaviour, and she's beginning to suspect he might even be starting to doze off.

"I missed you." He murmurs, proving himself at least slightly awake, and she feels her heart do something of a victory dance at hearing the sentiment declared, rather than only implied.

"I missed you, too." She replies easily, and kisses him once more, for luck.

As post-coital conversations go, it's not the longest they've ever had. In fact, as he drags himself to his feet and starts preparing to leave, she is forced to concede that it barely constitutes a conversation at all. But they are, without doubt, the best three words he's said to her in centuries.

As she looks back on all those unfinished sentences, she realises they might, in fact, be the best three words he's said to her in forever.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading!
Chapter twelve

There are bridges Clarke has mended, in recent weeks. And there are bridges she has at least looked askance at, wondered whether they might yet prove reparable. And then there is one bridge that she would gladly have let burn, she thinks, which she would cheerfully have seen engulfed in flame as the world ended, but which is somehow still standing despite all the reasons it should have long since crumbled into dust.

To this day she feels a sudden urge to shield her neck every time she sees Echo. She has still not forgotten that the woman tried to strangle her, back in Shallow Valley, while Wonkru marched, any more than she has forgotten the sight of her throwing her arms around Bellamy in that desert and ruining six years' worth of desperate optimism in one fell swoop. But it seems that caring about Bellamy is enough of a bond that they are, somehow, not quite capable of hating one another. Indeed, the cursed woman seems determined to be civil to her, these days, and that leaves her feeling obliged to show her a little common courtesy in return.

So it is that she goes to supper with a plan, the day after Bellamy gets back. She leaves Madi in Abby's safekeeping, thinking that this is a conversation which is probably best had unobserved, and takes a plate of miscellaneous meat stew, and heads for the seat opposite Echo's glowering brow.

"Clarke." The nod of greeting is not exactly cold, but it's far from warm.

"Echo. Hey. Do you mind if I join you?"

She shrugs by way of response, and Clarke takes that as invitation enough. She sits, and frowns, and hardens her resolve.

"I – I needed to say thanks. For saving him, out there." She stirs her supper and wonders whether there is any good way to go about admitting her debt to this woman.

"I didn't do it for you." Now that was cold, she thinks.

"No, I know – it's just – it's so lucky that you're always there to save him, whenever I let him down."

"It's not luck." Echo contradicts her firmly. "It's called loyalty."

Clarke pauses for a second, expecting her to go the whole hog and add in something along the lines of you should try it some time, but it seems Echo has given up on her. Perhaps she ought to do something about that.

"Maybe I should try that some time." She murmurs into her bowl.

She hears movement at that, and looks up to find that Echo is staring at her, gaze unreadable.

"You were right." Clarke continues speaking, and somehow now she's started it's impossible to stop. "You were so right. That day, back in Shallow Valley. Becoming a traitor in the eyes of everyone I care about did suck. And it still does, because... because I know I can never take it back. And it was worth it, of course it was, because of Madi but – but I should have remembered,
then, that I would always do whatever it takes to save him, too."

"I know." Echo says mildly. "That's what I told him."

"What?" She is struggling to process this unexpected nugget of information.

"That day when he came home from Medical and told me that he was supposed to be having a kid with you. I reminded him that you always cared about him. And – I told him about that day, and about how you changed your mind the moment you realised he was still alive."

"You did?" She can scarcely fathom it. Why would Echo defend her like that?

"Of course I did. He mourned you for six years, Clarke. To be honest, I think he's still mourning you." She gulps at that, because she can feel the truth of it, sitting deep in her belly. She's still mourning him, the him from before, too. "Fixing his relationship with you was obviously what was best for him. And when you really love someone, when you're really loyal to them, you have to do what's best for them, even when it's difficult."

She thinks she ought to scoop her jaw up off the floor, and soon, but she finds herself rather taken aback.

She also finds herself wondering how she is ever to compete with this woman, who has so consistently put Bellamy's needs above her own, in rather marked contrast to herself. Not that she necessarily wants to compete with her, of course, but all the same, it would be nice to feel that she wouldn't be completely outclassed, if ever she did try to give it a go.

In the end, she settles for something of a change of subject.

"I know we got off on the wrong foot, Echo." She begins at last. "In fact, I guess we got off on the wrong foot more than once. But I wonder if maybe we could try again? Anyone who cares about Bellamy that much is family to me."

"Funny." Echo says, voice nonetheless devoid of humour. "I could say the same thing to you."

This is, Clarke thinks, probably what counts as friendship, when the friend in question has been hostile to her for centuries, is a former enemy spy, and happens to be the woman her daughter's father was most recently in love with.

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Clarke insists to Madi that Bellamy should have a chance to catch up on some rest before they all go out on their excursion. It doesn't make her popular with her daughter, but it does seem to provoke a certain amount of warm relief on Bellamy's part, so she supposes that will have to do. So it is that he has been home four days by the time the whole family congregates at dawn with their hiking shoes and a hearty picnic.

"Why are you carrying that?" Clarke hisses at Bellamy, nodding towards the bulky pack slung over his good shoulder, trying to elude Madi's notice as she greets Abby.

"If I can survive what we got up to last night, I think I can carry a rucksack, Clarke." He smirks a little as she feels her cheeks burn at the reminder of that particularly enthusiastic attempt at conception.

"Be serious." She tries to stand on her dignity, but she finds that it's a little difficult to do so when she is distracted by the memory of his hips rolling beneath her.
"Don't fuss." He chides gently, smile warm. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine." She counters fiercely, but conscious all the while of the need to keep her voice down. "Your arm is still held together with Miller's terrible sewing, you are not carrying the picnic. As your doctor I order you to hand it over."

"I thought you said Miller's stitches were doing the job."

"Bellamy, please." She braves a step forward, reaches a hand out to the strap where it lies against his shoulder. "Please let me do this."

"You don't need to." He says softly, as she steps even closer.

"I want to." She insists, thumb rubbing small circles on his shoulder, eyes imploring him to concede.

"OK." He hands the pack over and gives a one-armed shrug. "But I get something in return?"

"Sure." She's not sure that there's anything he can possibly want from her, so it doesn't seem like a difficult deal to agree to.

"You're coming out with Spacekru tomorrow night." He tells her with a grin. "I still need to teach you how to have fun. And Raven reckons she hasn't seen you since I got back."

"That sounds like a good idea." She says, and is surprised to find that she means it.

The walk is a pleasant one, and it takes them in the opposite direction to Bellamy's recent mission, away from the creatures, away from the anomaly. That it does so is no accident. The terrain is easier here, the risks fewer, and it's altogether more suitable for a bunch of shell-shocked former leaders and their youngest relative. Madi darts around, seeking out pretty flowers or new plants, flitting from conversation with one relative to laughter with another. Clarke walks mostly with Bellamy, and Octavia joins them sometimes, but the former Bloodreina seems to understand that her brother isn't ready to spend the entire day chatting to her yet. Kane and Abby take the lead, hands clasped more often than not, smiling warmly at one another, and Clarke cannot help but envy their easy relationship. Marcus is not her father, sure, but all the same she has no doubt that the love between him and her mother is something rather beautiful.

Her relationship with Bellamy, such as it is, is rather pitiful by contrast, she cannot help but feel. This odd mixture of discomfort and forgiveness and lingering doubt, coupled with a fair bit of frantic coupling, is worlds away from the love she witnesses in her mother's life. But it's better than nothing, she reminds herself firmly. It's better than the crushing loneliness she felt only weeks ago. And it's better to go through this awkwardness than to lose her daughter.

They arrive at the picnic site, and the food is shared, and then Madi is quick to co-opt Bellamy and Octavia for a game of catch. She asks Clarke, too, but she finds herself feeling a little more tired than she would have expected, and she still needs to make it home. Maybe that's a good sign, she wonders. Maybe her body is already telling her she is pregnant.

She can but hope.

Instead of joining in their game, therefore, she sits with her mother and Marcus. The two of them have obviously been rejected from the game as being practically old by Madi's reckoning, and so they are left to spectate. Even that does not last long before Abby decides to take herself off on a short excursion to look for medicinal plants. Well, then. It appears that Clarke is destined to make conversation with Kane. That was easier before, too, she remembers. He is another person who
will never quite be the same after those six years. He is more grave, somehow, since Abby's addiction, and since resuming the role of de facto leader he is taking his responsibilities to his people more seriously than ever.

They are silent, at first, but Clarke feels that family days out are a time for conversation.

"Are you enjoying the day?" She asks. It seems a harmless enough place to start.

"Yes. Very much. It's good to have some time away from all of Sanctum's problems."

"It's not easy, being in charge." She can recall the words almost as clearly as she can recall the man who said them to her, the man Bellamy was back then.

"I'm not the chancellor." Kane is quick to correct her. "I'm only managing security, Abby's chief of Medical, Jordan's on -"

"So you may not be the chancellor, but you're in charge?" He gives a brief chuckle at that, and she is sorely tempted to laugh too. It seems they are all stuck on the past, in their own ways.

"Yes. A very competent young woman once introduced me to that leadership strategy."

She shakes her head, focuses for a little while on pulling grass out by the roots for something to do. Watches Madi and Bellamy play, Octavia nervously dancing around the edges of their lives.

Marcus clears his throat and speaks again. "Thanks for your thoughts on the Titans. It would be good to have your input more often."

"The what?" She chooses to focus on the part she does not understand, rather than the part she understands only too well.

"The Titans. That's what we named those creatures."

"You mean that's what Bellamy named them?" She knows him at least that well. There is no one else on this moon who would go around naming wildlife after figures from old Earth mythology.

"Yes." He concedes, before returning to that distressingly straightforward suggestion she glossed over. "Anyway, you should speak up more often. At the minute, what with Gaia and Indra, your twelve-year-old daughter effectively has more input than you do."

"I think that's only right. She's the commander. I'm just a doctor."

The look he gives her plainly indicates that her just a doctor act is about as convincing as her purely platonic feelings towards Bellamy act. That is to say, not convincing at all.

Well then. She had better keep practising.

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It has been a lovely day out, but Clarke is strangely relieved to have her daughter to herself for the evening. Since Bellamy got back from his mission and has been on leave from training, he seems to be in their lives every second of every day. And that's great, of course, in some ways. It's great for the way that her daughter lights up with joy at feeling part of a proper family, and it's great for the opportunities to rebuild their friendship. But it's exhausting, too, somehow. It's just so tiring to second-guess everything she ever says, and to overthink all that he offers in reply. They are still quite some way away from that comfortable give-and-take they perfected before the world burned.
It is with a rather relaxed smile, therefore, that Clarke takes a seat opposite Madi at the chess board that evening.

"Did you enjoy the picnic, honey?"

"Yeah. It was so fun. But it's good to just be at home playing chess, too."

"Yeah. I'm with you on that one."

They exchange moves in a comfortable silence for a few moments until Madi pipes up again.

"What do you think is going to happen to me? With the anomaly and everything?" She sounds more curious than afraid, somehow, but perhaps that is just an act.

"I don't know, Madi. I'm sorry." She feels powerless as she admits it. "But I know that whatever it is, I'll be there to protect you. And Bellamy will too, of course, and Octavia and your grandparents and all the people who love you."

"Yeah. I know that." She watches her daughter take a deep breath, knot her brows as if preparing for something painful.

"What is it?" She asks gently.

"If anything does happen to me, mum, you have to promise – you can't go overprotecting me again. You can't lose your mind like you did in Polis."

"I know." She concedes softly. "I have to use my head as well as my heart."

"Yeah. Exactly. Whatever happens to me – you can't sacrifice anyone else to protect me. Not ever again, no matter how scared you get."

"When did you become so wise, yongon?" There is something distinctly bittersweet about being taught how to parent by her own child.

"I think it might be something to do with this chip in my head." She points out with an impertinent grin that makes the resemblance to her father only too plain.

"Yeah." Clarke moves a bishop, wonders what there is to be said, now.

"You OK, Clarke? I guess this is hard for you." Is she not supposed to ask her daughter such things, not the other way round?

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm doing OK. It's just difficult, because you're right but – I love you so much. It's not easy, letting you grow up."

Madi looks thoughtful as she makes her next move, seamlessly taking that very bishop. "However much I grow up, I'll always love you, too."

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Raven might have been onto something when she pointed out to Bellamy that she hadn't seen her since his return, Clarke thinks. She has to admit that she has spent every evening since his mission in her own home, following a rather cheerful pattern of time spent as a family, then Madi's bedtime, then some thoroughly enjoyable attempts to conceive. It makes a nice change, therefore, to send her daughter to Abby and Marcus for the night, and wander to the bar with Bellamy at her shoulder.
"How was your day?" He asks as they walk, and she finds herself rather appreciating the fact that there is someone in her life with whom she can exchange small talk once again.

"Not bad." She says, because it is the truth. Medical isn't bad, as such, and sometimes she even feels that she has achieved something useful. It's just distinctly less than thrilling. "Treated a guy from Wonkru who fractured his ankle three days ago and only just decided it might be serious enough to get it looked at. You?"

"Dropped in to see Kane. It's been weird not seeing him this week while I've not been training."

"I suspect it's doing you good to have some rest."

"Yeah. And it's been great to spend so much time with Madi and you." Madi and her? That is an unexpected development.

"It's been good." She offers noncommittally as they enter the bar.

"But not quite worth getting my arm sliced open for." He suggests with a grin. "Go on, sit down. I take it you're still on water, just in case?"

"You'll know as soon as I know anything." She reminds him with an exasperated smile. "And I'd like to be allowed to get the drinks one of these days."

She stands before him, eyebrow arched, and waits for a response to that.

"Sure." He shrugs with a smirk. "I shouldn't argue with the possibly-pregnant mother of my child, should I? Whatever the hell you want."

Well. That was easier than expected. She elbows him cheerfully in the ribs and sends him on his way. "Good choice. Have a seat, I won't be long."

She gets the drinks, then navigates a careful path through the crowds towards Spacekru's normal table. She can't quite work out why, but the seating arrangements seem a little different from usual. It seems that the place that has been left for her is a rather small amount of bench by Bellamy's side. Never mind, she decides easily, as she puts down the drinks and squeezes herself into the seat. There are worse things in life than spending an evening sharing personal space with this man.

"Hey." She greets the table with what she hopes is a cheerful air.

"Clarke." Echo is the first to speak to her, with a slight quirk to her lips that she supposes is meant to be a smile. "How are you?"

"Good, thanks. You?"

"I'd be better if Murphy would give up taking the piss." She says with a surprising glint of humour.

"He won't." Clarke advises in return. "It's what he does."

She feels Bellamy chuckle a little at that, and can't resist the temptation to shuffle slightly closer into his side. After all, surely no one is expecting her to sit hanging over the end of the bench? There is nothing wrong, she is certain, with making herself as comfortable as possible, given the circumstances.

"What have you been up to this week, then?" Raven asks with her usual direct approach. "Avoiding us deliberately?"
"Not at all." She rushes to assure them, not wanting this newly rekindled friendship to turn sour again so soon. "Just spending time with Madi and my mum and Marcus, having some family time since Bellamy got back."

"Relax, Clarke. I was kidding." Raven looks, she thinks, almost as unsure of how things lie between them as she feels.

"Oh. Yes. Well, it's good to see you all again."

"Except John." Emori teases affectionately.

"Even John." Clarke insists with a grin, and is rewarded with a burst of warm laughter. This is, she supposes, what it feels like to have friends.

The evening passes quickly, with much discussion of nothing in particular, and her company becoming increasingly merry with moonshine as she looks on, sober yet cheery. Bellamy has certainly drunk a little more than normal, she decides. She can see no other reason why his arm should have found its way around her waist as they share their slightly-too-small space together. Either way, she's not objecting. She thinks that, probably, the Clarke of centuries ago would have jumped for joy at the thought that they might one day sit like this.

The Clarke of today would rather know what's going on behind that smile of his, she thinks sourly. The Clarke of today understands that emotional closeness is a little more useful than physical proximity.

All the same, the physical proximity is certainly very pleasant, and it's got her anticipating with eagerness what they might get up to when they find themselves alone. The evening is drawing to a close, now, Emori excusing herself and taking John with her, Raven muttering something about needing to get into work early tomorrow. Echo is the last to leave, and she fixes them with a considering sort of a look.

"Have a nice evening." She wishes them, appearing for all the world as if she genuinely means it. "It's good that you've worked things out."

That is a little presumptuous, Clarke decides. They haven't worked things out, not by any stretch of the imagination. They just don't yell and weep in public, these days. Working things out, that might be accurate, though, she hopes. She hopes it very much indeed.

"Thanks." Bellamy answers for both of them, and seems surprisingly untouched by the potential awkwardness of the situation. "We're getting there."

They are? He believes that they are, too? It seems her hope is not entirely founded on quicksand. With that she gets to her feet and begins to lead the way home, rather looking forward to what might occur when they arrive. She wonders, even, about taking his hand, but she's not sure she's quite feeling up to that, yet. She still hasn't recovered from how badly that went in Medical the other day.

She doesn't think she's imagining that they walk back to her place a little more briskly than usual. Doesn't think she's imagining, either, that he keeps sneaking glances at her out of the corner of his eye. And she's certainly not imagining the warmth of his lips against hers, the moment they get the front door closed behind them.

Sure, the sex has been pretty great this week. But this is something else entirely, she decides, as she breaks away from his heated kiss just long enough to lead him to the living room. They are not
destined to make it to the bedroom, tonight, it seems, and she comes to the conclusion that this is perfectly OK with her. She pushes him none-too-gently onto the sofa and sits herself on his lap, and gets back on with kissing him. Except she's not really sure that this even counts at kissing, what they're doing just now. It certainly doesn't seem like any kissing she's tried before. It's more urgent, somehow, more frantic, less neat, as she allows her lips to roam beyond his mouth and take in the curve of his cheek or the lobe of his ear. And he seems to be making out with her collarbone, which isn't necessarily something she's ever wanted to try, but it turns out that it's such a good idea she can't believe he's never done it before.

She groans a little in appreciation. After all, she recalls, it is only sensible to offer him a bit of positive reinforcement. If they're going to be screwing for the foreseeable future, he might as well know what she likes.

She's beginning to know what he likes, as well, of course, so she discards his shirt, starts running her hands over his skin, removes her own shirt and bra to allow him access to her breasts. And he buries his face in her cleavage with a moan, and it's rather reminiscent of that first time they attempted to conceive a child, but with one key difference. Somehow, this time, she's enjoying it too. She can't quite pinpoint what's changed. Maybe it's the way he's being so considerate of her pleasure, moving back up to her lips to kiss her as he teases her nipples with his fingertips. Or maybe it's the way he seems so damn appreciative, as if her body is something at least a little bit beautiful. Or maybe it's just the fact that, this time, she knows that they are in this together, and that he's not about to just take his pleasure and leave her to weep in the bathroom.

In fact, this time, she seems to be the one who's growing impatient, as she strips off the last of her clothing and faffs at his waistband until his erection is revealed. She arranges herself atop him, sits down carefully onto his cock, and begins slowly to ride up and down along the length of him.

"Yeah." He moans against her ear, buries his face in her neck. "Just like that, Clarke. You feel so good."

She freezes for a moment at that. Words like those, they seem like the kind of thing he might say if he was actually genuinely into this, actually wanted to be having sex with her. She allows herself to wonder, just for a heartbeat, if perhaps there might be more at play here than a bit of convenient pleasure in the context of a necessary act. If, perhaps, he might be starting to do more than only enjoy it.

No. That can't be right, and the idea needs quashing before she can get her hopes up. Not that she would hope for anything at all, obviously, because for all that they are friends again he's not the same man she used to be a little in love with. And he certainly can't be feeling any more than passing arousal after that gross betrayal in Polis. He might have forgiven her, but there's no way he's forgotten.

Decisively, she reminds her hips to get moving again. With a certain sense of resolve, she reclaims his lips, and forces herself to remember that, for all it's an enjoyable chore, this is a chore all the same.

She has to admit, though, it's probably about as good as chores get.

And it only gets better, really, as she carries on working him with a rising rhythm, and he carries on mumbling surprisingly meaningful encouragements against her skin, and she finds herself groaning a little more than can be strictly dignified. And she gets there before him, this time, but only by a margin of seconds, and then he's falling apart, too, and somehow the kissing only gets more beautiful as they relax into one another and she's still sitting there, and he doesn't seem at all inclined to ask her to move.
She wonders, for a moment, if this might be happiness. It's so long since she has been truly happy that she's not quite sure she can remember how it feels.

If nothing else, she decides, it is certainly contentment.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter thirteen

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

It is not long, of course, before fate unravels a little further, and Clarke loses her tentative hold on happiness and finds herself crashing back down to the ground with a start. Clearly, the universe has decreed that she may not be content for more than a handful of days at a time, she thinks sourly, as she is confronted with the evidence that this month, too, she is very much not pregnant.

It's not grief that she feels this time, not so much as despair. Last month, she remembers looking fearfully towards a future where she would have to repeat the worst night of her life, but where she presumed that she'd get pregnant sooner or later. This month, sure, the sex has been pretty great, but she still hasn't conceived, and that leaves her absolutely terrified. It is even worse, too, because they've been having really quite a lot of sex, recently, so if she isn't pregnant now then that's rather worrying. It has images flashing before her mind, waking nightmares in which she walks into Madi's bedroom one morning and her daughter is simply gone.

She tries for all she is worth to cling to some semblance of reason. Bellamy was away right in the middle of the month, she remembers, when she would have been at her most fertile. As long as they hit that week hard, next time round, there is still hope.

But in the meantime, there is only fear.

She wants to hold it together when she tells him, really she does, but it's a lost cause. He shows up that very day for an evening of chess and convenience, smiling from ear to ear as if all is well in the world, and it brings her failure sharply into focus. Here he is, full of energy, the perfect parent to Madi, and utterly committed to the cause of conception, and she cannot even manage to get pregnant.

She grits her teeth through the chess, and loses, but neither child nor father comment on that uncharacteristic development. She suspects that both of them can read that this is not a good time to ask probing questions. And then Madi wants a bedtime story, and Bellamy is only too happy to oblige, and she finds herself sitting alone in her own living room, staring at the fading wallpaper and trying to convince her racing pulse to slow.

Another lost cause, as it turns out. Another occasion where her head cannot quite keep control of her heart.
“Clarke?” Suddenly he is back in the doorway, and she's not quite sure how many minutes of her life she has lost in fretting.

“I need to tell you something.” It is as far as she gets before the wobble in her voice becomes overwhelming and the wobble in her chest becomes all-consuming, and at once his arms are around her and she is sobbing into his shoulder.

“Hey, Clarke, it's OK. It'll be OK. You'll get pregnant soon.” She should have known that he would see straight through her, would work it out even without words. And that's just as well, really, because words are utterly beyond her at this moment in time.

She sits there for a while, and lets herself cry, and takes comfort in the warmth of his arms. It makes for pleasant progress, she thinks, that she is now feeling secure enough in their reestablished friendship to let him see her at her most vulnerable like this. Of course, it would be even more pleasant if she wasn't weeping, but it seems she can't have everything. She should be grateful, she thinks, that she has managed to salvage having anything after all that life has thrown at her.

Meanwhile, of course, Bellamy continues to murmur quietly while she cries.

“It's OK, Clarke. You'll conceive soon. You won't have to do this for too much longer, I promise. It'll be OK.” She can't entirely make sense of that one, she decides, but maybe that's just because her cognitive faculties aren't exactly at full strength right now. Maybe it'll make more sense in the morning.

At length, she stops blubbing like a child and pulls away. She misses his arms right away, of course she does, but if it's not a particularly convenient time of the month to sleep with him she has no right to stay in his embrace.

“Thanks.” She murmurs, wiping briskly at her eyes. “I know it's early days. We just need to focus more on the middle of the month, this time round.”

“Sure.” He agrees with a brisk nod, not quite meeting her eyes. “Whatever you think.”

“Thanks.” She repeats, and wonders if she sounds pathetic.

“Well, I'll be going.” She knew he would, of course. There is absolutely no reason for him to stick
around, given the circumstances, but all the same, he could have stayed for a chat. Then again, chatting is what they normally do after sex, so she supposes she shouldn't be surprised that it is apparently not to happen on this more chaste occasion. But at the very least it would be nice if he could leave the building without that unexpectedly firm set to his jaw.

“OK. See you tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I'll come pick Madi up. And – let me know when you want to start trying again.”

“Yeah. I will.”

“Right then.” He gets to his feet decisively, grabs his jacket, shoves his injured arm none too gently into the sleeve. It is, she thinks, as if he can't wait to get out of here. “Bye.”

“See you.” The door is closed behind his retreating back almost before she has said the words.

She wonders how, exactly, it is possible that she feels even worse now than she did when she was actually crying. She's not sure how the situation managed to turn out like that, how he flipped from supporting her so carefully to running away so carelessly.

So carelessly, in fact, she notes, that his sweater is still slung over the arm of the sofa.

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She tries to avoid thinking about Bellamy's odd mood in the days that follow, but it becomes increasingly difficult as he makes it increasingly clear that his sudden abruptness is here to stay. She tells herself that it's not surprising that he might be grumpy occasionally, that they're both under a lot of strain, but she can't help wondering if there is more to it than that. As she lies in bed at night, she finds it rather challenging to convince herself that his sourness has nothing to do with him receiving the news that he will have to continue to sleep with a woman he hasn't chosen for at least one month more.

Madi, of course, takes her mind off the situation with her customary liveliness. Apparently oblivious to her mother's preoccupation, she insists that Abby will come over, and they will have an inter-generational girls' night together and – well, she is the commander. Clarke figures that she basically has to do whatever she wants. Or, at least, that's the way she chooses to look at it. She
acknowledges that she's also a bit of a pushover, where her daughter is concerned, but the whole commander thing – that's definitely the primary cause of her giving in to this demand so easily.

Abby therefore presents herself at the front door, and Clarke lets her in and shows her to the living room.

“Grandma Abby!” Hugs are exchanged all round, and the three women find themselves seated on the sofa together.

“This was a lovely idea, Madi.” Abby is getting a little more fluent at communicating with her granddaughter, Clarke is pleased to see. “Thank you for suggesting it.”

“I'm going to draw.” The girl announces decisively, and Clarke stifles a chuckle. They are certainly all three of them rather strong willed, she notes. Clearly it runs in the family.

“I didn't know you liked to draw.” Abby says.

“She likes adventures more.” Clarke explains affectionately. “But yes, we used to sit and draw together on Earth and we've not done it much recently since Bellamy got her into reading, so Madi suggested it for tonight.”

“I used to love watching your mum with her sketchbook when she was a girl.” Abby remembers wistfully. “I'm pleased she passed it on to you, too.”

“Drawing and stories are the only good things about sitting still.” Madi informs them as she takes sketchpad and pencil and moves to a separate chair.

“What are you up to, honey?” Clarke asks.

“Drawing you two. I'm doing a family portrait. Sit still.”

There's only one good response to that, Clarke decides. After all, she is the commander. She allows a smile to break out over her face, sits back against the sofa, and relaxes into a quiet evening with two inspirational women.
It is a nice way to spend a quiet evening, she decides about ten minutes in. It is easy. She's not supposed to talk, so there is no opportunity to overthink everything she says. And her mother is rather more at ease than usual without the pressure of meaningful social interaction. And her daughter – well, that is something else, she thinks, to see a girl who has so many reasons to be anxious simply chilling with a pencil.

She holds the drawing out for inspection when it is finished. It's not the most accurate sketch anyone has ever done, to be sure. The curve of her cheek is not quite right, and her mother's nose is the wrong shape. But the light in their eyes, the living warmth in their smiles, the love that she can see in every pencil stroke – these things make it, she thinks, probably the greatest work of art she has known.

Madi presents the sketch to her grandmother as a gift, and Abby makes no attempt to dissemble when she begins crying happy tears at the notion. They have a bit of a group hug moment, and Clarke finds herself thinking that they really ought to spend time like this more often.

It seems wrong, somehow, that her mother is always so surprised by their love.

Madi is certainly an affectionate granddaughter today, and when Abby announces that it is time for her to leave the girl follows her to the front door and waves her cheerfully on her way, with many requests to come over again soon. Clarke joins her in standing there until Abby is out of sight, at which point she closes the door and suggests that it is time for Madi to go to bed.

“So I'm the leader of my people but you can still send me to bed?” She pouts.

“You're the figurehead of your people and I'm your mother.” Clarke shoots back with a grin.

“Grandma Abby lets me stay up late when I'm at her house.”

“That's because she's your grandmother. That's what grandmothers do.” She cannot help but continue to smile as she pulls her daughter into a goodnight hug. “Go on, get to bed. Your father's taking you to visit Jordan on the farm tomorrow, you want to be well rested for that.”

“Yeah, because looking at a few fields is going to be exhausting.” She's not sure where her daughter learnt sarcasm, but she disapproves. She disapproves heartily, but rather affectionately. “When is he going to start taking me on proper adventures again?”
“Soon.” She says vaguely, wanting not to let slip anything about Bellamy's injury. “Now go to sleep.”

“I'm going.” She admits defeat with a comical roll of her eyes.

“Night night, honey. Sleep well.”

“You too.” With one last hug her daughter makes her way to her bed.

She turns and starts making her way back towards the living room, only to be interrupted by a most impertinent question.

“One last thing, Mum – why is Dad's sweater on our sofa?”

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It takes her longer to get round to returning the sweater than it really should. She certainly can't claim that she hasn't had the opportunity, because Bellamy seems to have adopted the Medical Centre almost as a second home. He's still on leave because of his arm, so he pops in every couple of days to get the healing wound checked out. And when he's not popping in for that, he pops in to pick up Madi. And when it's not to pick up Madi – well, sometimes he seems to pop in for no real reason at all.

He barely comes round to the house, though, and that is why she hasn't give back the sweater. That's what she tells herself, anyway. She's not about to start carrying it into work just because he's been careless, and besides which, surely he'll come over for a family chess night sooner or later.

Based on the way this week has gone, it seems that is likely to happen later.

She can't make sense of it at all. He's still spending loads of time with Madi, taking her out on all sorts of expeditions, or taking her back to his quarters to read. And he's doing a very good impression of a man who gets on well with her, too, but she can't help but feel that an impression is all it is at the moment. And she can't really work out why.
This afternoon, for example, as she sits in Medical pretending to be productive, his usual knock sounds at the door and she calls out in welcome.

“Hey.” He appears in the room, a slightly-too-careful smile about his lips. “How's it going?”

She shrugs. She supposes she ought to try to make conversation, but it seems like a bit of a lost cause. “Not bad.”

“Shall I go get Madi?” He asks, shifting his weight a little from foot to foot.

“She'll be here any minute. She's with my mum, just finishing up next door.”

“OK.” He helps himself to a chair. “We should take her out somewhere soon. I'm about to go back to training in a couple of days.”

Yes. She can count, actually. She didn't particularly need that reminder.

“I know.” She says shortly. He frowns at that, and she remembers that she is supposed to be pretending all is fine. “You're right. We should go on another picnic before Kane starts taking up all your time again.”

“I look forward to it.” Just for a second, she sees a flash of something genuine in his smile, and it gives her the courage she needs to say something she ought to have said a couple of days ago.

“You could come over tonight, if you like.” She offers carefully. “Play chess or something. We don't have any plans and it would be convenient.”

“No, that's OK. You and Madi enjoy your evening together.”

She nearly chokes at that, and she's not sure whether it's annoyance or disappointment which is stuck in her throat. Does he not remember what it means, for an evening to be convenient? Is he giving up so soon on their mission to secure Madi's future?
Before she has the chance to take him to task, their daughter dances into the room and sees her father there. The girl pauses on the threshold, just for a moment, eyes narrowed and gaze a little too perceptive as she takes in her parents' soulless smiles. And then she shakes her head a little, and hugs her father in greeting, and the two of them go on their way with barely a backwards glance.

Well then. It seems Clarke will have to take matters into her own hands.

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If she is to act on that resolution, Clarke realises she won't be able to spend the evening with Madi after all. Her daughter is only too happy to be sent to her grandparents' for the night, and is making a cheerful routine out of this happening increasingly often. Indeed, she even asks if she might get a spare toothbrush to leave there, and the question provokes a smile so bright on Abby's face that it seems likely to remain there for days.

So it is that Clarke wishes the two of them a good evening and gets on with being the pragmatic one in this obligatory relationship. She hardens her resolve, picks up the sweater, and sets out for Bellamy's quarters.

That resolve falters just a little when she finds herself actually standing at his front door. She didn't quite think this far ahead. For want of a better strategy, she takes a leaf out of Bellamy's book, unlocks the door with her key, and then knocks.

There is no response. And that's at least a little odd, all things considered, because she can see a glimmer of light between the curtains, which seems to her to suggest that he must be at home.

She knocks once more. Still nothing.

Cautiously, she pushes the door open. His home is not large, being essentially a bedroom and bathroom joined by a short corridor, so she faces very few options as to where she ought to look first. And the options become even fewer, suddenly, when she realises she can hear noises coming from the bedroom. They are noises she cannot easily make sense of. Her first horrified impulse is that maybe he's in the middle of enjoying a spot of entertainment with Echo, but on further reflection they don't sound like those kind of noises at all. It sounds a little like someone has a very heavy cold, perhaps.
Tentatively, she sets out down the corridor. She is very aware that she is invading his privacy, but she's also very alarmed by these unexplained snuffles. Surely, she thinks, it is only natural that her concern should win out.

She arrives at the bedroom, and pushes open the door. And suddenly everything makes sense, from the odd noises of tonight to the odd mood of the last week. And she would scarcely believe it, if she wasn't seeing it with her own eyes, but it absolutely cannot be denied.

Bellamy is weeping. And not just crying, oh no, but proper heaving sobs that shake his shoulders and shake her world to the core. This can't be right, she thinks. Bellamy does not break down like this.

Or maybe he does, these days. Maybe it is a feature of the man he has become with the passing of the decades, yet another thing about this new Bellamy that she does not know. Maybe this is just one more thing he does without her now.

Maybe, a treacherous voice whispers in the back of her mind, it is something he has always done. Maybe she has just never been close enough to him to know it.

She's not at all sure what the protocol is, here, how one is supposed to go about comforting the father of one's daughter when he appears to be falling apart at the seams. She only came here to return a sweater, and to try to talk him into screwing her once again. But she cannot walk away, now, cannot leave him to go through this alone.

She doesn't really want to leave him to face anything alone, ever again.

She takes a deep breath and walks towards him. Takes a seat on the bed at his side, reaches a cautious arm around him. Begins to murmur empty words of comfort in his general direction.

“You're OK.” It's plainly not the truth, but it seems better than saying nothing. “I've got you. It's going to be OK.”

He stiffens slightly but doesn't pull away, and she takes that as invitation enough to wrap her arm more tightly around him, to lean up against him and try to share a little of her human warmth. It's what she would want, in his place, and it's what he did for her only last week.
He stops sobbing before long, but she gets the impression that this is because he doesn't want her to watch him weep, rather than because he's all cried out. She brushes that thought firmly under the metaphorical carpet, logically concluding that allowing herself to dwell on it won't really help the situation, and continues to mutter assorted assurances under her breath. She's not at all sure that any I've got you of hers can actually be of much use to him, given the past that lies between them, but somehow those are the words that seem to be determined to leave her lips.

“Why are you here?” He asks when things have dried out a little.

She decides that straightforward honesty is the best policy. “To return your sweater, and tell you we can start trying again.”

“No, that's OK.” He shakes his head firmly. “We should wait until the middle of the month.”

“Oh.” She wasn't expecting that, hasn't made a plan for this eventuality. “OK.”

“Isn't that what you wanted?” He's beginning to sound annoyed, and she can't quite figure out why. “Focus more on the middle of the month?”

“I meant have more sex in the middle of the month, not less sex at the beginning.” She clarifies self-consciously. “If – if that's OK with you, of course.”

“Yeah.” He jumps to reassure her immediately. “That's OK with me. If you're sure that's what you want?”

“Yeah.” She echoes, allowing herself to break into a hint of a smile. “A decent sex life is the only good thing about this situation we've found ourselves in, I think.”

She's expecting him to laugh at that, but he doesn't. He only looks at her with an expression of something approaching wonder.

“Getting to know you again has been pretty great, too.” He mumbles in the end.

“Yeah, same, obviously.” She's not entirely comfortable and she can't work out why. “I was
attempting to lighten the mood.”

“Good luck with that.” He says, and she cannot read his tone.

“What is it?” She asks gently. “You know you can tell me.”

He shakes his head, and she doesn't blame him. In his shoes, she wouldn't tell her, either.

“Too many things.” Is what he does tell her. “I wouldn't know where to begin.”

“OK. Could you just tell me one of the things?” She suggests, rubbing what she hopes are soothing circles on his back.

“Octavia.” He begins, and she is not surprised. “I don't know what to do about her. How is it that I've forgiven you but I can't forgive my own sister?”

“We found ourselves in a situation where we almost had to forgive each other.” She points out. “I hope we'd have managed it eventually anyway, but honestly I know we've only forgiven each other this quickly because fate forced our hand.”

“Forgiven each other?” He sounds puzzled.

“Yeah.”

“Forbidden each other? As in, you've forgiven me?” No, now he sounds irritated, and she can't see any grounds for that.

“Of course I have.”

“So I've been trying for weeks to show you and Madi how sorry I am for putting her in that impossible situation and asking her to take the flame, and meanwhile you've already forgiven me and it never occurred to you that, maybe, I might like to know?” He asks, incredulous, and she thinks, over half way to angry.
“I thought you already did.”

“I didn't.” He snaps, but she forces herself to continue those circles just below his shoulder blades.

“Well, I know that now. I just – you always used to know what I was thinking.” It's a poor excuse, she knows it, and she suspects that the words hurt him at least as much as they hurt her.

“Apparently I don't any more.”

She doesn't exactly respond to that, because there is no good response. She returns instead to trying to help him bear just one of his burdens. “Of course I've forgiven you, Bellamy. Didn't we have that conversation about how forgiveness is what we do best, weeks ago?”

“You didn't say the words, though. I thought that what I'd done was so bad that you couldn't forgive me.” She hears his voice crack, brittle under the weight of that fear, and notes that she is beginning to work out what quite a few of the too many things consist of.

“No. Not that. I know now that you were doing what you thought you had to do to save your people. And that's all we've ever wanted to do, isn't it?”

“I was doing what I thought I had to do to save you.”

Now it is her turn to look wonderingly at him.

“I didn't think of it like that.” She murmurs in the end.

He shrugs in response, and she wonders how to go about attempting to help him with his to-weep list.

“I wonder – tell me if I'm overstepping because I know it's none of my business but – but what if I came with you when you go see Octavia some time? Would it help to have someone there as, I don't know, moral support?”
“You'd do that for me?” He appears somewhat awestruck at the thought.

I'd do anything for you, she thinks, but she suspects he's not ready to hear that just yet. And she is certainly not ready to say it, not in so many words.

“Sure.”

“I'm supposed to be there now.” Was that why he brushed her off, earlier? Was there, perhaps, an actual reason he turned down her invitation to an evening of playing happy families, beyond his catastrophic misunderstanding of focusing on the middle of the month?

“OK. We can go whenever you're ready.” Her hand seems to have given up on its circles, she notes idly, and has somehow ended up at his waist, drawing him towards her. And he has at some point put an arm round her, and she is leaning into him, in turn.

Who is she kidding? They're cuddling, plain and simple.

“Can we maybe just sit here for a bit, first?”

By way of response, she kicks off her shoes and curls her legs up on the bed beside her. She's not going anywhere.

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If Octavia is surprised to see Clarke when she opens the door, she doesn't show it. In fact, it is almost as if she was expecting her to start following Bellamy around sooner or later. Or perhaps it is more that she was expecting a return to a world where the two of them go everywhere side by side.

“Come in, the pair of you.” She invites them, stepping back into the hallway, beckoning them forwards even as Clarke struggles to process the notion of them as a pair.
“Sorry we're a bit late.” Bellamy offers sheepishly, and at the anxiety in his voice Clarke decides that this is surely an appropriate moment to make a new attempt at taking his hand. She has left it too long, she thinks, since that first failure.

Based on the gentle pressure she can feel of his fingers on hers, she can only presume that he agrees with her.

“No problem.” Octavia is all ostensible cheerfulness as she leads the way to what passes for a sitting room. “Make yourselves at home.”

Clarke feels Bellamy stiffen a little at that unfortunate choice of phrase and squeezes his hand in support. “Thanks, Octavia. Your brother was telling me that you've been helping out at the school?”

“Yes.” She brightens considerably at the introduction of the topic. “I've been teaching a bit of history.”

“You didn't tell me it was history.” Bellamy appears to be expending a great deal of effort on not sounding too reproachful.

“What else was it going to be?” Octavia's mood quickly sours. “The only other things I'd be fit to teach are killing people and hiding under the floor, which are not exactly -”

“Resilience.” Clarke interrupts before things can get any worse. “I think you could teach resilience, too.”

There is a beat of silence, in which both Blakes stare at her looking rather stunned.

“Thanks, Clarke.” Octavia offers in the end. “I can see why my brother keeps you around.”

Now it is her turn to practise stunned silence, because she cannot entirely process the idea that Octavia thinks he is by her side by choice. Surely his sister cannot be the only person on this moon who hasn't worked out what they have been forced into doing to save their daughter and their people?
Then Bellamy speaks and her silence grows even more stunned.

“Yeah, she's pretty great, isn't she?” He says, smiling fondly down at her, and it is almost too much happiness for her to process.

Octavia puts on an old Earth documentary at that point, something improving and educational about the rulers of Egypt many millennia ago, but Clarke allows it to pass her by. There are more important things going on here, other features more worthy of her notice and consideration than some long-dead dynasty.

It's official. She's pretty great. And she can't help thinking that, all things considered, they make a pretty great pair.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter fourteen

The week that follows leaves Clarke fairly convinced that Bellamy's definition of the middle of the month is faulty. He's been over two nights out of every three, since that evening that she went with him to visit his sister, and has certainly been both thorough and zealous in fulfilling his duties on the matter of impregnating her.

She's not complaining.

Apart from anything else, it's fun to have a sex life, and it's fun to have a friend, and if the two things are tied up in the same man, whom she happens to have had something of a crush on for several years of her youth – well, that's all just a bonus. A really rather enjoyable bonus. A bonus that makes her heart beat a little faster and the blood rush to that spot between her legs just thinking about it. She ought to learn some self-control, she thinks. It's not as if their copulation has even been particularly imaginative or exotic. No, it's just been enthusiastic, and at least a tiny bit passionate, and somewhere along the line it's become a little too easy to pretend that they're doing all this out of mutual attraction not shared obligation.

In fact, she's growing increasingly convinced that there is some mutual attraction going on as well as the shared obligation. She knows she looks pretty good for one-hundred-and-forty-something, knows she's not physically much different from the teenager he once fell for. And he is, to use the sort of terminology she remembers from their dropship days, hot. And his occasional use of the word hot whilst screwing her, that's a bit of a giveaway, too. But she's not setting too much store by that, of course, because she's pretty sure a compliment paid during sex doesn't count as a real compliment.

So, in summary, if this is what the beginning of the month is like, she can't wait for day fourteen. She can't wait to see what happens when he's really focusing.

She supposes she ought to be focusing, now, on doing her job. She's sitting in Medical, logging data for her mother as per usual, feeling more than a little redundant and wondering if maybe she should just start going with Bellamy and Madi on their adventures. They're out right now, on some scouting expedition to the north, but she has been promised that they will be going nowhere near the territory of the Titans. It sounds, all in all, like exactly the kind of relatively low-risk expedition a hopefully-pregnant woman like herself might safely partake of.

There is a knock at the door, and it sounds like Bellamy's knock but that can't be right. They're not due back for another three hours.

"Come in." She calls absently, and wonders what petty accident will be next through the door. She supposes she ought to go and -

It was Bellamy's knock. Because that is Bellamy, and next to him is Madi, and why oh why are they back three entire hours early? And why, of all things, is Madi wearing a face that looks alarmingly like the one she wore all those years ago to leave with Echo and head for the gorge? That face that means that she's petrified, but trying to look in control?

"You're back early." She observes in a tone that, she hopes, conveys equal amounts of confusion and demand for a good explanation.
"Madi wasn't feeling well." Bellamy begins. "So we -"

"I just fainted." Their daughter interrupts. "I'm fine."

Of all the things that Clarke would believe right now, she is nowhere close to believing that Madi is fine. She can see that there's far more than that going on here, can read it in the rather twitchy look Bellamy is wearing, and in the shock in Madi's eyes, but she forces herself to remain calm. Her daughter made her promise, she remembers, that she would use her head, that she would not go completely unhinged next time her little girl was in danger, and she's got a feeling that not unnecessarily losing her temper with Bellamy was implicitly part of that deal, too.

With painstaking care she therefore looks him in the eye and makes one crucial request.

"Could you please tell me exactly what happened."

To his credit, he does not dissemble. She cannot help feeling, though, that he does babble, and that fact has her even more concerned than before.

"Madi said she had a headache, not long after we left and – I'm sorry – but I thought nothing of it, she wanted to stay out so we just kept walking. And we weren't that near the anomaly, but it seems quite active today, you know those green flashes on the horizon? So then she started saying she felt dizzy, so obviously at that point I realised she needed to come home so you could check her out. But then there were a couple of anomaly flares, really close by and then – then she just passed out."

"How long was she out for?" She asks, grabbing a handful of assorted medical instruments and starting her examination.

"A few minutes." He admits, looking at least as scared as she feels. "I'd started carrying her back here by the time she came round."

"Any other symptoms? Any seizures or anything?"

"No. Nothing else. I'm – I'm so sorry. I should have been more careful. I should have brought her home when she said she had a headache."

"It's OK." She says with careful control, as she checks Madi's pulse. "People get headaches all the time, you weren't to know she would pass out."

"Are we good?" Madi asks cautiously, as she holds out her arm for a blood pressure cuff. "You're not going to freak out? You're not angry with us?"

"I'm not angry." She confirms. "I'm worried about you, of course. But you weren't being deliberately irresponsible, either of you. And I'm practising not losing it every time you're in danger."

"Thanks, Mum."

"Thank your father for getting you home so quickly." Clarke says with a nod in his direction, and he seems to take that as an invitation to stop hovering anxiously by the door and walk a little closer to them.

"How's it looking?" He asks nervously.

"Nothing seems to be wrong at all." This confuses her a little, but she smiles down at her daughter. "You're absolutely healthy, as far as I can tell."
"Maybe it really was just a fainting fit?" The girl asks hopefully. No, perhaps desperately would be more accurate.

"I'm not sure about that, honey. A few minutes is a long time to be out for. I think – I think probably it was to do with the anomaly. To do with your age and your time travel situation." She cringes at that, aware of the poor quality of her explanation, but she cannot quite think how else to go about putting it.

"I was worried you'd say that." She watches her little girl take a deep breath, knot her brows as if preparing to acknowledge something distinctly challenging. "I'm scared, Clarke."

There is only one possible response to that, she decides. After all, it is not as if she can tell her she need not be afraid, because that would be a lie. So it is that Clarke wraps her daughter in a very firm embrace. And suddenly Bellamy is closing the gap between them, too, and joining in a group hug, and somehow she knows that the three of them can take on anything, together.

"I know, Madi. I know." She soothes. "But we're here, and we love you so much, and we're going to look after you."

"Damn right we are." Bellamy chimes in, voice gruff with emotion. "No way are we letting anything happen to you."

They stay there for a while, holding one another in silence, but as she pulls away Clarke could swear she hears something, the faintest whisper ruffling the hair on the crown of her head.

"My family, my responsibility."

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The most worrying thing about the evening that follows is that Madi does not object to her parents' concerned hovering. In the normal course of things, Clarke thinks, her daughter would be only too keen to instruct them not to worry about her, but today she seems more than happy to go everywhere flanked by the pair of them, one at each shoulder.

It is in that fashion that the three of them spend the afternoon together, sitting in Medical, while Clarke makes a vain attempt to get on with what she is supposed to be doing, and Bellamy and Madi read. It is an unspoken understanding between them that the girl is not to be out of the sight of either parent in the immediate future, and that they intend to make a bit of a fuss of her until it is clear that she is none the worse for wear from her misadventure.

In much the same way, too, the three of them eat their supper together, and then retreat back to Clarke and Madi's home for an unscheduled family movie night. To be fair, this is not so unusual. Bellamy really has been coming over a lot recently. It is, though, slightly less than normal that the three of them sit quite so closely together, as if challenging the anomaly to take on the combined force of the commander of death and the man who has always kept her alive.

The film Madi chooses is, unsurprisingly, a rather juvenile and essentially optimistic cartoon about a fish and his heartwarming relationship with his father. This is, Clarke decides, proof if any were needed that her usually fearless daughter is feeling distinctly shaken by the afternoon's events. She can tell, too, that Bellamy is less than calm about what has happened. She has got to know him again, it seems, well enough that she can read the slight clenching of his jaw and knotting of his brow.

She reaches along the back of the sofa, careful to avoid brushing Madi's shoulders and alerting her
to the action, and gently settles her hand on Bellamy's upper arm. She figures that a little physical
contact will probably serve to comfort both of them, just now.

Sure enough, he looks up and meets her eyes with a grateful smile. She's getting the hang of this,
she allows herself to muse. And between them, they are getting the hang of this, of salvaging
something resembling a positive relationship out of the bitter confusion they started out with at the
beginning of this unexpected and completely crazy attempt at parenting.

It goes without saying that Madi needs a bedtime story, tonight, and that both parents walk with her
to her room in order to provide one. It is, though, perhaps worthy of note that they walk hand in
hand as they do so. Based on the way Madi's eyebrows hit the roof at the sight of it, she certainly
thinks that this new development is of interest.

"What story do you want tonight?" Bellamy asks, perching on the end of the bed, and Clarke finds
herself doing likewise, hand still in his.

"I don't mind. Something with a happy ending?"

Clarke can see that this could be tricky. In her admittedly limited experience of ancient history,
there are not that many happy endings. And if it's a story of her parents' youth that she is after –
well, peaceful resolutions are certainly in short supply, there. She's wondering if she is supposed to
contribute something, make some suitable suggestion, but before she has had chance to think of
anything more cheerful than that time Bellamy didn't actually die while being drained of blood in
Mount Weather, he begins to speak, voice rough with some emotion she cannot identify. Yet. She
cannot identify it yet, but she is determined that she will get there one day.

"Once upon a time, there was a janitor. He thought he'd lost everything. He cleaned toilets for a
living, and his mother was floated, and his sister was in lock-up. And he was desperate, so he took
a chance and stowed away on a ship bound for Earth to protect his sister. And then, while he was
there, he met some amazing people, including a very special young doctor who turned his world
upside down." He breaks off at that point with a rather fond grin, and Clarke feels her heart jump
for joy just a little. "I think you already know all that bit of the story?"

"Yes." Madi agrees, expression somewhere between an adoring smile and an eye roll. "Go on."

"So I'm going to tell you a bit of the story that I think I haven't told you often. A bit I don't talk
about enough. So you know that after a while, things went a bit wrong, and the world ended, and
our janitor had to leave behind the doctor? And I'm sure you've worked out, that was difficult for
both of them, and – and it was even more difficult, when he came back again, and everything was
somehow the same but different."

Clarke wonders where he's going with this, and based on the frown on Madi's face, she does too.
This is not, somehow, exactly the happy ending she asked for.

"But then, one day, out of the blue – he got the best news of his life. They got the best news of
their lives. Because it turned out that they had a daughter, an amazing girl who was so brave and so
strong and so full of life. And when you think about it, that's the happiest ending any janitor could
ever ask for. And so they started to go on hunting trips, and picnics, and swimming adventures.
And they played chess and watched movies, and every time their daughter was afraid, the doctor
and the janitor helped her to face it. And she learnt that it was OK to be afraid sometimes, but even
though scary things sometimes happened, they all lived happily ever after."

"The end?" Madi asks, brow quirked.
"Oh, I don't think so." Clarke steps in. "I think their story's just beginning."

She looks up and finds that Bellamy is gazing her in a rather transparently affectionate way that makes her feel strangely wanted. But before she can process that further, or do something really foolish like kiss him, their daughter interrupts.

"You know, I don't think that was the best story you've ever told." She comments, tone teasing. "It was a bit cheesy, not very original. But yes, point taken, you two aren't going to let bad stuff happen to me."

Bellamy cracks a grin at that. "Glad it worked, kid. Get some sleep. And give us a shout if you need anything."

The most worrying thing of all, Clarke thinks, is that Madi seems to genuinely consider the possibility that she might suddenly need help in the middle of the night, rather than just brushing Bellamy's words aside. All the same, they bid each other good night and the two adults make their way out of the room. It is one of the hardest things Clarke has ever done, somehow, to leave her daughter alone when she is so obviously still frightened, but she knows that she will be only metres away and knows too that Madi would not want the pair of them to stay and make a fuss.

They make it into the corridor, and ease her door closed behind them. No sooner is it shut than Bellamy has wrapped her in a predictably warm and surprisingly chaste hug.

"You doing OK?" He murmurs into the top of her hair.

"Yeah." She replies, because actually, she is. She's worried, sure, but her ability to hold it together, to keep her wits about her in times of emotional distress, seems gradually to be returning to her at long last, and she is more than glad of it.

"Good."

"What about you?"

"I've never seen her frightened before, and it's getting to me a bit." She can tell, she notes - she really is learning how to read him again. She can tell, too, that his anxiety is slowly dissipating as he holds her, can feel his tense muscles relaxing against her.

"Yeah, she doesn't get scared easily. Especially since the flame. The last time I saw her worried was when we had to split up, back in Shallow Valley, so she could go save you."

"I'm so sorry for today."

"Don't be. She was going to go near the anomaly sooner or later. I'm only glad she had you there to look after her and get her back to Medical so quickly."

"Thanks."

They stand there quietly for a moment, and it is pleasant. He is calmer, now, she can sense it somehow, and she is feeling rather at peace too. It is time, she suspects, for their next attempt at procreation. They can't hang around hugging all day. They have a daughter to conceive.

"Are you staying for a bit?" She murmurs somewhere near his collarbone. "Do you want to take this to the bedroom?"

"Yeah." He agrees softly, weaving his fingers through her hair. "That sounds like a plan."
They take things a little slower, this time, the atmosphere of that calming hug somehow holding
strong even as they make it to the bedroom and their embrace grows more heated. There is no
frantic discarding of shoes, today, and her bra is not flung into a far-off corner. No, as he opens her
waistband and pulls down her trousers, he follows the path of his hands with his lips, trails delicate
kisses along her skin. And she is only too keen to take him up on the hint, sliding his shirt slowly
over his warm flesh, investigating every inch of his body. In a fit of bravery, she places gentle
hands at his waist, and turns him around, and makes a start on kissing his back. She's not had much
chance, really, to appreciate this part of him, and there's something pretty arousing about pressing
soft lips to his shoulder blades.

And, sure, it makes her a little nervous, because it seems like the sort of thing she might do if she
was in an actual relationship, if sex was something to dwell on, not a means to an end. It seems like
the sort of thing she might do if she was trying to show him she cared.

He clearly does not overthink it, but simply gets on with appreciating it. He sighs deeply, and she
can feel him relaxing even further, anxiety unwinding, tension releasing. By the time he turns back
to face her and cups her jaw with his hand, the light has returned to his eyes again for the first time
since he walked into the Medical Centre that afternoon.

"Thank you." He murmurs against her lips, and begins to kiss her softly.

"For what?" She sees no real reason for gratitude, here. All she's done is bring a handful of
unanticipated obligations into his life.

"Being you." He murmurs between kisses. "Being here."

Now that seems like the kind of thing he might do, if he was trying to show her he cared. Maybe,
she thinks, if she's feeling really brave, she might try tackling that question later.

But she's not going to try to tackle it now, because he's kissing her so beautifully and running his
hands appreciatively over her naked body, and it doesn't seem like the right moment for tackling
difficult questions. She is content, instead, simply to lie back on the bed as he urges her towards it,
and wait for him to get on with screwing her.

But he doesn't. He doesn't, and she can't make sense of it. He's not hovering over her, not trying to
push inside of her, but is loitering at the end of the bed with an expression she cannot read. And
then, somehow, he is lowering himself between her legs and -

Suddenly, she works it out. She can't quite believe it took her so long to join the dots. But – but in
her defence, this is very much not something they do. Why would he be considering going down
on her, when it is in no way going to contribute to the goal of getting her pregnant?

"Is this OK?" He asks, warm breath already fanning over her sensitive skin, with a sort of awkward
nod towards her crotch.

"Yeah." She squeaks, because she suspects that probably it will be pretty incredible and she's not
exactly going to turn him down. But all the same, she thinks that, in the interests of honesty, she
probably ought to point out that it's not exactly useful just now. "Are you sure you want to? I mean,
it's not going to get me pregnant."

"I do understand how conception works, Clarke." He murmurs, ducking his head and bringing his
lips ever nearer. She's practically squirming already at the sheer thought of it. "I want to, just for a
bit, if that's OK? You're allowed to enjoy it, remember."
"Yeah." She's allowed to enjoy it, she repeats to herself. She's allowed to enjoy it.

And enjoy it she certainly does, when suddenly his mouth is on her and it is, quite literally, the best thing she has felt in centuries. And she is squirming against him, bucking her hips, trying to find the perfect angle and wondering how it is that her clit has managed to survive quite so many years without sensations like this.

He is sending her unhinged again, she notes, but this time in an altogether more pleasant way.

She finds herself moaning quite a lot, but it seems there is nothing to be done about that. She simply embraces it, and tangles her fingers in his hair, and gets on with enjoying it. And she can feel it building, can sense the edge growing ever closer, but somehow she starts to find that something is lacking. She wants him, here with her, mouth on hers, cock inside of her when she reaches her pleasure. This is great and all, but he's just a bit too far away.

As if he has heard her thoughts, he chooses that moment to break away, seamlessly to slip inside of her and start taking long, firm strokes. And his lips are on hers, and she can taste herself on his mouth and it's so damn hot that she almost falls apart right there. But she mustn't, not yet, not when there is still this to enjoy, still a rhythm to appreciate and pressure to writhe against. It is clear, though, that he's wavering too, she can read it in his increasingly erratic breathing and increasingly thorough kissing. And the fact that he keeps groaning yeahs against her mouth, that's a bit of a giveaway, too.

She tries to hold it off, really she does, but there is nothing for it. One moment she is appreciating the firm texture of his butt beneath her hands, memorising the softness of his lips against hers, and the next moment she is flying over the edge with such force that she wonders if, perhaps, the world might be ending again.

It seems to do that a lot, where her and Bellamy are concerned. And based on his groan, too, the world seems to be ending for him as well.

This time, though, the world is at least ending in quite a pleasurable way, and as her heart rate returns to normal there's kissing, and his hot hands on her breasts, and all in all she thinks she could probably get used to this. A shame, then, that it will doubtless disappear the moment she gets pregnant. And she really does want to get pregnant, so she supposes she is just setting herself up for disappointment, really.

She brushes that thought aside and brushes his hair back from his forehead.

"So that was fun." She comments. It's a lie. What it was, she thinks, was Earth-shattering. But she senses that admitting that could get awkward.

"You see? I told you I'd teach you how to have fun." He eases his weight off her, curls up on the bed beside her, arms still wrapped firmly around her.

"Thank you." She says, and in the relaxed intimacy of this moment she hopes he can tell that it's a rather enormous sort of a thank you. A thank you for everything from his co-parenting to his making this compulsory sex life so annoyingly addictive.

"You're welcome. Thank you, too, for – for making this so easy. All of it. I've no idea how to parent, and no idea how to go about showing you that I want things to be right between us but somehow everything is easier with you here."

"I could say the same to you."
"No you couldn't. You had six years to work out how to raise Madi. You should have seen me when she passed out today – I was a mess. And then I saw how scared she was, and I was trying so hard to hold it together for her."

"I know. I could tell. But you did everything right, Bellamy. The main thing was just that you showed her you care about her, that you'll be there for her."

"I'm trying."

"You're doing great."

They lie there for a while, and she rather thinks that is it. They have closed a little more of the emotional distance between them, have talked about the most meaningful issue of the day, and now she ought to roll away and go to the bathroom to clean up. And then tomorrow, they will take more baby steps, and at this rate they might even be honest with each other by the time she conceives.

She is wrong. She is about to suggest that it is time to go their separate ways when he tightens his hold on her a little and begins to speak.

"Clarke. I need you to know something important. I know that – that we've both made mistakes. And that we've both changed, and that you're not that doctor I told Madi that story about any more than I'm the same janitor. But I need you to know that, in spite of all that, I still care about you. A lot. And of course it's not the way I used to care about you and maybe it never will be but I'm so happy that you're back in my life again."

By way of response she kisses him, long and slow and tender, and it is a kiss that holds centuries of heartache and a lifetime of hope.

"I still care about you, too. I have always cared about you, even when I did a terrible job of showing it."

And then he kisses her back, and for a couple of minutes they let their lips do the talking, and she reflects that she was right, earlier, to begin to suspect that he might actually care. She was so right, and her soul rejoices to know it.

But then, of course, he pulls away, and leaves the bed. And then he gets dressed, and bids her goodnight, and then he goes home.

They care about each other. So much is certain. But things are, without doubt, not the way they used to be.

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Clarke is growing accustomed to human company again, so gradually that she almost does not notice it happening. There are people in her life again, these days, and not just in the busy Medical Centre sense – there are people with whom she actually spends quality time, exchanges meaningful conversation. There is Abby, for example, who is growing increasingly functional as the days drift by and her addiction fades to no more than a memory. There is Madi, of course, and they continue to make mother-daughter time a priority. And then there is Bellamy, who seems to have reclaimed his old place by her side.

Shoulder to shoulder, they take on the world, just as it always used to be.

And there are the rest of Spacekru, too, in passing, at the bar. Occasionally there is Kane, but she's not quite sure about him. He keeps saying things about how she should express an opinion more
It hits her, one morning, as she sits in the Medical centre and listens to her mother recount an entertaining anecdote about very little.

She's not lonely any more.

It is a realisation that makes her want to sing from the rooftops, but she's not sure the whole of Sanctum would appreciate that. Probably she'll just tell Bellamy, later that night, as they lie together chatting and he procrastinates over going home. That seems to be how things work, these days. To be fair, he hasn't said anything about coming over tonight but it's now well and truly the middle of the month and it must be acknowledged that – well, he comes over quite a lot, at the moment.

Of course, not being lonely is not the same as never being alone. The morning lengthens, and by the time she ought to go for lunch her mother is in surgery, with Jackson assisting, and Bellamy and Madi are out patrolling to the south and it looks like she is to be without company as she enters the mess hall.

Whatever. She can do this, she tells herself. She has just established that she is no longer lonely, that a good number of people are currently on speaking terms with her. Surely she can brave going to lunch alone.

She arrives at the dining room, takes her food, and scans the tables before her. And, thank goodness, the optimistic mood of the morning is borne out when she sees Raven beckoning enthusiastically. She hesitates, just for a moment, on realising that Echo is sitting alongside her. But really, she thinks, she ought to just get on with it. They are supposed to be attempting something resembling a friendship, after all.

"Clarke." Raven greets her with a nod. "How's your day going?"

"Quiet but good. You guys?"

"Productive." Raven answers.

"Dull." Echo says with just a hint of a cynical grin. It's not that she doesn't feel emotions, Clarke is beginning to work out. She just doesn't go around showing them to the world.

"Sounds like mine." She admits honestly, digging into her stew.

"How's Madi?" Echo asks. "Any more fainting spells?"

"None, thank goodness. She's still pretty shaken though."

"But not as shaken as Bellamy, I'm guessing?" It is at times like this, Clarke thinks, that she remembers that Echo probably still knows him better than she does.

"Yeah."

She is mercifully saved from having to think of anything more interesting to contribute to the conversation by the arrival of Octavia. She's not sure about this development, really. If Echo and Octavia have ever had a civil conversation since Shallow Valley, Clarke has certainly not
witnessed it. But all the same, she is sitting with them now, so clearly she fancies her chances.

"Hey." Octavia begins, a slight wobble in her voice. "Do you mind if I sit here?"

"Well, you've done it now." Echo says in a neutral tone.

Clarke thinks that Octavia ought to count herself lucky that she gets even that much welcome. They might be working on forgiveness, all of them, but they're only human.

"How are you, Octavia?" She asks, hoping to generate something of a warmer atmosphere.

"Not bad." She makes a game attempt at brightness as she stirs her lunch. "I'm pleased I've caught you all. I wanted to ask you about something."

"Ask away." Raven suggests, direct as ever.

"It's Bellamy's birthday in a couple of weeks. Seventeen days, to be exact."

"I know." Echo states, looking a bit affronted at the idea that she might need reminding, and Raven nods along, and Clarke feels slightly as if the two of them have kicked her in the stomach. How is it possible that she loved this man for years and is only just finding out when his birthday is? And after everyone else he has ever counted as family, as well, it seems.

The logical part of her brain is quick to remind her that birthdays were not exactly a big deal, in their dropship days, and that, at this point back in their first year on the ground, the two of them were far from the best of friends. All the same, it hurts, in a raw and primal way that she finds herself struggling to cope with.

Meanwhile, it seems, the conversation is moving on without her.

"... know birthday parties haven't really been a thing since we left the Ark, but we never celebrated Bellamy when we were kids, his whole childhood revolved around me – and so I thought we should do something nice for him. And I'm sure Madi would love it, too. You guys could take a family day, perhaps, and then we could go out for a drink in the evening?" Octavia finishes her suggestion and waits nervously for their verdicts.

"I think it's a brilliant idea." Clarke makes sure she is the first to agree.

"He'll think it's a silly idea." Echo frets.

"That's why we're selling it to him as something his daughter will enjoy." Raven points out.

"And that's why Clarke is going to be the one to tell him about it." Octavia concludes.

She is? That's news to her.

"Good shout." Raven agrees. "He won't argue with that."

"You're right." Echo chimes in. "Clarke, you handle Bellamy. I'll organise drinks. Octavia, you and Abby plan your family day?"

If Octavia objects to having Echo take command of her idea, she does not make it apparent. "Sure. Thanks. So we're agreed?"

Clarke has to admit, she did not expect agreement to be a feature of this particular combination of lunch companions. And yet, it seems, agreed they most certainly are.
It could almost make her laugh, the idea that all her friends think she is best-placed to tell Bellamy, were she not so busy fretting over how on Earth she is to go about doing so. Why, of all people, should she be the one to present to him an idea he is likely to think is, at best, unnecessary, and at worst a senseless waste of time and resources? Just because he cares about her, she thinks, does not mean he is likely to mince his words on this occasion. And she has to admit that, as ideas go, it is at least a little bit senseless. And it will, of course, use precious time and resources. But on some visceral level she can't quite explain, this birthday party means a lot to her. It seems like the perfect opportunity to show him how much each and every member of his family cares about him.

She contemplates her approach that night while they lie intertwined in a comfortable silence, both thoroughly satisfied and, she suspects, over halfway to happiness.

"What's on your mind?" He asks softly as she relaxes against him, head pillowed on his chest.

"I realised something today." She begins thoughtfully. "I'm not lonely any more."

He stills for a moment, and she wonders if perhaps that was the wrong thing to say. She's not sure how it could be, really, though. In a world where they're allowed to care about each other, surely admitting she was a bit miserable a couple of months ago is not such an unbearable revelation.

He squeezes her hand, then, and she senses that his stillness doesn't mean that at all. He's just not sure where to start.

"That's good." He says in the end. "I'm so sorry that – that you ever were. There are so many things I wish I could go back and -"

"Bellamy. Stop. I didn't tell you because I wanted another apology. I told you because I wanted to share my good news with you."

She feels him twist his neck, press a kiss against the top of her head. She takes that as her cue to continue.

"In related news, I had lunch with Raven and Echo and Octavia today. And your sister had an idea. She thought it would be nice to celebrate your birthday." She feels him stiffen, and she forces herself to continue. "She said it seemed only fair because everything was always about her when you were growing up. And she also pointed out that Madi would enjoy a party. We were thinking we could go on a family day out, and then you could get together with Spacekru in the bar that evening. And, to be clear, we all want to do this whether you think it's silly or not. And have I mentioned that your daughter would enjoy it?"

"Yes. You did mention that, once or twice, I think."

"So that's a yes? We're allowed to throw you a birthday party?"

"What – no – I – you must have had a birthday recently." He accuses in the end, in place of responding to her question, and she finds herself wondering why that is of any real relevance right now. "Because you must have been seventeen when we landed all those years ago but then I remember you being eighteen."

"Yes." She acknowledges warily. "I did. Last month."

"And we didn't throw some big party for you. I mean, you didn't even tell me it was your birthday. And Madi would have enjoyed celebrating that just as much." She resists the urge to remind him
that they were on rather less good terms at the time.

"But not so many other people would have wanted to throw me a party." She points out instead.

"I disagree." He states, with a vehemence she feels is not strictly required in a conversation about something as essentially petty as birthday parties. "I would have thrown you a party."

"Thank you." It seems like the right thing to say, even though she suspects he is stretching the truth somewhat. "But that's not the point. You have a whole family of people who want to celebrate your birthday with you, and a daughter who would be so excited about it, it would probably make her year."

"And we're talking about a family day out and some drinks at the bar? Nothing completely ridiculous."

"Yeah."

"And it was Octavia's idea?"

"Yeah."

"OK then. Sure. Whatever the hell you want." She giggles at that, and rewards him with a couple of careless kisses against his collarbone.

"Great. I'll tell them tomorrow. Echo seems to have decided she's coordinating it."

"Of course she has."

That comfortable silence falls once again, and Clarke begins silently to count down the seconds until he will excuse himself and go on his way. Begins to count down the lifetimes, too, that it seems she will have to wait until he will actually go crazy and just stay the night.

"Clarke?"

"Hmm."

"It's recently come to my attention that your birthday was last month. Would – would you let me take you out to celebrate? Just the two of us. Next week some time. We could go on a picnic. Or to the bar, or try something else from the wide range of leisure activities Sanctum has to offer." The halting quality of his voice takes her back to her youth, somehow, to growing up on the Ark, to Wells and his stammered attempts to invite her to the Unity Day dance.

It takes her back to a world in which dates happened to people like her.

"I'd like that." She murmurs, smiling against his chest so broadly she thinks he must be able to feel it. "I'd like that a lot."

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They don't go on a picnic, and nor do they go the bar. The picnic scheme is rendered pretty impractical by Bellamy's twisted ankle. He insists that it's only a minor inconvenience, that he's still perfectly fit to go on a short wander into the woods, but she stands firm. She is a doctor, and he has twisted his ankle, and if he wants to be fit to go back on patrol in a couple of days he needs absolute rest. No exceptions.

The bar, too, is ruled out on the basis that she's hoping she's pregnant and it doesn't seem very
celebratory for him essentially to drink alone. And she suspects, too, that he's decided it would be a little humiliating to hobble into the bar with a twisted ankle, but there doesn't seem a lot of point in bringing that up. He may be in less of a shooting-three-hundred mood, of late, but she sees no reason to poke the bear.

So it is that they find themselves with an empty house, Madi safely with her grandparents for the night, and they sit on the sofa and try to decide what they're doing.

"We could reschedule for another day." Bellamy offers apologetically. "I'm sorry I managed to screw this up."

"You fell over, Bellamy. It was hardly deliberate."

"I'm going to tell Miller he ruined your birthday party. If he hadn't left that damn -"

"Bellamy. It doesn't matter, honestly. It was still a kind thought."

"We could go pick some of your medicinal plants. That's something you enjoy?"

"Nope. You'd have to walk too far. Let's watch a film." She suggests, indicating the tablet they use to watch movies with their daughter.

"That seems like a bit of a let-down. We watch films with Madi all the time."

"Exactly. This time, we get to pick what we watch." She sits down, tablet in hand, and pats the empty place behind her. She's rather hoping that, from her body language, he'll pick up on the fact that one of the other strengths of this scenario is the way in which, without a twelve year old for company, they might be able to share the sofa a little more intimately than usual.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"That's what I want." It takes more effort than it really should, she thinks, to avoid saying by mistake that he is what she wants. Because it's the truth, really. The exciting thing about this lovely belated birthday celebration is not the activity, it's the fact that he's choosing to spend time in her sole company.

"OK." He sits down, but not quite where she was indicating. No, he occupies a spot at the other end of the sofa, stretches his injured leg out along it. And then, in a gesture it is impossible to misunderstand, he opens his arms and invites her to close the distance between them.

Well, then. Clearly he got that memo about more intimate sofa sharing.

She quirks an affectionate eyebrow at him, but moves into his arms all the same. She could get used to this, she thinks, sitting cradled in his embrace, her back pressed to his front, his arms wrapped around her.

"What are we watching?" She asks, focusing very carefully on the task of firing up the tablet.

"You choose." He murmurs against her ear. "It's your birthday party."

To her credit, she does not give up and screw him right there on the sofa. No, she relaxes back against him, and enjoys his company as they watch some unobjectionable romantic drama set in an historical period neither of them knows much of anything about. And she is even more proud of her self control when the credits roll and she does not immediately turn around to press her lips to his.
"Was that a satisfactory birthday party?" He asks softly.

"I don't know." She replies, hoping that he can read her teasing tone. "Is it over? I was sort of hoping that there was something else that would happen now."

"What did you have in mind?" He asks, buying into her premise, beginning to trail kisses down her neck, nuzzling into the soft skin behind her ear.

"Yeah, that sort of thing." She agrees, fighting to keep her voice light. "The birthday party's improving now."

"So teasing you is fun and all." He allows a hand to skim the skin at the hem of her shirt. "But could we maybe go to the bedroom and screw now?"

She laughs at that and twists around to run a teasing finger over the bristly line of his jaw. "Sure. Let's go."

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Surely, Clarke thinks, she must be pregnant by now. The middle of the month has come, and gone, and they have focused on it with a studiousness that she takes pride in. To be fair, they've continued to focus rather enthusiastically since then, as well.

She's a doctor, so she knows full well that she can't be certain she's pregnant until she takes a pregnancy test. Any myths that she will be able to feel it, or some such, she chooses to dismiss as just that – myths. But all the same, she finds herself rather more confident about the whole thing than she was this time last month. Somehow, she is relaxed, and happy, and fully expects a positive pregnancy test in a couple of weeks' time.

Of course, as she's feeling confident, she could just take the test now. The tests they have on Sanctum work even in the very earliest weeks. But she's decided that she won't do that, not until her period fails to show, and shows her she's succeeded. She tells herself that she's just being cautious, doesn't want to jinx the situation with foolish over-confidence. But she has to admit, too, that the relationship she currently has with Bellamy is rather a comfortable and rather an enjoyable one, and she sees no sense in complicating it until she actually has to. That's just good sense, she tells herself, to want to make the most of this happiness while it lasts.

People start to notice the change in her mood, make comment on her newly rekindled confidence. Her mother offers pointed remarks about how she's glowing, how great it is to see her happy for a change. Echo uses the word good more often than Clarke thinks can be strictly necessary, nods approvingly at her in a way that she supposes she would once have found a little threatening, but now finds only heartening.

And, of course, Raven sticks her nose in where it is not required. And yet, Clarke cannot bring herself to resent it.

"So I take it you've been trying again?" She asks her, out of the blue, as they sit at lunch one day.

Clarke chokes a little on some mashed root vegetables and thanks the heavens that Echo is not here to listen to this.

"What?"

"I take it you've been trying again. To conceive Madi. I can't see why else the two of you are suddenly joined at the hip again and you've remembered how to smile."
Clarke can see why else, as it happens.

"I think talking to each other has done us more good than trying to have a child." She says with affected nonchalance.

"How sweet." Raven says, in a tone that Clarke suspects means that she does think it is sweet, but is trying not to show it. "How's it going?"

"I presume you're asking whether I'm pregnant, not how the actual conceiving is going?"

"Either. Both. Personally I was never that impressed with his skills in the bedroom, but everyone else seems to give him a good report."

She chokes a little more. These vegetables really are bad for her health. "Excuse me?"

"We slept together once. Back at the dropship." Raven shrugs.

"No one tells me anything." She's not sure whether she's more upset or amused by this development.

"I'm not sure it's news. Most people slept with him, back then."

"Except me." She points out, risking another spoonful of mash. "Yet somehow I'm the one he's supposed to be having a kid with."

"I don't think that's very surprising." Raven chews thoughtfully on what Clarke thinks is stewed goat. "So I take it you're not pregnant, yet?"

"I don't know. I'm beginning to hope."

"Well, good luck. And – you know – let me know if you need anything. I'm not sure what pregnant women need, but – yeah." Clarke understands that this is not the sort of thing Raven goes around saying very often, and feels her heart warm at it.

"Thanks. That's kind of you."

"No foot rubs, though. Bellamy will have to provide those."

"I'm not sure he's into giving foot rubs." She responds thoughtfully.

"Clarke." Raven gives an affected shiver. "Trust me when I say you are better qualified to know what he's into than I am."

That revelation catches her by surprise, actually, given the six years she missed. It is a pleasant kind of surprise, and she finds herself smiling broadly. "Yes. I suppose I might be."

"Can we stop talking about how two of my best friends are currently screwing, now?"

Two of her best friends? Today is full of pleasant surprises, and this newest revelation gives her the courage to tease in return.

"You're the one who started it." She grins. "But yeah, sure. What have you been up to this morning?"

"The rover's finished. Want to come look at it after lunch?"
She has little interest in rovers. And she has a large stack of her mother's notes to write up after lunch, and an even larger stack of Wonkru DNA results to log.

Naturally, therefore, she agrees.

"Yeah. That sounds great. I'd love to."

"Of course you would."

It is almost, Clarke thinks, as if things between her and Raven are in danger of becoming normal once again.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Madi is determined that she will not hide from the anomaly forever. This is unfortunate, really, because her parents are fairly determined that she shall. But it seems that one cannot permanently wrap the commander in cotton wool and expect to get away with it.

So it is that Clarke finds herself agreeing that they will go on a short family expedition to the north, being rather careful to avoid getting too close to the anomaly. She makes it clear that the only reason both parents are accompanying Madi on the gentle hour-long stroll they have planned is that they both provide vital skills. She is there to provide medical assistance, should it be required. Bellamy is there in case she needs to be carried home, or in case any rogue animals need to be shot.

They are certainly not both there because they can't quite bear to be sitting at home alone while their daughter is potentially in danger.

The atmosphere as the three of them begin this walk is, Clarke thinks, pitiful. They are evidently all set on pretending that all is well, and that they are happy to be out and about, but they are all failing miserably. Madi is chatting away at a mile a minute, but it comes across as rather more panicked than excited, on this occasion. Bellamy's face is so carefully arranged that she expects him to fall apart at any moment. And she knows full well that she is not fooling anyone with her determined conversation about the flora and fauna they take in as they pass.

"Look, Madi. It's that herb your grandma Abby was talking about."

"Oh, yes! You mean that miracle plant that Jackson discovered that you can put on a wound and it makes the blood clot? She told me all about how they tried it on Indra that one time and then Kane said that we ought to start farming it and then Jordan said that we couldn't because it doesn't like to be cultivated."

"How interesting." Bellamy is apparently doing a careful impression of a man who has noticed nothing unusual in his daughter's nervous gabbling.

"We're thinking of naming it after Jackson." Clarke tries to steer the conversation back to saner territory. "It would be nice, I thought, for him to get the glory for a change."

Neither of her companions offers any response to this. She keeps walking, on the alert for something else she might point out as a topic of conversation, but nothing presents itself. She decides, at her wits end, that she might try for a little humour instead.

"I think this is going quite well. This must be the longest the two of you have ever been out of the village without a twisted ankle or a fainting spell. You're quite the accident-prone pair, aren't you?"

Bellamy grunts a little. Madi gives a nervous giggle. She should have realised this was no time for joking. She has to admit, she's struggling to see the funny side of the situation herself, but this oppressive silence is weighing rather heavily on her and she'd do anything to make it stop.

Anything?

Perhaps it's time she tried something a little bolder. Perhaps it's time she tried actually tackling the
topic of Madi's illness head on. And perhaps it's time she tried reminding Bellamy that they're in this together. She starts with that bit, closes the polite distance between them as they walk a pace behind Madi on the path. Reaches out for his hand and interweaves her fingers with his.

He looks up at her, surprise fresh in his eyes, a question in the crease of his brows.

By way of response, she squeezes his hand a little tighter.

"How are you feeling, Madi?" She asks outright. "Any signs at all of headache or dizziness?"

"Nothing so far." Her daughter says breezily. "I'll let you know if I start to feel ill."

She scampers a little further ahead at that, and Clarke resists the urge to call her back. She cannot keep her daughter within arm's length forever.

"Thanks. I'd be lost without you." Bellamy whispers gruffly, as soon as Madi is out of earshot. "I was lost without you."

"I think lost is probably better than unhinged." She says affectionately, allowing herself to lean into him slightly as they walk.

He lets out a burst of laughter, the tension in his face easing somewhat, and drops a rather unexpected kiss onto her cheek. This, she thinks, this is definitely starting to look a lot like happiness. In fact -

Without warning, Madi crumples to the ground, some twenty metres ahead of them. Clarke hears a scream, realises it is her own. Watches Bellamy break into a run, makes haste to follow. After what feels like an age, but is in reality only seconds, they reach their daughter, who is in something of a heap, taking panicked breaths and sweating profusely.

"Madi, honey? Can you hear me?" Clarke checks her pulse.

"I don't feel well. I just – I suddenly got dizzy – and then I had to sit down."

"OK, baby. You're OK. Let's get you home."

Bellamy scoops their daughter up into his arms, and the three of them turn back towards Sanctum.

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Clarke supposes that there is progress, here. At least now they have established that Madi definitely does become ill whenever she gets too close to the anomaly, and this time she didn't actually fall unconscious. All they have to do is ensure that she avoids going too far north, and she should be fine.

At least, that's what she's hoping.

The evening they spend together is surprisingly cheery. It is as if, now their fears have been confirmed, there is no further need for nervousness. There is only the need to band together for Madi's protection. And, really, if she and Bellamy can take on an army of grounders or the deathwave of Praimfaiya and survive, they can certainly manage the task of keeping their daughter away from the anomaly.

Madi is napping on the sofa, now, recovering from her earlier dizziness, while her parents play chess and speak in hushed tones.
"Do you think she'll get better once you get pregnant?" Bellamy asks thoughtfully. She resists the urge to tell him that she is already beginning to suspect she's conceived. Her period is due any day, and she's becoming more convinced of their success with each moment that passes.

"I have no idea. Maybe."

"I guess there's no point worrying about it. We can't do anything about it except keep screwing." She is relieved to see him joking again after the anxiety of earlier.

"I can think of worse duties."

"Yeah." He cracks into a grin. "But there is a twelve year old sleeping on the sofa just now, so maybe we should change the subject."

She laughs out loud at that, and with the sound Madi begins to stir.

"You OK, kid?" Bellamy is quick to stride over to her side.

"I'm good." She confirms, sitting up slowly. "How long was I asleep?"

"A couple of hours." Clarke joins them on the sofa. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yeah. No so much as a headache."

"That's good." Bellamy looks as relieved as she feels.

"Can I come play chess now?" Madi asks, all sunshine once again. Or perhaps, Clarke thinks, making a game display of sunshine.

She decides to help her out with that. "Of course you can, honey. I think your dad could use a teammate."

And so it is that chess is played, and a concerted attempt is made to forget that the commander cannot venture more than half an hour to the north of her home.

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Clarke tries to find a balance, in the days that follow. A balance between protecting Madi, but also letting the adolescent live her life. She is not made to be cooped up, any more than her parents are, and so it is that she continues to go out to school and on the occasional patrol with her father, but goes nowhere near the anomaly. And they practise the art of spending a little more time than usual at home, a bit more reading, plenty of sketching, a healthy dose of chess.

"You feeling OK, Madi?" She asks, as the two of them sit together at the table one evening, sketching nothing in particular.

"You can stop asking me that every ten minutes, you know." The girl says with a hint of her usual boldness. She is evidently feeling much recovered since her misadventure earlier in the week.

"Sorry, honey." She fishes around for a change of subject. "Are you looking forward to your father's birthday?"

"Yes." Madi nods enthusiastically. "Will there be swimming?"

"It's too cold for swimming, now, I think."
"Dad will swim anyway." She says it confidently, but Clarke wonders if it is true. If Bellamy goes swimming, she thinks, there are likely to be difficult questions about the jagged scar that runs the length of his left arm from that encounter with the Titan.

"Maybe."

"What are we giving him for a present?"

"I'm not sure it'll be a present kind of a celebration, Madi. Your dad won't want us to make a fuss, and no one has the resources to spare for presents."

"We have to give him something." Her daughter pouts. "We have to."

"I'm not sure, honey."

Madi looks thoughtfully down at the sketch she's working on, a rendition of Clarke smiling softly at something unseen. And then -

"I've got an idea." She says, excitement growing in her voice. "And it's not a big thing, and it wouldn't be making a fuss, and it wouldn't use loads of resources. I think we should make him a sketchbook."

"A sketchbook?"

"Well, a book of sketches. Drawings of our family. I think he'd really like that."

It's partly the light in her daughter's eyes that makes her agree to the scheme, the eagerness that the girl cannot repress. She cannot bear, somehow, to let her down, especially in the midst of all this stress about her health. But it is not just that, she knows. It is also the fact that, deep inside of herself, she wants to give him a heartfelt gift, too.

"You know, Madi, I think you might be right."

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Clarke wakes up the following morning almost certain that she is pregnant. In a world where her menstrual cycle has run like clockwork ever since her contraceptive implant failed about a hundred and twenty nine years ago, even through the stress of being alone with a child in the wake of an apocalypse, she can see no other reason for her late period, now.

But all the same, she doesn't take a pregnancy test. She'll take one tomorrow, she tells herself, or the next day. It's just not a priority for today, when Madi still needs looking after a bit more closely than normal, and there are sketches to be done for Bellamy's birthday sketchbook. She firmly silences the voice in the back of her mind that points out that, in fact, she works in the Medical Centre, and it would hardly take a lot of time or effort to take the test today.

She silences even more vehemently the voice that asks whether, perhaps, there is another reason she's not taking the test today. That whispers, just on the edge of her hearing, that Bellamy won't have any reason to share her bed once she tells him she's pregnant, and that this bubble of happiness that hangs so delicately around them will burst with a resounding pop.

Of course, the universe hates her. This much is, by now, well established. So it is that, today of all days, people just will not stop asking after the state of her uterus. Raven and Echo allude to the question over breakfast, but she brushes them off with a less-than-subtle change of subject. After all, Bellamy's birthday arrangements are of far more importance today than her potential
pregnancy. Octavia bumps into her on the way to Medical, asks her with a pointed brow whether there's any news on the Madi front. And just when she's about to lose the plot entirely, about to scream from the rooftops that her womb is no one else's business, her mother, of course, decides to take up the question.

"How are you this morning, Clarke?"

"I'm well, thanks. You?"

"Fine, fine." Her mother answers dismissively. "Was there – was there anything else, besides well?"

"I don't know what you could possible mean, mum."

"I just wondered whether you might be – expecting."

"No, not sure yet." It is not quite a lie, she tells herself. She isn't sure, yet, after all. She hasn't checked. "I do wonder why everyone is so keen to ask about that, at the moment, though."

"I think they're just trying to show you they care about you." Abby suggests, apparently finding it difficult to meet her eye. "Everyone loves Madi, and you and Bellamy have always been important to them. I don't think it's surprising that they would want to know if – if you've had any joy on that front."

That, Clarke thinks, is an interesting turn of phrase. She's not sure she wants the entire village gossiping about whether she and Bellamy have had any joy in conceiving.

"How does everyone even know we're trying?" She cannot get her head round this. She has only told her mother and Raven, and she supposes that he's probably made it clear to Echo, too.

"Clarke, sweetheart. It's kind of obvious."

"It is?" Have they been particularly loud, or something? Can the neighbours tell what they are up to?

"Yes. A couple of months ago you were yelling at each other. Now you go everywhere side by side. And hand in hand, more often than you seem to realise." Damn it. She knew that new habit of taking his hand was going to get her into trouble. He must be mortified, she thinks, that the whole of Sanctum has noticed what is going on between them.

"Oh." She offers, rather uselessly, as she forces herself to take a seat at her desk and get on with pretending to work.

"It's not a bad thing, Clarke. As your mother, allow me to suggest that it's a very good thing. After all those years on your own – just look how many people are here for you now." She hasn't looked at it like that, she muses. Perhaps her mother might be on to something after all.

"Maybe you're right, mum. Thanks."

"You're welcome. And – when you want that pregnancy test, just let me know."

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In the spirit of embracing the fact that so many people are interested in her wellbeing, Clarke seeks out company even more often in the days that follow. She is particularly keen to continue to
promote her newly rekindled friendship with Raven, and therefore spends a great deal of time pretending interest in the engineer's many ongoing projects. Clarke knows that Raven knows full well that she has no real interest in the engine of a rover or the structure of a comms tower, but it is nice to have companionship all the same.

On the eve of his birthday, for reasons that remain unclear to her, Bellamy even accompanies her. They have ended up sitting together at lunch, somehow, while Madi is at school, and he says something about how he doesn't have much to do, and next thing she knows, he is following her to the workshop as if spending spontaneous leisure time together, without their daughter as cover, is a perfectly normal part of their routine. She's not complaining. But she is very careful, this time, not to reach out and take his hand. Apparently people notice, when she does that.

They are half way to their destination when she realises that he is frowning at her. She contemplates asking why, seethes for the thousandth time with silent resentment that, despite the progress they have made, she still has to ask such things. She longs for the days when she simply knew, is desperate for a future in which, perhaps, that might come to be the case once again. In fact -

Her musings are interrupted by a warm hand closing around hers. And, really, that seems like something he is unlikely to have done by accident. And it certainly isn't the kind of thing he could be doing out of obligation, not like their sex life. No, she decides, something of a happy glow spreading slowly through her chest. This seems like a step he must have taken because he wants to wander round Sanctum hand-in-hand with her.

If Raven thinks it is noteworthy that the two of them have walked into her workshop together, for no actual reason, in the middle of the day, holding hands, she does not mention it. She simply makes a surprisingly un-Raven amount of fuss over how pleased she is to see them. Kane is there, too, hovering by the lazer-comm, and they pass a cheerful few minutes asking about each other's days and discussing nothing of any real importance.

Then the conversation moves onto rather more significant topics.

"How are Indra and the team?" Bellamy asks, shifting his weight in visible discomfort. Clarke cannot imagine how much it must be costing him, to sit safely at home while his comrades are out on another week-long mission. She reflects on what he has given up, to be with his family, and steps a little closer to his side.

"They're doing well." Kane reassures him smoothly. "They're due back tomorrow."

"Who went?" Clarke asks, rather less in touch with security matters than the other occupants of the room.

"Indra, Miller, Ivon, and Drusus." Kane reels off.

"A good team." Bellamy muses, and she wonders what he is thinking.

"Yes." Kane agrees. "But that brings us to something I wanted to speak to you about, actually, Clarke. You and I both know that you're wasted on a desk job. And I was thinking, on missions like this – well, a good field medic would be invaluable. And you'd be perfect for it, of course, with your experience. And you're good in a crisis. What do you -"

"No." Bellamy interrupts him, face like thunder. "Absolutely not. Are you out of your mind?"

"Bellamy." She attempts to adopt a soothing tone. "Just a moment -"
"No." He cuts her off, turns back to Kane, ripping his hand out of her grasp. "No way is Clarke going out there. She needs to stay with Madi. And to ask this while you must know she might be pregnant. It's insane. If you think for one moment I'm going to let her -"

"Let me?" She cannot believe she has just heard that. "Let me?"

"Clarke, please. I just meant -"

"I don't take orders from you." She reminds him, voice full of venom. Good. He deserves a certain amount of venom, she thinks, after this ridiculous attempt to order her about.

She makes decisions about her life. Her, and no one else. And if he thinks a bit of decent sex is going to change that – well, then. He's got another think coming. She storms out of the workshop, not even stopping to check whether the door slams behind her.

Not even stopping to check whether he realises what he's done.

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Clarke spends the remainder of the afternoon storming angrily around the woods in the name of collecting medicinal plants. After all, if she's seriously considering this field medic idea, she needs to get used to being out and about a bit more. Not that she is seriously considering it, really, she admits to herself. She knows that, at the very least, she ought to wait until after she's given birth to Madi. But all the same, she finds herself burning with a certain determination to prove that she could do it, if she so wished.

The time to pick Madi up from school thankfully comes around at last, and Clarke is quick to do so. And then she spends the evening sketching with her daughter, trying very hard to pretend she is still excited at the prospect of compiling their drawings into a birthday gift for Bellamy when, she's quite aware, she's very recently adopted a habit of wincing every time she hears his name. At length, the sketchbook is finished, and the evening is over, and she reaches the point where she can bid the girl goodnight and give up the pretence of cheerfulness.

If Madi wonders why her father has not come over tonight, when he has been over every evening in the last week, she does not mention it. She simply takes herself to bed with ever appearance of happiness and a great deal of enthusiastic anticipation of the morning's picnic.

Clarke sighs in relief, and takes a seat at their small table. She leafs carefully through the selection of drawings, torturing herself with half a dozen reminders that they were reclaiming a bit of happiness, together, until this very afternoon. But she can't weaken, she tells herself, can't overlook the fact that he tried to order her about like that. She's only been so happy with him, recently, she tells herself, because she was so lacking in human company. But now that she has other friends, again, she doesn't need him. Doesn't need this man who is so unlike the Bellamy she remembers, who thinks he can tell her what to do, can instruct her to continue in a desk job she is so patently unsuited to.

Of course, she does need him, at least until she's definitely pregnant. But she will keep him at arm's length, in future. She realises, now, that they are not actually so close as she was beginning to think.

Fate being what it is, just as she reaches that resolution, she hears the key turn in the lock. And then she hears, naturally, that very familiar knock on the door. She barely has time to acknowledge the blossoming confusion in her chest, the chaos of conflicting feelings that encompass everything from rage to welcome, before he appears in the doorway of the living room.
"Clarke?" She's not sure why he phrases it as a question. She raises her brows in a way that, she hopes, conveys that he had better say something good or she will throw him from the house. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You were right. You don't take orders from me, and I shouldn't have tried to tell you what to do."

She gives a bare nod. It is, after all, the truth.

"I was worried about you." He tells her, voice raw. "I was so worried that you were going to agree, because I know how bored you've been of working in the Medical Centre and I could just see you being so excited at the chance to do something that suits you better that you wouldn't think it through."

"Of course I'm not really going to go." She acknowledges the truth, both to him and to herself, with a resentful bite to her voice. "I do have some sense, still. I know I need to think about Madi. I just – I miss it, Bellamy. I'm not made for sitting in the Medical Centre all day long. I need to be out and about and doing things that are actually useful."

"I know." He braves a step towards her. "Kane had another idea, if you're interested. He thought – well, he thought it was about time you started going to his security meetings, joined his band of not-very-official advisers. Got back on with making the decisions."

"Last time I made a decision it was the wrong one." She reminds him sadly, thinking of the time she betrayed him and so many others back on Earth.

Somehow, it seems, he knows what she means, as he finally closes the distance between them and stands a scant pace away, hand outstretched towards her.

"You've made plenty of good decisions since that, Clarke. Changing your mind and helping us get through that valley. Keeping the door open those couple of seconds for me and Murphy and Monty and Emori to get on the ship." There is a pause, and she rather thinks he is done, but then he continues so softly she has to strain to hear him. "Telling me – telling me how you used to feel about me."

She doesn't weaken, at that. No, that's not what's going on here, not at all. Rather, at those words, she remembers that the pair of them are rather stronger, together. She stands and steps forward, wraps her arms around him. Rests her head against his chest and listens to the reassuring rhythm of his heartbeat. And he hugs her back, and she can feel him pressing soft kisses against the crown of her head.

"I'm sorry." He murmurs again, and she wonders how often the two of them will end up sharing those words before this life is through.

"I forgive you." She replies, as she always will. "I don't know what I'm going to do, Bellamy. I promise I will be sensible, and think of Madi. But I need to do something other than sit around in Medical all day."

"I know." He whispers soothingly. "I get that. But – I'm not just worried about Madi, Clarke. Promise me you won't do anything that puts you in unnecessary danger, either?"

She finds herself somewhat touched at that, and hugs him ever tighter. "That's a bit rich, coming from you."

"Clarke -"
neck. "You promise me that you'll stop taking risks, too, though? Your family needs you in one piece."

"My family includes the perfect field medic. I figure she can sew me back together again." He attempts a joke, and she pulls back to fix him with a stare. "I promise, too. No more unnecessary risks."

"Thanks."

"Are we good?" He asks, sounding a little nervous as he plays with the ends of her hair.

"Yeah. I think we've survived worse arguments." She forces herself not to dwell too long on that thought. "Are you staying for a bit?"

"If that's OK." He says as she pulls way from the embrace.

"Make yourself at home." She wonders if perhaps that was the wrong thing to say, but he appears untroubled as he takes a seat at the table.

"What's this?" He asks, gesturing to the sketchbook that lies open where she left it, a picture of him and Octavia and Madi playing catch looking up at them.

She sees no point in lying. She is already keeping quite enough secrets from him, she thinks, hand settling instinctively on her still-flat stomach as she eases into the chair across from him.

"Your birthday gift from me and Madi. You'd better look pleasantly surprised when she gives it to you tomorrow."

He chuckles at that. "I will. This is beautiful. You drew it?"

"That one, yeah. Madi did some of the others."

"Can I take a look? As long as I promise to look surprised tomorrow?"

"Sure."

He flips eagerly to the front of the small stack of drawings, where Madi's rendition of Octavia smiles out of the page. Makes impressed noises, turns to Abby and Marcus on a family day out. Then there are Raven, Echo, Murphy and Emori crowding round a table in the bar. Madi's sketch of Clarke and Abby, which he compliments with a smile. The drawing of the game of catch which he started with. And then, the last of the lot, the one Clarke thought it was at least a little silly to include.

It is just her. Her face, smiling a half-smile. It's the piece that was lying on the table when they settled on this particular present. And it's not the world's greatest drawing, really, all things considered. She's pretty sure her eyebrows aren't quite that shape, for a start. But Madi was proud of drawing it, insisted that it belonged in the collection. Ignored her insistence that this isn't really a sketch of his family, as such.

It seems that, on this occasion, Madi was right. Or, at least, that's the message she's getting from the way he's beaming down at the page, as if this is the best gift he's ever been given.

"Thanks." He says at last, sounding a little choked. "This is really... thanks."

"You're welcome. I know you didn't want us to make a fuss but Madi insisted." She watches his
face fall a little at that, and asks herself why that might be. She's got a hunch, and she thinks it's a
good hunch but – well, she doesn't always read him correctly, these days.

All the same, she steels herself, and takes a risk.

"And... and I really wanted to do something special for you, too. To show you how much this
unexpected family life means to me."

He's kissed her before, of course. He's kissed her several times in the last couple of months. But
never before has he reached across a table and seized her by the shoulders, nor pressed his lips to
hers quite so firmly.

Never before has he kissed he quite like this.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Bellamy arrives bright and early on the morning of his birthday, and Clarke wonders for the eighth day in a row why he bothered going home at all the night before. The hour was late by the time they finished working on project procreation, yet he still insisted on returning to his own bed. This is, she thinks, evidence if any were needed that their relationship will dry up when she takes that pregnancy test. She'll take it soon, she tells herself, because she realises she must, but she's determined to at least enjoy spending his birthday with him before she worries about changing things so irrevocably. And she knows things will change irrevocably, because she's nigh on certain that she has, in fact, conceived.

She greets him with a hug, and he greets her with a rather unexpected peck on the lips. Well, it is unexpected to her, but he is looking at her as if going around kissing her is perfectly normal behaviour. To be fair, it is something they do a lot, just not quite so casually.

"Sleep well?" She asks, and then curses herself. Can he hear her implicit criticism of his decision to go home last night? Because, really, he does have every right to go home. She just happens to think it's a bit of a waste of time.

"Yeah. You?"

"Yeah." Somehow she still seems to be in his arms, but it seems foolish to object. "Happy birthday."

She supposes the rather lengthy kiss that follows is his way of saying thank you. She's certainly not complaining, because it's rather an engaging sort of a kiss, and she's just beginning to wonder whether they have time for a quick detour to the bedroom when she hears Madi's footsteps behind them.

They are clearly in agreement on one aspect of their relationship, she notes, as the pair of them spring apart. They are clearly in agreement that their daughter is not to catch them making out in corridors.

"Morning, parents." She greets them, eyes narrowed playfully. "I'm sure there's nothing to see here. Happy birthday, Dad."

If Bellamy is surprised that he is so decisively being referred to as Dad, these days, he does not show it. "Thanks, kid. Are you excited for our adventure?"

"Yeah. Do you want your present now?"

"Present?" He does, Clarke thinks, a decent job of looking surprised. "You didn't have to get me a present, Madi."

"We wanted to. It's from both of us. And it's not big or anything it's just – it's from us."

The sketchbook is duly produced, and admired, and sure enough, Bellamy's praise is even more effusive than it was last night. Clarke can't help feeling, though, that he schools his expression a little more carefully when he gets to the final drawing, this time round.
It takes a while, but at last, Madi is satisfied that the sketches have been sufficiently admired and the three of them prepare to leave the house. There is breakfast to be eaten, and there are family members to be collected, and there is, most importantly of all, an adventure to be had.

They are a merry party as they set off into the woods, laden with more picnic food than a group of six can possibly be expected to eat, and carrying what Clarke cannot help feeling is a rather optimistic amount of swimming paraphernalia. Madi takes the lead and takes, too, plenty of minor detours from the path whenever she sees anything of interest. The surprise of the day, though, is that Abby is by her side in this, and Clarke knows it does the whole family good to see her so carefree and utterly healthy. Less stunning, but still far from routine, is the way that Bellamy strikes up conversation with his sister as they are leaving the village and walks with her for the remainder of the trip. Clarke dawdles close by for the first few minutes, ready to mediate their stilted attempts to discuss Octavia's history teaching should she be required to do so, but when it becomes clear that a certain spirit of reconciliation is in the air she leaves them to it. And she misses Bellamy's hand in hers, of course she does, and she misses the safety that comes with sticking close to him. It is hard to leave him even for a few minutes, now that she has him back after so long apart. But he needs a little privacy to speak with his sister and, besides which, Clarke needs to talk to Kane.

"So Bellamy told me what you said after I left, yesterday." She shouldn't feel this nervous, she thinks, in conversation with the man who is essentially her stepfather.

"Yes? What do you think?"

"I think that – that I'm not ready to do anything too like leading, just yet. I've made so many mistakes, Marcus, and I'm still working them out. But I'd like to do something more useful than I'm doing right now."

"To be clear, what you're doing right now is very useful." His voice is calm, and measured, and she remembers why everyone feels quite so secure with this man as head of security, for all his past misjudgements. "But yes, I think it would do you good to be more involved in running the place. May I invite you next time I call a meeting?"

"Yes. Yes, I'll be there."

Silence falls, and she is content to let it. She is very content indeed, as it happens, now that she has told Kane her decision.

"Clarke – about working out your mistakes. I'm still working mine out, too. What I did, back on Earth – it was at least as bad as anything you did. But somehow I'm running things once again. Don't let your past count you out from doing the right thing now."

"Thanks. I'm getting there." She really is, she thinks, as she smiles at the sight of her family walking before her.

"I'm sorry I caused trouble between you and Bellamy, yesterday. I should have realised he'd find it a difficult suggestion to hear. I just want to remind you that you're still young, Clarke, cryosleep being what it is. You can concentrate on your family now, maybe, and get back to saving the world later."

"I think it's a bit late to save the world." She jokes without much humour.
"Yes." He agrees wryly. "An unfortunate turn of phrase. But my point stands."

"Yes. Yes, I think it does."

She thinks about his words quite seriously, really she does, and she suspects that she will continue to think about Kane's various suggestions often in the days to come. But for now, it is time to celebrate her daughter's father's birthday. And it is time for her to reclaim a little more of her lost youth.

"Can you see that, Marcus?" She points at the glimmer of light that peeps through the trees, evidence that the lake is just ahead. "Race you to the beach."

With that, she takes off running. She is pleasantly surprised to find that Kane follows, hot on her heels, and pleasantly unsurprised to find that Madi gets wind of what's happening and streaks ahead of the pair of them. Octavia, too, joins the fun, and Clarke sets about competing with her rather more zealously than the occasion perhaps merits.

She has just found sand beneath her feet, is just rejoicing at her arrival on the shore and her imminent victory, when she feels warm arms close about her waist.

"Wha -" She gives a strangled cry and rolls to the floor, a rather heavy and all too familiar body tumbling with her.

"I think you lose." Bellamy tells her through his laughter, as the two of them sprawl in the sand, limbs still somewhat tangled, smiles rather broad.

"That is definitely not fair." She pouts, and makes a great show of extricating her arm from his grasp. "I was winning."

"Yes. And I couldn't have that. No way were you beating my sister."

"Blake loyalty runs deep." Octavia commiserates cheerfully, looking down at the pair of them as they continue to sit where they fell.

"What she said." Bellamy agrees, and Clarke finds herself a little bemused. Sure, she was aware that the siblings were working on fixing things, but she didn't realise they'd got as far as Blake loyalty runs deep. That seems like a bit of a substantial development, and she's not sure how she missed it.

"I'm pleased to see you two on the same side." She offers tentatively, as the other members of their party begin to converge around them.

"We're trying a bit of a birthday truce." Bellamy tells her brightly. "And then – then maybe we'll see if it lasts, too."

"Yeah. Hopefully." Octavia agrees, looking happier than she has seen her in centuries. "But let's be honest, Clarke, he just wanted an excuse to roll around in the sand with you."

"I deny that." Bellamy argues ineffectually. "No such though crossed my mind."

"No one believes you." Madi pipes up, and Clarke feels her cheeks flame.

"It seems that way." He acknowledges without apparent distress. "So are we laying the blankets out here?"
"Well, you two don't seem to be moving any time soon." Abby sets down her bag, and gets to work on setting up their base for the day.

They do move, before long, to participate in a ball game that has no clear rules and no clear goalposts, and whose actual aim is even less evident. But it is not the kind of day for organised fun, this. No, this is a day for laughing at everything and nothing, for falling over in the sand really quite a lot, and for quietly encouraging one another to take small steps out of their respective comfort zones. Abby and Kane teach Madi how to jump rope, and are rather hampered by trying to do so on a beach, of all places. Octavia practises being warm and funny, and makes a generous quantity of jokes. Naturally, this confuses everyone except her brother, who assures Clarke under his breath that this is what his little sister was like, once upon a time.

Clarke's journey out of her comfort zone is an incongruously comfortable one. It consists simply of engaging in a great deal of rather couple-like behaviour with Bellamy, and noticing that doing so is very enjoyable, and does not appear to cause the world to end, nor even scare him away. They hold hands a lot and, of course, that is something they do these days. But she's not aware that they do it this persistently. Hand holding whilst trying to eat a picnic lunch is, it turns out, really quite impractical, but lovely all the same. There is kissing, too, more pecks on the cheek than she thinks can be strictly necessary, but every time she goes crazy and steels her courage and presses her lips against his skin, he looks so damn happy she thinks her heart might just burst. And then the afternoon begins to lengthen, and Madi insists on swimming, and of all people it is Kane and Abby who volunteer to accompany her. And so it is that the birthday boy sits – or birthday man, she supposes, for all that he is beginning to remind her so much of the rather younger Bellamy she first knew – and chats to his sister, and wraps his arms firmly around the mother of his child, and the three of them relax and look out over the lake, watching the joy of the girl who has brought them back together.

This is beginning to look like a happy ending lifted from one of those stories she remembers from her Old Earth Studies classes, Clarke muses. Yes, that's it. This is beginning to look like a fairy tale.

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Of course, every fairy tale needs a princess. That thought has her smiling slightly to herself as they walk back to Sanctum, her hand still holding fast to Bellamy's. She remembers, of course, how much she used to cringe at that word, on his lips, or on Finn's, but now she can look back on that with a certain detached nostalgia. Finn is gone, of course, but that Princess is gone too. And that particular brand of Bellamy, he is long gone with them.

It is the first time in centuries she has allowed herself to remember Finn at any length, and she notes with some surprise that doing so does not make her sad, exactly. She thinks likewise of Lexa, and looks back upon their relationship in her mind's eye. And it hurts, still, to have lost them, of course it does, but the wound is not so fresh now. With this new planet and this new start there is something of a sense of closure. And with this new family, she notes, as a couple of bittersweet tears ease their way down her cheeks, there is a sense of new hope, and of being able to move on. Her past will always be with her, of course, but for the first time in as long as she can remember, she is genuinely excited about the future.

"What's wrong?" Bellamy's gentle question breaks into her thoughts, and his gentle thumb wipes the tears from her cheeks.

"Nothing." She rushes to reassure him. "It's a good thing, really. I was just remembering some of the people we've lost."
He squeezes her hand. "That's a good thing to do."

"And – and I was thinking how grateful I am for some of the people I've found again, too."

"Like I said the other day, I was a bit lost."

She is about to follow up on that, to continue this risky attempt at discussing things that actually matter during the hours of actual daylight, when she realises that her mother has appeared at her shoulder and is trying to insert herself into the conversation.

"Mum?"

"Would you two both come by our place to drop Madi off, when we get back? We have something for you, Bellamy." Clarke finds that a distinctly odd way of phrasing the question. Surely, in that case, only Bellamy need accompany them? She is protective of her daughter, of course, but she doesn't think her entire extended family needs to be there just to walk across the village with her.

"Both of us?" She queries, but is ignored because Bellamy is protesting at the same time that he doesn't need a gift from them.

"We insist." Abby tells him firmly, continuing the trend of ignoring Clarke. "It's nothing big, and I promise you it's very boring and practical."

"Well, in that case, how can I say no?"

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It turns out that the boring and practical gift is a shirt, which very much wins Bellamy's approval. He's grateful for the thought, of course, and because it's a reasonably nice shirt, but Clarke knows that his gratitude is all the more keenly felt because Abby and Kane have paused and given careful consideration to what he would like, and chosen something that isn't frivolous, won't make him feel uncomfortable.

So that's lovely and all, but Clarke still has no idea why she's here.

"Shall we be off?" She asks, when she thinks they have enthused over a bit of burgundy fabric for quite long enough.

"Sure." Bellamy agrees easily. "We have a while before we need to be at the bar, but -"

"Hang on." Abby interrupts, looking a bit uncomfortable. "Clarke, could you – could you stay a moment?"

There is most definitely something afoot.

"Why? What's wrong, mum?"

"Nothing's wrong at all, sweetheart. I just wonder if you might stay a moment when Bellamy goes."

"Sure." She agrees, still rather suspicious, but seeing no real alternative.

So it is that Bellamy suggests that he will meet her at the bar, and says goodbye to Madi, and thanks everyone many times for a lovely birthday outing, and goes on his way.

"Now can you tell me what all this is about?" Clarke hisses to her mother as soon as he is out of the
door. Presumably this must be something she is determined to keep from him, some sort of further birthday surprise, or similar.

"Just come this way." Abby starts leading Clarke towards her room, and does not object when Madi follows. "I just – I got you something, and I know you're going to object that today is supposed to be about Bellamy but – well – I think he'll appreciate it too, if you know what I mean."

Madi coughs loudly at that, in a futile attempt to disguise her laughter. So much for being subtle in front of their daughter, Clarke thinks wryly.

"What are you on about?" She asks, her mind flying in some rather disturbing directions. What can she mean, by something he'll appreciate too? "You didn't need to get me anything."

"That's what you said when it was actually your birthday." Abby responds, as they arrive at her room. "So I'm making up for lost time."

With a flourish, she indicates a hanger suspended from the door. And it takes Clarke a good few seconds to work out what's going on here, because, really, it's unthinkable. Why on Earth is there a dress hanging in her mother's room? Surely, this cannot be the gift her mother is talking about. It must have cost her a fortune in bartered supplies to get her hands on something like this. Admittedly, it's a far cry from the long formal dresses she remembers wearing in Polis – it's clearly not new, and is a sort of mid-length and rather utilitarian blue number that wouldn't look out of place in the village.

In fact, it is exactly the sort of thing one might wear to spend an evening in a makeshift bar.

"Do you like it?" Abby asks, looking distinctly nervous, even while Madi squeals with joy.

"It's beautiful." Clarke is quick to reassure her, because really, it is. Second-hand and everyday though it may be, she thinks it might just be the most beautiful gift she has ever received.

Her mother makes quick work of ushering her to go change, and of brushing out her pink-streaked hair. She attempts to lend her alternative shoes, and even encourages her to borrow a more civilian jacket, but that seems like a step too far. She still wishes to be Clarke.

And as she leaves the house, scarcely minutes later, with Abby and Madi waving her off and their enthusiastic shouts following her half way to her destination, she definitely does feel like Clarke.

But she also feels a tiny bit like a princess.

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She's not trying to make an entrance, on her arrival to the bar. It just happens. One moment she's walking in the door and Bellamy has his back to her, and the next thing she knows Murphy is elbowing him and gesturing in her direction and he's turning round and staring at her rather blatantly as she crosses the floor towards them. And then she's arriving at the table, and suddenly he's jumping to his feet and kissing her on the cheek and making, she thinks, a bit of a mess of indicating the empty seat by his side.

"Hey." She whispers, for his ears only. She can greet the rest of their friends later, she figures, but right now he's looking at her wearing a rather impressed sort of a facial expression that he's only ever worn in her dreams until this moment.

"You look good." He tells her, voice pitched low. She shouldn't be surprised to hear it, she thinks. The look on his face the moment she walked in here was obviously code for you look good, and
besides which he's been making frequent use of the word hot during sex for weeks. But it feels so special, somehow, to hear it said out loud and out of bed like this.

"You too." She fights past her nerves to tell him. "Nice shirt. Is it new?"

He grins at that, and helps her to a chair. If this is what he's like now, she thinks, it seems she is destined to be truly fussed over once she tells him she's pregnant.

"Hey." She greets the rest of the table at last as she takes her seat. "How is everyone?"

"Pretty good." Emori raises her glass in some kind of cheerful salutation. "Bellamy was just telling us that the former Chancellor went swimming this afternoon."

"Which former Chancellor?" She asks brightly, by way of response, trying not to let her composure falter as Bellamy slings a careless arm around the back of her chair.

"No." Raven is shaking her head in disbelief. "Both of them? I can't believe Kane actually went for it."

"Abby's more surprising, surely?" Echo asks.

"No. She'd do anything for Madi, she adores her." Raven argues. "Kane's the surprising one."

"But he would do anything for Abby." Bellamy points out. "So really it's no surprise at all."

"Look at you, with your happy little family." Murphy teases him good-naturedly. "Best birthday of your life, I'm betting?"

Clarke expects Bellamy to be a bit embarrassed by that question, but it seems she is guilty of underestimating him yet again.

"Obviously." He scoffs. "It's been great."

"And it's only going to get even better from here." Raven decides on his behalf. "Can I get anyone another drink?"

Her question is greeted by a chorus of positive replies, but Clarke notes that Bellamy is not among them. In fact, as the evening lengthens, he drinks very little indeed, and she can't really understand why. Sure, he's not usually one for drinking to excess – at least, not since they ironed out their differences and stopped having loud confrontations at this very table – but he's normally one to get into the spirit of things when his friends are having fun. At this rate, she thinks, he will end the night no less sober than her, and for obvious reasons all she is ordering is water.

"You OK?" She whispers eventually, while the rest of the group are distracted by some anecdote of Murphy's. She's worried that he might not be feeling well, or something.

"Yeah, why?"

"You've barely drunk anything. I thought you wanted to teach me how to have fun?" She teases to mask her concern.

"I'll have my fun when we get home." He tells her with a smirk. "Really, I'm fine. It would be a bit weird for me to get wasted while you're sober, don't you think? I didn't think that would be much fun for you."

"Thanks." She says, trying to sound more grateful than confused. She really doesn't understand
what goes on in this man's head, sometimes.

"Besides which," he adds, tone light, free hand playing absently with a coaster, "I think I might want to be able to remember tonight in quite a lot of detail. That dress is really something."

Well, then. Now that makes a bit more sense. She braves a kiss on his cheek, feels him smile beneath her lips.

"Shallow." She accuses him affectionately, trying to pretend that this isn't a dangerous topic of conversation. "All this, just for a dress."

"To be clear, I'm more interested in the woman inside the dress." He tells her, displaying no discomfort at admitting it. "But yes, I have definitely noticed the new outfit."

"Damn it. My mother's going to be so smug." She backs away from the precipice of exploring whether, perhaps, the mutual attraction might be beginning to outweigh the shared obligation, and hates herself a little for doing so.

He lets out a laugh, and, without missing a beat, joins Emori in taking the piss out of Murphy's anecdote. And she's disappointed in him, of course she is, for not pushing the subject, but she's even more disappointed in herself. Maybe she'll try again later, she muses. Maybe this is something she wants to persevere with.

She only means to persevere with exploring the mutual attraction, of course. As far as caring for each other goes, well – she intends to leave well enough alone. Mutual attraction is reasonably safe, as dangerous emotions go. That's just an acknowledgement that he looks good in his new shirt, and will look even better without it. But she refuses to contemplate whether this caring for each other goes beyond the extent to which it's normal for two close friends - who used to be a little in love, as it happens - to care for each other.

That way, she knows, lies madness.

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They walk home from the bar a little more briskly than normal, but Clarke doesn't mention it. She doesn't mention, either, the fact that Bellamy keeps turning towards her, smiling down at her as they walk with an expression that warms her through right to the tips of her toes.

When they end up pausing to make out a little, though – that she does feel the need to mention.

"We should probably take this home." She suggests against his lips, pulling away just far enough to form the words.

"You started it." He accuses. It might be the truth. That doesn't seem to matter right now.

"Come on." She pulls away, keeps hold only of his hand. "I have a surprise for you. And it's probably one you don't want Indra to see."

He laughs at that, raises his eyes to take in the fact that, yes, they have somehow ended up kissing right outside their fearsome friend's front door. "Sure."

Yes. Yes, they're definitely walking more briskly than usual. But somehow, still, Clarke's home is taking forever to come into view and it's the longest walk of her life and she can't -

There at last. They make it through the door, kick off their boots, shrug out of their jackets. And
Bellamy makes a start on tugging her towards the bedroom, but she stops him abruptly with a pair of hands on his hips.

"No." She whispers, kissing him to soften the reprimand. "Not yet. Time for your surprise."

It's something she's always imagined doing, of course. Well, not quite always, but for several decades, which seems plenty long enough. It is something she allowed herself to dream of, all those years on Earth alone, allowed herself to imagine the look in his eyes and the moan in his throat. But it is something she has never done, not yet, not in the weeks they have been sleeping together which have seamlessly become months, not even in the last few hand-holding days.

She doesn't know what has possessed her, to make her brave enough to try this tonight. But she thinks that if she doesn't give it a go now, when she can pass it off as a silly birthday treat, she will probably never have the nerve to try again.

So it is that she kneels at his feet. She unbuckles his belt, slides trousers and underwear down over his hips. And then she takes his cock into her mouth.

Sure enough, he gives a moan, just as he did in her lonely fantasies. But this moan is better, somehow, even more maddening than those imagined moans, and it is rough and raw and sounds somewhat like he is being strangled whilst trying to choke out her name.

He tries again. Yes, definitely her name.

"Yes?" She releases his erection just long enough to ask the question, looks up at him with a grin in her eyes as she takes him back into her mouth.

"Wha – what are you doing?" He appears to be gritting his teeth a little, she thinks. "You know that's not going to -"

"I know." She pulls away, curls her hand around him while she speaks. It seems they will have to have a brief chat before she can finish the job. She swallows back her disappointment that he still thinks this is supposed to be about conception, urges herself not to dwell on what, exactly, the implications of his words might be for the future of their relationship.

"Then why are you...?" She resists the impulse to tell him she's already pregnant. After all, she hasn't actually taken the test, yet, so it's not quite deception to keep it from him.

"Because I want to." She tells him, running light fingertips over the length of him. "Think of it as a birthday present, or as enjoying it while we're here, or whatever. But I'd like to do this, if you want me to?"

"Yes." He groans, as she skims the pad of her thumb against his tip. "Yes, please, Clarke."

Without further ado, she gets back to work. And without further ado, he gets back to groaning, and sure enough, when she looks up he is looking back at her as if she is, to say the least, hot. And he's winding his fingers through her hair, and he's beginning to thrust against her a little, beginning to encourage her with his hand on the back of her head to go longer, deeper.

She's only too willing to oblige. There's something about this, about seeing and hearing him lose control at her actions, about the intensity with which he is calling her name. Something about it seems more real, somehow, more like an actual relationship than anything they have done before. And it's not all about him, either, not all about some kind of unhealthy unbalanced situation of debt and obligation like the place they started from. No, this is very much about them, she notes, as she observes that she's not that far from falling apart at the simple sound of her name on his lips.
"Clarke. I'm going to -"

She doesn't answer with words. Her mouth is otherwise engaged. She reaches up, takes his free hand. Squeezes his fingers so hard she thinks that she's probably in danger of breaking something.

And then he breaks, at last, shuddering against her mouth, spilling all over the back of her throat, and sighing so loud and long that the silence hurts, somehow, when he is done.

And then there is only the sound of her laboured breathing as she tries to pretend she is not ridiculously aroused by what they have just shared. Slowly, feeling suddenly shy, she gets back to her feet. And she's not sure what she's planning to do next, really, whether she's planning to kiss him a bit, or take him to the bedroom, or pretend that what just happened was nothing extraordinary.

She never gets the chance to work it out. Suddenly he has kicked his trousers away from where she left them pooled round his ankles, and has scooped her up, and is carrying her to her bed.

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If she wasn't pregnant before, Clarke thinks, surely she must be now. She knows, of course, in a logical and biological way, that this is not how conception works. That there is no correlation between feeling thoroughly satiated and being thoroughly fertilised. But all the same, she has never felt so totally screwed in her entire life.

In a good way. Screwed in a good way.

"So I've had a decent birthday." Bellamy tells her nonchalantly as he holds her tight against his chest.

"Decent? I'm hurt."

"Yeah, OK. It's been great. Second best day of my life, I'd say."

"Second best?" She asks, confused. It's been a pretty strong contender for the best day of her life, and it wasn't even her birthday. "What was the best?"

He cranes his neck to meet her eyes, and looks at her as if she's lost her mind. "The day I realised you hadn't died in Praimfaiya. Surely that's obvious?"

"Oh." Is that really true? "I didn't think of that. I guess – I guess I remembered more of the bad things about that time than the good."

"Yeah, sure, once we realised how much everything had changed it started to suck. But that first moment when Madi ran out of the trees and told me you were alive – nothing is ever going to beat that."

She doesn't have the words to do justice to that declaration of care. She kisses him soundly instead, then settles back against his chest, and begins to count out the seconds until he will say his goodbyes and take himself home. They have shared their sex and their significant conversation for the day, now, after all.

She has counted to three hundred and eighty four when she notices that he is snoring softly. And she knows that, at that point, she really ought to shake him gently by the shoulder, ought to prompt him to go on his way. Surely, she thinks, he will be embarrassed when he awakes and realises that he fell asleep here. But she's beginning to find counting more difficult herself, now, and it's quite
comfortable here, his arms wrapped firmly around her even in sleep.

One moment she is counting four hundred and fourteen, and the next, it is morning.

She knows it must be morning, because there is a little sunlight sneaking in through the gap between the curtains, and because someone is having an ear-splitting row about their assignment for the day as they walk past outside. But it can't be morning, surely it can't, because Bellamy is still in her bed, is curled closely against her, her back against his front.

His morning wood pressed hard against her butt cheek.

She wiggles experimentally. Maybe if he wakes up and thinks she's still asleep, he can run away without this all being too embarrassing, or something. And they can pretend that this never happened, that they never took this terrifying step towards a real relationship.

That doesn't happen. When she wiggles, he wiggles back. And then somehow he starts kissing her bare shoulders, and then his hand finds its way to her breast and – well. One thing leads to another. And she's starting to believe that the only rational explanation for all this might be that they are becoming the kind of couple who sleep together even when they don't entirely need to.

Sanctum is well and truly awake outside by the time they decide they had better get on with their lives.

"That was a fun way to start the day." He comments with a smirk, as he starts to scour the house for his scattered clothing.

"Maybe you should stay over more often." She offers nonchalantly, avoiding eye contact as she rescues her precisely practical dress from the floor and hangs it with more care than the task strictly merits.

"Yeah. I think I should."

That decides it. She's taking a pregnancy test.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
The result of the test comes as no surprise, to Clarke at least. Her mother is beaming with stunned joy, so she supposes she had better try to enter into the spirit of things. And she does feel happy about it, of course she does, but happiness is not the strongest emotion of the morning. No, the main thing she feels is relief.

She is pregnant, and Madi will therefore be OK.

Of course, there is still anxiety. There is anxiety about whether her daughter will continue to have fainting spells, and about whether her baby will be whole and healthy. There is a little anxiety as to whether the child she is carrying is even Madi at all, but Abby tells her they will do a DNA test when the fetus is a couple of months older to check. There is anxiety, too, as to how Bellamy will take this news, and how it might affect their relationship.

But yes, mainly there is relief. And an overwhelming desire for her mother to calm down.

"Clarke, sweetheart, this is so exciting. When are you going to tell Bellamy? When are you going to tell Madi?"

"I'm not sure, yet." She makes a show of sitting down at her desk and getting on with her day.

"Can I tell Marcus? I have to tell Marcus. Just think, I'm going to be a grandma."

"You already are, Mum. Madi's been calling you grandma Abby for months." She points out drily.

"You know what I mean. We must have a party, something to celebrate your good news."

"We just had a party." She reminds her, brow quirked. "And I don't think conception parties are a very traditional thing."

At that, her mother at last seems to understand that Clarke is taking the news rather less excitably and rather more cynically than she. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Mum. I'm happy about it, of course I am. And I'm so relieved to know that Madi has a future. But I've still got a lot of other things on my mind, I guess."

"You know you can tell me, whatever it is?"

"I know." She lies kindly.

Maybe she is still a little lonely after all, she thinks, as she realises rather abruptly that, in fact, she cannot tell anyone everything that is on her mind, right now.

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She decides she will tell Bellamy the result of the test first. And she knows that a braver woman would go and seek him out during the day, would run to him, even, the moment she confirmed her hunch, but she doesn't quite feel up to doing that. Besides which, she argues, it would hardly be rational for her to burst into the middle of his training session just to share a bit of news with him. No, it makes much more sense for her to keep calm and tell him later.
So it is that she plods through a normal day in the Medical Centre, brightened only by Kane popping by to tell her he'd appreciate her presence in his office the following morning, and wades through a great deal of inconsequential chatter over supper. Bellamy comes back to the house with them afterwards, naturally, and the three of them settle on the sofa and watch an old Earth movie of gods and heroes. It passes a little quickly, Clarke thinks, from her place by his side, and her last hours of enjoying his carefree arm slung around her shoulders tick by all too fast. If he chooses to sit with her like this in future, she knows, it will not be carefree. It will be deliberate, if he ever does this again. If he is next to her after this, he will be there by choice.

And that thought scares her, almost as much as the thought that he might not choose to do so.

At last, Madi is put to bed, and the two of them find themselves alone. And as she should have predicted, really, Bellamy is not slow in initiating a searing kiss, and in wrapping his arms about her waist.

"Bellamy, stop." She pulls away from him.

The look on his face tells her loud and clear that he has taken that request badly.

A little flustered at this less-than-auspicious beginning, she makes a start at explaining herself. "I just need to tell you something."

"Yes?" He is frowning, still, and she wants to make it go away, but isn't quite sure how to do so. Perhaps she should just have out with it.

"I'm pregnant." Despite her ongoing anxieties, she cannot help but smile as she says the words. "I'm pregnant, I just found out this morning. We did it."

"That's great news, Clarke." His reaction is neither like hers, nor like her mother's. He looks happy, yes, radiant even, but somehow he's still frowning a little, too, and the combination makes for a rather bizarre expression.

"Yeah. Yeah, it is. Madi's safe. Or at least, we think she is. My mum will do a DNA test on the fetus in a couple of months."

"Great. I'm so happy for you, Clarke." That's really quite weird, she thinks. Isn't he supposed to be happy for himself, too?

"I'm happy for us, too." She corrects him cautiously.

"Yeah, of course. Wow."

There is a beat of silence, and she wonders if she is supposed to be the one to fill it. She wonders, too, why he's still wearing that very odd and slightly concussed expression.

"So you – you took the test this morning? And you didn't get chance to tell me earlier?" So it seems that one of the things playing out on his face must be hurt, then, she realises a little too late.

"Yeah. I just – I didn't want to interrupt you, I guess."

"And you didn't want to tell me that you were planning to take the test, or that you thought you might be pregnant?" This is starting to feel like an inquisition, she thinks, and a distinctly unpleasant one at that.

"I wanted it to be a surprise." She opts for, in the end. It's not the truth, not by a long shot, but
based on the way his face relaxes just a little, it seems to be the right thing to say.

"Yeah. Definitely surprised."

He's still standing rather close to her, hasn't moved since that interrupted kiss, and he's beginning to look a bit uncomfortable with that fact. He shifts his weight slightly, and she takes the hint and steps away from him. She doesn't know, really, how she expected this conversation to go, isn't sure what she was hoping for. But she's becoming increasingly convinced that this is not the script, and that somehow, somewhere, something has gone awry.

"Clarke?" He interrupts her thoughts, that inscrutable mess of emotions still furrowing his brow.

"Yeah?"

"So I guess we don't need to sleep together any more?" She gasps at that, chokes a little on her own breath, as she tries to make sense of what he's really asking. But she can't do it, can't read his tone, can't make sense of his careful emphasis, and she curses for the thousandth time the fact that this man is no longer her Bellamy. She was so sure they were making progress, until this. She was so sure she was getting to know him again. And this is certainly the worst possible moment to find out that she was wrong.

She realises he must still be waiting for her reply. In her defence, she's still waiting too. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she's still hanging on for the rest of his sentence, presuming he's going to follow up with something along the lines of but maybe it'd be fun to keep doing it anyway. He never does.

And there is no way she's going to say it herself. There is no way she is making herself vulnerable to him once more, no way she is putting her heart out there for him to disregard. She refuses to let the loss of this man send her unhinged ever again.

"I guess." She answers at last, tone neutral. It's not much, she knows, but it leaves the door open, at least. It leaves the door open for him to pursue the subject further, if he particularly wants too.

He doesn't. She knows this not because he says it, not in so many words. But because, for all that she can no longer read him, as he stalks out into the night without so much as a goodbye, the front door slamming behind him sends a pretty clear message.

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Clarke is in a rather calmer frame of mind, the following morning. She reminds herself carefully and often that Bellamy has ever been influenced by his emotions, and that storming out of her house is a much less devastating scenario than shooting three hundred grounders. Clearly, he got a bit hurt by her not sharing her news with him sooner, but that's OK. She can work with that.

She will have to work with that, because they will have to remain civil to parent Madi together. And, besides which, she fully intends to continue to care about him as a friend at least, even if he has made it clear that she is no longer supposed to care about him as a sexual partner. She is, therefore, entirely in control of the situation and her own emotions.

At least, she is control of the situation and her own emotions until she actually sees him.

As she walks with Madi into breakfast, late and a little flustered at the question of how she is to fit in dropping her daughter at school on the way to meet with Kane, her eyes catch on a familiar head of dark hair. He's facing away from her, but she'd recognise him anywhere, the set of his shoulders,
the curve of his neck as he leans in close to his companion across the breakfast table.

As he leans in close to Echo.

She presumes the worst straight away, of course she does. Well, not the worst, because he's at perfect liberty to form romantic relationships with whomever he wishes, now that she has no further need of his contribution to conception. But she presumes, naturally, that the only reason he would be leaning across the table to engage in what is clearly a very private conversation with a woman he loved for several years is that they have picked up exactly where they left off.

She forces herself to take a few calming breaths. The Clarke of old would be unsurprised by this, she thinks. That less-unhinged creature of logic would have remembered that they were only sleeping together for the greater good, and would have expected him to return to the woman he chose as soon as their mission was accomplished. And that Clarke would have noted, too, that she is still in a much better situation than she was a couple of months ago. She has friends, now, and her daughter's future is secure, and really, she shouldn't wish for more.

But this Clarke had to go and get her hopes up. And somehow, even after he stormed out of her house last night, it is not until this moment that she starts to fear that something is very wrong, that perhaps it is not just sex that has disappeared from her life. Perhaps Bellamy himself will disappear too. Yesterday's dramatic exit she could easily attribute to his being a bit hurt about her secrecy, but nothing more serious. But if he's back with Echo, then Madi's dream of a perfect family is about to crumble around her ears.

That thought breaks through her distraction and galvanises her into action. She strides in front of Madi, trying to block her view, attempting to herd her towards a table some way distant where Miller and Jackson are eating together. It has been too long, she thinks, since she spent any social time with the pair of them and -

Too late. Madi is grinning at someone over her shoulder, is stepping round her and heading in the direction of the distressing scene she has just witnessed. Clarke spins on her heel, panic beginning to set in, and takes in the sight before her. Echo is waving at them, blatantly beckoning them over, a small but apparently genuine smile gracing her features.

Well, then. Things just got a little more complicated, to say the least.

With some trepidation, she follows her daughter towards the table. Bellamy seems to have noticed their approach, now, too, and has jumped to his feet and turned to them with a strained smile.

"Madi. Clarke." He greets them with every show of happiness. "I was just telling Echo about the patrol we're going on this afternoon, kid. We're off to sector five to look for wildfowl."

This is a bit odd, Clarke thinks. It is odd because wildfowl do not, in her experience, tend to merit the kind of obviously secretive discussion he was having with Echo as they arrived. And it is even odder because he has told them all this, at great speed and with a slightly flustered air, despite the fact that no one asked.

"I see." She offers neutrally, putting down her tray. She is about to take her seat when she finds herself being pulled into a quick hug, and notes that Bellamy seems to be kissing her on the cheek in greeting.

Odder and odder. Is she to understand that he stormed out of her home last night, but they are still on cheek-kissing terms?
She is silent for some minutes, as is Bellamy. Echo and Madi, on the other hand, are engrossed in a detailed discussion of the new bow Echo has recently acquired.

"How are you this morning?" Clarke eventually asks under her breath, hoping to gain some insight into what on Earth is going on.

"I'm good." He tells her, eating his porridge with a degree of enthusiasm she can't help but feel must be at least somewhat staged. "I'm looking forward to taking Madi out to look for wildfowl this afternoon."

"That sounds lovely." She says without conviction. She has had quite enough of those damn wildfowl, and of the emptiness of this conversation. Is he not going to acknowledge what happened less than twelve hours ago?

"How are you?"

She decides that she will join him in this game of trivialities he seems so set on playing. Surely that is only reasonable. "Not bad. A bit rushed, I need to get Madi to school and then make it to Kane's on time."

"When do you need to be there?"

She checks her watch. "Twenty minutes."

"Let me take Madi to school." He offers, some of that careful cheerfulness leaving his face at last to be replaced by an earnest desire to be of help. Thank goodness, she thinks. Now he looks slightly more like the Bellamy she knows.

"You would do that? Thank you, that would be great."

"No problem." He swallows the last of his breakfast. "You hear that, kid? I'll take you to school whenever you're done eating."

"I'm almost ready." Madi gestures to her bowl. Sure enough, she has bolted down her food with all the eagerness of a hungry adolescent. A hungry adolescent who doesn't like to be late for lessons, Clarke notes.

"What are your plans for the day, Echo?" Clarke forces herself to be polite. For all that she's pretty convinced there's something odd going on here, she certainly doesn't have rational grounds to be rude to Bellamy's former lover.

"Patrol in sector seven. Then teaching an archery class."

"That sounds good." Clarke offers. She feels she is supposed to say something.

"Can I join your class?" Madi asks, all enthusiasm, as she speaks through her final mouthful of porridge. "I'd love to learn how to shoot, and Bellamy always says you're really good when he's telling me stories about Spacekru."

Yes. Clarke rather imagines that he does.

"Maybe one day, Madi." Echo looks uncomfortable, Clarke thinks. Or maybe that's just her face. She's fast losing faith in her ability to read anyone at all, after last night.

"Not today." Bellamy suggests gently. "Let's get you to school. Come on."
Madi gathers her belongings and pulls her mother into a hug. And that is it, Clarke thinks. Goodbyes duly said, they will now be on their way without a backwards glance, and she will be left to eat her last couple of bites of breakfast in an excruciatingly awkward silence with Echo.

She's not far wrong. They do go on their way, and there isn't a backwards glance. But there is, of all things, another warm kiss on her cheek as Bellamy says goodbye. This is only getting odder, really, and she rather wonders where it will end.

The oddest thing is yet to come.

"I don't know why he's lying to you." Echo hisses as soon as Bellamy and Madi are out of earshot.

"Sorry?" She asks, both wondering what the other woman is on about, and also thinking she ought to apologise for the venom she is apparently feeling.

"We weren't talking about patrols or wildfowl or anything of the kind, the idiot." Well, then. Apparently the venom is directed at Bellamy. "He was telling me your news, how excited he is about the baby. And how he's grateful that I broke up with him and told him to make things right with you. And then he was starting to say something about whatever happened last night when you showed up and he decided to start lying to you."

"I see." She says, not really seeing at all. She is very much struggling, in fact, to make any sense of this whatsoever.

"I'm sure there's a reason he's being an idiot." Echo sounds, however, rather unsure.

"I don't know." Clarke says, and it is probably the most honest thing she has said since she told Bellamy she was pregnant ten hours ago.

"No. I don't think he does, either. But you'll get there, you always do. Good luck working it out."

"Thank you."

Well, at least there is a significant positive here, Clarke thinks. At least she can confirm that this is what friendship with a former enemy looks like.

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If they are going to get there, they are not going to get there soon, Clarke realises, as the week passes and Bellamy continues to behave in a frankly weird way. He still eats almost every meal with her and Madi, and greets her with one of those rather bizarre chaste cheek-kisses at every opportunity, and comes over to the house every evening to watch a movie or play chess.

But he never stays. Without fail, every night, the moment Madi is safely tucked up in bed he excuses himself and is out of the door almost before Clarke has taken a breath, almost before she has noticed that, yet again, she is to spend the night alone, with nothing but the ghost of his lips against her skin for company. And she misses the formerly rather energetic physical part of their relationship, of course she does, but by the end of the week she knows that it is not what she misses the most.

No, most of all she misses talking to him.

They still speak, of course, harmless conversations over the breakfast table that follow the pattern of that first morning chat about patrols and wildfowl, passing words when they walk by each other in Kane's office about when he will pick up Madi, happy family conversations with their daughter
of an evening about books or films or games.

But they do not truly talk in as much as they discuss nothing of real significance. And this is only to be expected, she realises sadly, because the circumstances in which they used to talk so openly no longer exist. She looks back with fondness on the conversations they were sharing only eight days ago, in her bed, wrapped up in one another, sharing in the warm afterglow of sex.

At this rate, without those moments, centuries could pass without her ever truly getting to know him again.

For the first couple of days she is confused, but broadly optimistic. Surely, he wouldn't be going around kissing her on the cheek and being seen so much with her in public if he didn't still care about her? Her optimism begins to wane, however, as she reflects on that over the next couple of days. She's beginning to believe that being seen so much with her in public is a bit of a key part of the puzzle, actually. Because she can't help but notice that he's still pretty demonstrative while they're out and about, and that he always wears a careful smile in the village. But inside her own home, he's becoming increasingly withdrawn.

On the ninth night, he says goodbye without so much as that damn kiss on the cheek, and that troubles her.

It troubles her, too, that the rest of the village are starting to get wind of her pregnancy, are starting to approach her with their congratulations and tell her what a sweet family they make, but she has yet to tell Madi the news. She has just thought, all along, ever since the beginning that, when the time came, she and Bellamy would tell their daughter together.

She realises now that this was a foolish dream. She is in this alone, still, just as she always has been. Bellamy's reticence over the last week proves that, for all that he's playing happily families quite so carefully in public.

She decides that she will have to tell Madi herself. The following evening, Bellamy does not come over to fail to pretend to be happy. He takes himself instead to the bar, and to Murphy's company, and Clarke cannot help feeling a certain sense of good riddance. Spending so much of this last week with a man who is at once Bellamy and somehow not Bellamy has been exhausting. She will therefore take advantage of this occasion to share the news with her daughter.

"Madi? Can we talk?" She asks the girl as she is sketching a fearsome version of her Aunt Octavia wielding a sword.

"Sure." She appears to hear nothing amiss in her tone.

"I have some news for you. I'm – I'm pregnant. And we think the baby is you, so you should be safe now."

"I know." She says, without missing a beat. "Dad told me."

"He did what?" She cannot believe that he would take it upon himself to make this announcement without her.

"He told me. A couple of days ago." Clarke evidently does not do a very good job of hiding her fury at this, as her daughter takes on a conciliatory tone. "Don't be annoyed with him, Mum. He thought I already knew. He thought you'd already told me."

Madi's instruction not to be annoyed is destined to go unheeded, it seems. "He could have tried asking. He could have tried talking to me about it."
“You could have tried talking to him.” Madi points out mildly.

No, Clarke thinks sadly. She honestly doesn't believe she could.

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That revelation certainly doesn't make things better, in the days that follow. Clarke was aware that any sense of romance she might have imagined was a part of their relationship had long since evaporated into hopeless fantasies, but it isn't until that conversation with Madi that she comes to realise they're not even that good at parenting together.

Occasionally, she catches herself wondering how they ever managed to lead a camp together. Then she remembers that the Clarke and Bellamy who used to lead, back on Earth, and this vastly incompatible Clarke and Bellamy who live on Sanctum now, are very different people. Their names endure, yes, but sometimes she thinks that is all that is left of the team they used to be.

It hurts more, in some ways, than it did before. Before his forgiveness, and before they had a go at caring for each other. Because she knows what she's missing, now, knows what it's like to have a pretend relationship with that man who shares a name with one she used to love. She knows how his lips feel, and how his hips feel, and can virtually still taste that birthday surprise they shared only weeks ago.

It hurts, too, because from the outside, it seems there is nothing wrong. She knows this because none of their friends and family have noticed a thing, blinded as they are by the perfect display of a perfect family that they are putting on. She knows, in fact, that things look better than ever from the outside, since they have started sharing the good news of her pregnancy. And so it is that she is bearing this alone, unable to tolerate the thought of bursting the bubble of happiness that their loved ones are feeling on their behalf. Bearing it alone, as she is beginning to realise she will always, ultimately, bear everything.

Two weeks have passed since that pregnancy test when Bellamy shows up at Medical to collect Madi and Abby shows herself as oblivious as ever.

"Bellamy, how are you today?” Clarke groans internally at her mother's perky greeting, and prepares herself for the challenge of accepting his chaste cheek-kiss with equanimity.

"I'm good." He presses his lips briskly against her skin in between answering her mother's question. "Had a great morning beating Murphy at shooting."

"That sounds like you." Clarke says with a careful laugh. "What are you planning for this afternoon?"

"Fishing. Do you want to come?" She blinks at that, allows herself to consider for a heartbeat whether the invitation is genuine. Whether perhaps, hidden behind all of this odd awkwardness, the man who cares about her might still be holding out hope.

"No thanks." She knows it is the correct answer. "See you later."

"Yeah." He shuffles his feet a little, and she wonders what's going on. This looks almost like nervousness, and doesn't seem at all to fit with the ostentatious joy they have been practising of late.

"What is it?"

"Are you sure you don't want to go fishing? Or – or maybe we could do a family day out some time
this week?" She's trying not to look surprised at his question, but she's not sure it's working for her. "It's been a while." He adds in a whisper.

"That sounds great." Madi jumps in. "We haven't been on adventure since your birthday."

"It does sound lovely." Abby agrees.

It doesn't sound lovely. Clarke frets. It sounds awkward, and exhausting, and she thinks it will only make her realise even more starkly how much things have changed in the last fortnight.

But, on the other hand, if she's very lucky, maybe they might use this as an opportunity to try speaking to each other. Maybe, if the universe will allow it, they might even be able to start getting there.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Fretting about their family outing does not consume Clarke in the days that follow. She is a rational creature, and she is standing firmly by her resolution not to be sent unhinged by the loss of Bellamy Blake ever again.

Not that he was ever hers to lose, of course.

No, that is exactly the kind of thought she is supposed to be avoiding. She must distract herself from such things. So it is that she takes great care over her ongoing duties in Medical, and frequently volunteers to go out on missions to observe and collect Jackson's recently discovered herb. She spends, too, rather more time than strictly necessary in Kane's office, offering her opinions on everything from education to agriculture. She's still steering clear, though, of having thoughts on anything that touches too close to security or military matters, anything that could get people killed. She's not quite ready for that, not yet.

The day of their next adventure rolls around and she carefully avoids having any expectations at all as the whole family gathers and sets out towards sector five. There is some irony, Clarke feels, in their choosing to head for the very wildfowl which so frustrated her as a topic of conversation on that first morning that things went so wrong between her and Bellamy. But she is assured that the wetlands are very scenic and that the terrain is easy – just the sort of thing that is suitable for a recovering drug addict and a pregnant woman.

She's only one month pregnant, of course, or more likely a little over, but it seems that her relatives are determined to make a fuss of her. They continue to make a fuss of Madi, too, and everyone has adopted the habit of asking after the girl's health on a near-daily basis, much to her annoyance. She hasn't had a single dizzy spell since that last excursion to the north, and Clarke is determined to keep it that way.

Octavia is particularly lively today, her birthday truce with her brother having evidently stood the test of time, and Clarke is glad of it. Her sunny presence, together with Madi's innate high spirits, have her feeling almost cheerful as they eat up the miles towards their destination.

Then Bellamy appears by her shoulder, looking for all the world as if he is actually walking alongside her by choice, and she creeps ever closer to contentment.

"Hey." She finds it somehow easier to greet him with a smile now than she does to put on this act in the village. Perhaps it is the magic of a family outing, or perhaps it is the change of setting, or perhaps they really are getting there.

"Hey." He's not quite touching her, but as he falls into step by her side he is close enough that she can feel his warmth. "How are you doing?"

"I'm OK." She answers, trying to control her joy at this unsolicited display of concern. Clearly he does still care about her, at least in some way, after all.

"That's good. How have you been feeling? Any sickness? Any sign of how the baby's doing?"

She swallows her disappointment at that, tries to cope with the sudden switch from sunshine to sorrow. So he does care, it turns out, but only for Madi's sake. And she doesn't resent her daughter
for this, of course, because that would be madness.

But for the record, if she were to be a little mad just now, she reckons that would be understandable.

"No sickness. Everything's OK as far as my mum can tell. It's too soon to know for sure whether it's Madi." She recites a summary of her state of health dispassionately, and doesn't allow herself to dwell too long on the fact that she's giving the father of this child exactly the same answer as she gave to the cheerful stranger who cleans Kane's office.

"That's OK." He says gently. "I'm sure she is. And we'll know soon enough. As long as you're alright, everything's good."

Well, then. Maybe they are getting there. But even if that is the case, they are apparently doing so extremely slowly.

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Clarke continues to practise with some determination for her potential future role as a field medic. Sure, she doesn't go far, with the wellbeing of her unborn child as her priority, but she is keen to be out and about and collecting supplies, rather than only sitting at her desk and acting as her mother's unofficial secretary. And if these excursions get her some fresh air, and help distract her from this situation she never asked for, and above all from her preoccupation with the way things lie between her and Bellamy – well, then. So much the better.

On this particular morning, she takes Madi along with her, too. Her daughter has no lessons today, but has elected to spend the free time with her mother rather than her father, and Clarke has to admit that she is at least a little overcome with joy at this decision, this resounding vote of confidence. Joy that rises above even her sadness that it does not seem to have occurred to any of them to spend the day together, all three of them.

"I hope this isn't too boring for you." Clarke frets as they set out. "We're only going herb-picking."

"I just wanted to hang out with you." Madi says, sounding suddenly rather childlike. "You've been spending so much time helping Kane recently and – and going out on adventures with Dad is great. But I miss going on adventures with you."

"I'm not sure this will be much of an adventure." At least, she hopes it won't. They're heading north, but she intends to stay far closer to the village than to the anomaly.

"It'll be great." Her daughter decides. "What are we looking for, anyway?"

"Jackson's miracle herb."

"Is that what they're calling it?"

"Your grandma wants to call it Jacksonia Vulgaris. Sounds a bit pretentious, if you ask me."

"We could call it JV for short." Madi suggests with an impish smile.

Clarke laughs aloud. "Let's. Definitely."

This is going to be a very enjoyable adventure indeed, she decides at that. She has her daughter's company and good humour, and a pleasant morning of picking herbs lined up. It will be, all things considered, a wonderful opportunity to get some fresh air and leave her troubles behind her.
That's when the horizon flashes green, and Madi stumbles against her.

"Madi?" She asks, worried, as her arms automatically reach out to support her crumpling body. "Are you OK, honey?"

The girl straightens with visible effort. "I'm fine. Just a dizzy spell. Let's keep going."

"Keep going? Are you out of you mind? That flash must have been miles away and it still got you. We're going home."

"Mum, no. Please. Please can we stay out?" She looks on the verge of tears. "I just miss going on adventures with you. And – and I miss you looking all happy like this and laughing at stupid stuff I say."

"Madi, honey." She pulls her daughter into a hug. "We need to go home, because you need to be safe. That's not me being overprotective, it's just me being sensible. But I promise that we'll have a lovely day at home. And I'll try to laugh at all the stupid things you say."

"And we can come out again another day? And go as far away from this stupid anomaly as possible?"

"Of course, Madi. Of course we can."

With that, they turn and make their way carefully back along the path. At least, Clarke muses, they do not have a long walk home. But it is rather worrying that Madi has had a dizzy spell so close to the village, she thinks, as they find the trees thinning not fifteen minutes later.

There is a rustling sound ahead of them, and she braces herself for whatever wild animal has decided to make their day even more unpleasant. But it is no such thing. A small patrol emerges before them, four people, Echo in the lead, Murphy at her shoulder.

"Clarke? And the hobbit?" Murphy is the first to greet them.

"What's wrong?" Echo asks without preamble. Clearly Clarke has not done as well at pasting a calm expression onto her face as she hoped.

"Nothing." Madi lies robustly.

The tilt of Echo's brow makes it clear that she is not fooled.

"Madi just had a dizzy spell." Clarke tells them quietly. "So we're going to go home so she can rest for a while."

"That sucks." Murphy sums it up accurately.

"Do you need any help getting home?" Echo offers.

"No thanks. We're nearly there."

With that, they say their goodbyes and set off again towards the village. Clarke could swear she hears whispers behind her, perhaps a rustle in the undergrowth, but when she turns round, there is no one there.

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Clarke sits in the living room later that morning, bolt upright on one of the chairs that serve the
small table, and pretends to draw while Madi naps on the sofa. She's made very little progress, really, no more than a vague impression of the shape of a flower and the curve of a leaf, distracted as she is by watching her daughter's chest rise and fall.

Then she hears the key turn in the lock, and a familiar knock at the front door.

She curses internally at this man's poor timing. How on Earth has he managed to show up now, right when her worries have her least composed to face him? And what is to become, now, of that plan to spend a lovely day at home with her daughter when she wakes?

With a sigh, she heads for the door, clutches her jaw against the imminent likelihood of one of those increasingly frigid kisses. Finds her jaw gaping open in surprise when, all of a sudden, she is engulfed in a rather vehement warm hug.

"Bellamy?" She's not sure why it comes out as a question. Perhaps she's asking for an explanation of this enthusiastic embrace.

"Clarke. Hey. I'm so sorry, I got here as soon as I heard."

"Heard?" She queries, nose still pressed against his neck.

"About Madi, of course. Murphy came and fetched me. Is she OK?"

"Yeah, she's fine. It's just a bit worrying that it happened so close to the village."

"Yeah, of course." He pulls back a little to look her in the eye. "Are you OK? I know it must have been a pretty stressful morning for you."

He's only asking because of the baby, she reminds herself. He's only asking because he knows stress could be bad for her child. But all the same, she has had a stressful morning, so she allows herself, just for a moment, the luxury of pretending he's asking because he cares about her.

"I'm doing fine. It was good that you came over." She finds herself meaning the words, actually, thinking that this long-drawn-out hug is doing her really quite a lot of good. It is doing her good, too, to know that it must be for their benefit, not for the sake of keeping up appearances, safe from public eyes as they currently are.

"Of course I came over. You two are my family and I -"

"Dad?" Madi's voice, thick with sleep, sounds through the open living room door. "Is that you?"

Clarke doesn't think she is imagining his sigh as he pulls away. She feels like sighing, too, as she adds yet another to the tally of unfinished sentences fate has left between them.

"Hey, kid." He pastes a smile on his face, goes to kneel by the sofa. "How are you feeling?"

"Better." She sits up cautiously. "When did you get here?"

"A couple of minutes ago. I was just talking to your mum."

"Oh. Sorry." Madi looks genuinely regretful as her gaze flickers between the two of them. "Don't let me interrupt."

"Hey, it's fine." He soothes.

"Yeah. We can talk any time." Clarke lies cheerfully. Based on the events of recent weeks, it is
certainly far from the truth. "How are you feeling? What can we do for you?"

"Can I have a story?" She asks, looking incredibly young, anxiety lining her face.

"Of course you can, Madi." Bellamy takes a seat on the sofa by her side, settles into the cushions as if he is here to stay.

Well, then. So much for an afternoon of laughter with her daughter.

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She knows she should attempt to engineer an opportunity for Bellamy to finish that sentence, but she never does. She just can't quite face it, somehow, feels that if it all goes wrong it could take her yet another step closer to unhinged. And she's avoiding that fate for all she's worth, reminding herself carefully that life looks a whole lot better than it did just a couple of short months ago. She has her daughter, and her friends and family, and she has a bizarre public relationship with Bellamy, and those are things she could only have dreamed of securing, before. And, anyway, if that sentence was really so important – well, then. Surely he could have tried to finish it for himself, by now.

She knows, too, that she should attempt to be a bit more open with her friends and family. She still doesn't quite dare to be truly honest with her mother, fearing that any bit of bad news could send her reaching for the pills once more, and she can't tell her daughter that all is not well between the parents she so adores.

She could, however, tell Raven. But she doesn't, not quite. She skirts around the issue, sure, but never entirely opens up to her. She just knows she couldn't bear it, if Raven could make sense of him, now, when she cannot. It would be, she thinks, the final nail in the coffin of any hope of ever understanding him in her own right, of ever truly getting to know him again.

So it is that when she sits with Raven at lunch, the week after Madi's dizziness and that unfinished sentence, she is careful to conceal their complete lack of communication and closeness.

"How are you?" Her friend asks with good cheer which is presumably not caused by the bowl of uninspiring stew before her. "How's pregnancy suiting you?"

"It's fine. It's too early to say much about how the baby's doing, though."

"Yeah, of course. But how's the expectant mother doing, then?" She tries not to tear up at this unexpected evidence that her friend actually cares about her wellbeing, rather than only that of the future – and past – commander. "Got Bellamy giving you those foot rubs yet?"

"No." She says, careful to avoid any eye contact that might give her away. "Not yet."

"That's awfully restrained of you." Raven says, and Clarke can hear the frown in her voice. "I'd have thought you'd have been making the most of the way he dotes on you. I swear, if I see him pull a chair out for you at supper one more time I'm going to have to slap him."

"Yes, he does seem to have decided I can't deal with my own furniture." It might be sweet, she thinks, if they were actually speaking to each other in any useful sense, but as it is, it just makes their situation all the weirder.

"I suppose it's sweet, in a sickening kind of way." Hmm, OK then. Definitely other people agree that it is supposed to be sweet.
"Maybe." She shrugs carefully, takes a bite of lunch.

"Is everything OK, Clarke?" Damn it, she has apparently not been acting as well as she hoped.

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"It's just that, if it were me, and I was expecting a baby with a man I'd loved for literally decades, who had started following me round making a fuss of me, I think I'd probably be over the moon. And you don't look very over the moon."

"I am, of course I am." She lies, wishing she was brave enough to tell her what's really going on behind closed doors. The awkward silences, the careful avoidance of time spent alone with her. The unfathomable coldness of all of those ridiculous kisses on the cheek and the stilted politeness with which he puts a chaste hand on her lower back every time he offers her a chair.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Absolutely. I'm just still worried about Madi – you know she had another dizzy spell last week?"

Raven appears to see nothing amiss in her answer, as she nods and accepts the change of subject. Perhaps, she thinks, that is what hurts most of all.

Perhaps this friendship is built on quicksand every bit as much as that beautiful but dutiful relationship with Bellamy has turned out to be.

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Clarke is pleasantly surprised when Bellamy walks into the Medical Centre the following morning, even though Madi is at school and he must know this full well. He must, therefore, be there to see her, and that thought is enough to make her day, for all that she's busy steeling herself to endure that blasted kiss on the cheek she has come to expect.

She is even more surprised when, instead of his usual greeting, he stands a foot away and addresses her with actual words and an impenetrable expression.

"Clarke? Can we talk? Have you got a moment?"

If he finally wants to actually speak to her, she thinks, she has all the time in the world.

"Sure. Are you OK without me for a minute, Mum?"

"Of course." Abby gives a brisk nod, attention still on the notes before her.

Clarke takes a deep breath and leads Bellamy in the direction of that very consultation room he sat in while she tended to his arm all those weeks ago. Time has been playing weird games throughout her life, she muses as they walk. That might be months, but it feels like half a lifetime ago. That span seems longer, somehow, than the six years she spent on Earth without him.

"What is it?" She asks when they arrive, and have the door shut behind them for privacy. She can't read his face, of course. Or rather, she has long since given up trying. But she senses that it must be something substantial for him to walk in here and demand to see her. And even if it's bad news, somehow, she is at least rejoicing that he is so keen to share it with her.

"I've just seen Kane. He wants me to lead a team out to the west, beyond the territory we've
explored so far. Leaving in five days, and we'd be gone about a week."

She resists the urge to point out that he promised there would be no more missions that took him away from his family for so long. As far as she can tell, his mind is already made up. Her role in this, she supposes, is to look publicly supportive and to look after Madi while he is gone.

"OK. Thanks for telling me." She is grateful for that, after all. She is grateful that this is the closest they have come to a conversation which is actually about anything since she told him she was pregnant. "Do you want to tell Madi, or shall I?"

He blinks at that, as if it is not the answer he was expecting. "Sorry?"

"Who's telling Madi?"

"Why don't we both tell her? Together?" Ah yes, of course. That game of happy families they are playing.

"Sure. Are you planning on coming over tonight?"

"Of course."

"Great." She says, all false cheer. "Let's tell her then."

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Madi seems, once again, supremely unconcerned at the idea that her father is to disappear into the unknown for a week. Clarke is relieved at this, because her daughter has become substantially more nervous in disposition since the fainting fit, but it seems that her unshakeable faith in Bellamy's ability to survive heroic exploits endures.

She only wishes she felt quite so confident.

It is awful, preparing for his departure while things are still so strained between them. She wants so badly to hold him close, and tell him that she wants him to come home in one piece. To tell him, perhaps, even that she will miss him. Because she will miss him, even more than she is missing him right now, while he is somehow simultaneously here yet very much absent. But, of course, no opportunity to say any of these things presents itself, and it seems that she is growing out of practice in the art of creating opportunities for herself, the art of actually initiating conversation. With anyone, actually, she notes sadly, not just with him.

It seems he is growing out of practice, too, at touching her. The stilted public intimacies are becoming ever fewer as the days go by, and she finds herself strangely relieved. As charades go, it is a rather wearing one. And there is nothing that hurts more than being kissed on the cheek by a man who, only weeks ago, was instead trailing his lips down the inside of her thigh.

The last evening before Bellamy's departure rolls around, and, of course, he presents himself at her front door to spend the evening with his daughter. They watch a film, as they have been doing increasingly often of late. There is simply less need for awkward chat during a movie than during chess, she supposes. Madi tries to convince her father to pick something to watch in honour of his imminent going away, but he refuses with spirit, and insists that his daughter should choose whatever she likes. And so it is that they spend three unbearably long hours watching some cheerful account of the lives of a besotted couple brought together by seven children, and she rather finds herself wondering if this means Madi has noticed that something is amiss with the lack of casual intimacy her parents are sharing around the house.
As messages go, Clarke thinks, this movie is hardly a subtle one.

But maybe it is an effective one, she muses, as they put Madi to bed and then they find themselves standing in the corridor outside her room. She's a little confused as to why they're still hanging around, and can only presume that the moral of this evening's story might have something to do with it. Normally Bellamy is straight out the door the moment Madi's head hits the pillow. Why, then, is he still loitering, with that strangely thoughtful look in his eyes?

At least, she thinks he looks thoughtful. Obviously she wouldn't know, isn't claiming that she knows what's going on in that head of his. She's learnt not to claim such things, as a rule.

"Bellamy?" She takes a large breath, and a larger risk. "Do you want to stay for a bit? We haven't played chess in a while."

He shakes his head, and she thinks that the expression on his face might be regret. Or it might not. Whatever. It doesn't matter to her.

"I can't. We're leaving early tomorrow."

"Oh." She tries not to look too downcast at his rejection. "Well, then. Have a good trip."

That's ridiculous, she curses herself inwardly. It is trite. He is not going on a trip, this is not some merry day out in the sun. He is going on a potentially dangerous mission, and if she's not careful, she won't get to say a proper goodbye.

As if he has read her thoughts, he steps forwards and engulfs her in a hug. And she should be surprised, really, because there have been precious few such hugs in recent weeks, but almost instinctively she finds that her arms have reached around him in turn, and she is holding him tight and pressing her cheek against his neck.

"Stay safe." She murmurs, hoping he can hear just how fervently she means it. "Come back to us."

"Of course I will." He soothes gently. "I'll be back before you know it. You take care of yourself, and of our girls."

She nods, and he holds her even tighter at the motion, and the kiss he presses to her forehead is somehow rather warmer than his lips have felt in weeks.

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Clarke finds herself strangely optimistic in the days that follow. They are still capable of sharing beautiful hugs, and actually the shared parenting of Madi has been going rather better of late. And yes, of course, it's not nice that he's out on a mission in the middle of nowhere, but Raven and Kane keep them updated about his safety and she intends to speak to him herself, with Madi for company of course, once or twice while he's gone.

She's rather looking forward to that. She remembers only too clearly that meaningful chat they had over the lazer-comm on his last long expedition, remembers the emotional closeness they managed despite the geographical distance. Perhaps, she hopes, they might manage something like that again. It would make a change to have something pleasant to think of while she lies in her lonely bed.

She makes it to day three before cracking and suggesting to Madi that it is time to call Bellamy.

"I thought you'd never ask." The girl responds with an impish grin. "Let's go."
"What – now?" They are half way through a game of chess.

"Yes. Come on."

Madi's enthusiasm is infectious, Clarke decides, as they walk briskly to the workshop. That's definitely all that's going on here. Any suggestion that she is enthusiastic in her own right about this, that she is eager to learn if this call, too, will bring them back towards each other, is clearly unfounded.

They arrive at their destination, and Emori offers them a warm welcome.

"Hey, you two. Here to speak to Bellamy?"

"Yes." Madi answers for them. "Please. Is he there now?"

"Last thing I knew he was guarding the camp while Echo and Miller head off to scout. I reckon he can guard and talk." With that, she picks up the handset and begins to speak. "Bellamy? You there?"

They wait barely seconds for his response. "Yeah. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Your womenfolk are here for a chat."

"They are?" Does he sound excited at the prospect, or is she wrong again? "Pass me over, then?"

"Hey, Dad." Madi virtually tears the handset from a laughing Emori. "How are you?"

"I'm doing OK, kid. We discovered a new type of animal today." Clarke feels her heart leap to her throat at this, wonders if this news heralds a threat like the Titans.

"You did? What are they like?" Madi asks with naive anticipation.

"Sort of like a smaller, tamer version of boar, maybe? They're little and fat, anyway, and they don't seem aggressive. And they taste good." He concludes with a laugh.

"They sound cute."

"Yeah, they are, I guess. How's school?"

"Boring. We're doing human biology and it's way more basic than what grandma Abby teaches me."

"That's because not everyone's grandmother is the Chief of Medical, Madi." He teases cheerfully. "Did Emori say your mum's there too?"

"Yeah, she's right here. I guess I'm maybe hogging the handset a little."

"Hey, don't worry about it, kid. It's great to speak to you. I'd just like to chat to her too." Would he? That's news to her. Before she entirely has time to collect herself, Madi is giving her the handset with a teasing grin.

Clearly, she is now expected to look like one half of a perfect-parents-couple.

"Hey." She supposes the perfect parental relationship would probably involve a few more endearments, a superfluous dear or darling, but they've never really been her thing. "How are you?"
"I think our daughter just asked me that." Right. Yes. Of course. How stupid of her.

"So she did." She tries for a carefree laugh. "Tell me more about these new animals, then?"

"There's not a great deal to tell." He sounds a bit confused. Although she could be wrong, of course. She often is. "They're small and good for eating."

"OK. And how are Miller and Indra and the others?"

"They're fine." No, she's almost positive that's confusion, now.

"Great, great. And is it cold out there?"

"Yes. Winter tends to be cold, I hear."

She chuckles cheerfully at his bad joke. "Of course."

That is when she makes her mistake. That is when she catches Madi's eye, sees the utterly despairing look painted across her daughter's face at this evidence of her parents' incompatibility. And she can't blame her, really. This trivial conversation about absolutely nothing is a pretty poor attempt at happily ever after.

It's pretty poor, even, as attempts at polite indifference go.

And suddenly she cannot bear it. She cannot bear the crushing disappointment of this comms conversation that is so unlike the last one they shared. Cannot bear the crushing fact that they have regressed, somehow, to something even worse than where they were before that last hug. Cannot bear the crushing realisation that rushes upon her, all at once, that they will never, ever get there.

With a garbled suggestion to Madi that she should stay and chat to her father for a while, Clarke flees from the workshop, desperate to get home in time to hide her tears.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Clarke stops trying after that. Of course she does. She's only human, and the fates seem determined
to test her to the limit of her sanity. Well, that limit is fast approaching. And she is going to back
away from the precipice before she goes tumbling, unhinged, over the edge.

She doesn't call him again, sends Madi instead with cheerful encouragements and the message that
she has far too much to do in Medical. And then she sits at her desk, and gazes blankly out of the
window, and tortures herself by wondering what the two people she cares about the most on this
moon are discussing without her.

He comes home in one piece, thank the heavens, and right on schedule, and she is in Kane's office
discussing food supplies as the whole group of them walk in to report back. And so, of course, she
greets him with a careful smile and proffers her cheek for that damn peck.

Yes, just as she expected. Just as cold as she remembers.

And then because these are soldiers, about to make their report on a mission, she excuses herself
and runs out into the night.

After all, things that might get people killed are just another area she has given up on.

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Bellamy seems to take the hint, after that, and maintains a little more distance. He is even more
physically distant, too, and those public displays of what one might expect from a happy couple
decrease in number even further. And this is good, of course it is, because she was finding all that
rather exhausting, but all the same it has her worried. Will people realise, now, that something is
wrong?

It is with this thought in mind that she starts to avoid interacting with him in public, makes a point
of minimising occasions where they will be expected to be together. She is determined, for
example, that there will be no more family outings, at least until she has her emotions back on a
slightly more even keel. She just can't face the thought, right now, when she's still getting her head
around the changed state of their relationship. And it's probably her hormones, too, she jumps to
reassure herself, that's probably something to do with the fact she keeps finding herself crying at
nothing in particular.

Unfortunately, no one seems to have told their family that a family outing is not on the cards.

It is easy enough to put off her mother. She points out that she is busy, as is Kane, and that really
it's a bit too cold, now that winter has set in, for a family outing to be an enjoyable thing. There
will be more family excursions when spring comes, she promises, and the flowers are blooming
and everyone is less preoccupied with the question of how they are to keep Sanctum fed.

It is harder to put off Octavia.

"Clarke." The woman she occasionally tortures herself by thinking of as a sister-in-law plops into a
seat opposite her at lunch. "Long time no see."
"I've been busy." It's not that far from the truth, after all.

"Yes. So my brother tells me." Octavia has her brow quirked, as if inviting reply, but when Clarke does not speak she presses on. "So when are we next taking Madi out for the day?"

She chokes a little on what she thinks is a parsnip, and tells herself that it is a good thing that Octavia is feeling secure enough in her place in the family, these days, to try to initiate cheerful days out.

"I'm afraid I'm busy for the next couple of weeks. I've got to help Kane keep everyone fed through the winter, you understand, and with this weather more people are needing Medical attention, too." None of those things are lies, as such, but she has to admit that she might perhaps be stretching the facts somewhat.

"Oh." Octavia's face falls. "I'm sorry to hear that. I think – taking Madi out always does all of us good, you know?"

"Yeah." She seems to remember that might be true, actually, but there's no point dwelling on the happy memory of Bellamy's birthday too long. "You know, you'd be welcome to spend some time with her while I'm busy. Go out with her and your brother, have a Blake family day out."

She does want her daughter to be happy, after all. And she wants Octavia to be happy, too, and Bellamy, and all the people she cares about. She's only struggling a little to be happy with them, just now.

"That would be OK?"

"Of course. Madi would really enjoy that."

"Great." Octavia is grinning from ear to ear, and Clarke wonders what that feels like. It's been too long since she last experienced happiness like that. "I'll have a chat to Bellamy about it."

Clarke is only too glad that Octavia volunteers for that task. Chatting to Bellamy is one duty she is sadly struggling to fulfil, of late.

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Days pass, and become weeks, and Clarke is so busy with her less-than-necessary tasks that she scarcely notices the stretching of time. It's only reasonable, she tells herself, to spend quite so many hours in Medical and in Kane's office. She doesn't have a foolish social life to waste her time on, since she stopped hanging out with Bellamy, and started avoiding their mutual friends for risk of being forced to closer to that edge of unhinging. And her daughter is surrounded by people who love her, and is taken on adventures by her father or aunt or grandparents almost every afternoon and the vast majority of evenings. And Clarke makes sure to spend some quality time with her every couple of days, of course she does, but it seems only fair to let the girl catch up on the time she missed with these other relatives who were not around when she was younger.

The only inconvenience of her pregnancy so far seems to be this emotional upheaval. She is certain that her expectant state is the primary cause of her tearfulness and low spirits, and that this estrangement from the baby's father is only a relatively small part of the problem - after all, it was specifically to avoid distress that she shielded her heart from him in that fateful conversation about their no-longer-necessary sex life that is now fading into the mists of time.

She's three months pregnant now, and she can scarcely believe it. She's experienced no nausea to speak of, and is yet untouched by aches and pains.
No, she has only these damn tears that keep leaking inexplicably from her eyes to trouble her.

And Raven. It seems she has Raven to trouble her, too.

"Clarke. It's me." Her friend announces herself as she marches into Medical.

"Yes." She agrees mildly, blinking away a few rogue tears as she reads a great deal of nothing on the screen before her.

"You're coming to the bar tonight." Raven informs her, tone strident. "I can't remember the last time you came out to have fun. Emori reckons it's not since Bellamy's birthday but that can't be right. So you're coming out tonight."

"I can't come tonight." She fishes for an excuse, finds none, and presses on regardless. "It's silly to come to the bar when I'm pregnant and can't drink."

"You were pregnant and couldn't drink the last time anyone actually remembers seeing you there."

That catches her on the back foot. She pauses, looks up into Raven's eyes, then realises that doing so is a colossal mistake. Her friend looks really rather concerned.

"I don't want to." She says, voice beginning to quiver. "I don't want to come and have fun, because I don't feel very fun."

Somehow, suddenly, Raven is hugging her, and that's a bit unexpected. She supposes they're as close as two people can be with the history they share, but hugging is still not something they bother with very often. And certainly not this prolonged and rather intense kind of hugging.

"I know, Clarke. I know." Raven murmurs reassuringly. "But it will do you good to get out and see people. You've been working too hard, and being pregnant can't be easy. If you won't do it for yourself, at least take a night off for the sake of the baby's health."

Now that, she can do. That, in fact, she can agree to all too easily. She needs this baby to be OK more than she needs anything else in this life.

"OK, then." She pulls away from the hug and wipes a hand across her eyes. "I guess I'll see you tonight."

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It is probably the last time, she thinks, that she will be able to wear her preciously practical dress for quite some months. It is a little snug around the breasts already, but the flared skirt still flows perfectly smoothly over the very slight curve of her belly. She knows it's a bit excessive, to put her dress on just to drink water with her friends, but something in Raven's words about it doing her good to get out and see people has touched a nerve. Perhaps, she thinks, it might do her good to put on a dress, too, to make a little effort and try to enjoy herself. And she expects that the company for the evening will be Raven and Echo and Emori, and they are just the sort of supportive friends who she supposes will comment cheerfully on her outfit without making too much fuss. At least, she thinks they're supportive friends. She's seen so little of them recently that she can't entirely remember.

She drops Madi with Abby and Marcus, and sets out for the bar. She's a little later than she would have liked, having wasted precious seconds in talking herself into putting on this dress, but at least that means that she will have to endure less of the evening than if she'd arrived early, she supposes.
She makes it to the bar, heads to their usual table. The decor seems to have changed a little in the
last three months, she notes, a few items of optimistic artwork adorning the walls and making the
place look a bit less – well – makeshift. And then she returns her gaze to the table, takes in Raven
and Echo and Emori, just as she expected them. Takes in Murphy, too, and that's OK. She can deal
with Murphy.

Realises that, of course, her daughter's father is sitting there, as well, his back to her as he chats to
Raven.

"Clarke." Echo is the first to greet her, and at the sound of her name, Bellamy's head turns so
quickly she is surprised he does not clutch his neck in pain.

"Clarke." He echoes, as he jumps to his feet, shifts a little as if not quite sure what to do now.
Apparently reaching a decision, he pulls her into a quick hug, gives her a quick peck on the cheek.

"I didn't know you'd be here." He offers by way of greeting, eyes faintly narrowed in Raven's
general direction.

"I didn't know you'd be here." She throws back at him, eyes very much narrowed and boring, she
hopes, something of a hole in Raven's forehead. She can't believe that her friend has set this up, has
engineered this moment to throw them into each other's company. And no doubt they will all be
watching the two of them, will be ready to over-analyse every awkward interaction between them
and -

"It's good to see you." He says, sounding almost as if he actually means it, and that seems a bit
odd. He saw her only hours ago when he dropped off Madi, and he hardly bothered saying a word
to her, then.

"You, too." She lies carefully, before taking her seat.

The conversation starts up again around them, some cheerful discussion of a young man in Echo's
archery class who's so incompetent that he hit a nearby tree instead of the target.

"He sounds ridiculous." Raven crows, accidentally a little unkind, Clarke thinks, as she sometimes
can be. "You should throw him out of the class."

"He's quite sweet, though." Echo offers thoughtfully, gaze fixed on her drink.

"Sweet?" Emori repeats with an air of disbelief. "You didn't say he was sweet earlier, you said he
was hot."

"Maybe I did."

"Something you want to tell us, Echo?" Murphy prods her with a coaster for good measure.

"Not yet." She says with a grin. "I'll keep you posted."

"You should invite him out for drinks with us." Raven suggests, even as Clarke prays for the floor
to rise up and swallow her. She is not ready, she thinks to gossip about the possibility of Bellamy's
former lover starting a new relationship. She just came here to sip water and put on a smile.

"Yeah." Bellamy agrees with Raven, smile warm. "Bring him out to meet us some time."

"Would you be OK with that?" Echo asks outright, never one to avoid the difficult questions.
Clarke envies her for that, in this moment.

"Of course." Bellamy seems to find it the easiest question in the world to answer. "You deserve to be happy."

"I was hoping you'd say that. Now that you two are together I thought that maybe I should try meeting someone new." Together? The two of them? What planet is Echo living on, exactly?

Bellamy, of course, gives no sign that anything is amiss. "Good for you."

Clarke stares into her water and waits for the evening to be over. She is fed up, she decides, of everyone choosing to believe that all is well. She is about ready to scream, or to break down in tears right here in the middle of having fun, and if one more -

"You know something?" Bellamy's voice breaks into her thoughts, pitched low in a whisper as he leans towards her a little. "That dress was my favourite birthday present. I should have told you at the time but – well – I guess it's too late now."

She swallows back tears at that. Not at the idea it's too late now, nor even at the thought that so much has changed. No, she can't quite process the fact that this dress was his favourite present, when she was so sure at the time that he enjoyed even more the birthday surprise that followed it, when she sucked him off, kneeling at his feet upon rough carpet.

She supposes that's just another thing she thought she knew about him that is, it turns out, absolutely and completely incorrect.

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Bellamy still comes over to their home, albeit rather less often. Increasingly he takes Madi out for the afternoon, or even invites her to his quarters for the evening, so when he shows up in Medical to insist that, tonight, he really must spend the evening with them at their house, Clarke begins to suspect that something is afoot.

She asks no questions, though, because asking difficult questions is Echo's talent, not hers, these days. She seems to remember that she was a rather braver woman once, too, more prone to probing where it wasn't expected of her, but she's just so damn tired of taking all the risks that life can throw at her. She therefore agrees in a distinctly placid manner, and he appears at the door, and Madi chooses a film, and the evening passes much as such evenings do.

The film concludes, and Madi gets to her feet.

"I guess it's bedtime? Am I seeing you tomorrow, Dad?"

"That's – that's actually why I wanted to come over tonight, kid. I'm going away for a while tomorrow." Clarke feels the air rush out of her chest, but Madi seems far less bothered by this development.

"You are? Where? How long for?" Madi asks, all curiosity.

"North again. To find out how the Titans are behaving now that it's the middle of winter. For a week, hopefully, and we'll have the lazer-comm so we can speak whenever you want."

"Cool. Are you excited?"

"Yeah." She's pretty convinced that's not the truth, but it's not her place to determine that, she
"Cool. Well, stay safe. And I'll see you next week."

With that, Madi pulls him into a hug that lasts, perhaps, a moment longer than usual, and then she is gone, and in the silence that she leaves behind her Clarke could swear she can hear her own panicked heartbeat.

"When were you going to tell me?" She asks, trying very hard to keep control of her voice. "And why do you keep doing this, anyway? What happened to staying with your family?"

"My family doesn't seem to need me anymore." He bites out. "You didn't seem to care, last time I went."

"I think we've established that I always care, even when I do a terrible job of showing it." She reminds him, tone bitter.

"That's an understatement."

"What?" She's lost track of what he means, yet again.

"You've been doing a pathetic job of showing it, recently."

"Like you've been any better." She shoots back at him, before she can allow herself to think too hard about the truth of his words.

"At least I've been trying." He snaps, voice rising in pitch and volume to the point that she's pretty sure Madi can hear them. Heavens, she's pretty sure the whole village can hear them. "Do you have any idea how infuriating it is, the way you always hide your emotions? I think you're even hiding them from yourself, half the time. It's impossible. How is anyone supposed to get close to you?"

They're not, of course. That's the answer. If no one gets close to her, then losing them can't send her unhinged. But she senses that he wouldn't find that a very helpful comment right now, so she brushes his words under the metaphorical carpet and sits there in stony silence.

"I'm done with this. I am more than done with this. I am going to go and do something useful with my life. Kane needs me to lead this mission, and I do not let people down. And right now, going and fighting a herd of Titans sounds a damn sight easier than raising a child with you."

The door slams again, of course. He's getting good at that, now.

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It takes a lot of energy, not dwelling on what Bellamy has said to her, but she manages it. She manages it very well indeed in the first couple of days that he is away, keeping herself busy with entirely useful tasks like calculating how long their stock of bandages will last and experimenting with the use of Jacksonia in a poultice. She manages it perfectly well, in fact, until her daughter goes to call him on the lazer-comm.

She does not accompany her. There does not seem a lot of point, if he is done with this. She sits at home, and draws sketches of Wells and Finn, Jasper and Lexa, Monty and Harper. There is something oddly comforting, in moments like this, about drawing the people she has lost. Now that these people are dead, she cannot lose them again.

Not like Bellamy whom, it seems, she is destined to just keep on losing, time after time after time.
There is the sound of a key in the lock. Her daughter reenters the house, and bowls into the living room, and wraps her in a very firm and extremely zealous hug. And she's a bit confused, really, because she said goodbye to her scarcely an hour ago and this seems like a slightly excessive greeting for such a short separation.

"Are you OK?" Clarke asks carefully.

"Yeah. I'm good. That was from Dad."

"It was?" She cannot make sense of this. What was from him, exactly?

"Yeah. He gave me a message for you. He said to give you a really big hug and then tell you that he's really sorry, and that going on the mission was his only choice. He said you'd know what that meant."

"Yes." She allows herself to hope, because she doesn't think there is any other way of interpreting that message. "I think I do."

"Good."

"How – how is he?"

"Why don't you go ask him for yourself?"

"Madi, please." She knows she sounds desperate. That's because she is. "Is he OK?"

"He's fine. Cold, he said, but safe and sound, and no sign of the Titans yet. They're beginning to wonder if they hibernate. And he said – he said he's missing us. Both of us."

He is? What happened to being done with this? She shakes herself mentally, and comes to a decision.

"Madi? When you go to speak to him next – would it be OK if I came with you?"

"I knew you'd say that." Her daughter says, grinning triumphantly. "I told him we'd both be there tomorrow. He didn't believe me, bet me a new book that I couldn't get you to speak to him." Well, then. That settles it.

"Looks like you're about to win yourself a new book, then, honey."

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Clarke's intention is to stop by the workshop the following evening, on the way to supper. That is a conventional time of day for social lazer-comm calls, she seems to remember.

She doesn't last that long, in the end. Not even vaguely. Instead she suggests to Madi that they take a quick detour on the way to breakfast, and tries to ignore the amused glint in her daughter's eyes.

"I knew it would all turn out like this." The girl teases her joyfully. "I knew you'd both stop being idiots eventually. Come on, Mum. Let's go make Dad's week."

That might be a bit optimistic, Clarke thinks, but all the same she walks willingly towards the workshop with Madi. And she allows herself, in the light of her daughter's sunny outlook, to take a second look at a few of the things that have happened in the last couple of months. Considers, in particular, that last argument they had before he left, and that message he sent via their daughter.
Allows herself to wonder, just for a moment, whether maybe he was trying, after all.

They soon arrive at the door to the workshop, and open it, and step inside. And Clarke is rather surprised to see quite so many people here at such an early hour. At least some combination of Emori and Raven and Shaw and some of these other folks she vaguely recognises from engineering must be on duty, she supposes, tasked with staying on standby at the comms unit. But surely not as many as this. And she can't for the life of her work out why Kane is here, nor Jackson, nor the half a dozen military men she does not know as well as she would, if she were doing what Bellamy apparently thinks would be more useful.

Why on Earth are they all here before breakfast? And deep in conversation, too, heads close together, a murmur of concerned chatter filling the air.

Something is wrong, here. Something is very, very wrong.

"Hello?" She speaks up from her place near the door, and a couple of dozen heads look up to take in the two of them.

"Clarke. Madi." Kane begins to cross the floor to them, Raven hot on his heels.

"We were just here to speak to Bellamy." Clarke says with some trepidation.

"Yes. Well." Kane shifts from foot to foot, clearly uncomfortable to say the least. "He's a little late for check-in. Nothing to worry about, we hope."

She feels the ground shift beneath her, staggers sideways into Raven. Notes that Emori seems to be there, too, with an arm around her shoulders. There definitely is something to worry about. The presence of so many people and so many concerned expressions makes it plain as plain can be. But she mustn't fall apart completely, she reminds herself. She has to stay strong for Madi.

Has to keep it together for her little girl, whose father is currently out there in goodness only knows what kind of trouble, and thinking she hates him, to boot.

If he's even still alive, that is.

She tries in vain to gather her scattered thoughts, but it is no good. She is beset by images of everything from Bellamy's face against the pillows of her bed to his arm ripped open by one of those savage beasts, and it is sending her head spinning at a mile a minute.

"Why don't I take Madi to school?" Jackson offers, stepping forward, clearly taking the news of Miller's disappearance rather more stoically than she is taking Bellamy's. He's had longer to adjust to the news, perhaps. And it seems unlikely that he thinks Miller died hating him. "I think you'd rather be at school than sit here waiting for news, yes?"

"Yeah." The girl agrees easily, somehow seeming much less stricken than Clarke finds herself. "Thanks, Jackson. I'll see you later, Mum? And you can tell me what news there is then."

The two of them exit the workshop, and Clarke finds herself sitting on a chair that has at some point been acquired from somewhere, looking up at Kane's concerned face. She has only one question, somehow, only one thought that is clear enough in her mind to bother expressing.

"How late is a little late?"

Marcus swallows with visible difficulty. "Eight hours late."
She loses the plot completely at that, weeps and crumples against her chair even while Raven tries to tell her that the news is not necessarily as bad as all that. Maybe they have just had a technical problem with the comms unit, she suggests. In fact, they are likely all alive and well, only unable to get in touch with them. And if that is the case, they could well be back at the village within days.

She doesn't bother replying. She is too busy weeping, and sorting through her thoughts, and coming to a rather ill-timed realisation that she has, without doubt, been an idiot. That she realises it now should come as no surprise to her, she supposes. Timing has never been their best thing.

Kane moves away eventually, heads to his office to decide what is to be done now. Raven goes back to the comms unit, to tinkering with it in the hopes of revealing whether the problem is a technical one. Clarke stares at the floor, and counts the specks of dust, and reaches a decision that, of course, comes all too easily now that Bellamy might well be dead.

She promises to herself, and to any deity who might still care about the human race, that if she gets another chance to make things right with Bellamy she won't blow it. She knows she had her second chance a long time ago. And it's not her third chance, either, or her fourth, or even her seventh.

But if he comes home, she won't ever push him away again.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Madi copes with the uncertainty that follows rather better than Clarke does. That's not saying much, really, though, because Clarke does not cope. She struggles enough for the first week, while everyone around her is insisting that the missing team are probably fine but just having a technical problem.

Then the day that they ought to have arrived home comes and goes, and she finds herself falling apart completely. The irony of this is not lost on her, given everything she has done in recent months in the name of avoiding any opportunity for the loss of this man to send her unhinged, but she is too overwrought to escape her fate on this occasion. The knowledge that Bellamy is, most likely, dead, and that he died thinking that she hated him, is the worst thing that's ever happened to her, she thinks.

And that's saying something, given her life story.

She tries in vain to convince Kane to let her set out to look for them. She could take Raven's rover, she argues, at least part of the way until the ground becomes impassible, and that way she might find them quickly and easily. Or at least find the bodies, and something approaching closure.

Kane is having none of it. He tells her in no uncertain terms that it is too great a risk, that he cannot send yet more troops out there when he does not know what has become of the original team. That this spell of heavy snow is not suitable for a search and rescue mission. And that, above all, there is no way she is going out there pregnant. He must see in her eyes, though, that she is set on doing it anyway. That she will run out of this village barefoot and alone if that is what it takes to find the man she realises, too late, she ought to have kissed goodbye.

But then, of course, Kane reminds her about Madi. That the adolescent Madi needs her mother, and that the unborn Madi needs her to stay safe and well. Reminds her, too, that there is no way Bellamy would want her to risk her own or her child's wellbeing on such a fool's errand.

Reminds her that nothing mattered to him more than his family.

That is what it does, actually. It's that casual use of the past tense, the knowledge that even Kane has given up on them ever coming home.

It is time to tell Madi that her father is dead.

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Clarke wonders why it always seems to snow when her life is going to pieces. She remembers the snow that lay about them before Praimfaiya, cannot help but compare it to the snow she sees falling now, beyond the window, as she sits on the sofa beside her daughter and prepares to break the bad news to her. The girl should be out playing in that snow, she thinks, not sitting here about to have her youthful optimism shattered. And she knows that this is what will happen, because her daughter's outlook has been a little too positive for her own good since Bellamy went missing. She keeps talking about what they will do when her father gets back, oblivious to the way those around her are so careful, instead, to make plans based only on if.

"Madi." She begins carefully. "We need to talk about something."
"So talk." Her daughter barely looks up from the book she is reading, a loan from Bellamy before he walked out into the winter.

"It seems that – that your dad probably isn't going to come home, Madi. I'm so sorry, really but... but we think he must be dead." It is a struggle to get the words out through her tears, even though she has rehearsed for this.

"You're wrong." She says calmly, turning a page.

"What?" This is hardly the hysterical response she was expecting.

"You're wrong, and I'm a bit disappointed in you, to be honest, Mum. Of course he's coming home. He always does. Wasn't that the point of all those bedtime stories you used to tell me?"

"Madi -"

"It's what the flame tells me, too." Her daughter sounds annoyed now, and she can't really see any grounds for that. Maybe it's just grief, she supposes, surfacing as denial.

"What do you mean?"

"The flame tells me that I should always have faith in Bellamy. That he always comes through. And I hardly think Lexa would want you to give up on him now."

She feels the force of that as an almost physical slap. "Madi -"

"No, Mum. You don't get to give up on him. I know the rest of this stupid village already have, but you are supposed to believe in him." Maybe it is just denial, she reminds herself firmly, but all the same it seems to have stirred something within her.

She has given up on him too easily in the past. It is true. Isn't that what she found herself realising, the moment Kane told her he'd gone missing?

Surely, then, she ought to support her daughter in not giving up on him now.

"Maybe, Madi. Maybe you're right. I – I don't know." She cries a little more, wonders how to continue speaking. "I don't know what to think, any more. All this is just such a mess, and I feel so guilty. Because – because I fell out with him, just before he left."

It is somehow a relief to get the words off her chest, and she begins to relax into this comforting heart to heart with her daughter.

She is rather shocked, therefore, at the girl's angry response. "Be honest, Clarke. You fell out with him three months ago."

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It only gets harder, after that. Madi is annoyed with her for her lack of faith and her lack of honesty. Raven is annoyed with her for her excess of fretting and excess of loitering in the workshop, still somehow vainly hoping that a message might come through on the lazer-comm. And most of all, Clarke is annoyed with herself, for making such a mess of that precious chance at a peaceful family life. But it is, she observes sadly, very typical of her to have done so. She's never been much good at realising how much she cares about anyone until she has lost them.

Echo is, somehow, the only person not visibly annoyed with her. She can't quite make sense of that
one. Perhaps that friendship, that bond of caring for the same man, runs deeper than she thought. Or perhaps her friend is struggling with the guilt of staying home while that team went out without her, just as she is struggling with the guilt of that ill-timed argument.

It is two weeks, now, to the day, since Bellamy left on that supposedly week-long mission. Madi is asleep – or is, at least, hiding in her bedroom and using her early night as an excuse to avoid her mother's miserable company – and Clarke is sitting on the sofa and reading a book that belonged to her daughter's father. She didn't used to be a big fan of reading, she seems to remember. But they say that grief can change a person, and besides which, borrowing his books makes her feel close to him, somehow. He might well be dead in a snowdrift somewhere, but if she closes her eyes, she can almost smell him by her side and -

She starts from her reverie, thinks she heard a noise. It sounded like the key turning in the lock, but that doesn't seem at all likely. There are only three people on this moon who have a key to that front door, and the only two still alive are already in the house just now.

But then there is another noise. A noise which is, unmistakably, a particular, familiar, knock at the door.

She has jumped to her feet and dashed out into the corridor before he has even got the door closed behind him. And sure enough, it is Bellamy, and he is very evidently not dead. No, he is alive, and well as far as she can see, with no visible injuries beyond a bit of windburn marring the curves of his cheeks and the tip of his nose. And his beard has grown out a bit, of course, and his hair is dishevelled and he has quite obviously been wearing the same filthy set of clothes for the last fortnight. But as he shifts his weight nervously, a hint of a smile playing about his lips, she thinks he might just be the most beautiful sight she has ever seen.

There is only one appropriate response to this development, of course. She throws herself at him. There is no other word for the way that she winds her arms around his neck and presses her lips to his in a kiss that is three months overdue.

For a heartbeat, she is worried about kissing him. What if he pries her arms gently from around him, tells her kindly that he cares about her in a rather less kissing sort of a way?

No, that's not worth worrying about. Not in the grand scheme of things, not compared to the dead-in-a-drift concerns of the last fourteen days. A polite rejection from her closest friend is a risk worth running, she thinks, in the interests of honesty, and of trying.

And as it turns out, she needn't have worried at all. Sure, he stays frozen for perhaps half a second, apparently struggling somewhat to process this development. But then his arms close around her waist, and his lips begin to respond to hers, eager and urgent, desperate, even.

It is, without doubt, the best kiss she has experienced in centuries. Perhaps even the best kiss she has experienced in lifetimes.

He breaks away eventually, and she swallows back disappointment. They do need to talk at some point, she supposes, but she was really rather enjoying that and -

It turns out he has pulled back only far enough to scatter kisses down her neck, to start exploring towards her collarbone and then her chest. This, she can cope with, she decides rather easily.

"Are you OK?" She asks, while her mouth is not occupied. "We thought – we thought you were -"

"Shh." He murmurs against her skin. "I'm alright."
She sighs in relief as he moves away from her neck and back up to look her in the eye.

"We can talk later. But – I'd quite like to keep kissing you now, if that's OK?"

By way of response, she closes the gap between them. And she's missed him really rather a lot, and is really quite excited that he's back from being missing-presumed-dead, so it shouldn't come as any great surprise when her hands get a bit bolder, start exploring his firm back beneath his shirt, or start pulling his hips flush against her. And, to his credit, he doesn't seem surprised by this. Not at all. He simply gets on with caressing the curve of her bum, with brushing his fingers softly against her breasts, with whispering her name against her lips in between kisses.

Confidence bolstered by these developments, growing increasingly convinced that they are, in fact, on the same page, she reaches for his belt.

"Are – are you sure?" He asks, and she steels herself to be open and honest. To put her heart out there, and know he won't let her fall apart. It's what she should have tried months ago, she has come to realise while he's been gone, and she very much intends to make up for lost time now.

She nods, once, and his face relaxes into an expression even she can read. He looks, she thinks, utterly delighted.

"I don't want to hurt the baby." He mutters, apparently expending a great deal of effort on trying to be sensible, trying to convince his head to rule his heart.

She's done with that. She is so, completely, done with that.

"We'll work it out." She tells him with certainty. "We always do."

They definitely do work it out, on this occasion. She makes short work of stripping him, and he makes short work of stripping her, and she is so excited that she does not even bother pausing to observe that he smells like a dead Titan carcass.

Not that she's ever smelled one of those, to be fair. He smells like she imagines a dead Titan carcass would smell.

But this is hardly the moment to dwell on such things, as she leads him to the sofa, and pushes him back against the cushions, and climbs into his lap. And he welcomes her with open arms, quite literally, holding her close and scattering kisses across her face, then twisting to nuzzle into her chest, and it's so much happiness that she thinks her heart might just burst.

Wanting him to feel some of that happiness, she reaches a tentative hand down to explore the length of his cock.

"You might not want to do that." He suggests with a strained chuckle. "This might not last very long if you do that."

"I'm not sure this is going to last very long anyway." She points out. They're both panting between kisses already, and he's not even inside of her yet.

She reckons it's probably time to do something about that. She rearranges her legs, lowers herself rather less carefully than would probably have been wise onto the length of him. Kisses him hard, swallowing his groan. Makes a start on rising and falling against him, urged on by his hands which seem to be everywhere, now on her butt helping her to find her rhythm, now on her nipples, driving her to distraction. And he's moaning her name, and it sounds every bit as good as she remembers. She's crying out his name, too, aware that Bellamy has rather too many syllables to roll easily off
the tongue in a moment of passion, but too ecstatic to care.

She was right. It doesn't last long, on this occasion. She's been riding him for scarcely minutes when she feels herself fall unhinged in the most beautiful of ways, enjoys clenching around him for all she is worth. And he's there, too, burying his face in her hair and choking on a strangled gasp. It is, she notes, a new contender for the shortest screw of her life. But somehow, right now, that doesn't seem like a bad thing.

After all, it gives them more left of this night, more time to try again. And again and again and again, perhaps.

"Welcome home." She whispers, when she can speak once more.

He holds her even tighter at that, something she didn't realise was possible until he does it.

"I missed you." He tells her, voice raw from sex and emotion and, she thinks, possibly also a few tears.

"I missed you, too. I'm so sorry, Bellamy. For – for before."

"I think I got that." He tells her, and she can hear his smile. "I'm sorry, too. Good job forgiveness is what we do best?"

"Yeah." She answers the question she knows he is asking, wondering all the while if, perhaps, she ought to climb out of his lap eventually.

As if he has read her mind, he reaches for a kiss, and then starts easing her off of him. She is about to protest, to tell him that she'd quite like to stay here all night, when it becomes clear that all he has in mind is rearranging her into a slightly more sustainable position, sprawled across his thighs, legs out along the sofa.

She is, of course, only too willing to comply.

She wraps his arms around her – just in case has not taken any of the hints she has dropped so far – and asks the questions that have been on her mind since he opened the door.

"What happened? How are you here?"

"Kane sent me." It seems he has rather misunderstood the thrust of her question. She didn't mean here, in the house. She meant here as in alive. "He ordered me, actually, to come straight here and tell you I was OK. He seemed to think you might want to see me."

"He was right."

"I gathered."

"But that wasn't what I meant. I meant what happened out there? You've been missing for weeks but you come back unhurt?"

"A lot of snow happened, that's the short version of the story. We couldn't get back. And Miller dropped the comms unit in a river, that didn't exactly help."

Something in the flippancy of his tone breaks her. "Do you have any idea how worried we were? Not even worried. We – we thought you were dead. I thought you were dead. I thought you were lying there in a snowdrift somewhere, and that you'd died thinking I hated you."
"Hey." He presses warm kisses to her hairline between words. "Hey, it's OK, though. I'm here. And I'm OK. I'll always come back to you, Clarke. You know that."

"That's what Madi said. She's – she's a bit angry with me. I didn't do a very good job of having faith in you."

"As long as you didn't start a relationship with someone else while I was gone, you've got me beaten." She can hear the nervousness in his voice, hear that this is perhaps his greatest fear.

Why did she ever let herself believe she couldn't read him, anyway? What are a few months of miscommunication set against all the time that has passed between them?

"I didn't." She confirms easily, decides it's time for another kiss and gets to work on that.

A few more minutes pass, minutes of lazy kissing and of cradling one another close. Clarke supposes that, probably, they ought to get on with facing life eventually. That perhaps she still ought to be the sensible one, sometimes.

She pulls away from his lips and makes a suggestion. "We should wake Madi up, tell her you're home safe."

"Yeah. I should maybe put some clothes on first, though." He suggests with a chuckle.

"Maybe you should shower first." She counters, with a pointed slant to her brow. "It's a good thing I'm so into you, because you stink right now."

"You're so into me?" He picks up on her clumsy phrasing with a smirk.

"What gave it away?"

He doesn't answer that. He kisses her instead, and tells her something that makes her day, unbelievably wonderful though it has already been. "It's a good thing I'm so into you too."

With that established, he lifts her none-too-elegantly off of her lap and gets to his feet. She shows him to the bathroom, coaxes the rather idiosyncratic shower into life for him, and goes in search of towels. She doesn't have anything particularly suitable for him to wear, so she settles instead on lending him her robe, and leaves that in the bathroom for when he is done. She throws on some clothes of her own and sets out on a hunt for food, next. If Kane sent him straight here, she figures that he must be tired and hungry. But the mess hall isn't open at this time of night, and as the residents take every meal there that means the pickings are a bit slim when it comes to what she has on hand right now. She finds a couple of ration bars, pours a glass of water, and sets them down on the living room table.

She forces herself to take a seat at the table, too. She sort of wants to go check on how he's getting on in the bathroom, confirm that he hasn't suddenly disappeared again, but that seems like it's probably not a very rational thing to do. It seems like something that unhinged Clarke of recent days would do, and she's trying quite hard not to be that Clarke, tonight.

He emerges moments later, hair damp and smile broad, her robe entertainingly small on his much larger frame.

"Looking good." She teases him with a grin.

"What's this?" He gestures to the snack on the table before her.
"I thought you probably hadn't eaten. Sorry, it's all I could find."

"Thank you." He seems oddly touched, as he takes a seat and demolishes half a bar in one mouthful.

"You're welcome. I was trying to guess what you might need after a fortnight trapped in the snow."

"You're doing pretty great so far." He reassures her even while chewing. It's a little gross, she supposes, but nothing she can't overlook. "We've covered one hell of a reunion with you and some decent snacks. Now all I need to do is see my daughter and sleep for several days."

"Is that what you have planned?"

"Well, Kane's given me some time off. I'd like to spend tomorrow with you and Madi if that's OK?"

"Of course. We'd like that a lot."

"Great. But yeah, apart from catching up with you two I plan on doing a lot of sleeping." He finishes the last of the snack, dusts his hands down on her robe. Realises that he's just done so, and looks at her with an apologetic grin.

"Come on. Let's go tell Madi the good news." She decides, taking his hand and tugging him towards their daughter's bedroom.

She knocks gently, then eases the door open. Watches the light from the corridor spill across the girl's sleeping face, and whispers the words she thought she would never have the chance to say.

"Madi, honey. Wake up. You're father's home."

Their child makes some incoherent noise, begins to stir a little.

"Madi?" Bellamy approaches the bed, towing her with him. "Madi, it's me."

The girl's eyes blink open, and she takes in the rather comical sight of her father standing before her in his odd outfit. "Dad?"

"Yeah, kid. It's me. I just got back."

"You did? But somehow you've had time to change into Mum's robe?"

"Well, I took a shower first."

"He did kind of stink." Clarke adds for good measure.

That is what does it, it seems. That is the moment that Madi decides that this is, in fact, actually real and not some product of her imagination. She throws herself at her father in a rather fierce hug, and Clarke joins the party, too, and the three of them are reunited for the first time in far too long.

"I knew you'd come back." Madi says at last, as they disentangle themselves. "I knew it."

Clarke feels tears crowd her eyes, blinks them away determinedly. This is an evening for happiness, she resolves.

"Go back to sleep, Madi." She suggests now. "You can catch up properly in the morning. We're going to spend the day together tomorrow."
"We are? But – but I have school? And don't you have to do that town plan for Kane?"

"I think your dad coming home safe is a bit more important than that."

Madi wastes no time in agreeing with this assessment, and agreeing that going to sleep now is an acceptable trade off if it means a family day tomorrow. With that, therefore, they say goodnight, and close the door, and find themselves standing in the corridor and looking at one another, hands still very much intertwined.

For the first time since Bellamy opened that door, Clarke finds herself feeling distinctly awkward. So they've established that there's some mutual attraction going on – so much seems obvious. And she's demonstrated, too, that she cares about him enough to want him not dead and enough to offer him two measly ration bars and a cup of water.

She's not sure where they go from here.

Bellamy, on the other hand, seems to know exactly where they go from here, as he leads her in the direction of her bedroom. And she could definitely get on board with this idea, she decides, cheeks heating at the mere thought of it. And maybe, in fact, this has helped her to work out what she needs to say next, what her next attempt at trying might consist of.

"So I know we don't need to sleep together anymore, but I was thinking it might be fun if we did it anyway."

He looks a little startled at that, but he's smiling, so things can't be all bad. "I was thinking that, too. Definitely. But – but that honestly wasn't why I was headed in here."

"Oh." Well, now she feels foolish.

"I'd like us to do that again another time, of course." He rushes to assure her, appearing strangely nervous. "But – but I was wondering if – would it be OK if I got some sleep? Would it be OK if I stayed here tonight?"

This day has already marked itself as very definitely the best day of her life, she knows. How could the day of his miraculous homecoming be any less than the best day of her life? But with that question, she thinks, he has rendered today absolutely unbeatable.

"I'd like that." She tells him, reaching up to kiss him softly for good measure.

He disentangles his fingers from hers, and slips out of her robe. Pulls back the covers, and climbs into the same side of the bed he occupied on the night of his birthday, all those months ago. And she takes the hint, too, shedding her clothes and climbing in next to him, pressing so closely against him that she thinks, probably, he can hear her heart beat. He wraps his arms around her, and she thinks that this can't be a very comfortable position to go to sleep in, but it would appear that neither of them really cares, just now, about such trivialities.

"Goodnight, Clarke." He whispers, and places a soft kiss on her forehead. "Sleep well."

She feels a moment's panic at that, because they've not talked, not really, not yet. And that's a vital piece of the puzzle, she knows it is, and it's all very well for them to start screwing again, and for him to be staying the night, but she wants him back in her life in every way, not just to fulfil her shallow girlish fantasies. And she gets that he's exhausted, of course she does, but surely they need to say something about what has happened in recent months.

She can do this, she resolves, bolstered by the warmth of his arms. She can show him that she's
trying.

"I thought you were only sleeping with me because you had to." She tells him, even though the words try to stick in her throat. "I thought you were only speaking to me because you had to. I'm sorry."

"I thought you were only with me because you had to be, too. I guess we were both wrong?" She can hear everything he's not saying, somehow, suddenly, just as she always hoped she would remember how to. All of the insecurity and hope, nervousness and excitement.

And one last, miraculous, chance.

"It seems that way." She confirms, and feels his chest deflate with relief. "Can we – can we maybe start over? And have another go? I know that I screwed up, Bellamy, but I promise -"

"Clarke." He cuts her off, quietly but firmly. "I can't believe you even have to ask that, after this evening. To be clear, I definitely want us to have another go."

"You do?"

"Yes. But - but I don't want us to start over. You were right, all those months ago. The mistakes we've made – they're part of who we are now. I don't want us to forget about them, but I do forgive you."

It's more than she deserves. But, then again, Bellamy Blake has always been more than she deserves. Perhaps it's time she stopped dwelling on that and lived a little.

"Thank you."

"Pretty sure you've still had to forgive me more times in total."

"Shall we maybe not keep score on that one?"

He chuckles softly at that, drops a few more kisses onto the crown of her head. Then gives an impressively loud yawn. And then she's laughing too, stifling giggles against his chest and rejoicing that, for once, good fortune is on her side.

"Get some sleep, Bellamy."

"If you insist."

She reaches for a goodnight kiss. "Please don't go missing again any time soon."

"I'm staying right here."

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Clarke leaves Bellamy to sleep in the following morning for as long as she can. They haven't made any particular plans for the day, of course, only that they intend to spend it together, so when she awakes to the sound of him still snoring softly, she tiptoes out of the room and makes a start on collecting up their discarded clothing from the night before. It is for the best, she thinks, that she should clear that out of sight before Madi surfaces from sleep. Holding his filthy garments at arm's length, she drops them in a heap at the foot of the bed, before taking up the book she was interrupted in reading the previous evening and settling herself into a sitting position against the pillows to read.
She hasn't tried reading in bed before. There's never seemed any real point to it, until today. But as an activity that passes the time and makes her feel close to the wonderful man who's currently curled up beside her, it turns out it's not a bad choice at all.

"I recognise that book." Bellamy's voice, thick with sleep, interrupts her focus.

She jumps a little, looks down into his smiling face. "Erm, yes. It's one you lent Madi."

"Since when are you into reading in the mornings?"

"Since today, actually. But I started reading while you were gone." She admits quietly. "It helped with missing you, somehow."

He sits up at that, wraps an arm around her. "I picked some plants for you, when I was missing you. I know that sounds stupid, but there's a load of pathetic bits of frost-damaged plants in the pack I left at Kane's. Anything I didn't recognise and thought we hadn't documented yet. I thought – god, this does sound stupid – but I thought that maybe if I came home with a load of new herbs for you to play with in Medical, you might start speaking to me again."

"I was going to start speaking to you again anyway." She tells him, blinking away tears that spring to her eyes at this evidence of his desperate thoughtfulness. "I decided that as soon as Madi gave me your message, and we went to the workshop the next morning but you'd already lost contact."

"We lost the comms unit pretty soon after I spoke to Madi." He confirms sadly. "You were really on your way to speak to me? Even before I gave you a fright and disappeared?"

"Yeah." She gives up on any hope of reading this morning, puts the book aside.

"That's good to know."

He pulls her in for a lingering kiss. And lingering kisses with Bellamy are, she thinks, probably one of her favourite ways to spend a morning, coming a close second to enthusiastic lovemaking with Bellamy, but she has to concede that they don't really have time for this, today.

She pulls away reluctantly and explains herself in an apologetic tone. "We don't have time for that before breakfast. You slept in quite late. If we're going out for the day you need to get home and change and I need to get Madi awake and ready."

"You're probably right." He drops a teasing kiss on her nose.

"We'll have plenty of other opportunities." She suggests, slightly nervous as she wonders exactly how this new phase of their relationship might work.

"We'd better have." He smirks at her, then rolls out of bed and heads for the heap of clothes she has left for him. "These are disgusting. What on Earth possessed you to screw me when I showed up on your doorstep dressed like this?"

She knows it's supposed to be a joke, but the sorrow is still too recent for her to find it funny. "I'd missed you."

He turns at the tone of her voice, meets her gaze and holds it. "I'd missed you, too."

He starts to dress himself then, pulls his trousers on, T shirt following close behind. Give his jacket a considering sort of look before shrugging and chucking that on, too. Doesn't bother with the pair of socks that Clarke thinks could probably stand up on their own, laces his boots straight onto his
"I'll see you at breakfast?" He asks, reaching out a hand towards her.

"Yeah." She closes the distance, squeezes his fingers gently. Reaches up to give him a kiss of farewell. "See you soon."

He leaves, then, striding out of the bedroom, and she hears his progress down the corridor, hears the front door close behind him.

He doesn't slam it, this time.

And then he is gone, and she has to take a deep breath to remind herself that, this time, he is coming back. And she will see him again, and soon, just as soon as she gets on with her day. She puts on some clothes that seem broadly appropriate for a family expedition into the snow, and sets out to her daughter's room.

"Madi?" She knocks at the door, peeps her head into the room.

"Mum. Hey." The girl is fully dressed, bar shoes, and appears more than ready to face the day. Why, then, is she still hiding in here? "Was that Dad leaving I just heard?"

"Yeah." There doesn't seem any point lying about it. "Why didn't you come out and say hello?"

"I thought you guys might need some time to sort things out. Did you do it?"

She chokes a little at that, hoping her daughter does not mean quite what she thinks she means. "I beg your pardon?"

"Did you apologise and kiss and make up and tell him you love him, and all that?"

"Something like that." She mutters, and avoids eye contact by bending to pick up a stray sock.

She hasn't told him she loves him, of course. Because she doesn't love him, not quite, not yet. He's still not the man he used to be, and she's beginning to understand that, actually, he never will be. And anyway, she is not that same girl, so if he did find some way to magically turn back the clock, they would find themselves seriously mismatched. But this new Bellamy, the one she's still finding her way around, he's quite something, too. And she's looking forward very much to the pair of them getting to know each other, together.

So, no, she doesn't love him yet. But she knows now that, if the universe stands still long enough for them to work it out, she will.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter twenty one

Madi does not comment on the unusual sense of urgency with which Clarke gathers her belongings, and laces her boots, and dons her jacket. If anything, she seems just as keen to get out of the house, too. And if the two of them march to the kitchens with unaccustomed haste to ask for some snacks for their expedition – well, that is only to be expected.

They have somewhere to be, after all.

By the time they emerge from the kitchens and out into the mess hall proper, Bellamy is somehow already there before them. Clarke sees the mass of people clustered around him first, actually, but then an intimidatingly enormous Wonkru warrior steps back, and Bellamy looks up and meets her eye, and really, she's not sure which of the pair of them is more relieved at that. She seems to remember he used to be more appreciative of admiring crowds, once upon a time, but right now he's looking at her like he's expecting her to save him from this excess of excitement that half the village seems to be feeling at his safe return home.

"Clarke. Madi." He greets them a little louder than strictly necessary, starts cutting a path through the mass of wellwishers.

"Dad." His daughter runs towards him, wraps him in a hug so fierce that she's a little worried she might bowl him clean over in his current exhausted state.

Thankfully, he survives the experience, and even manages to extract himself and keep walking towards her, their excited child at his shoulder.

Clarke takes a few deep breaths, and wonders how she is supposed to manage this, now. She wants, above all things, to avoid a return to that cold cheek-kissing she remembers with such hatred, but she's not sure what he's expecting from this new kind of relationship they've decided to have a go at. Maybe they might go for a long hug, she thinks, or maybe she might kiss his cheek. Or maybe this time round, the cheek kiss might at least be a little more lingering, something even approaching heartfelt.

And then he is there, right in front of her, a smile about his lips despite the dark shadows beneath his eyes, and she decides to just go for it.

She kisses him full on the mouth, in full view of the entire dining room, for a full fifteen seconds.

It would be an understatement to say that some people are whooping and whistling by the time she pulls away. She thinks that, probably, the whole damn village is cheering. But she finds herself feeling rather liberated, rather unconcerned with what they all think. This beautiful man has just walked back into her life and told her that he wants to be with her, and she intends to make the most of it.

Her daughter has been whooping, too. She can see it in the very Blake smirk about her mouth. She pulls her into an affectionate half a hug and the three of them head to take some food and find a table. They find Octavia, too, which is for the best. Clarke is all too aware that Bellamy chose to greet one branch of his family last night, but not the other, and has been worried about how that might go down. But his sister betrays absolutely no sign of annoyance or disappointment as she
embraces him and asks after his state of health.

Their party is then four, as they actually, finally, get to eat their now lukewarm porridge. Clarke sort of wonders if the whole going missing situation might act as a bit of a catalyst for Bellamy and Octavia to fix a few things, in much the same way as it has made her rethink her priorities so radically and made her welcome him home so warmly last night, but as they carefully exchange cheerful chat about how she's enjoying teaching, it seems that this is one miracle that will have to wait.

It's not urgent, she tells herself. They have all the time in the world, now, for these two members of her family to practise forgiving each other. And she'll be right there beside them, every step of the way, to help them work it out.

......

The walk to the lake is a little more challenging today than it was on Bellamy's birthday. The path is well-trodden underfoot, and the snow is far less deep here than it must have been on his ill-fated mission to the north, but all the same, it makes for slow going, and for a trip which is not necessarily what Clarke might have chosen whilst the best part of four months pregnant.

But Madi is over the moon, of course, so that's good enough for her. The girl is running before them, scooping up handfuls of snow and flinging them in no particular direction, and it does her heart good to see it.

It is not until they have nearly arrived that, all of a sudden, she finds a handful of snow being thrown in a very particular direction indeed. There she is, wandering along the path, telling Bellamy about a selection of the dull things that have happened in Medical in recent weeks, and quite unexpectedly she feels the cold wetness of snow against her left ear.

She looks up and sees Bellamy trying very hard not to smirk.

"Was I boring you that much?"

"Not at all." He rushes to reassure her, seeming suddenly anxious that she might not be finding this as amusing as he is. "I just thought – snow."

Well, then. Two can play at that game. She scoops some up for herself, chucks it straight back at his smirking face.

And then he's laughing, and lobbing more snow in her general direction, and she's aiming for his hair because, she thinks, he might looks quite sweet with snow-bedraggled hair drifting into his eyes, and then Madi gets wind of what they are doing and starts contributing snowballs of her own from afar. And all in all, it's quite a lot of fun, she decides, to frolic around in the snow with these two people she cares about so much.

Or, at least, it is fun until Bellamy shovels a fistful of snow down the back of her neck.

She gasps in shock, and holds her hands up in surrender. "That's it. No more. I concede."

He decides, for reasons that remain unclear to her, that her words merit a rather lengthy and somewhat chilly kiss.

"I think Madi won that one." He says when he pulls away at last.

"I think she took advantage of the fact that neither of us wanted our daughter to sit around in wet
clothes all day." She comments lightly.

"I didn't think of that." She watches his eyes fill with panic. "I'm so sorry, Clarke. Are you going to be OK? Is the baby going to be OK? Stupid of me, I was just messing around and I didn't think -"

"Bellamy." She cuts him off with a kiss. "We're fine. I've survived worse. And Madi has too."

She shocks herself with those words. She thinks it might be the first time she's actually referred to this baby she didn't ask to bear by the name of the daughter she loves so much.

Apparently, then, it is something of a day for miracles, after all.

They reach the lake not long after that, and pause for a moment to take in the sight. There are great sheets of ice floating on the surface of the water, and the layer of snow coating the sandy beach makes for a very odd appearance indeed. Madi, of course, is not interested in hanging around to make any profound comment on such things. She wants to get on with building a snowman, an old Earth custom she has read about in her father's books.

Bellamy laughs at her suggestion. "You go for it, kid. I'm going to sit here and make a fuss of your mother."

Sure enough, he does. He sets down his pack, rolls a tarpaulin over the snow for them to sit on. Produces a cushion from goodness only knows where and sets it down before her. And then offers her, of all things, a flask of hot pine needle tea.

"Are you going to sit down?" He asks, when she is still standing and staring at him some seconds later.

"Yeah, of course." She does so with a little caution. "Thank you. This baby is lucky to have such a caring father."

He looks askance at her at that. "Or maybe I wanted to do something nice for you?"

She offers him a smile, and cuddles in close to his side, and looks out at Madi making her incongruous beach-based snowman. But somehow, she notes, her smile seems to have become distinctly tearful, and she's a bit annoyed about that. Because she's not sad today, of course not. No, she must just be overwhelmed with happiness at having Bellamy home in one piece, and of course there are those pesky hormones -

"Clarke? What's wrong?" He holds her a little tighter as he notices her tears.

"Nothing." She rushes to assure him. "It's just the hormones."

She hears him take a careful breath, wonders what's coming next. Is he a bit annoyed, perhaps, that she's ruining this lovely day with her stupid irrational emotional state? Is he rethinking whether or not she's really sufficiently fun to want to give this a go, for real?

"Or maybe it's something to do with having to get pregnant to save the human race?" He suggests gently. "Or maybe to do with getting back together with a guy who left you behind to die when the world ended? Or trying to work out what your role is, if not leading your people? Or being anxious because your daughter keeps having weird dizzy spells? And then there's the fact that, for some reason, you feel the need to hide all this from everyone who cares about you because you still have this idea that you're supposed to bear it for them, so they don't have to?"

Well, now. If he carries on like that, the universe isn't going to have to stand still for very long at
"Thank you." It's inadequate, but it's a start.

"Any time." He says, and she can hear that he means it. "I know you like to keep things to yourself but – but if ever you want to share what's bothering you, I'll be here to hear it."

"I know." After all, she does know that, now. "I think maybe talking is one thing the two of us need to do better at. I'm still trying to guess what you're thinking, like I used to be able to, but now I keep getting it wrong."

"I keep doing that, too." He admits sadly. "I got it so wrong, when you told me you were pregnant."

She steels herself to have a go at that talking thing, then. To have a go at helping both of them out.

"How do you feel about the baby? About me being pregnant?" He looks at her consideringly for a moment, as if trying to work out what the correct answer is, and she has to suppress the urge to throttle him. "Honestly, Bellamy?"

"Honestly? I'm over the moon. And I'm sorry for that, in a way, because I can tell your feelings are a bit more complicated than that. But I love Madi, and I'm so relieved that she's going to be OK, and excited to meet baby Madi."

He pauses for a moment, gazing at their daughter rolling snow, and continues a little more hesitantly.

"And – there's more to it, I guess, too. You know family has always been important to me, ever since I had to care for O as a kid. And when I first met you, Clarke, back on Earth, and loved you, I knew it wasn't really a time for thinking about the future or about raising families. But whenever I did let myself daydream about it, about what the world might be like if we managed to secure some kind of peace, I guess I always imagined that if I had a family I'd – I'd have a family with you. So this second chance is – it means everything to me."

Of course, that has her crying again. Most things do, it seems, at the moment.

"Thank you for being honest with me." She tells him through her tears, squeezing his hand.

"Knowing how happy it makes you, it gives me another reason to be happy, too, if that makes sense?"

"Yeah."

He doesn't say anything else, no empty platitudes about how he wishes she could be more happy for herself, and she is grateful for it. They simply sit there, and hold each other, and watch the child they love so much make a mess in the snow.

......

Clarke isn't quite sure how it has happened, but somehow she has been talked into going to the bar tonight. They were on their way home from their visit to the lake and their admiration of Madi's misshapen snowman when, seemingly out of nowhere, their daughter announced her intention to spend the night at her grandmother's house. And Clarke couldn't make sense of this, initially, was a bit confused as to why Madi didn't want to spend the evening with Bellamy, but the girl made it quite clear that her mind was made up. She would spend the night at Abby's, and her parents would take themselves for an evening out.
And, well, neither of them could argue with the commander, could they?

So it is that Clarke finds herself, now, standing in her bedroom and staring thoughtfully at that precious blue dress. It's silly, she tells herself, to spend so much time contemplating this. She is just going for a drink with friends, and really the whole village is far too preoccupied with her pregnant state to bother noticing whether or not she has made an effort with her clothing. She should just get on with making the decision already, and either don some stretchy leggings that accommodate her developing baby bump, or squeeze into this damn dress.

Of course, she opts for the dress.

It's definitely too tight around the breasts, now, she notes, but she supposes that Bellamy is unlikely to complain about the frankly indecent cleavage this situation creates. And the full skirt accommodates her belly surprisingly well, and on a godforsaken moon where maternity wear is in short supply, she thinks she looks perfectly acceptable, thank you very much.

Or at least, that is what she thinks until Bellamy opens the door.

She realised already, of course, that he must find her somewhat physically attractive. She's not completely oblivious to the clues he's left along the way, on that front. But this is, she thinks, the first time he's ever actually stared at her open-mouthed. And then, suddenly, he seems to realise that there's something quite a lot more useful his mouth could be doing, and makes a start on kissing her, instead.

It's a pretty hot kiss, she can't deny it. And this dress leaves quite a lot of her shoulders and upper back bare and he seems pretty keen to celebrate that, too, as his lips start trailing across her exposed skin. There are worse ways to say hello, she supposes, but she thinks that probably they ought not do this all night.

"Hello to you, too." She pulls away, but keeps hold of his hand. Just in case. Just so she can't lose him again.

"You look stunning." He tells her outright, and she feels her stomach swoop a little at his words. Stunning? Stunning is a new development.

"Thank you. You look good, too." She's still getting used to being allowed to notice that, really.

"But not stunning." He insists with a smirk. "It's not even just the dress, although I think I've made it pretty clear I do like that dress. It's – I don't know – you look very pregnant and it's kind of hot."

She smiles shyly at that, but her mind isn't really on the compliment. She thinks that, really, this is as good an opening as she's going to get to practise being honest and open about something that's been bothering her.

"You know when you said that this dress was your favourite birthday present. Can I – can I ask you about that? Because I guess I was a bit surprised that – you know – your birthday surprise wasn't your favourite birthday present."

He frowns at her for a moment. "Oh. Ohhh. That was awesome, you know that, right? And I'm really hoping you might try it again some day. But I liked the dress because – I liked seeing you in peace time."

"What?" She is proud of herself for asking what he means, rather than persisting in ignorance.

"It's like I said earlier." He tries to articulate his thoughts, becoming visibly more uncomfortable
with each sentence that passes his lips. "We were always at war, on Earth. I liked seeing you having fun and wearing something frivolous. It made me think that maybe I could start thinking of that peaceful future and having a family with you."

She kisses him for that. She's not sure whether it's the relief at hearing that he did not mean to condemn that birthday surprise, or her joy at hearing how much this peaceful future with her means to him. Or maybe it's just a reward, a thank you to him for telling her something he clearly did not find easy to share.

Maybe it's just because she likes kissing him.

Whatever the reason, he's clearly not complaining, as he tangles his fingers in her hair and nibbles a little at her lower lip. And she's not exactly going to turn down that invitation. He used to be wearing a jacket, she seems to remember, but it's quite hard to make out with him properly with a jacket in the way. And his shirt, a nice neat button-down – she thinks that was tucked in once. But, well, it definitely isn't any more, because if it were she wouldn't be able to dig her fingernails into the smooth skin of his lower back, and that would be a shame.

He groans her name and she forces herself not to actually shove him up against the wall and demand he screw her. She's always found the whole groaning-her-name thing a bit of a turn-on, but they have a bar date to get to.

"We should stop." She says reluctantly, pulling away from his lips. "We don't want to be late."

"We have ages. And I have a better idea." Grinning, he takes her hand and starts leading her towards her bedroom.

This is an idea she could get behind, she decides easily, following him only too willingly. They probably do have a little time, she supposes, and sex is quite fun and – well – she's supposed to be practising having fun.

They make it across the threshold, and are standing at the foot of the bed, and she's pretty sure she knows what happens next. She's a feeling they are supposed to start making out again, and then strip, and then arrange themselves in an orientation where he can screw her effectively without any logistical challenges from her pregnancy. And then they are both supposed to orgasm, loudly, and then they will go to the bar.

She therefore reaches for the hem of her dress, and makes a start on pulling it up past her hips.

"No." He reaches out a hand towards her. "Would you – could you keep that on? I just thought I might – you know – we probably have time for me to go down on you quickly before we leave."

Is this a thing? Do real couples, who are together by choice, indulge in a spot of speedy oral before they go out for the evening?

"Is that what you want to do?" She asks, finding it a little unfathomable that her pleasure might be all he's expecting from a sexual encounter.

"Yeah. If – if you want me to, of course."

"Yeah. I just – won't that be a bit disappointing for you?"

He groans a little, presses a kiss to her hairline. "For goodness' sake, Clarke. Do I need to spell it out for you? What do you think I was thinking about while I was snowed in, in a damn cave, for ten days?"
"Huh?"

"I had a lot of time to – you know – to think about you. And how I'd like to make you happy if I managed to convince you to give me another chance. And about the noises that you make when I've got my head between your legs."

"Oh." She thinks she ought to be blushing, but she's too busy feeling rather awestruck that he's ever bothered fantasising about her like that. "I'd like that, if you want to."

He doesn't wait to be told twice. He eases her back onto the bed, and pulls her underwear aside, and suddenly his mouth is there, doing all sorts of frankly alarming things to her insides, making the moon shift rather quicker than normal beneath her. And she knows she's being noisy, is gasping aloud, is moaning his name as if it is some kind of prayer, but he did say, after all, that he liked to hear her. And this is even better than she remembers, somehow, and it's all she can do to dig her fingertips into his scalp and beg him to finish the job.

She suspects she's crushing his skull a little, but it doesn't seem like there's much to be done about that, just now.

She can feel it building, now, can feel him leading her ever closer to the edge, but this time, she is not afraid to fall. She can feel, too, the tickle of that increasingly familiar beard against the inside of her thigh, and she thinks that, actually, she can feel his own excitement increasing as she urges him on.

And then she is there, falling apart around his mouth, coming back together again as he clammers up the bed to kiss her softly.

"So, time to go to the bar?" He asks with a smirk as her breathing slows.

"Shh." She wraps an arm around him, cuddles him close. "Not yet. Thank you, that was good."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Even better than I remembered."

He rewards her with a kiss for that judgement and they lie in comfortable silence for a few moments. At length, though, she decides it probably is time to get going.

"You know your beard tickles a bit when you do that?" She informs him conversationally, as she reaches down to pull her underwear back into place.

He does not respond in the same lighthearted tone. "I've actually been thinking about shaving it off."

"What?" She is only surprised, she tells herself, not alarmed.

"I've been thinking about shaving it off." He shrugs, but she senses that the conversation is actually not so casual as all that. Maybe he is trying for a bit more honesty, too. "I know you prefer me without it and -"

"No. You don't know that." She reminds him, somehow a little annoyed. "You can't possibly know that, because I've never said it."

"OK, you haven't said it. But I was clean-shaven back on Earth when you loved me and I figured that you preferred it that way."
"Bellamy. You realise this is completely stupid?" There is, she thinks, no other word for it. "We've got centuries of history and we're having a baby together. Your choice of facial hair is not going to make any difference to how much I want to be with you. Keep it or shave it, I'll still want you."

He looks completely taken aback at that. "You mean that?"

"I mean it." At least, she supposes, she now knows that she is not the only one feeling a little insecure in this relationship. "Come on, grab your jacket. We're going to go and have fun."

They set out of the door hand in hand, and have a mild dispute over who will lock the door behind them. Bellamy insists that it is her house, and she should have the honour, but her key is zipped into her pocket and she's pregnant and, really, the least he could do is volunteer to be the one who faffs with the key.

He concedes, of course, and they set out across the village.

"Are you looking forward to seeing everyone?" She asks. The answer seems obvious, but she's still remembering how to make conversation after a rather isolated couple of months.

"Yeah." She hears him take a deep breath, and is pleased to note that she has some idea what that clue means.

He's not sure she'll like what's coming next.

"I'm really looking forward to catching up with Echo. I'm not saying that to upset you, but because I'm trying to be honest. I missed her so much. Not in the same way I missed you, of course." He squeezes her hand to emphasise his point. "But she's had my back for years, so it was hard being out there without her."

Clarke forces herself to breathe carefully, to respond rationally to his words, not her own illogical insecurities. To show him how grateful she is that, yes, he is trying for some honesty, too.

"I get that. She's very good at what she does, I can see why you'd miss her when a mission got tough. And she's about the only person who would put up with me this last week, so I can't complain."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. She's a good woman."

"But she's not you." He leans across to press his lips to her cheek. "I'm sorry I ever blamed you for trying to break us up. I was a bit confused."

"Now that's an understatement." She reprimands him gently.

They have arrived at the bar, now, and it seems that the days of him sending her to sit down are long gone. That would, apparently, put a little more space between them than either of them is prepared to accept, just now. They therefore get their drinks and head for that usual table. And then, of course, everyone leaps to their feet to hug Bellamy, and Clarke finds herself relinquishing his hand to grab his drink before Murphy knocks it flying, and there is really quite a lot of joy and laughter.

There is also, she notes, a long hug between Bellamy and Echo. But she can deal with that, now, because they are working on honesty, and she has no reason to feel insecure.
Hugs duly exchanged, they find themselves confronting the question of seating arrangements. And there is a problem, here, because there are only two seats left at the table. One of them, a rickety stool next to Murphy, the other, half a bench next to Raven on the opposite side of the group.

Well, then. The answer to this one is simple.

"Raven." Clarke addresses her briskly. "Please can you move?"

"Why?"

"Because we want to sit together." The voice is Bellamy's, but the words are exactly those she would have chosen. If they've made it as far as completing each other's thoughts, she decides, things must be going OK.

And then, really, as the evening lengthens, things seem to be going more than OK. She's distinctly out of practice at the art of making conversation, sure, but somehow that doesn't seem to matter. Her friends fill in the silences for her, and Bellamy's hand in hers keeps her grounded, and she is, in fact, a good two-thirds of the way to successfully achieving fun, she decides, by the time Echo turns to address her with what passes for a smile, on that woman's face.

"Congratulations." Echo's never been one to waste words, of course, but this seems concise even by her standards.

"Thank you." She pauses a little, unsure what the protocol is in situations where one is being congratulated but it is less than clear why. "You mean about the baby, I guess?"

She is met with a frown that, although she's still getting to know Echo, she is pretty sure suggests that her conversational companion thinks she is being an idiot. "I meant about Bellamy."

"Oh."

She's not ready for this. She could not be less ready for this, for dealing with congratulations from Echo, of all people, in the wake of two months living almost entirely in her own head. Sure, she likes to think they're friends now, but this is on a whole new level and she is, completely and utterly, not ready for this.

To her surprise, Echo covers the awkward moment for her, gives a not-unkind laugh.

"I know, I know. It's not where I thought we'd end up, either, all those months ago when he came home and told me about Madi. But I can see, now, why he was hurting so much without you, all those years on the Ring."

"Thank you. I know this can't be easy for you." After all, she knows what it's like, to watch Bellamy Blake hold someone else close. She has been on the other side of this situation, too.

"I've faced worse." She snorts a little. "You forget what I was before Praimfaiya."

There is silence, and Clarke supposes it is her turn to fill it, but she has no idea what to say.

Again, Echo saves her. Saving people is apparently her greatest talent. "You know, it's been easier than I thought it would be. It's doing me good, to be my own person instead."

Now that, Clarke thinks, she can't make sense of. The best thing, she has always felt, about being with Bellamy, is that she gets to be her own person at the same time, as well.
"What are you two conspiring about?" Bellamy's cheerful question interrupts.

"You." There doesn't seem any sense in denying it.

Murphy catches that, joins in with a laugh. "You want to watch that, Bellamy. The girlfriend and the ex comparing notes."

"I don't mind." He says, and she finds herself thinking that this rather relaxed Bellamy who has come home to her doesn't seem to mind much at all.

"He trusts us." Clarke states, tone light, heart proud.

He rewards her for that with a brief kiss on the lips. "You took the words right out of my mouth."

Yes. There seems to be a lot of that going on between the two of them, lately.

……

Clarke is running late when she arrives at the Medical Centre the following morning. In her defence, it is difficult to make promptness a priority when she is still getting used to waking up next to Bellamy. And having morning sex with Bellamy. And brushing her teeth with Bellamy. And – well – there's a lot of Bellamy in her life at the moment, and that's a good – but time-consuming – thing.

It's not a magic wand, of course. She still has her moments of surprise tearfulness, that weeping that might be about a little more than just her hormones. But she doesn't have them as much as she did when she thought Bellamy was dead, and that's more progress than she could ever have wished for, just two short days ago.

She takes a seat at her desk, but her heart's not really in it. She's wondering how Bellamy's morning meeting with Kane is going, for one thing. He's still technically on leave in the wake of that ill-fated mission, but when she decided she really ought to show up for a morning's work in Medical, at least, he decided he might as well show his face in Kane's office and share a bit more detail about their snowy quest for Titans. But she decides not to wonder about that for too long, because she'll see him again this afternoon, and she reminds herself as rationally as possible that there's only so much trouble he can get into during the course of one morning separated from her.

She wonders, then, instead about whether it might be time to ask her mother a rather important question.

"Mum?"

"Yes?" She doesn't bother looking up from her list of tasks for the day.

"Just to check – am I far enough along to do the DNA test, now? To find out whether this baby is Madi?"

"Yes." Now she has Abby's full attention. "I didn't suggest it before because – well, because of the circumstances. But yes, would you like to find out now?"

"No." She knows, now, what the correct answer to that question is. "Can I bring Bellamy when I come in tomorrow morning? He'd want to be here."

"I'm pleased to hear you two have fixed things." She jumps in shock at that.
"You realised they were broken?"

"Of course I did." Her mother snaps, uncharacteristically short. "Why do you think I kept asking if you needed to talk?"

She did? Clarke doesn't remember that. There's a lot, actually, about the last couple of months that seems to have escaped her.

"I'm sorry. I guess I didn't want to worry you." She pauses to gather her honesty. "I wasn't sure how you'd cope with it."

"Clarke." Her mother gives up on pretending to read, gets up and walks over to her. "I've just survived ten days watching my granddaughter's father go missing-presumed-dead and my daughter fall apart over it. I don't think I'm about to have a relapse if you tell me some bad news."

She's not sure who starts it, but somehow the two of them seem to be hugging, now. And that's just as well, really, because it means that her mother cannot see the shame and confusion on her face at the thought of just how thoroughly she has failed to interact with everyone she cares about, recently.

When her mother starts speaking again, it catches her by surprise.

"To answer your original question – yes, we could do the test tomorrow. Or you could go remind Bellamy that he's technically on leave, and fetch him here now."

Well. That's a suggestion she only needs to hear once.

She finds it surprisingly easy to stick to her resolution, as she walks as briskly as her slight baby-bump will permit in the direction of Kane's office. She remembers taking that pregnancy test all those months ago, and wondering how a braver woman might go about telling Bellamy the news. Well, she knows the answer, now. A braver woman would have told him she was taking the test in the first place.

She arrives at the office, knocks on the door. Hears two familiar voices raised in welcome and enters with what she hopes is a winning smile.

Well, it certainly can't be a losing smile, she thinks, based on the way Bellamy jumps to his feet and kisses her in greeting.

"Hey, Clarke." If she has ever seen Kane grin this widely before, it certainly hasn't happened in quite some time.

"Hello. Both of you. Would it be OK if I borrowed Bellamy for a moment?"

"Of course. He's on leave, but he doesn't seem very good at remembering it."

She has to laugh at that. "I'm sure he'll be back soon."

With that, she takes his hand and drags him out of the door. It occurs to her, at this point, that he hasn't actually spoken yet, but when she looks across at the dazed smile he's wearing that all makes quite a lot of sense.

"You OK?" She asks affectionately.

"Yeah. What did you want to borrow me for?"
"I thought you'd want to be with me for the DNA test. To check whether this little one is Madi." She finds that she is rather shocked at herself, there. Shocked at how easily affectionate she finds herself feeling towards the baby.

"Thank you." He squeezes her hand. "You were right. I definitely want to be there."

They arrive back at Medical, and prepare for the test. Clarke always expected to be a bit nervous about this, nervous at the prospect of finding out whether or not she has actually succeeded at securing her daughter's future, nervous at the prospect of her mother sticking a needle into her stomach, but she finds herself feeling strangely at peace.

Whatever the outcome, this is one test they will face together.

Bellamy whispers to her, voice soft, as her mother goes away to analyse the result. "You doing alright?"

And all at once she is there, eighteen years old again, on that lonely road to TonDC that was suddenly so much less lonely with him by her side. And she is remembering that the answer to that question will not always be a yes but that, with Bellamy at her shoulder, she will always find the strength to carry on.

"I think so. You?"

"Yeah. She'll be OK, Clarke. Whatever happens, we'll make sure of that."

Abby is not gone long. She emerges only minutes later, a broad smile on her lips, but all the same, Clarke needs to hear the words before she can begin rejoicing.

"The baby's her. She's Madi."

Finally, it seems, fate is running in her favour.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter twenty two

It takes three days for Clarke to realise that Bellamy's return cannot fix everything. It has fixed some things, certainly, and it has empowered her to fix a few more for herself. But there is, it seems, nothing that his miraculous survival can do about a man's guts spilling out all over the operating table.

She is sitting at lunch, sharing a rather civilised meal with Bellamy and Octavia, when she gets the message. A young woman she loosely recognises as being on good terms with Gaia comes sprinting into the mess hall, and sees her, and runs over.

“Clarke. Thank goodness. It's Layla and Ivon. They ran into a Titan, and Jackson and Niylah have got Layla but Ivon needs a doctor too and I can't find your mum -”

“I'm coming.” She stands, lunch abandoned, tries to look calm for this worried stranger's sake. Tries not to betray her concern at the idea of working alone to treat what is, presumably, major trauma.

“Thank you.”

“Bellamy, get Madi from school this afternoon?”

“Sure.” He gives her a quick parting kiss. “You've got this.”

“Yeah.” She turns, is on the point of running out of there as best as she can, between the pregnancy and the snow which still blankets the village, when she hears Octavia's voice.

“Clarke? Is there anything I can do to help?”

It comes to her, all in a flash. That Octavia made herself useful around their improvised dropship sick bay, centuries ago. That there are worse people to have on hand in a medical emergency than the level-headed and rather pressure-proof daughter of a seamstress.
“Come with me. And keep calm.”

She is pleased with that impulse decision, fifteen minutes later, as she finds herself elbows-deep in a near-stranger's blood. It's one of the more complicated cases she's had to deal with, and she misses her mother more than she would have thought possible, but she knows what she's doing, and Octavia is there with calm common sense by the bucket load.

They manage, between them. A blood transfusion is given, and Jacksonia is applied, and a great deal of stitching is done. And somehow, miraculously, this Wonkru warrior with the build of an ox does not die on them.

Abby runs in, minutes or hours or days later, full of apologies, and full of praise for the work they have done.

“I'm so sorry. I must start taking a comms unit with me when I take the day off. This could have ended so badly -”

“It didn't, though, Mum.”

“Thanks to you both. Goodness, Octavia, I didn't know we had another doctor in the family.”

She looks shy at that praise, Clarke thinks. It has been a while since anyone has suggested that the former tyrant has an aptitude for anything other than causing misery.

“Thanks, Abby, but you know it was all Clarke.”

“Not true. You made the poultice, and helped with the stitches.” Clarke looks up and meets her mother's eyes. Tries, silently, to communicate that there is something she thinks might usefully be said, but that will sound a lot better to Octavia coming from the Chief of Medical than her brother's lover.

“I know you must be busy, with your teaching. But if ever you wanted to stop by and learn more about what we do here, you'd be very welcome.”
Octavia looks outright stunned at that, as a smile breaks out across her face. “Thank you. I might think about that.”

They get on with useful things, then. With cleaning the operating room, and with cleaning themselves, and at last they are done for the day and both patients are resting peacefully under Abby’s care. The two younger women therefore excuse themselves, and Clarke heads to her desk in the office. She ought to stay and write up her notes about Ivon, she thinks, before she goes home.

On arrival at her desk, she is met by something of a surprise. There are two half-finished bowls of stew there, and a brief, dog-eared note.

I'm so proud of you both. Finish your lunch and I'll see you later.

- Bellamy

……..

It is a great source of joy to Clarke, to spend time as a family of three again, after shutting herself away from Madi and Bellamy so often in recent months. Her daughter seems to have forgiven her rather easily for her various failings, and is eager to get back on with enjoying their time together.

It is unfortunate, then, that they have to cancel their next planned picnic.

Nothing is amiss, as Clarke wishes Bellamy good morning with a lazy kiss, and rolls out of bed, and pulls some clothing on. Nothing is amiss, either, as she ventures into the corridor, and checks their packs for the day ahead, and sets about filling their canteens with water.

But then she hears muffled noises coming from her daughter's bedroom, and realises that something is very much amiss.

“Madi?” She knocks, eases the door open. “What's wrong?”

Her daughter is crying, in the rather loud and messy way that much smaller children than Madi sometimes do, and Clarke cannot fathom it. Her little girl has never been a weeper, not even with the recent sources of anxiety she has had to face, and she certainly cannot see any reason for sobbing in such a frankly juvenile fashion at the prospect of a cheerful day out with her parents.
By way of response, Madi only shakes her head and cries all the harder.

Clarke perches on the edge of her bed, pulls the girl into her arms. Starts to make noises that she hopes are soothing, even while her heart is galloping at a mile a minute.

“Madi, honey. Tell me what's wrong and your Dad and I will help you fix it.”

“You can't fix this.” She wails, utterly inconsolable. “You can't.”

“What do you mean, baby? What's wrong?”

“I have a headache.” At that, everything makes sense, in the most sickening of ways. “I have the kind of headache I get before I have a dizzy spell. And I can't go out on a hike, because when I faint then you and Dad will get upset and scared and have to carry me home.”

“Madi, hush, it's OK.” She squeezes her tighter. “We were going to head south, do you think you might be able to manage until we're further away from the anomaly?”

“I don't think so, Mum. I'm really sorry. I'm – I'm a bit worried about getting out of bed, to be honest.”

“OK, honey. Don't apologise. We want to spend the day with you, the hike isn't the important part. You stay in bed and rest, and we'll bring the family day to you.”

“Really?”

“Really. There are loads of things we can do right here. We can read, or draw, or play chess. Or you can just ask your dad cheeky questions about his youth.”

Madi giggles a little at that, and the sound breaks through her tears.
“You see? It'll be fun. And we can go on a hike another day, when you're better.”

There is a heartbreaking pause, then Madi voices what is, it seems, her deepest fear. “What if I never get better?”

“I don't think it's a coincidence that you started getting sick when I got pregnant, honey. I'm sure you'll be just fine in five months' time.”

“You are?”

“Absolutely positive. And I'm a doctor, so I must be right.” She gives her daughter one last squeeze about the shoulders, then pulls away. “Change out of your hiking stuff, baby, and put your favourite pyjamas on. I'll send your dad out to get us some breakfast while I get started on our indoor adventure. What do you want to do first?”

“Can we draw?”

“Of course we can draw. I'll be right back.”

Bellamy's first reaction is concern, of course, but because he is her rock he does not allow anxiety to immobilise him for long. He dresses quickly, and takes himself out to the village to grab some food from the mess hall, muttering something about seeing whether he can find anything else to cheer Madi up as he goes. Clarke gathers some drawing supplies, and stares contemplatively at the living room table for a moment.

Yes, she's had worse ideas.

Ten minutes later, the table and two chairs are at the side of Madi's bed. It's a bit of a squeeze in her room, now, but at least it means they can all sit around the table in comfort while they share their breakfast and their drawing and whatever else the day has in store for them. All things considered, Clarke is quite happy with her rearrangement of the furniture.

Bellamy seems less happy, when he returns twenty minutes later, with a pack that appears to contain more than just three portions of breakfast.
“You moved a table and two chairs from the living room to here?” Not just not happy, then. Exasperated, perhaps. Maybe with a hint of something approaching panic. “You're four months pregnant, Clarke. Could it not wait until I was home?”

Home? Home? He doesn't actually live here, last time she checked. Just spends every spare moment here. And sleeps here. And is beginning to keep a small selection of clothes here.

“I'm fine.” She attempts to sound conciliatory. “No harm done. And you can move them back, later, if you like.”

“You're a bit overprotective, aren't you, Dad?” Madi pipes up, looking genuinely cheerful for the first time all day.

“Maybe a little.” He concedes, depositing his pack on the table. “Do you want to see your get well soon presents?”

“You got me something?” Their daughter sounds over the moon at the thought.

“I got you somethings.” He clarifies. “More than one. Here's some medicine from grandma Abby, to take the edge off your headache. That's not the most exciting thing, but I thought it might be a good place to start.”

Madi takes the pill, swallows it down with a gulp of water. Clarke is relieved to note that it is not the same medication her mother found so addictive.

“I grabbed some more books. Look, this one's about Odysseus, I know you've always liked him best. And I thought today might be a day for having apple bars for breakfast, instead of porridge.”

“They're my favourite!” Madi exclaims with some excitement.

Clarke tries very hard not to fall in love with Bellamy on the spot for all this evidence of his thoughtfulness. When she does fall in love with him, she wants it to be a solid and sensible thing. She realises that's not a very romantic way to think, but after all that has happened between them she wants it to be a certain and well-founded kind of love, not just a passing infatuation.
To be fair, she's beginning to suspect that she's past the passing infatuation stage, already.

Meanwhile, Bellamy has saved the best get well soon present for last, as he produces half a dozen sticks of charcoal and offers them to his no-longer-distraught daughter.

“Thanks, Dad. This is going to be the best indoor adventure ever.”

“You're welcome, kid. You know we'd do anything for you.” He tells Madi, and reaches out to squeeze Clarke's hand under the table.

Yes, that's done it, it seems. That passing infatuation has now, well and truly, passed.

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They don't only talk after sex, now. They talk before sex, in the day time, as well as while they lie together and drift into sleep at night. And, to be honest, Bellamy's also a bit prone to talking during sex, in as much as frequent repetition of the single syllable of Clarke can really be classified as talking.

He's groaning her name right now, actually, as he thrusts into her, and she braces herself on all fours on the bed. It's not necessarily doing much for her, this position, not necessarily hitting the spot, but it's something that is still vaguely feasible while she's pregnant and he's evidently enjoying himself, so that's good enough for her. It's good enough for her in quite a substantial way, really, as she finds herself growing more aroused by his lust than by any physical sensation she's actually experiencing. And she's sure he'll finish the job later, when he's done, if need be.

He groans her name again, and this time he adds a whole frantic sentence about how good she feels around his cock.

“I like it when you say my name.” She tells him.

Then she realises what she has done.

And then she freaks out a little.
It's just that she's never really tried to express any opinions about their sex life before now, or at least nothing beyond saying she's enjoyed herself after the act. She's certainly never attempted to exert any influence over what they might actually do, never tried to shape his behaviour towards her pleasure. And she can't quite decide whether she's more proud of her bravery or horrified at the thought of how he might react. What if he preferred her easily pleased and compliant? What if he objects to her attempts to influence his behaviour in the bedroom?

What if he's not into the same things she is?

He doesn't say anything in return, just keeps on thrusting and groaning. He might, perhaps, be calling her name a little more often, she supposes, but she tells herself firmly that this is just wishful thinking. By the time he spills inside of her, she has herself almost completely convinced that he didn't hear her, or doesn't care, or is at least not inclined to mention it.

He wastes no time in rolling her onto her back, and taking his mouth down to the crook of her legs, and she is left writhing before him for only a few moments before she feels herself fall over that most pleasant of precipices.

Then he takes her in his arms, and kisses her for a bit, and then he takes her by surprise.

“'It's a good thing I like saying your name, then.’” He whispers. “I was worried that maybe it came across as a bit weird, but after all these years – I like celebrating the fact that you're you.”

“I like hearing you enjoy yourself.” She admits, finding it surprisingly easy to do so while her head is buried in his chest and she cannot be expected to meet his eyes. “It, you know, it gets me going to hear that you're so into it.”

“I'll remember that.” He tells her, then continues a little more hesitantly. “I'd like to hear more about what you're into, if ever you feel like you could tell me.”

She almost laughs at that. The idea that she, who has had scarcely a handful of sexual partners, is going to be full of bold requests for this man who once screwed his way half way around that dropship camp seems more than a little ridiculous. But it is good, she decides, and rather reassuring, to know that he wants to hear any thoughts she might ever have on the subject.

“I'll let you know if anything comes to mind.”
“Please do.” He nuzzles into her hair a little, and she thinks she hears a sigh. “I’m so happy we're doing this, Clarke. You know, actually being together, or whatever we're calling it.”

“You can call it whatever the hell you want, as long as you're still here in the morning.”

He is, of course. Because they're together, now.

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Breakfast with Octavia seems to have become a bit of a habit, since that first morning that Bellamy returned. Clarke supposes that this isn't so surprising – she is family, and apparently their morning routines just line up quite well – but all the same it's not what she'd have predicted, a few short months ago, that this formerly-more-than-estranged brother and sister would be relaxing into one another's company far enough to laugh over porridge almost every day.

And laughing over porridge is normally a pretty fair description of how things play out. Madi tends to take centre stage, keeping the conversation lively, and the Blake siblings do their best to respond in kind. And Clarke is there, of course, to help them out if ever they find themselves flagging.

This morning, then, is unusual. Because this morning, it seems to have been decided that they shall actually talk about a topic of some importance.

It all starts with Clarke asking Madi whether she's sure she's feeling OK, after her health scare of yesterday.

“Don't fuss, Mum. I'm fine. I'll tell you if I'm not.”

“What's happened?” Octavia looks concerned. “Did you have another dizzy spell?”

“Yes.” Madi admits sadly.

“At home, this time.” Bellamy shares. “So we were a bit worried, weren't we, kid? We had to have
an indoor adventure.”

“It was the best indoor adventure.”

“I’m glad you’re feeling better, anyway.” Octavia sounds genuinely concerned.

“Thanks, Auntie O.”

Well, now. That's a new development.

“You're welcome, Madi.” Clarke is surprised that Octavia can actually speak through the smile splitting her face. It is, she thinks, the happiest she has seen her since before Lincoln's death.

“Do you – do you want to come over tonight, O?” Clarke is too proud of Bellamy for reaching out to his sister to bother being affronted that he has started inviting people to a home that is still, technically, hers. “We were planning a family movie night and you'd be very welcome.”

“Thank you.” She seems at least a little moved. “I'd really like that, but I have plans with Niylah. Maybe another time?”

“Yeah, sure. Whenever.” Bellamy faffs self-consciously with his empty porridge bowl.

“You're always welcome.” Clarke chimes in, and tries to be subtle about squeezing Bellamy's thigh reassuringly under the table.

“That's kind of you.” Octavia says it as if she is not used to being on the receiving end of kindness, not even from her own family.

Silence falls, as the four of them stare down at their finished breakfasts and wonder what to do next. Clarke thinks that this is probably her cue, that she is perhaps supposed to say something cheery and play the mediator. But then Octavia is standing up, and preparing to leave, and apparently their family counselling session is done for the day.
No, not done. Not quite done. Octavia has, it seems, a few parting words to say yet.

“Thanks, big brother. For that note the other day.” She pauses, bites her lip for a moment. “It meant a lot to me, to know that you're proud of me.”

Before Bellamy has had chance to do more than gasp in shock, Octavia is gone.

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The fog of sadness and confusion clears from Clarke's mind a little further in the days that follow, and she cannot help but feel that this might have something to do with her newfound habit of sharing her thoughts, and of practising honesty. And yes, by and large, this has meant sharing her thoughts with Bellamy, but she has a hunch that being honest with the rest of her friends might be a thing worth practising, too.

Of course, being honest with Raven has ever been challenging. Between Clarke's tendency towards bearing things herself and Raven's tendency towards pretending to be unbearable, they have never been the most open of friends. Even when they were close, back on the ground so many years ago, Clarke cannot remember ever saying anything more transparently affectionate to her than I'd pick you first.

Well, then. Perhaps today is a day for putting that right.

It is with some trepidation that she knocks at the door of the workshop. If anyone asks her what she is doing here, the only honest answer will be trying to make friends. And as she's practising honesty these days, it seems likely that she's at risk of making herself a little pathetic, here. But it will be worth it, she tells herself firmly, if she can consolidate her friendship with this woman who was so determined to help keep her sane, while things were so rough with Bellamy.

“Come in?” Sure enough, it is Raven who greets her.

“Hello.” She peeks around the door. “Are you busy?”

“Of course I'm busy.” Raven responds, but cheerfully so. “I'm always busy.”
“Yes. Of course. What are you up to?”

“Waterproofing the remaining comms units with a bit of sealant. We thought that might be a good idea, just in case Miller strikes again. I think I might tie string round them, too. These guards are all idiots.”

“I resent that.” She says lightly, finding it easier to relax into their usual patter than she has of late. “Bellamy isn't an idiot.”

“I don't know. I think he's been pretty idiotic recently. I think he was probably doing something wrong if he didn't actually manage to start a steady relationship with a woman he's loved for literally centuries until she thought he'd died.” He's loved? As in, he has loved? As in, Raven thinks he still does?

No, that's not why she came here.

“That wasn't his fault.” She defends him with spirit. “I wasn't exactly communicating with him very well. I wasn't communicating with anyone very well, and I'm sorry.”

Raven waves a careless hand. “I'm over it. You've got a lot on your plate. You've both got a lot on your plates, I guess. And – you know – I'm here if you need someone, and all that.”

“Thank you. I know that, I was just struggling to see it a bit while I was upset. Thanks for dragging me out to the bar that time.”

“Really? You had a miserable time.”

“Well, yeah. But it was good to know that you wanted to have me there.”

Raven frowns a little, focuses very carefully on fiddling with the comms unit in front of her. “I spent six years thinking you were dead, Clarke. Of course I want you around, now.”

Clarke swallows the tears that are threatening to clog her throat, curses once more these unsolicited emotions.
“Thanks, Raven. I'm pleased you're around, you know? Bellamy wasn't the only person I missed, all those years.”

“You missed him more, though.” Her friend reminds her with a grin.

“Yeah. Don't take that personally, but – yeah.”

Raven grins at that. “I should hope so.”

Clarke gathers her wits a moment, summons the courage to have a go at reciprocating a bit in this friendship. “How's the leg, these days?”

At that, Raven's usually impassive expression gives way to a mixture of surprise and warmth. “Not bad at all, thanks. I got a lot stronger in space, training with Echo and all.”

“That's good.”

“Yeah.”

They stand there for a moment, a careful pace between them, and Clarke pretends a sudden intense fascination with the comms unit on the workbench. She has absolutely no idea what she's looking at, to be clear, but she's still remembering how to converse and – well – the whole leg thing is all she knows about Raven's struggles, this side of Praimfaiya. And yes, she's very much aware that this makes her a terrible friend, and yes, she does intend to do better at -

“Clarke?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for asking.”
“Any time.” She tries to keep her sigh of relief as subtle as possible. “That's what friends are for.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
A fortnight has now passed since Bellamy's miraculous return, and he has not slept in his own bed once. OK, that's not quite true – Clarke seems to remember that he might have taken a nap at his place, one afternoon, when he was still exhausted from that mission and she was helping her mother out in Medical – but her point stands. He hasn't spent the night in his own bed once.

But somehow, that is not the thing that Clarke treasures the most.

It is great that he spends the night, of course. There's something very comforting about waking up from a nightmare to find his reassuring warmth by her side, and obviously it opens up many more opportunities for a distinctly active sex life. And there's something inherently quite romantic about it, she can't help but feel, something that draws a stark contrast with the dutiful screwing and fleeing that marked the beginning of this relationship.

But, all things considered, the staying the night is only one facet of her favourite thing about this new phase of their relationship, and that is the sheer domesticity of it. They have been sharing duties regarding Madi for some months now, of course, and that continues to be a part of it. And he's increasingly keen to volunteer for all sorts of errands, from fetching snacks to fixing that idiosyncratic shower – although, to be fair, he did make a mess of that, and it ended up being Raven who saved them from a flooded bathroom.

And then there's something else she can't quite put her finger on, some seamless merging of routines and of personal space, those moments when it appears that he guesses what time she will appear at the door before she even knows it for herself. The fact that an increasing quantity of his possessions seem to have made themselves at home in her bedroom, from spare clothes to spare books.

She understands it, all at once, one afternoon, as she is doing a batch of laundry in the sink and wondering if she might have found it more efficient to carry it over to the single tired washing machine that lives in the workshop. One moment she is up to her elbows in soap suds, and questioning how it is that she is still forced to clean her undergarments in this primitive way, and the next she is faced with a pair of men's boxers and a startling realisation.

Bellamy has moved in. He might not have noticed it yet, but it has, without doubt, come to pass.
She will say nothing about it, she resolves. They have only been together by choice for two weeks, and she suspects that he will need a little more time to adjust to the idea before he goes about confronting the situation in actual words.

In the meantime, though, she finds her confidence rather bolstered. She finishes her thankless chore, hangs the selection of her family's clothing up to dry, and sets off for her shift in Medical.

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It is, unfortunately, not a quiet day. Two broken bones and one cardiac emergency later, she sags at her desk and realises that she has, most definitely, missed out on a quiet evening with her family. It is very much night time, now, and she can only be grateful that Bellamy was to pick Madi up from Gaia's lesson this evening and put her to bed at a sensible hour. She suspects that he stretches the definition of sensible when she's not there, suspects that he allows their little girl to stay up listening to stories rather later than is strictly wise, but she is disinclined to interfere in their attempts to make up for the twelve years they missed of each other's lives.

She finishes writing up her notes and heads for home. The house is silent as she unlocks the door, which is hardly surprising. It is well past the time when a twelve year old child and a guard with a dawn patrol ought to be fast asleep. Not quite ready to fall into bed just yet, in need of a glass of water and a little sketching time, perhaps, to clear her mind, she makes for the living room.

She can't make sense of it, at first. She cannot for the life of her understand why there is a chipped mess hall bowl, slightly too full of beans – at least, they appear to be beans – and evidently stone cold, sitting in the middle of the living room table.

Then she remembers that Bellamy seems to have accidentally moved in, and wonders whether these two developments might be related.

Sure enough, when she approaches the mysterious meal a little closer, there is a scrap of paper by its side.

'I figure cold beans are better than going hungry?  
- B xxx'

She's not that convinced by his logic, actually. This bowl looks unappetising at best. But she knows that she ought to eat for the sake of the baby and, besides which, she doesn't want him to
think she is rejecting his really rather sweet gesture. She chews experimentally on a stodgy spoonful, and finds that it is not altogether as unpleasant as it looks.

This is, apparently, what domestic bliss tastes like.

Hungrier than she realised after that long shift in Medical, she polishes off her delayed supper briskly, drinks her water, and decides against sketching. She's really rather keen to go cuddle close to Bellamy, and she thinks that, probably, kissing his shoulders will clear her head as well as any contemplative drawing ever could.

She therefore heads for the bathroom, and thence to the bedroom, and eases the door open as quietly as possible. She treads lightly as she walks towards her side of the bed. Unlaces her boots, pulls off her clothes and drops them in an exhausted heap at her aching feet. And then she slips into the bed. It's a challenging situation, this. She wants Bellamy in her arms, but she's not quite sure how to go about achieving that without waking him up, and that doesn't seem fair when he's got to work so early in the morning.

“Clarke?” His voice, smudged about the edges with sleep, solves the problem for her.

“Hey.” She abandons any hope of subtlety and wraps an arm about him. “Go back to sleep.”

He wiggles a little, settles more deeply against her. “Did you get your supper?”

“Yeah. Thanks.” She punctuates her words by pressing her lips against his skin. “You seem to be making a habit of leaving food out for me.”

“I'm never sure what else to do. I've got no idea what it's like, dealing with a medical emergency, and no idea how to support you. Did it go OK, today?”

“She died.” Clarke states dispassionately. A lot of people have died, and she was far from close to this Wonkru warrior, but all the same, losing a patient is never pleasant.

“I'm sorry to hear that.” He finds her hand, entangles his fingers with her own.
“Don't be. It happens. And an aneurysm in peace time is probably not the worst way to go.”

He doesn't answer that, clearly not entirely comfortable with the topic at hand, and she finds herself feeling grateful all over again to have this man by her side, for the way that he is prepared to push the edges of his comfort zone for her sake.

“Thank you. For the beans and for the chat.”

“Any time.” He presses a kiss to her palm. “Get some sleep, Clarke. We've already packed Madi's stuff for school tomorrow, so you can afford to sleep in a bit.”

“Thanks. I don't know what I'd do without you.”

He gives a hollow chuckle. “I think you managed just fine, as far as I remember.”

“You know what I mean.” She chastises him gently around a yawn.

“Of course I do. Now go to sleep.”

She's not going to argue with that. After all, she wouldn't want to interfere with this domestic bliss they've been working on.

……

One of Clarke's projects in recent weeks has, of course, been the cataloguing of the various plants that Bellamy brought back from his mission. She has dried them, and packaged them, and filed them, and made a start on performing chemical analyses on some of them, and is feeling at least a little smug about this positive impact she is making on the community. Or, rather, the positive impact she will make, just as soon as she learns anything of actual use. She might not be leading her people, as such, these days, but if she can be of help in the cause of healing her people – well, then. That has to be better than nothing.

That's what she tells Kane, this morning, as he laments at great length the state of everything from their supply of fresh meat to the haphazard curriculum on offer at the school.
“But we're doing well on the medical side of things, Marcus, when you -”

“Clarke. Of course we're doing well on the medical side of things. Just look at who works there.” He sounds exasperated, she thinks, and not much like the calm, controlled, confidence-inspiring Kane who is to be seen in public. “On the security front, though -”

She is mercifully saved from having to interrupt him by a knock at the door. And that's for the best, really, because a school curriculum is all very well, but she's still not inclined to get involved with conversations that feature guns and the like.

“Come in.” He calls, and attempts to rearrange his face into something like its normal authoritative expression.

He gives up on that one, though, when the door opens to reveal Miller and Bellamy. It seems that they, too, are privy to the fact that the de facto leader of Sanctum is a little frazzled, just now.

“Clarke?” Bellamy steps into the path she is already taking towards the door. If they are here to report, she has no intention of hanging around. “Stay for a minute? We won't be long and then we can get lunch together?”

She ought to stick to her policy, she supposes, but his imploring face does look rather genuine and, really, if they're only going to be a minute, she can't see that it could hurt. And if she gets to eat lunch with Bellamy, well then, that's not an offer she's going to turn down. She gives a slight nod, and does not walk any further. She adopts what she hopes is a neutral expression, and sets about pretending not to listen.

“How was it out there?” Kane asks.

“All quiet in sector six.” Bellamy states calmly. “We shot a couple of those little boar things and dropped them at the kitchens on the way here.”

“Thanks. If only all my guards were as good as you two.”

“About that, Kane. Sir.” Miller shifts his weight awkwardly, as if referring to his old mentor as sir
isn't enough of a giveaway to the other occupants of the room that he's feeling uncomfortable. “We had a bit of an incident with that cadet you asked us to take out. Corvus, his name is. He – erm – when we first heard the boars, he panicked. Let off a couple of rogue shots.”

“He did what?” Kane makes no attempt to conceal either his horror or his fury.

“One of the bullets got Tiya on the arm – just a graze, she's fine – but yeah.” Miller trails off uncertainly.

“So one of the cadets is so incompetent that he shot one of his comrades because of a little panic over ten kilo herbivores?” Kane clarifies, voice rather less than measured.

“Yes.” Bellamy acknowledges quietly. “Sorry. We had a chat with him on the way home, tried to teach him a bit more about how to be at home in the forest.”

“Yeah.” Miller chimes in. “He's a sweet guy, Kane. Just not very confident out there.”

“Or very competent, it seems.” Kane offers, voice sour. “Go on, get your lunch. I'd better hope I find some magic solution to this cadet problem, hadn't I?”

They do not hesitate to do his bidding, having no great interest in sticking around to watch him rant. The three of them leave the building together, and then Miller excuses himself to go meet up with Jackson, and so it is that Clarke finds herself walking at Bellamy's shoulder as the pair of them go to get some lunch and find a table.

She takes a seat, and is on the point of asking where he thinks they should take Madi on their next day out when he opens with a rather different topic, instead.

“Why do you always leave?”

“What?”

“Why are you always so desperate to get out of Kane's office whenever a patrol team reports in?”
“Because I don't do security.”

“You know that's stupid, Clarke. I know you're still working on moving on from everything that happened on Earth, but you're great at all that strategy stuff. You should be doing what – what you're meant to do.”

“Says you.” She spits back, bristling with annoyance, and just a little bit of hurt.

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“I get that you don't want to go out on such long or risky missions now you've got a family, but you're made for more than this, Bellamy. That one morning patrol with a nervous cadet is the most exciting thing you've faced all week, and it shows.”

“There's not a lot of career opportunities for a stay-at-home dad guard.” He bites out, stirring his soup with unnecessary vigour.

“Why did you ever join the guard, anyway? You're obviously meant for more than following orders. I always thought you were too bright to waste your life on doing what other people told you to.”

“There weren't a lot of options for even bright boys from Factory Station.” He reminds her. “And anyway, I thought it might help me protect O.”

She can hear the grief in his voice, and is sorry that they've somehow ended up on a topic that does neither of them any good. She is sorry, really, that they seem to be having a disagreement at all, in such stark contrast to that domestic bliss they've been working on, and finds herself more than a little upset.

She swallows a mouthful of food, and tries for a conciliatory tone. “I can see that.”

He doesn't respond. He glares at his soup.
“What have you got planned for this afternoon?” She asks, when she can bear the silence no longer. So much for a cheerful lunch date, she thinks sourly.

“I'll pick Madi up from school.” He summons a little brightness at the idea. “We might tag along to target practice with Murphy's squadron.”

It is no wonder Kane is struggling to hold Sanctum together, Clarke muses, when one of his best men is spending the afternoon tagging along with John Murphy for want of a better use of his skill set.

“What about you?” Bellamy asks, apparently trying to set his annoyance aside, but failing miserably. She doesn't like to see him frustrated with her like this and, really, she's beginning to think that perhaps she ought to try to do something about it.

“I'm helping Kane with some town planning.” She tells him, but as soon as the words leave her mouth she thinks better of them.

Maybe, she wonders, she is not meant to do town planning this afternoon.

Maybe, it is time to explore exactly what it is that she is meant to do.

......

Clarke isn't sure how to introduce Kane to her change of heart. It will sound a bit odd, she thinks, if she walks into his office and tells him that she suddenly wants to make life-or-death decisions, just because the man she is sleeping with thinks it might be a good idea. And because she doesn't really want him to look so cold or disappointed with her as he did over lunch today ever again.

So it is that she starts with a rather different strategy.

“It sounded ridiculous, what that cadet did this morning. That must be the first time you've ever had anything like that happen?”

“I wish.” Kane's bad mood has apparently still not lifted. “That kind of thing is happening all the
time, recently. Cadets shooting at trees by mistake, new recruits having stupid accidents. Two of them got in a fistfight the other week over a stolen ration bar. They just seem to have no sense of discipline. And I'd be the first to admit that their training programme isn't fit for purpose.”

“So would you say that's the main problem on the security front, just now?” She's fishing for information, of course, and she's hardly being subtle about it, but Kane seems too troubled to care.

“That and the lack of field medics. Miller's agreed to get some medical training, but we know he's doing that out of love of Jackson rather than because he has any love of the job. Or any great aptitude for it, though he's better than nothing. But he's still only one, and he can't go on every mission.”

Well, then. Those two problems are easily solved.

She says as much to Kane, and he stares at her with, she thinks, equal parts confusion and disbelief. “What do you mean?”

“Put Bellamy in charge of training the cadets.” She says it as if it is the most obvious thing in the world. That is, in fact, because it is. “And I'm sure you'll find Octavia a great field medic.”

“Clarke. I have a very high opinion of you, and of your family. But you can't seriously be suggesting that your boyfriend and his sister are the solution to everything.”

“No. But I do think they're the solution to these two problems. Bellamy's obviously the perfect candidate to oversee the cadets. Do you know anyone else who has experience of turning a hundred confused adolescents into a viable army?”

She sees Kane's jaw drop at that, can practically hear him wondering how on Earth he could have overlooked this. “You're right, of course. I never looked at it like that.”

“Well, good job I'm here, then.”

“I don't see where you're coming from with Octavia, though.”
“Did my mother not tell you that Octavia helped me perform surgery when we were having an emergency the other week?”

“No.” He looks incredulous at best.

“Well, she saved Ivon’s life. I remember her being useful back at the dropship med bay, too. A bit of training and she’ll be capable of most basic procedures that might be required in the field. And she’s got the right temperament, she doesn’t scare easily and she’d be able to defend herself if ever she needed to.”

“People would never accept her. The idea that they’re supposed to trust Bloodreina to save their lives, now? It's madness.”

“I've killed plenty of people, and I still work in Medical.”

“I'm telling you, the people wouldn't like it.”

“Aren't we supposed to do what's right, not what's popular?”

Kane is frowning at her, still evidently unconvinced.

“I'm telling you, Marcus. I'm telling you that this is right. You've been saying for months that you want my input more often. Well, here I am. And that's the only solution I can see. Take it or leave it.”

He sighs at that, a long and tired but not entirely displeased sigh, and claps her heartily on the shoulder.

“Welcome back, Clarke. It's good to have you on board. I think you had better go fetch Bellamy.”

……

Clarke isn't sure what to expect from going to fetch Bellamy. She's fretting about the atmosphere at
that chilly lunch, wondering how to go about showing him that she gets it, now. That she
understands he only wanted to encourage her to make the best use of her talents, and experience
something approaching job satisfaction and fulfilment. But she's still a bit annoyed with him,
really, because she only wants those same things for him, too, and he didn't seem too interested in
that part of the conversation.

With some trepidation she arrives at the firing range, wonders how to go about beckoning him
over. Before she has reached a decision, Madi sees her, and runs towards her, and pulls her into a
hug. There is something rather lovely, Clarke thinks, about this warm welcome from the child she
last saw four hours ago. It is pretty heartwarming, she decides, to have been so evidently missed.

“Madi, honey. Hey.”

“Mum. Dad didn't say you'd be joining us.”

Bellamy has, by now, noticed her arrival, and is walking towards her with an expression that she
cannot quite make out.

“I'm not here for target practice. Sorry. I'm here because Kane wants to borrow your dad for a
moment.”

“He does?” Bellamy looks understandably surprised at this news. “I thought you two were working
on town planning this afternoon?”

“That's not quite how it turned out.” She explains hesitantly, not entirely sure how much to give
away when the news is surely Kane's to tell.

He frowns at her a little, before apparently admitting defeat. “OK, then. Sure. Let's go.”

“I want to stay.” Madi doesn't pout, not exactly. She is looking rather too commander-ish for it to
be truly a pout.

“Madi, we won't be very long.” Clarke soothes. “And then you can come straight back here.”
“She could stay.” Murphy speaks up from behind Bellamy's shoulder. “I don't mind looking out for her, if she stays.”

Clarke's jaw nearly hits the floor at that. Since when is John Murphy a viable babysitter? “I'm not sure about that.”

“Oh, please, Mum. I'll be fine.”

“I'll keep an eye on her, too.” Indra wades in. “You have protected my daughter before now. I will see that no harm comes to yours.”

Well, then. Indra seems like a slightly more trustworthy guardian. And between the pair of them, Clarke thinks that, maybe, her near-teen daughter might be able to cope without parental supervision for just a couple of hours. It might be time, she supposes, for her little girl to start learning a little independence. She looks up to meet Bellamy's eyes, silently asking whether this arrangement sounds acceptable to him.

“Thanks, guys.” He answers for them both. “That's kind of you. You be good, Madi, until we get back.”

“Of course.” She replies, all mock innocence and rolling eyes.

With that decided, they say their goodbyes and set off back towards Kane's office. Clarke is expecting awkward silence, in as much as she is expecting anything at all, and is wondering how to go about showing Bellamy that she would rather this awkward silence didn't last entire months like their last bout did. She might start by taking his hand, she thinks, or perhaps telling him softly that he might have been onto something, or -

“Clarke?” His voice interrupts her train of thought. “I'm sorry. About how I acted at lunch. I've been kicking myself ever since.”

“It's OK.” She says, opting for that hand-holding. She is relieved when, on reaching out, she finds that he is there to meet her half way. “You were right. It would do me good to get on with doing what I do best.”

“But I shouldn't have been like that about it.” He sounds, she thinks, disproportionately contrite.
One joyless lunch date is hardly the greatest challenge they have ever had to overcome.

“Bellamy, really. It's fine. I just got upset because I feel like you're wasting your talents at the moment, too.”

He makes a scoffing noise at that, and she finds herself wondering yet again how it is that this remarkable man is always surprised to be considered valuable. He's been so upbeat since his return from that mission, so transparently joyful about her pregnancy and their relationship, that she's not given much thought to what might actually be going on behind closed doors. To questions about whether he still finds himself weeping alone, from time to time, and whether the state of his relationship with his sister is still weighing on his mind, and whether the day will ever come when Bellamy Blake believes in himself, as much as Clarke Griffin believes in him.

Those are questions to ponder another time, though, it seems, as they arrive at Kane's office, and enter, and are invited to take seats.

“What's this about, Kane?” Bellamy asks, eyes narrowed.

“Did Clarke not tell you on the walk over here?”

“I thought it was your place to tell him.” Clarke murmurs, not quite happy with how quickly she's found herself in the thick of things. An hour ago, she seems to remember, she was looking forward to a town planning meeting. “I thought it would be better coming from you.”

Kane frowns at her, but does not disagree. “Well, Bellamy. You're aware that we've been having some issues with the cadets recently. And I'm aware that you're looking for a role that makes use of your considerable talents but allows you to spend the evenings at home with your family. How would you like to take charge of training the cadets? Become the first person to hold this new post?”

The look of disbelief on Bellamy's face lingers scarcely a second, before he is jumping to his feet and reaching out to shake Kane's hand.

“I'd like nothing more, Kane. Sir. Thank you. I'm honoured. But – are you sure?”

“Of course I'm sure. As if we could give the job to anyone else.”
Bellamy still looks a little bemused, she thinks, but his eagerness is fast outweighing that. “So how does this work? When do I start?”

“Don't ask me.” Kane gives an exaggerated shrug. “It was Clarke's idea, ask her.”

Clarke jumps in shock at that, momentarily distracted from observing the joy suffusing over Bellamy's face. “Don't ask me. I don't know. I don't even know how many cadets we have, let alone what their schedules are.”

“I'm sure the pair of you will work it out.” Kane tosses a tablet in Clarke's general direction, passes Bellamy a sheaf of papers. “I'm off to see Jordan. I'll be back in a couple of hours.”

He strides from the room, shoulders proud, his earlier state of near-despair apparently forgotten.

“Well.” Bellamy turns the topmost sheet in his fingers. “I suppose we'd better get on with working it out, then.”

Sure enough, they do work it out. Working it out is, after all, what they do best.

……

Clarke jumps a mile when Kane reenters his office a little over two hours later. That time has rather passed her by, somehow, but she has to admit that she feels proud of what the pair of them have achieved. She's prouder, still, that Bellamy was so ready to take the lead in achieving it, once she gave him a little nudge to do so, reminded him that he was, in fact, at perfect liberty to tackle this problem however the hell he wanted. That he was actually in charge of this programme, and should be the one calling all the shots.

“How are you doing?” Kane asks with evident interest.

“Pretty well.” Bellamy answers smoothly. “We've planned out a sort of induction programme for the next few days, so I can work out where we're starting from. Then I'll see what we get and take it from there. We talked about what the goals of the training are, and which areas we want our cadets to be skilled in by the time they complete the programme. So it's just a matter of coming up
with a schedule of activities to meet those goals.”

“Excellent. I won't bother you, or show up to inspect, or anything. I haven't got the time. As long as no one is shooting each other by accident by the time they come to me, you can do what you like. But do come to me if you need anything.”

“Of course. Would it – would it be OK if we go to fetch Madi now?”

“Absolutely. Do try to remember you're your own boss, now, Bellamy. That was part of the point of inventing this job for you.”

Clarke giggles at that, speaks up for both of them. “Thanks, Marcus. This means a lot to us.”

“And it'll be good for Sanctum. Everyone benefits. Now get going, the pair of you. Are you going to bring Octavia in tomorrow morning, Clarke?”

“What?” Bellamy asks, evidently confused, at the mention of his sister.

“Sorry. I didn't say before, because we were doing this.” Clarke rushes to explain the situation, gesturing at the broadly cadet-themed mess of notes before them. “We were thinking of inviting Octavia to take some field-medic training. She'd be no immediate danger, of course, and even if she started going out on missions she would be well protected and -”

“Clarke.” Bellamy interrupts with a hand on her thigh. “Stop. She's a grown adult now, and if she chooses to go out into danger that's her decision. I wasn't going to criticise you. I was going to thank you. I think she'll be really happy to be asked.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah. Come on, let's go get Madi.”

With that, they say their goodbyes to Kane and set out towards the firing range. For the first time all afternoon, Clarke allows her mind to wander to the question of how their daughter is faring without them.
As if he has read her mind, Bellamy takes up the theme.

“Do you think this will affect our childcare routine? This new role I'm doing?”

“Perhaps a little.” She tries to sound matter-of-fact, not wanting to dampen his evident joy at this opportunity that has come his way. “But Madi likes coming to Medical and observing my mum. And she can go to work with you when that suits, if you're doing target practise or survival skills or something.”

“She could probably teach most of these nineteen-year-olds a thing or two about survival skills.”

“Yeah.” She agrees with a giggle, knowing full well that her daughter would indeed be only too keen to outline everything these gormless cadets are doing wrong. “And there's loads of other people who care about her, Bellamy, and would gladly have her learn a bit about their work for an afternoon. You saw Murphy and Indra volunteer today, and Gaia takes her for lessons already. I'm sure Raven would love to teach her how to change a fuse, if ever neither of us is available.”

“Yeah. You're right. It's just a little hard letting her out of our sight, you know?”

“I know.” She squeezes his hand.

They walk in silence for a moment, and they are nearly at the firing range when Bellamy speaks next.

“Thank you. For inventing this job for me.”

“I didn't do it because I care about you.” She says carefully, needing him to understand that he has arrived here by competence rather than favouritism. Needing him to learn to back himself, again, a bit more. She may not have much liked that arrogant Bellamy she first knew on the ground, but she thinks that this current model is a little too lacking in confidence. “I did it because it was the right thing to do, and because you're obviously the right person to do it.”

“I think that's the reason I'm thanking you, actually. Thank you for getting involved with all this when I know you've been finding it hard. Thank you for backing me into a corner where I have to
get on with doing what I'm good at, again, too.”

“You're welcome.” She reaches up to press her lips to his cheek, the warmth of his skin dispelling once and for all any lingering chill from that frosty lunch date. “Let's go tell our girl your good news.”

Chapter End Notes

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